

THE CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS IN EAST BENGAL, EAST PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH: HISTORY AND MISSION

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Abstract

The history of Christianity in Bengal extends for about five hundred years. Although the total number of Christians is not large, theirs is a complex and exciting history. Accompanied by the Portuguese traders, the Jesuits, the Dominicans, the Franciscans, and the Augustinian missionaries belonging to Roman Catholicism came to Bengal. The Protestant missionaries came to Bengal about two hundred years after the Roman Catholics. The Congregation of Holy Cross is one of the Roman Catholic religious orders which has been working in Bangladesh since 1853. Holy Cross missionaries had started their activities only with very little hope of making any progress in this region. However, with their missionary zeal and dedication, they have founded themselves in Bangladesh both in terms of evangelization and education in a country where the majority population is Muslim, which seems to be an excellent achievement for a religious congregation. Holy Cross is the most successful religious order that has been preaching Christianity among the tribal people in Bangladesh. Of the total Christian population in Bangladesh, 50 percent are of tribal peoples. They are also very successful in providing the leadership for the whole Catholic Church and themselves. The Congregation is successful at raising local clergy through secular and theological education. The paper presents a historical review of the Holy Cross Congregation in Bangladesh from its arrival to the present day.

Key-words: Holy Cross, Missionary, Evangelization, East Bengal, Bangladesh.

Introduction

Christianity was first introduced in Bangladesh (erstwhile East Bengal) by the Portuguese traders who came to the Indian subcontinent in the sixteenth century (Zene, 2002, p. 101). Accompanied by the Portuguese traders, the Jesuits, the Dominicans, the Franciscans, and the

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Augustinian missionaries belonging to Roman Catholicism came to Bangladesh for evangelization (Goedert, 1983; Thekkedath, 1988). The Protestant missionaries, on the other hand, came to East Bengal about two hundred years after the Roman Catholics. Today, the largest single denomination is the Roman Catholic Church. The Congregation of Holy Cross is one of the Roman Catholic religious orders which has been working in Bangladesh since 1853. The Congregation was founded by Basile Moreau, in 1837 in Le Mans, France. The recognition of this Congregation as a religious order from the Vatican lies in the acceptance of the “unwanted mission of Bengal” as the mission was said to be the most destitute in the East (Timm, 2003). Thus, Bengal has historical importance for the Holy Cross itself. From the early years of its history, the Congregation has been working for the people of Bangladesh through education. Particularly its contribution to education is significant. For the last 170 years, the Holy Cross missionaries have also been spreading Christianity in many parts of the country, particularly among the tribal people. Because the mission of the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross was to make God known, loved, and served, and thus save souls (Catta & Catta, 1955). Constitutionally, their primary mission is to preach the word of God and the Christian education in particular (“The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross,” 1988). Of the total Christian population, 50 percent are those of tribal (Timm, 2001). One of the apparent contributions of Holy Cross to the Catholic Church is the development of the local Church, education of priests, and leadership for themselves and the community. From the humble beginning in 1853, the Congregation established itself as one of the most important Catholic religious orders in Bangladesh with the vibrant activities on religion and education (Geodert, 1983). The paper presents a historical review of the Holy Cross Congregation in Bangladesh from its arrival to the present day.

Background and History of Holy Cross in East Bengal (1853-1947)

The history of Christianity in Bengal (West Bengal and Bangladesh today) extends for more than four hundred years. Christianity was first introduced in Bengal by the Portuguese traders who came to the Indian subcontinent in the sixteenth century A.D. (Allen, 1995; Thekkedath, 1988). Moreover, from the very beginning of their coming to India, the Portuguese had continued their effort to establish Christianity in India. As they provided both missionaries and money to the Church in India, the

Vatican gave a special privilege to the Portuguese by signing an agreement (Frykenberg, 2008). The agreement between the Vatican and Portugal was called the Right of Patronage or “*Padroado*,”¹ which gave them control over all the missionaries in India (Goedert, 1983; Timm, 2003). However, while the Portuguese failed to meet the need of the Church in Bengal such as providing enough missionaries and money for this region, the Vatican took steps to end the control of Portugal over the mission in Bengal. As a result, in 1834, the Vatican had created the new region of Bengal and was placed under the responsibility of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith² (Thekkedath, 1988). Furthermore, in 1845, the Vicariate Apostolic of Bengal was divided into the Vicariates of East Bengal (Bangladesh today) and West Bengal. Moreover, the new Vicariate Apostolic³ of East Bengal was placed under an Irish bishop, Thomas Olliffe (Goedert, 1983).

Thus, the formation of a new mission area created an opportunity for the Holy Cross Tradition to come to East Bengal (Bangladesh today). Thomas Olliffe, newly appointed Bishop of East Bengal, found the area very difficult to live since Bengal was known for natural calamities, disaster, and disease (Clancy, 1953a). Moreover, the region was predominantly Muslim majority where, he believed, the hope of making converts was very low for them. Therefore, very few missionaries wished to come and preach the Gospel. Knowing all those uncertainties, while he was trying to get more missionaries in Rome for his newly created East Bengal mission, at the same time, Moreau, the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, was also trying to get the Papal approval for his Congregation. He founded the Congregation consisting of priests, brothers, and sisters, who would be in close ties in faith and mission, and dedicate themselves to the zeal of making God known, loved and served, and disseminating the knowledge of salvation to others (Beiting, 2005; Jenkins, 2011). Moreau saw his effort as a work of reconstruction of the

¹ The *Padroado* "patronage" was an arrangement between the Holy See and the kingdom of Portugal, affirmed by a series of concordats, by which the Vatican delegated to the kings of Portugal the administration of the local Catholic Churches. The *Padroado* was suppressed in 1928.

² The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Latin: *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*), or simply the Propaganda Fide, is the Congregation of the Holy See responsible for missionary work and related activities.

³ A vicariate apostolic is a territorial jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church under a titular bishop centered in missionary regions and countries where dioceses or parishes have not yet been established.

Church in the light of the social upheaval of his time. Moreau also added a missionary zeal to the Congregation he founded, and it grew and expanded beyond the border of France. (Catta & Catta, 1955; Jenkins, 2011).

Pius IX, the then Pope, found a path to satisfy both of them as he suggested Moreau that if he would take the responsibility of East Bengal mission and sent men to help Olliffe that would help him to get the approval of his mission from the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Propaganda Fide*) (Catta & Catta, 1955). Moreau took that opportunity and hoped that because of the acceptance of Bengal mission, he would quickly receive papal recognition for his newly founded religious congregation. In 1857, within four years of his acceptance of the Bengal Mission, the Congregation of Holy Cross got the recognition from the Vatican (Timm, 2003).

East Bengal (Bangladesh today) was one of the first missions of Holy Cross Tradition outside of France. In 1853, four priests, three brothers, and five sisters headed by Michel Voisin had arrived in East Bengal to assist the priests who were already there (Clancy, 1940). However, still, the number was small in comparison to the people of the vast territory. Thus, two more priests and a sister were sent out in 1855. However, their boat was capsized while they were traveling from Kolkata to Dhaka, and two of them died (Goedert, 1983). Following few years no Holy Cross personnel were sent to East Bengal.

In 1856, Olliffe, the Bishop of East Bengal, was transferred to Kolkata in West Bengal by the Vatican and Moreau was asked to take full responsibility of this region since he agreed to undertake the responsibility of new Vicariate⁴ of East Bengal (Timm, 2000). He responded positively and appointed Louis Verete, a Holy Cross priest, as Pro-Vicar Apostolic⁵ in East Bengal (Clancy, 1953a). His decision to take the full responsibility of East Bengal mission caused a sharp criticism among the people of Holy Cross Tradition as the memory of the plight of missionaries who came to East Bengal, and those who died and became ill were vivid in their mind. They also pointed out that while all other missions refused to accept it, it was not wise to accept the mission. Meanwhile, the sad news continued to

⁴ A Vicariate is a group of parishes within an Archdiocese, defined by geographic area for the purposes of administration.

⁵ An appointee of the vicar apostolic to succeed him temporarily in case of his death or in the event his jurisdiction would be impeded by "captivity, exile or inability."

come to their office in France as the Pro-Vicar Apostolic, Verete, died at sea while returning home (Ahmed, 2018; Timm, 2003).

Following that accident, Pierre Dufal, another priest of Holy Cross, became the Pro-Vicar Apostolic and was ordained as the first Holy Cross bishop. He was also asking for new men for his mission. Moreau appealed to his people for volunteers, but nobody responded. All other men in Holy Cross did not feel any commitment to East Bengal mission, and many considered the mission was a mistaken one. This situation forced Moreau to resign from the post of Superior General⁶ in 1866, and Bishop Dufal was appointed to succeed him (Barrosse, 1969; Goedert, 1983). However, Dufal was reluctant to continue this responsibility and resigned in 1866 and returned to East Bengal. Afterward, Sorin, the then Head of the American Holy Cross Tradition, was appointed as Superior General (Goedert, 1983). In 1872, the General Chapter of Holy Cross decided to close the East Bengal mission because of the death and sickness of the missionaries working there raised severe concern among them in their home-based offices. As a result, in 1876, the mission was transferred to the Benedictine missionaries (Quinlivan, 2004a). Thus, their first attempt to East Bengal failed.

However, the Benedictine's responsibility in the East Bengal mission was very brief as the Holy Cross missionaries returned to East Bengal in 1888. In 1887 the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda in Rome asked the Congregation of Holy Cross to resume the responsibility for East Bengal (Timm, 2004). At that time, the North American Holy Cross was well established and had enough members and financial resources to support the East Bengal mission. Thus, Sorin had reasonable ground to resume the responsibility of East Bengal mission (Quinlivan, 2004b). This time all the missionaries came from USA and Canada as there was a significant shift in the administration of Holy Cross since Sorin, the Head of American Holy Cross mission, became the Superior General of Holy Cross, which might have played an essential role in sending missionaries both from the USA and Canada. For the next thirty years, from their second coming to East Bengal was a constant struggle for establishment (Donahue, 1937).

⁶ Superior General or General Superior is the leader or head of a religious institute in the Roman Catholic Church. The Superior General usually holds supreme executive authority in the religious order, while the general chapter has legislative authority

In 1890, Augustin Lounge was appointed as the Bishop of Dhaka, the capital of East Bengal. Although he was provided with more missionaries, compare to his predecessors, and was able to open several parishes. Nonetheless, he lacked enough men and money for the mission (Clancy, 1953a). He died in Dhaka in 1894, and he was succeeded by Peter J. Hurth who served in the diocese of Dhaka for a long time. He had a reputation as education both in the USA and East Bengal. As an educator, he realized the need of education for his mission and concentrated on founding schools and religious teachers. He started founding the building of St. Gregory's High School. He died in Dhaka in 1909 and was followed by Bishop Linneborn (Goedert, 1983). During his tenure, one of the significant developments of Holy Cross missionary activities was the beginning of the evangelization of the Garo, one of the tribal communities in East Bengal (Bal, 2007). The evangelization also flourished among other tribal people living in other parts of East Bengal including those of Chittagong Hill Tracts. The two significance starting points of their developments: beginning of educational institutions; and evangelization of the Garos in the first quarter of the twentieth century in the history of Holy Cross in East Bengal paved their way to establishment and flourishing both in their religious and educational missions in East Bengal.

The developments of the Congregation of Holy Cross in East Bengal mission started during the time of Bishop Joseph Legrand, who was ordained in 1917 (Clancy, 1940). The attitude of the Holy Cross community in their home-based countries, including the United States and Canada was beginning to change, which helped to the establishment of Catholicism in East Bengal. Around this time, the Holy Cross missionaries were hoping that substantial progress could be made among the Garo tribe as they were converting to Christianity (Goedert, 1983). During this period, three important decisions were also taken in favor of the East Bengal mission, which had lasting and fruitful consequences for Christianity in East Bengal. Goedert (1983) noted, "This awakening to the needs of the missions paved the way for new programs in Dacca and ushered in an era of fifty years of steady progress"(p.15). The three decisions were (1) the establishment of Foreign Mission Seminary in Washington to provide missionaries to East Bengal, (2) a minor seminary was established in Dhaka to catalyze the future leaders from the local people, (3) the Dhaka Diocese was divided into two, Dhaka and

Chittagong, creating new diocese⁷ of Chittagong to facilitate the missionary activities more effectively (Goedert, 1983; Timm, 2003).

Firstly, for years, many missionaries of Holy Cross had argued that Holy Cross did not consider all of their mission centers across the globe while they recruited and trained the missionaries at the Foreign Mission Society, which was established at Notre Dame, Indiana in 1914. One of the significant activities of the Foreign Mission Society was the publication of "*The Bengalese*," started in 1919, which contained different news and stories concerning mostly of the East Bengal mission (Timm, 2003). However, their attitude towards the East Bengal mission started to change when Michael Mathis, the Head of the Foreign Mission Society, visited Dhaka in 1922; he realized the need of more people in East Bengal and thought that to meet the need there would be a separate mission seminary. While he returned to the United States, he proposed to the General Administration of the Congregation to found a unique mission institute. The Superior General accepted his proposal and decided to open a Foreign Mission Seminary in Washington in 1924, where Mathis was appointed as the first Superior and Procurator. The prospective missionaries who would like to work in the East Bengal mission studied at Holy Cross College, Indiana (Goedert, 1983). They were also offered courses on Bengali, mission methodology, Hinduism, Islam, and the history and society of East Bengal (Timm, 2003). The Foreign Mission Seminary provided enough missionaries to the East Bengal mission, which accelerated missionary activities in East Bengal.

Secondly, simultaneously, the Vatican was also asking all the Catholic religious congregations working in foreign missions to prepare native people to take vacations. As a response to the call, the Congregation of Holy Cross also founded seminaries, novitiates, catechetical school and training institutes to train the diocesan and religious priests in their missions. They established several such institutes in East Bengal as well. In 1919, Bishop Legrand opened a training school for novitiates and catechists at Tumilia, the then largest parish in the diocese of Dhaka. Later, in 1920, a new seminary was founded in Bandura, named St. John's Apostolic School, adjacent to the Holy Cross School, to train the local people in the priesthood (Timm, 2003). The seminary contributed significantly for the growth and development of the Holy Cross in East

⁷ Diocese, in some Christian churches, a territorial area administered by a bishop.

Bengal both in terms of providing priests and educators. As Timm (2003) cited “The minor seminary was crucial for the growth of the Church since it not only contributed to the growing number of priests but to a growing number of educators and educated priests and laity from among those who dropped out at various stages of their spiritual journey” (p.41).

Finally, to speed up the missionary work, in 1923, the Holy Cross missionaries proposed to create a new diocese of Chittagong consisting of the south-east part of East Bengal. The General Chapter⁸ of Holy Cross approved the proposal in 1926. Finally, the Vatican officially approved their decision in 1927. The Canadian Province of Holy Cross took the responsibility of Chittagong diocese while the U.S. province of Holy Cross would serve in the diocese of Dhaka (Goedert, 1983). The new diocese of Chittagong, which was created in 1927, left Dhaka with half of its territory and missionaries, which facilitated missionary activities more intensely (Clancy, 1953b).

The decisions taken in favor of the East Bengal mission had started to be beneficial. The number of priests was increasing as the Foreign Mission Seminary providing them. Within eight years, the number of Holy Cross priests in Dhaka became double. Also, the local seminary started to provide clergy. Moreover, a women’s religious community was started to grow to take vocation among them was also increasing. The Foreign Mission Society was also providing money needed for the dioceses here in East Bengal. With the leadership of Bishop Crowley, who succeeded Bishop Legrand in 1929, the Christians community was growing in East Bengal (Goedert, 1983). The conversion among the Garos had increased. The Garo Catholics soon constituted half of the Catholics in East Bengal (Timm, 2003).

Since the number of missionaries increased steadily, therefore, the Holy Cross founded new parishes and planned for new projects. Both primary and secondary education was expanded by founding new schools. They were also thinking of opening a college. They have also developed their literature (Clancy, 1953b). Legrand, the Bishop of Dhaka, wrote the “Introduction to Christian Religion” for the Catholic religious teachers. They started to publish the diocesan’s monthly journal “*Dharma Jyoti*” in

⁸ The General Chapter is the highest authority in the Congregation. The General Chapter is composed of an equal number of brothers and priests, exclusive of the Superior General who presides.

Bengali. There had been various projects on the translation of the Bible and prayer books in Bengali. There was also a project called “Holy Cross Vernacular Series” headed by Fr. Omer Desrochers. Fr. Goodall translated the “Catechism of Christian Doctrine” into Garo dialect and published a prayer book in Garo. He also wrote “The Catechists Companion” for the catechists working in East Bengal (Timm, 2003). There were several other translation projects on the life of Jesus and Apostles, which proved critical educational resources and development of Holy Cross missionaries in East Bengal.

However, as the Second World War started, the missionaries from the USA and Canada began to decrease, and the flow of funds also reduced. Soon after the end of the war, the East Bengal church asked for more missionaries, and they were responded positively. As a result, more priests from the US joined with the existing priests in East Bengal (Goedert, 1983). However, within a few years after WWII, the partition of India in 1947 brought significant changes both in civil and political administration in the Indian subcontinent, which also affected the Holy Cross mission responsibility.

The Congregation of Holy Cross in East Pakistan (1947-1971)

The Congregation of Holy Cross responded accordingly after the Partition. As the capital of East Pakistan, Dhaka became more important both in terms of economics and politics. As the flow of missionaries and money coming from the United States and Canada continued with some interruption during the Second World War, they expanded the missionary activities and founded themselves in the society firmly by facilitating new establishments and parishes in Dhaka and other areas of the country.

Before the Partition, there were only three Catholic establishments in the Diocese of Dhaka: the building at Laksi Bazar where the Cathedral and two schools were situated, Bishop’s House at Ramna, and the Monastery of the Adoration Sisters in Amputty (Goedert, 1983; Timm, 2003). The Sisters of Holy Cross also started to found a parish church and an orphanage in Tejgoan, nearby Dhaka. After the Partition of India and Pakistan, new institutions and buildings of Holy Cross came into existence very quickly. In 1947, Moreau House was founded as a community headquarters. In 1949, Notre Dame College was started (Gillespie & Peixotto, 2001). In 1950, the Sisters of Holy Cross founded Holy Cross

College for girls. In 1952, the Medical Mission Sisters started the construction of Holy Family Hospital. In 1953, Mary House was built by the Bengali Sisters. In 1954, Holy Cross Brothers founded St. Joseph's High School and the Technical School in Narinda. In 1956, a new parish was established, and the construction of a new cathedral began. In 1965, the Brothers of Holy Cross constructed the new building of St. Joseph's High School in Muhammadpur (Goedert, 1983; Timm, 2003). Both Notre Dame College and Holy Cross College continued to flourish.

Outside of Dhaka, new parishes were founded in Narayangong, Comilla, Mugaipur, Srimongol, Pabna, and Jalchatra. The number of conversions increased particularly among the tribal people in Dharendra, Solepore, Motbari, Tutel, Comilla, Mausaid. They have also expanded their evangelization activities among the tribal communities living in the districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Timm, 2003). High schools were founded in Tumilia and Nagori. Among the Garos, new construction was started in every parish. In Mymensingh, a hospital, a girls' school, and a catechist school were founded. Apart from that, in Jalchatra, a leprosarium and new parish compound were built. Also, in Biroidakuni, Baromari, and Srimongol, many parishes and parish school were founded (Goedert, 1983). Most of the construction works were the result of the development of the Holy Cross. Moreover, they were highly successful in the conversion of the Goros in Mymensingh and Sylhet among the Mandis, Khasis, and other tribes.

The continuity of Holy Cross missionaries from the US Province of Holy Cross to East Pakistan was steady until 1958. There were forty-nine American priests in 1958, the year it had the most missionaries in the diocese of Dhaka (Timm, 2003). However, the situation changed in the early 60s as the Holy Cross started their missionary activities in Uganda and other countries. The new missions were provided missionaries at the expense of East Pakistan (Goedert, 1983). Moreover, this was also followed by the decline of vocations (taking an oath of priesthood) in the US Province of Holy Cross and the emergence of new theology (liberation theology and religious dialogue) in the Vatican which downplayed the missions. The outcome was the loss of interest in the missions both in the community and the houses of formation. The closing of Foreign Mission Seminary in 1969, and the dissolution of the fourth vow (working in a foreign mission) of in the revised Constitution of Holy Cross in 1968, also

played a significant role in declining the number of foreign missionaries in East Pakistan.

As a result, no new missionary from the United States came to East Pakistan after 1962, and thus, the number of Holy Cross priests in East Pakistan continued to decline (Timm, 2003). Although the vocations were declining in the West, they were on the rise locally. Before 1947, there was only a minor seminary at Bandura in the diocese of Dhaka, but, now, the Archbishop of Dhaka founded an intermediate seminary at Ramna, in Dhaka, where they can study theology and afterward, they could go to Karachi in West Pakistan for further study (Goedert, 1983). Thus, the local missionaries started to join with the foreign Holy Cross missionaries who were already working in East Pakistan and were taking charge of the mission. One such significant development was the consecration of the first Holy Cross local bishop, Theotonius Ganguly, C.S.C., in 1960 (Timm, 2003). Thus the administrative posts were started to entrust to the local Holy Cross personnel. During this period, the process of indigenization of Christianity in East Pakistan started with the development and consecration of local people in priesthoods, which also continued during the time of Bangladesh.

It is important to note that there has been significant development of both Christianity and the Holy Cross itself in the field of education and evangelization during the Pakistani period, which also continued during the Bangladeshi period. In this period, the Holy Cross missionary activities also expanded its sphere including the establishment of vocational and technical schools, boarding schools for girls and working women, old homes, hospitals, dispensaries press, trade union, etc. All those institutions flourished under the strict Catholic administrative system.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, two significant developments took place in the missionary activities in East Bengal. Firstly, the Holy Cross missionaries concentrated more on working among the tribal people of the country and found a more promising field for evangelization (Hennessy, 1952). The conversions among these people were high compared to the Bengali Hindus and Muslims. Secondly, as the Holy Cross Missionaries found that these tribal people were more eager to respond to the Gospel, and the conversions were taking place on a large scale, so there was a marked shift of their missionary work in those places.

The Congregation of Holy Cross in Bangladesh

The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 forced another change of Holy Cross and affected their course of action in Bangladesh. Timm (2000) cited, "Independence brought big changes in the politics and economics of Bangladesh....It brought big changes in the Church as well" (p.2).

Since the war affected all the people of the country, it also affected the Catholic Church and Holy Cross in many ways. As many Muslim and Hindus left the country for India as the war started, so many Christian families left as well. However, all the Catholic missionaries and local priests stayed in the country. Therefore, several missions and missionaries were attacked by Pakistani Army and three priests- American, Italian, and local Santali (tribal) were killed by them(Timm, 2003).

Holy Cross mission centers and churches in Bangladesh gave refuge to many Hindus who were frightened of their lives during the war. They were handed over the crosses, rosaries, and medal or were put under temporary religious instruction (Timm, 2000). Many of their schools were used as temporary shelters for the people who were driven out of their houses and villages. Few of priests of Holy Cross such as Fr. Edmund Goedert, Fr. Benjamin Costa and the Brothers at their High School in Nagori, took the risk of their lives in saving the lives of others who were in danger (Timm, 2003).

After the war ended, the new government had a massive task of rebuilding the country, which was torn by devastating war and loss of life. The government and international donor agencies took part in the rebuilding process. The Holy Cross missionaries also participated in the process of rebuilding Bangladesh one way or another outside their primary activities of evangelization and education, although both social service and education are considered to be a part of the evangelization process (Allon, 1919; Archer, 1926; Bellenoit, 2007).

As the millions of people, who took shelter in India started to come back to Bangladesh, the Holy Cross Congregation and the Catholic Church in Bangladesh, along with the government, also involved in the rehabilitation of them and reconstruction of the country. Christian Organization for Relief and Rehabilitation (CORR), the bishops' official agency for relief and rehabilitation, which has been renamed as Caritas Bangladesh, estimated that it spent \$42 million for rehabilitation within

two years after the war ended (Gillespie & Peixotto, 2001; Goedert, 1983; Timm, 2000). Some of the Holy Cross priests were directly involved in the relief and rehabilitation activities.

The combined effort of all Catholic missions in the relief and rehabilitation works also raised the question among themselves concerning the priority of their works as most of them were involved in relief works rather than taking care of their parish activities (Timm, 2000). There were also complains that CORR and other Christian NGOs were involved in the conversion in disguise of relief and rehabilitation works (Ali & Nurullah, 2007; Bano, 2007; Islam, 2001).

There was another major shift in the history of Holy Cross in Bangladesh - the creation of a new church with the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 (Timm, 2000). It accompanied with the localization of the leadership of Catholic Church and Holy Cross itself, although the process was started in the 1960s with the consecration of Theotonius Ganguly as a bishop, the first Bengali bishop. For a hundred years, the leadership of both the Holy Cross and the Catholic Church had been in the hands of foreign missionaries. However, after the independence, by 1972, all four bishops were Bangladeshi, and three of them belonged to Holy Cross. Moreover, in 2003, there were seven bishops, and all were Bangladeshi, and three of them were from Holy Cross (Timm, 2003). The establishment of a local church has been founded. Thus, Timm (2003) argued that “the basic mission of the Holy Cross had been achieved” (p.69). Since the establishment of the Church was well-grounded, they thought that they could now diversify their activities. Timm (2000) mentioned:

By Independence, the Church had been established. The missionary purpose of Holy Cross had been fulfilled. All authority and control in the Church passed into local hands almost overnight. There were problems of financing and staffing to be met, but overall, it was a time of great joy and promise in the Church. Holy Cross now had to look for a new role to play. It was no longer a time to set up new parishes, to build new churches and rectories. (p.15)

After the independence priesthoods among the local Holy Cross people multiplied. In 2003, there were 35 Holy Cross local priests, and the local priests were surpassing foreign priests. In 2000, there were 29 local priests and 11 foreign priests compare to 24 foreign priests and five local priests (Timm, 2003). This development has been considered as a “great leap forward” as

Holy Cross started in East Bengal only with few foreign priests, which is going to be a vibrant and growing local Holy Cross community.

As the priesthood was growing among the local Holy Cross people, so did the expansion of its facilities. Mathis House, a residential hall, was built adjacent to Norte Dame College both for the priests who were teaching in the college and for the Holy Cross seminarians who were studying at the college (Gillespie & Peixotto, 2001; Quinlivan, 2004a). A joint novitiate both for the Fathers and Brothers of Holy Cross at Sahardi, Barisal, and a Joint Formation Team consisting of the two groups was formed to work there in 1978. In 2002, the Moreau House, the provincial headquarters was founded in Rampura, Dhaka. The old Moreau House was turned into a seminary and renamed Moreau Seminary (Timm, 2003).

During this period, Holy Cross also has established its administrative structure in Bangladesh with the merging of its earlier mission territory. Although Holy Cross missionaries had been working in East Bengal from 1853, in 1927, East Bengal mission had been divided into two Dioceses consisting of Dhaka and Chittagong. While the American Holy Cross missionaries were entrusted the Diocese of Dhaka, the Canadian Holy Cross were responsible for the Diocese of Chittagong (Timm, 2000). In the beginning, there was no formal administrative structure of Holy Cross in the two Dioceses. There was another organizational change in 1946, just before the Partition, when the Priests and Brothers of the Congregation of Holy Cross who were working together from the very beginning of their coming to East Bengal, were separated administratively and financially. Moreover, in 1968, they found the first Holy Cross administrative structures both in Dhaka and Chittagong (Timm, 2003).

However, within a few years, they were also talking about the merger of the two Vicariates as the war between India and Pakistan started in 1966. The Holy Cross missionaries were afraid of evacuating the country for safety so that they might hand over the responsibility of the mission to local Holy Cross people (Timm, 2000). Moreover, before and after the independence in 1971, many of the Holy Cross missionaries returned to the USA, Canada, and other Holy Cross missions. Simultaneously, religious vocations in the USA and Canada were declining (Timm, 2003). Therefore, they wanted to give the mission's responsibility for the local Holy Cross personnel. The purpose of merging two districts was to create a single community and make them more effective.

The negotiation concerning the merger of two Districts of Holy Cross continued for many years as the disagreements among the two groups - American and Canadian Holy Cross priests- lingered for a long time. Finally, in 1984, the two groups of Holy Cross Fathers agreed to form Bangladesh District of Fathers composed of two separate districts. Richard Timm C.S.C. was appointed as the District Superior (Goedert, 1983; Timm, 1995). Following the example of the Holy Cross Priests, the Brothers of the Holy Cross in two districts formed the Brothers' District of Bangladesh. Once the District was formed, they proposed to the Indiana Provincial Chapter to create a Vice-province, thus in 1988, the Sacred Heart of Jesus Vice-province was created with Fr. Zimmerman as the first Vice Provincial (Timm, 2000). The Council of the Congregation, another new administrative structure was introduced. The Priests, Brothers and Sisters superiors meet annually to discuss the issues in common. The first meeting was held in Dhaka in 1982, and the superiors of different groups attended the meeting (Timm, 2003). Thus, the three groups of the Congregation of Holy Cross work together, as they consider themselves as "the family of Holy Cross" in order to achieve their missionary goals in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

In 1853, Holy Cross missionaries had started their activities only with very little hope of making any progress in this region, but with their missionary zeal and dedication they have founded themselves in Bangladesh both in terms of evangelization and education in a country where majority population is Muslim, that seems to be a great achievement for a religious congregation. They are very much successful in evangelization among the tribal people in different regions of the country. They are also very much successful in proving the leadership for whole Catholic Church and themselves. The Congregation is successful at raising local clergy through secular and theological education. The schools and colleges founded by them provided opportunities as those located in cities have a quota and special programs designed to support aspirant clergy. Because of such educational programs, the Bangladeshi HC people have taken over the leadership of the Congregation and the Catholic Church of Bangladesh which has been leading to local self-government Church. By 1970, all the bishops of Bangladesh were local Bengalis (Holy Cross in Bengal, 1988, p. 3). Today, the Catholic Church in Bangladesh, including

the Congregation, has sufficient local clergy. Currently the local Bangladeshi comprise a majority among the Brothers, Sisters, and Priests of Holy Cross. Since the local clergy have grown to a considerable number, and the bishops are all Bangladeshi nationals, the Congregation consider the Church of Bangladesh in the technical sense is 'established'. It can be seen that the missionaries' aspiration and mission of founding local churches and raising local clergy have become a reality thanks to the HC educational institutions. There has always been a sense among the local people that Christianity is a foreign religion, now it might be that it will no more be seen or called a foreign religion as all the pastors, priests and bishops are from local people.

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