

CATHOLIC STANDARD

53rd YEAR

FIRST QUARTER

MARCH. 1957

Published for the Bishop of Georgetown
by the Sword of the Spirit.



Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam

One Hundred Years with the Jesuits in British Guiana

1857, – 1957

Part II: Bishop Etheridge, S.J., Bishop Butler, S.J.

Bishop James Etheridge, S.J.

1853 – 1877

On the 25th June, 1858, Fr. Etheridge was appointed Titular Bishop of Torone and Vicar Apostolic of British Guiana.

On September 9th, as Bishop-elect, he sailed for England to be consecrated, leaving Fr. Jones as Vicar-General and acting Superior. The consecration took place at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm St., London on October 17th, 1858, by Cardinal Wiseman, Archbishop of Westminster, assisted by Archbishop Errington, his Auxiliary, and Bishop Hynes. The new Vicar Apostolic then proceeded to Rome to visit the Holy Father and the Father General of the Society.

Administrator of Port-of-Spain

No sooner had the new Bishop returned to British Guiana than another burden was laid on his shoulders. On February 13, 1859, he was appointed Administrator of the Archdiocese of Port-of-Spain, and Apostolic Delegate to Haiti, offices which he filled in the interval between the departure from Port-of-Spain of Archbishop Spaccapietra who had asked to be relieved of his See, and the arrival of Archbishop English, his successor, on 23rd November, 1861.

The same month (February) Bishop Etheridge had to leave Georgetown for Trinidad to be present at the consecration of Bishop Poirier, of Roseau, Dominica; but he was back for Passion Sunday, when he confirmed 370 candidates in the pro-Cathedral. On May 15, he visited Berbice, where he confirmed 56, and a few days later sailed again for Port-of-Spain, to take up the administration of the Archdiocese on the departure of the Archbishop.

After a few weeks stay in Trinidad, Bishop Etheridge returned to Georgetown and sent Fr. Woollet to visit the Indian Mission at Santa Rosa in order to build a presbytery there and a temporary chapel, as the church was in a state of delapidation.

The Bishop's activities at this time were extraordinary. In August he confirmed 353 candidates at the pro-Cathedral, the second confirmation there this year. The same month he sailed to St. Lucia. He



Right Reverend JAMES ETHERIDGE, S.J.
Titular Bishop of Torone.
Consecrated: 17th October, 1858.
Died: 31st December, 1877.

administered Confirmation at Castries, again in Grenada, and later at San Fernando, Trinidad. In January 1860 he returned to Georgetown, confirmed 112 in the next month at Malgretout, and on March 10th once more departed for Trinidad, to be in Port-of-Spain for Holy Week and afterwards undertake a Confirmation tour throughout the Archdiocese. He was absent from Demerara till November 24, when he returned via Barbados from St. Vincent, having given Confirmation there and in the Grenadines.

Sacred Heart Church

Before his departure for Trinidad, the Bishop had seen the necessity of erecting another church in Georgetown to provide especially for the spiritual welfare of the Portuguese. On April 14, 1860, a site was bought for this purpose in Main Street for \$1,870. Fr. Jones, the Vicar General, negotiated the purchase, and a contract for the building of the church was signed for \$12,000. Thus the beginning of the Sacred Heart Church was made.

Ordination

On December 7, 1860, there arrived in the Colony Fathers Marcocci and Joseph Baldini, S.J., together with Brother Castellani and Rev. Julius Mosca, S.J. The latter was in deacon's orders, and was ordained priest in the Ursuline Convent Chapel the day after his arrival. The Bishop was away in Trinidad for the first six months of 1861. He returned to Georgetown in June, but sailed again for Barbados and Trinidad, where he was laid up with a bad attack of fever for a month. Being advised to take a change, he left for England, accompanied by Fr. Segrave from Barbados. Meanwhile Fr. Marcocci who had been in British Guiana only six months, had had to return to Europe invalided in July.

One Mission only!

Bishop Etheridge returned to the Colony in March 1862, now relieved of the additional work of Administrator of Port of Spain whose Archbishop had been appointed in the previous November. The Vicariate was now well on its way to being established on a firm footing. Its spiritual life showed great signs of progress.

At Christmas 1861, the Church of the Sacred Heart, Main Street had been opened by Fr. Schembri for midnight Mass, and it was solemnly blessed by the Bishop on 22nd June, 1862. In 1863, Fr. Negri took up residence in the newly-built presbytery.

1865

It is interesting to see the status of the Catholic Missions and out stations as given in the "British Guiana Directory" for 1865:

GEORGETOWN, Brickdam. Pro- Cathedral Church of the Resurrection. Bishop Etheridge, Revs. S. Bond, A. Emiliani, A. Gualandi, F. Raggazzini.

Main St., Church of the Sacred Heart: Revs. B. Schembri, C. Negri.

WEST BANK DEMERARA. Malgretout Estate, Church of the Annunciation and Stations at Canal No. 1 and Hague, Rev. N. Casano.

EAST COAST, DEMERARA. Stations at Plaisance, Beterverwagting, Buxton, Enmore, Clonbrook and Mahaica. Rev. J. Mosca, resident at Victoria.

ESSEQUIBO. Church of St. Lewis Bertrand. Rev. J. Baldini. Stations at Danielstown, Wakenam, Leguan. Serves the mission of Moruca Creek.

BERBICE New Amsterdam. Church of the Ascension: Very Rev. J. Walker. Stations at Albion and Skeldon on the Courantyne Coast; at Icourawa, Canje Creek; Hopetown, West Coast. The Chapel at Longdam served from New Amsterdam.

Churches followed in quick succession at Hague (land bought in 1861), Victoria (1866), Henrietta (1868), Buxton, Beterverwagting, Meadow Bank and Leguan.

A new chapel for the Ursuline Convent was opened in 1865, when Pontifical Mass was sung by the Bishop of Roseau and Bishop Etheridge preached the sermon. This chapel immediately served as a chapel of ease to the pro-cathedral, which for some time had been inadequate for the increasing Catholic population.

Next started the culminating work of Bishop Etheridge's regime - the building of the first Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, designed by Brother Caesar Castellani, S.J. The pro-Cathedral was dismantled to clear the site - indeed it was the Lady Chapel from this that was "transported and delivered" at Victoria to be the Church there - and a temporary church was set up at the corner of Camp and Hadfield Streets to serve till the Cathedral should be completed. The foundation stone was laid in 1868. After seeing the preliminary work started, Bishop Etheridge departed, in July 1869, for the U.S.A. *en route* to Rome for the Vatican Council.

Papal Honour

Less than three years before, on the 17th June, 1867, he had been named by His Holiness, Pius IX, an Assistant to the Pontifical Throne, and this was his first visit to Rome since receiving the honour. Meanwhile the building of the Cathedral went steadily on, and soon after his return to the Colony in May 1870, the Bishop was able to see part of his great work nearing completion. It was possible to open a section of it in Easter week, 1871.

But the building of the cathedral was not by any means the Bishop's only preoccupation.

St. Vincent de Paul

As early as 1858, one year after his arrival, the first conference of St. Vincent de Paul Society - Our Lady's Conference - was formed, and so began that continuous lay care of the poor that has continued down the century.

By 1865, there were started in Georgetown - the "Pro-Cathedral School", the present St. Mary's, and a Portuguese Female School in Water Street - the forerunner to the Sacred Heart School of today, as well as a school attached to the mission at Malgretout and one in New Amsterdam.

By 1870 to 1871, St. Mary's with a roll of 157, boys only, and the Sacred Heart Church schools - "Main Street Boys" (school roll of 107) and "Main Street Girls" (roll of 49) were placed on the list of Government-recognized schools.

In 1866, the Catholic Grammar School, now St. Stanislaus College, was started under Fr. George Langton.

The Bishop made frequent tours for Confirmation in the Colony and Barbados, and

sometimes found time to fulfil engagements elsewhere. We find him, for instance, in Dominica in March 1873, and in St. Lucia and Trinidad in May of the next year.

It was on this latter tour that the Bishop, whose health was never robust, showed visible signs of weakening under strain of his labours. He was taken ill during the consecration at Port-of-Spain, of Bishop O'Carroll (auxiliary to the Archbishop) at which he was assisting; and when he arrived in Barbados on his way home, at the end of May 1874, he had to go to bed for a fortnight.

Joy and Sadness

Meanwhile the Cathedral was rapidly nearing completion. The stained-glass window and organ had arrived. The Bishop returned home on June 22nd, and resumed his usual work. The date of the solemn opening of the Cathedral was set for August 30th. We can imagine the Bishop's feeling as the great day came nearer. But alas, on August 29th, the Bishop was taken seriously ill, and the Last Sacraments had to be administered. The ceremony of opening could hardly be postponed, since all arrangements were made, and there were many visitors. The Archbishop of Caracas presided at the ceremonies, and Bishop O'Carroll sang the Mass and preached. The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception was an accomplished fact. To the joy of all his people, Bishop Etheridge soon rallied from his sickness; but instead of taking the rest he needed, he went out for three days to Buxton. By the end of September he was working as usual.

Death of a great Pastor

But he never fully recovered from this illness. He had a real change in Jamaica at the end of this year (1874), but his diary for 1875 shows gaps in his untiring work forced upon him by sickness. Sometimes he revived his failing strength by a sea-voyage to Barbados or one of the nearby islands. On Christmas Day 1877 he managed to sing Pontifical Mass in the Cathedral - the first for many months and the same evening he set sail for Barbados, where he said what proved to be his last Mass on December 30. That evening he embarked for the return voyage, but next morning the ship's doctor had to be called to him. He breathed his last on December 31st, 1877. Owing to the climate it was considered necessary to bury him at sea, and this was done the next morning. Thus passed a great prelate in the 70th Year of his age, the 50th of his religious life and the 20th of his episcopate.

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