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Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam

One Hundred Years with the Jesuits in British Guiana

1857, – 1957

Part III: Bishop Butler, S.J.

Bishop Anthony Butler, S.J.



Right Reverend ANTHONY BUTLER, S.J.
Titular Bishop of Melipotamus.
Consecrated 25th August, 1878.
Died 25th August, 1901.

SUCCESSOR to Bishop Etheridge was the Right Reverend Anthony Butler. Appointed Vicar-Apostolic of British Guiana in 1878 while he was in charge of the Jesuit Mission at Bedford, England, he came out to the Colony for his consecration. This took place in the newly built Cathedral in Georgetown on 25th August, 1878, the Consecrator being Bishop O'Carroll, O.P., Coadjutor of Port-of-Spain, assisted by the Bishops of Gaudaloupe and Surinam.

The new Bishop already had an interesting history behind him. Descended from the famous family of Butlers of Ormonde, Ireland, whose history goes back to the Anglo-Norman invasion, Anthony Butler was born in 1830. He joined the army and was gazetted to the Royal Irish Fusiliers, "The Faughs", with whom he served for eighteen years, seeing active service and gaining medals in the China War and the Indian Mutiny. At the age of 36 years with the rank of Captain, he astounded his family and his regiment by his decision to leave the army and enter the Society of Jesus. He was ordained in 1872 and sent out to the Jesuit Mission in Jamaica, where it so happened that his old regiment was stationed at the time. Before long their late "Captain Butler" became their Chaplain! He later returned to

Europe for further theological studies at Ghent, after which he was put in charge at Bedford in 1877. Here it was that one year later he received his appointment from the Pope as Vicar Apostolic of British Guiana.

Carrying on with all the impetus of the pioneering pace set by his predecessor, Bishop Butler's regime was to be one of achievement, pre-eminently 'the episcopate of the schools'.

Schools

One of his first moves was to re-open the Catholic Grammar School early in 1880 which had been closed just four years before by Bishop Etheridge. The new start was made in the premises of the "temporary Pro-Cathedral" - the former chapel at the corner of Hadfield and Camp Streets - which, at the express request of Bishop Etheridge had been designed by Br. Castellani precisely to serve this purpose when the Cathedral should be completed. The story of the school is told under its own head, but it was the coming of Fr. Barraud in October of the same year, and his long term of twenty years as

Headmaster from 1880-1900 that was to set the school firmly on its way.

It was Bishop Butler's far-sighted vision that aimed at providing a Catholic Elementary School in every parish.



Fr. Edward Sidgreaves, SJ

At the beginning of his Episcopate there were seven Catholic Elementary Schools: three in Georgetown - St. Angela's of 1852 or the 'Ursuline Convent School' as it was more often styled, the 'Cathedral School' now St. Mary's, and 'Main Street' - Sacred Heart boys and girls; one on the East Coast and one on the West Coast, Demerara, one in New Amsterdam and one in Essequibo.

Under his care this number rose to thirty-one, and included the foundation of six new schools in different wards of Georgetown - Charlestown (now known as Carmel), Bourda, Queenstown and Wortmanville (St. Thomas More); as well as the "Regent Street School", established in 1879 and closed in 1929, and Albouystown, established 1890, closed 1922; and country schools in Plaisance, Beterverwagting, Buxton, the Moruka district and the North West.

Boys Orphanage

It is during this Episcopate that there appear most continuously those names which are still revered by the older generation among us today:-

Fr. Casati who for over thirty years endeared himself to his people at Plaisance and who started the Boys' Orphanage there. We read of him first serving the district from Brickdam in 1872, visiting the village twice a week. In 1875, he transferred the sacristy of the old Cathedral (i.e. of the Church of the Resurrection) to Plaisance and according to the *Catholic Standard* at the time of his Golden Jubilee in 1906, "has lived there happily ever since."



Fr. A. CASATI, S.J.
Thirty-seven years at Plaisance.

Fr. Baroni for 27 years Chaplain to the Catholic inmates at the Leper Hospital, Mahaica, with

Bishop Butler established that tradition of care and interest which has been sustained by the Bishop's successors in office to the present time. Fr. Baroni's work took in successively a great part of the East Coast, Demerara - Victoria, and Buxton, as well as a spell in Essequibo.



Fr. M. Messini, SJ

Fr. Gambetti, almost continuously at the Sacred Heart Church, Main Street from 1872 to 1909; *Fr. Sidgreaves* for thirty years at Malgretout and Hague from 1878 to 1908; Fr. Messini in Essequibo - are still recalled today.

In an episcopate of comparatively scanty written records, the facts of work accomplished stand out.

In 1882, the Bishop completed the tower to the Cathedral - already famed in this part of the world for the beauty of its gothic lines.

In 1890, in pursuance of his continuous policy of development of education, the Ursuline nuns opened their convent in New Amsterdam under his pastoral care, and started St. Mary's School (secondary) for girls.

Sisters of Mercy

In 1894 the Bishop brought the Sisters of Mercy to British Guiana - and who can measure the effect of that move on our schools and the Colony's life today? Originally intending them for Barbados, Bishop Butler changed his mind at the last moment and brought them on to this country, asking the Ursuline nuns instead to take over the Convent in Barbados which they did in the same year.

Starting in Charlestown the Mercy Sisters took over the already existing school - now Carmel School - on May 1st, 1894.

In 1895, the Bishop put them in charge of the Sacred Heart Girls' School. In 1897, they opened St. Joseph's High School, thus providing with St. Rose's at the Ursuline Convent, another Secondary School for girls in Georgetown.

North West

In 1896, the mission was started in the North West District with the opening of the Church at Morawhanna. Working out from there, missionaries established centres along the river notably at Hosororo. Both places were, under the next Bishop, to have Convents of Mercy with schools run by the Sisters.

In 1897, at Bishop Butler's request, the Sisters of Mercy opened a convent at Santa Rosa on the Moruka River - one of the oldest Catholic centres in the Colony, an Arnerindian district.

Fr. Messini had already started an orphanage for boys, which he now put under their care, and they also opened a boarding school for boys. Thus early started the Sisters first "Missionary Community in this Missionary Country". With a short break early in the 1900's, it was to grow from strength to strength in the succeeding Episcopate.

In 1897, Bishop Butler opened the Church of the Holy Rosary at Kitty and in 1899 on the feast of St. Patrick, the new Church of St. Patrick was opened in Barbados; and in 1901, St. Anthony's Church at Bartica was opened.

All this time up to the turn of the century, Bishop Etheridge and Bishop Butler had exercised the office of Superior of the Society of Jesus in this mission.

In 1900 this office was made distinct. In January of that year, the Provincial of the English Jesuits visited British Guiana and appointed Fr. Compton Theodore Galton as Superior of the Society in British Guiana and Barbados.

Bishop Butler's term of office was now drawing to a close. Schools, churches, the new Mission in the North West, the establishment of the Men's Guilds and the Sodality of Our Lady and St. Ignatius at the Cathedral were all the visible signs of the spiritual progress of the Church. The secular priests sponsored by him - Fr. John J. Purcell from Jamaica and the Guianese born Fr. John Victorine – were working in the Vicariate. He had made his last visit to Europe (and Rome) in 1898. He was then in failing health and returned, as he said, "to die in harness". By a coincidence he died on the anniversary of his consecration - 25th August, 1901.

Military Funeral

As an army man, he was accorded a full military funeral. "The coffin draped with the Union Jack and with a sword laid upon it, was placed on a gun carriage, and the horses drawing it were each led by an officer in full uniform. Thus passed to his rest a worthy disciple of St. Ignatius Loyola." (Memorial of Sir Henry Blackali at one time Chief Justice of Trinidad).

All sections of the community - Catholics and Non-Catholics - hastened to pay their last respects. The funeral procession went round the Cathedral square, crowds being gathered on all sides of the cordoned-off streets. The Bishop was buried within the Sacred Heart Chapel of the Cathedral.

The tomb withstood the ravages of the 1913 fire and can be seen today just within the railing in the extreme North Eastern corner at the Cathedral compound - in itself an interesting witness to the old layout of Camp Street which, at that time, curved out eastward, the back of the old Cathedral with its beautiful stained glass window occupying the space of what is the pavement today. After the destruction of the Cathedral the town authorities seized the opportunity to straighten the street. It must be remembered that in the days of the old Cathedral the presbytery was at the Western end of the same compound. When the present presbytery was built at the opposite side of Brickdam there was ample room left for our big Cathedral of today.

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