

SALVATORIAN MISSIONS IN INDIA ASSAM DISTRICT (1890-1915)



In 1890, the Salvatorian community was just nine years old, having been founded by **Father Francis Jordan** in Rome in 1881. But already there was fervor to establish the community outside Europe, and Father Jordan sent four missionary priests and brothers to the northeast corner of India – the district of Assam – in January 1890. **Father Otto Hopfenmueller**, **Father Angelus Muenzloher**,

Brother Marianus Schumm and **Brother Joseph Baechle** became the first Salvatorian missionaries to travel away from Europe. They arrived in Shillong, India, on February 27.

Adjusting to the new country and a different climate was not easy for the missionaries. On August 20, just six months after they arrived in India, Father Otto Hopfenmueller, the Superior of the community, died suddenly. Ten days after that, Brother Marianus also died suddenly. Was this to be the end of the very first Salvatorian foreign mission?



Quite the contrary, for Father Jordan sent three more priests and another brother to Assam! They were joined by three Salvatorian Sisters - **Sister Laurentia Heilmeier**, **Sister Scholastica Hopfenmueller** (the niece of Father Otto) and **Sister Benedicta Ruderich**. Father Angelus was appointed as the new Superior of the Mission. Within the next several years, several other members of the Salvatorian community went to minister in India. A few died there as well. In June of 1897, an earthquake destroyed much of the property, though thankfully none of the missionaries died in the quake. Now part of their task was to rebuild not only the Mission, but to help their people rebuild their homes and their lives as well.



Despite the hardships they endured, the Salvatorian Mission in Assam flourished over the next decade-and-a-half. But events elsewhere in the world would end up taking the missionaries away from this first Salvatorian foreign mission. In 1915, with the outbreak of World War I, all the German missionaries in India were forced to leave, by order of the

British government in charge of India at the time. Unfortunately, that meant every Salvatorian serving there. Some returned to Germany, some went to the United States to minister there. The Indian Catholics had come to love the Salvatorian missionaries and now they were forced to say goodbye. The mission established by the community was placed in the care of other religious orders.

It wasn't until 1990, one hundred years after the founding of that first Salvatorian foreign mission, that members of the Salvatorian community returned to India, this time to Bangalore. That same year, members of the Society's Generalate visited the old Mission in Assam to help the people celebrate the 100th Anniversary of their founding. People greeted the Salvatorians with open arms, many telling stories they heard from their parents and grandparents about the early missionaries. They visited the graves of Father Otto Hopfenmueller and other Salvatorians who had died there, only to find that, even after all these years, the deceased missionaries were fondly



remembered, honored and respected for their dedication and their work among the people. From those early days when the Gospel was first introduced to the district of Assam, the Catholic community had now grown to over 400,000 members. Those early Salvatorian missionaries were true heroes, men and women who were willing to leave their homeland and their families to cross the world and bring the Gospel to a different land and a different culture with a different language. People didn't dwell on the hardships, they only celebrated the work that was being done.

In 1894, our Founder, Father Francis Jordan, reflected on these early missionaries and indeed upon the mission of the entire Salvatorian Family, as he wrote in his Spiritual Diary:

“As long as there is one person on earth who does not know God and love Him above all things, you dare not allow yourself a moment's rest. As long as God is not everywhere glorified, you dare not allow yourself a moment's rest. As long as the Queen of heaven and earth is not everywhere praised, you dare not allow yourself a moment's rest. No sacrifice, no cross, no desolation, no trial, no temptation, oh! absolutely nothing should be too difficult for you with the help of God's grace. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me. Let no betrayal, no infidelity, no coldness, no abuse lessen your zeal. But everything through Him, with Him, and for Him. Let all peoples, nations, races and tongues glorify the Lord our God!”



The tomb of Fr. Otto Hopfenmueller was redesigned in 2015. His photo and one of Fr. Angelus Muenzloher were added.



