

Data regarding His Eminence Valerian Cardinal Gracias

Valerian Cardinal Gracias was born on 23rd October 1900 at Karachi of Jose Antonio and Charlotte; his father died when he was three years old. He received his education at St. Patrick's High School, Karachi, under the German Jesuit Fathers. To his mother, mainly responsible for his upbringing, he owes much that he learnt in life and to a great measure his vocation to the priesthood. He has always spoken about, and even now refers to, his mother with tender devotion. He joined St. Joseph's Seminary, Mangalore, where he excelled in Rhetoric and Philosophy. From there he was sent to the Papal Seminary, Kandy, where he is remembered as one of its most distinguished alumni, and obtained the Doctorate in Divinity with honours. His superiors appreciating his talents sent him, after his priesthood, to the Gregorian University, Rome, where he obtained the much coveted title "Magister Agregatus".

No sooner had he returned to India than the then Archbishop Joachim Lima, S.J. chose him as his Private Secretary (1929-36). He also held the important post of Chancellor of the Archdiocese. It was at this time that he excelled as a preacher, whose name became famous not only in India but also abroad. We find him preaching missions in India and Burma. One of his major activities was his genuine interest in University students, and in this connection he became the first Ecclesiastical Adviser of the Catholic Students' Union of Bombay, and helped by his knowledge and tact to steer this institution safely through many stormy interludes.

In the history of Father Gracias the one thing that strikes out is his destiny, if one can call it so to be the first to hold most important offices in the Church of Bombay, and in the new India of the time. Hence we see that in December of 1941 Archbishop Roberts appointed him the first Indian Rector of the Pro-Cathedral of the Holy Name, a post which hitherto had been the exclusive preserve of the European Jesuits of the Mission. He lived up to and surpassed the high expectations which his superiors entertained of him. It was at this time



that he made a name for himself as an administrator and brilliant organiser. He knew how to gather around him helpers in various spheres and enlist the ready co-operation of all sections of the community for religious functions or social welfare undertakings. In spite of his labours in the ministry, he found time to write; and it was this talent which enabled him to undertake successfully the editorship of the Bombay Weekly "The Examiner" for two terms when its editor was on leave. He wrote the following books in his spare time which have been widely appreciated: "The Vatican & International Policy", "Heaven & Home", and "Features of Christian Life".

To understand certain difficulties in the ecclesiastical administration of Bombay and the appointment of the local clergy to the bishoprics, one must keep in mind that since December 1928 an Agreement had been signed between the Holy See and Portugal, doing away with the old problem of Double Jurisdiction in Bombay and placing ecclesiastical affairs on a totally new footing. (Cfr. Father Hull's "Bombay Mission History", Vols. I & III). According to Article III of the new Agreement it was decreed that the Archbishop of Bombay "shall be alternately of a Portuguese and British nationality and shall have jurisdiction over the whole territory of the Archdiocese enlarged as stated." It was the then Archbishop Roberts, S.J. occupying the See of Bombay from 1937, who with a large measure of foresight saw the urgent need of placing an Indian in charge of ecclesiastical affairs in Bombay, not only from the missionary point of view, but also because of the swiftly changing political conditions in India. The leaders of the country were pushing ahead the concept of independence, and working on totally new lines. And Archbishop Roberts in search of an Indian priest could find no one more suitable from all points of view than the young, intelligent and energetic Rector of the Pro-Cathedral, Father Gracias. He was appointed the first Indian Bishop Auxiliary of Bombay on May 16, 1946, amidst the enthusiastic applause of the whole Archdiocese. In order to provide full scope to the new Bishop, Archbishop Roberts left Bombay on a tour of seamen's welfare, thus



leaving the whole Archdiocese for several years in the hands of Bishop Gracias; to whom the Holy See granted the powers of a Residential Bishop.

The young Indian Bishop was more than equal to the task. He undertook an extensive pastoral visitation of the whole Archdiocese, and particularly in the districts performed the unprecedented feat of visiting each and every house. New parishes were erected and a further impetus given to the establishment of schools and charitable institutions. He gave encouragement to Religious Congregations of Men and Women entering the Archdiocese to undertake educational schemes and social welfare. Thus inter alia two new hospitals were opened in the districts and the leper home in Surat which had been a problem to the civil authorities was set on a new footing by placing over it the Spanish Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

By reason of his office he came more and more in touch with the civil authorities, among whom he enjoyed the highest esteem. Thus when the stage was set for the resignation of Archbishop Roberts there could be no better choice for the first Indian Archbishop of Bombay than Monsignor Gracias. He was nominated Archbishop in 1950. One can gauge the extent of his work when one considers that the Archdiocese of Bombay is 21,500 sq. miles in area with a Catholic population of 225,723 and 91 parishes, several mission districts, the following Religious Congregations of Men: Jesuits, Salesians of Don Bosco, Order of Friars Minor, Society of the Divine Word, Missionary Society of St. Francis Xavier, Society of St. Paul, the Capuchins, and the Redemptorist Fathers, and no less than 19 Religious Congregations of Women. Catholic life is centered round the schools of which there are 46 High Schools, 80 Elementary Schools, besides the University Colleges, one St. Xavier's College conducted by the Jesuit Fathers, and Sophia College for Women conducted by the Religious of the Sacred Heart.

Archbishop Gracias completed the series of firsts by being nominated the first Indian Cardinal in history amidst the universal applause of the whole Catholic world. Indian leaders were enthu-



siastic over the appointment and the public reaction to him on his return to Bombay was unique in the metropolis (enclosed Special Number of "The E

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