constant threat that the residents of the Orphanage seem to have dwindled in number. In the beginning of the 18th century, it is reported that only one Friar looked after a small group of orphan boys there (Meersman, 1957:125). With regard to the parish, we have this contribution from Fr. Humbert (1:81). He refers to the list recently found in the Historical Archives of Goa dated January 10, 1714, in which, surprisingly, the church “NS da Luz” is shown to have had as its Vicar a secular priest!

Agashi was lost to the Franciscans about the year 1739 when the Marathas attacked Bassein. Very probably the church of OL of Light was destroyed in the encounter together with the church of St. James. But it would appear that St. James, under the secular clergy, who were allowed to remain by the Marathas, was re-built soon afterwards, for we are told (Humbert, 1:144) that Fr. Francisco de Tavora, a secular priest, was its Vicar till 1760 (but we do not know from which year), and that he had “worked under the Franciscan Fathers before the Marathas.”

It would also appear that the Christians of Agashi, even after the Maratha occupation enjoyed the free practice of their faith according to the testimony of the scholar Anquetil du Perron who arrived in Agashi on the Patronal feastday of the parish (December 16, 1760) and found “the roads were filled with people who wended their way to the church, with as much liberty as in a Christian state.” According to Meersman (1971:189) the date of the Patronal feast indicates that du Perron was speaking of the Franciscan church and not that of St. James. If this is true, then were both the churches in existence during the period of the Maratha occupation, with the secular priest at St. James also looking after the parish of OL of Light? When did the church of OL of Light then disappear and the name of St. James given to the parish of Agashi? and what are we to make of an opinion held in certain quarters that the church of St. James was re-built on the same site of the Franciscan church of OL of Light?

In 1900, Fr. Jovito V. Dias, with the help of the parishioners, extended the small church of St James and beautified it to give its present appearance. Prior to the opening of St. James Marathi Primary school in 1968 there was an English-medium primary school in Agashi by the name of “Holy Martyrs” (built in 1938)
thus indicating that the tradition of the “Boy Martyrs” is still alive in Agashi. The St. James High School was built and inaugurated in 1977.

HOLY SPIRIT, Nandakal, (1573)

The Church of the Holy Spirit at Nandakal, lying some 13 kilometers to the north of the Fort, between Nirmal and Agashi, is another fruit of the early missionary activity of the Franciscans. But the exact year of the church’s foundation is a matter of dispute. Here are three references to the church of Nandakal, which bear upon the date of its foundation:

(1) Fr. Hull (I:5), basing himself on a list of churches taken from the Goa “Annuario” of 1901 and supplementing it by the dates of foundations collected from da Costa’s Relatorio of 1892, states that the church was built in 1573.

(2) Gerson da Cunha in his “Antiquities” (1876) gives 1560 as the year of the church’s foundation. But he presents no substantial evidence to corroborate his opinion.

(3) Fr. Meersman puts its foundation “before 1585 when its name occurs for the first time in Franciscan documents. In that year Amador de S. Anna and Paulo da Portiuncula were appointed to minister to the members of this community” (1971:186; Also Humbert, I:xx).

Fr. Meersman’s opinion does not clash with that of Fr. Hull or Gerson da Cunha, for the latter two both date the original church before 1585. Since Gerson da Cunha does not present evidence for the year 1560, it may well be that Fr. Hull is right in assigning 1573 as the year in which the church of the Holy Spirit was built for the convenience of those
parishioners of the Holy Cross, Nirmal, who lived in the immediate environs of Nandakal. At first, the Vicar of Nirmal may have also been the Vicar of Nandakal; but with the growth in the number of Catholics in Nandakal and the neighbouring villages, the parish of Nandakal was separated from that of Nirmal, so that by 1585 it had a Rector of its own.

Though the Franciscans had to give up the Rectorate at the time of the Maratha invasion in 1739, the Holy Spirit Church was one of the churches in Bassein which escaped destruction. The story goes that when the Maratha soldiers came to destroy it, they were attacked by a swarm of bees, the denizens of the woods that surrounded the church. With the departure of the Franciscans the parish of Nandakal passed into the hands of the secular clergy. The first secular priest whom we know of, was appointed Vicar of the church in 1743. (Humbert I:62).

The church was reconditioned in 1910. In 1930 a porch was added to the church and other alterations introduced: galleries within the church were constructed and more windows in the sides of the church were opened. But all these modifications have not altered the church’s original form since Portuguese days.

Though the parish of the Holy Spirit has given birth to two new parishes in recent years—St. Joseph at Umrella in 1973 and St. Paul at Narnhat in 1975—it remains, in terms of numbers, the biggest parish in the whole of Bassein (8,600 parishioners). Very recently two sub-centres have been opened at the western (Ranawar) and eastern (Boling) extremities of the parish to cater to the outlying villages and their needs.

OUR LADY OF GRACE Papdy, (1574)

This was the second parish founded in South Bassein outside the Fort (the first being St. Thomas, Sandor). According to Fr. Hull (I:5), the church of O.L. of Grace was built in 1565. He appears however, to have confused the church of “Our Lady of Grace” with that of “Our Lady of Help” which was built in 1565 (see the Note on St. Thomas Church, Sandor).

To find out the true beginnings of this church at Papdy we should consult the “History of the Society of Jesus” by Fr. Sebastian

"At the time when Fr. Peter Almeida was 'Father of the Christians' (Pais dos Christaos) and Vicar of two parishes, St. Thomas and Our Lady of Grace, Bassein...some pagans and moors forced a young man to destroy a cross which had been erected in front of the church of Bassein, "de cima" (Papdy)."

Now Fr. Peter de Almeida SJ was the "Father of the Christians" during the years 1574-76. He died in 1579. So the church of O.L. of Grace must have been built in or a little before 1574. The parish of Papdy was separated from the mother parish of Sandor which was run by the Jesuits. In 1574 itself the Papdy church passed into the hands of the secular clergy to return to the Jesuits the following year.

The Jesuit Report of 1669 gives us some more information on the parish of Papdy during those early years. The church was some three kilometers from the Fort and comprised the villages of Davly (Remedy), part of Sandor, and Mafaregua. The land for the church was given by a Portuguese lady, by some Christians as well as by some Hindus and Muslims living in the locality. At the time of the 1669 Report, the parish had 1388 christians; and
184 families of Hindus and Muslims. The people were very poor and lived on manual work. By occupation, they were gardeners and farmers.

The parish of O.L. of Grace remained in the care of the Jesuits till the Maratha invasion of 1739 after which the parish was looked after by the secular clergy. It would appear then that the church itself was not destroyed by the Marathas. According to the data collected by Fr. Humbert (I:143), the parish of Papdy was run by the Vicar of the Mother of God Church, Palle, and this arrangement was generally maintained, given the paucity of priests, until about 1839 when Papdy began to have a Vicar of its own (Humbert, II:69).

The Thomas Baptista school was first established in Papdy as an English teaching school on September 22, 1889 and was soon converted into an Anglo-Vernacular school on December 27, 1891. It is one of the oldest educational institutions in Bassein. It was raised to a High School on May 9, 1935—and was at that time the only High School in the whole of Bassein.

OUR LADY OF REMEDY, Remedy (1577)

The parish of O.L. of Remedy was the second parish to be separated from the mother parish of St. Thomas, Sandor, in south Bassein (the first being that of O.L. of Grace, Papdy). It was started by the Dominican Fathers some 12 years after their Mother House of St Gonzalo was built in the Fort. About the foundation of the House in the Fort, Conti quotes from a rather stern letter written by Dom Antao de Noronha towards the end of 1564 to the King of Portugal shortly after his arrival in Goa as the Viceroy of India (Contact, 1973, Vol. IV, No. 1):

"The Vicar General of the Dominicans was in Bassein when I arrived here. He had bought a plot of land in the Fort and is at present digging the foundations of their house. I stopped him straightaway, because I do not think a new house there will be of any use and service to your Majesty..."

The Dominicans, however, won the case and by the end of that year, they already lived there. From this house the Fathers founded the church dedicated to O.L. of Remedy outside the Fort.
The Chronicler of the Dominican Order says: “We have no news regarding the Father who founded this church, but we know for certain that Frey Lobo Cardozo resided in it and that he converted many people.” With the permission of Governor Dom Diogo de Menezes (1576) given to the Vicar General of the Dominican Order, Fr. Lobo Cardozo began work on the church at Remedy. It was completed during the term of the succeeding Governor, Dom Luis d’Athaide (1577-1581). The main benefactress of the church was a certain Donna Anna Ortiz about whom we know nothing.

The church probably received its name from the fact that it had a statue of Our Lady which was considered to confer favours and blessings upon those who venerated it. During Portuguese times the fame of this statue spread far and wide so that both natives and foreigners visited the church to seek the favours of O.L. of Remedy. One case may be related here. The Jesuit, Fr. Manoel Godinho, before starting on his land-journey from Bassein to Portugal, first visited this church. His business was very important as he had been sent by the Viceroy to influence the King of Portugal against ceding the island of Bombay to the British.

He says: “I started from the Fort of Bassein on December 15, 1662. I went straight to the church of O.L. of Remedy, distant two cannonshots (about one and a half kilometers) from the city (Fort). In front of the miraculous image...I offered to God all the sufferings of such a dangerous journey. Having received her blessings, I began with courage my journey and by midday, I reached Dandora river (Vaitarna river and creek of north Bassein)” (Conti, “Contact”, 1973, Vol. IV, No. 1).
During Portuguese times, Bassein was invaded by Moghuls, Arabs and the Marathas. On almost all these occasions, however, the invaders did not dare to attack the church of O.L. of Remedy. Thus for example, in 1679 the Arabs attacked Bassein; they looted the town and set fire to the churches of St. Thomas and O.L. of Grace. But they left the church of O.L. of Remedy untouched. However, in 1690 a certain invader, by the name of Kakaji, pillaged Bassein and destroyed many churches. Not even the church at Remedy was spared by him and his soldiers.

The next assault was at the time of the Maratha invasion of 1739. As in the case of the other churches, the Dominicans had to leave Bassein and the care of the parish of Remedy devolved upon the secular clergy. The first secular priest known to have looked after the Remedy parish was the Vicar of Holy Cross, Nirmal (Humbert, I:74) in 1770.

The present church was re-built in 1939. Its doors were once the lateral doors of the Jesuit church of the Bassein Fort. A fire burnt down its beautiful main altar and the present altar was transferred to this church from the Bhuleshwar Cathedral of Bombay, when the latter was closed down in 1941. This parish celebrated its fourth centenary in October, 1977. On that occasion an extension to the church and a new Rectory were built during the Vicarship of Fr. Nelson Rebello.

MOTHER OF GOD, Palle (Before 1585)

It is difficult to say when exactly the church of the Mother of God came to be built in the village of Palle at the southern end of Bassein opposite Panju island. It is mentioned for the first time in the Franciscan Chapter-lists of 1585 when Diogo da Purificacao and Francisco de Rosa were residing there. (Meersman, 1971: 184) If we assume that it was built after 1577, then this would have been the fourth church to be erected in South Bassein outside the Bassein Fort (after those in Sandor, Papdy and Remedy).

Fr. Paulo da Trindade tells us that there was a beautiful statue of Our Lady in this church. Very likely it was presented to the church at the time of the foundation of the parish sometime before 1585. The Franciscan Chronicler describes the image in these words:
The first parish church held by the Franciscans round the district of Bassein is in the village of Palle just in front of the City (Fort). This church is dedicated to the Mother of God and possesses an image of Our Lady of great beauty, and the most perfect in the whole of India, as far as we know; she appears pierced by a sword. The people of the Fort have great devotion to her and come to this church every Saturday to hear the Mass offered in her honour. They present her, besides, gifts of oil and wax candles."

Within the parish of Palle the Franciscans also built a Friary dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. It was abandoned after the Maratha invasion of 1739 when the Franciscans had to leave Bassein. No trace of it exists today.

When the Franciscans quit Palle in 1739, Fr. Humbert informs us that Fr. Domingos Carvalho was Vicar of this church in 1741, and that in 1755 the Vicar of Palle was also the Vicar of Papdy (I:143). It seems difficult to hold that the church of Palle was destroyed by the Marathas in 1739, seeing that the Vicar of Palle generally functioned as the Vicar of Papdy as well for a century (Humbert, II:69). The church at Palle was, however, re-built between 1840-44 at a new site some hundred feet to the west of the original site.
Even to this day, the people of Bassein call this church by its old Portuguese name, “Mae de Deus”. The annual feast has always been celebrated on December 18—the “Palle Festa”—to which all the people of the neighbouring parts, whether Christian or non-Christian flock. They pray and offer candles before the statue of Our Lady on the main altar. Is this the original statue of the “Mother of God”? It does not appear so. The present statue of Mary has no child Jesus in her hands, and what seem to be two swords piercing her breast are obviously recent additions. This fact together with the practice of celebrating the feast on December 18, exactly seven days before the Nativity of Our Lord, seem to indicate that the feast celebrated is the “Expectation of Mary.”

OUR LADY OF MERCY, Merces (1606)

About three kilometers to the northwest of the Fort, between Sandor and Remedy lay a village which later came to be called by the name of “Merces.” In the second half of the 16th century, the Catholics of Merces, most of whom were fisherfolk (Kolis) used to attend religious services at the church of O.L. of Remedy, even though they were the parishioners of St. Thomas, Sandor. The simple reason for this was that Remedy was more conveniently accessible to them, especially during the monsoons, than was Sandor. Eventually Merces was erected as an independent parish with a church of its own. The village soon received its name from the church which in Portuguese bore the name “Nossa Senhora das Merces.”

The date of the foundation of the church and parish, however, is in dispute. Here are three opinions:

(1) Fr. Hull holds (I:5) that the church was built in 1696. From evidence that we now have, this date is much too late. The church was in existence before 1696.

(2) The Jesuit Report of 1669 seems to hint that this church was separated from the parish of St. Thomas in 1606 or thereabouts, at the time when Frey Alexio de Menezes was Archbishop of Goa: “O.L. of Merces passed to the Augustinians when the Archbishop of Goa demanded it.” This seems to indicate that a chapel of sorts had been built in the village prior to 1606, and was served by the Jesuits.
This village chapel was converted into a parish church in 1606 when Merces was cut off from Sandor.

(3). Fr. Conti holds the view that there was no chapel worth the name built in the village before 1606. He cites "Mitrás Lusitanas" as supporting his opinion. This source fixes the day of the blessing of the new church on December 2, 1606. His opinion is further confirmed, he claims, by documents published in Portugal by Fr. Antonio da Silva Rego (Vol. 11:256): "In 1606 Frey Sebastiao Seixas built the church of Merces outside the City walls."


Two points seem to emerge as certain from this evidence: that the parish of OL of Mercy began to exist as such from 1606 and that from that year on till 1739, it was under the care of the Augustinian Fathers. Then came the Marathas. And the Augustinians had to leave Bassein and commit the parish to the care of the secular clergy.

It appears that the church at Merces was destroyed by the Marathas far from the records we see that the parish of Merces was looked after by the Vicar of Remed till just after the middle of the 19th century. The church was re-built in 1856 and on January 17, 1862, Fr. Sebastiao Jose Florencio de Faria took possession of the parish as its Vicar (Humbert, II:123). From that year onwards, Merces has had a Vicar of its own.

In the course of the last five years the church has been renovated and extended with the opening of a wing and the inclusion of the porch within the area of the church by Fr. Ignatius Rasquinha.
ST. MICHAEL, Manickpur (1606)

Once upon a time this church was known as the church of St. Michael of Porim (or Purim). Porim, the name of the village in which the church was located, was changed to Manickpur only at the beginning of this century. Many of the graves in and outside the church, some of the people who died during this century, bear the name of Porim not that of Manickpur.

Up to 1606, the Catholics of Porim belonged to the parish of St. Thomas, Sandor. In 1606 the Archbishop of Goa, Dom Aleixo de Menezes, at the insistence of the Jesuit Provincial, thought it proper to separate the village of Porim from Sandor and to set it up as an independent parish. Immediately, a chapel of sorts was built in the village of Porim. It was a very simple structure with a roof of palm leaves and walls of reeds and mud. As the number of Catholics kept on increasing, the Jesuit Fathers of the Fort decided to build a bigger church. They selected the site on spacious grounds in the centre of five "pocaries" (sub-divisions of a village) known as Wanapoor, Devamany, Porim, Navgaon, Ullmeman. Three successive parish priests worked at building the church which when completed was considered perfect in every respect. It was dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel. Besides the five "pocaries", the parish had under its jurisdiction six more villages: Gocavarem (Gokhivera), Calmona, Balliam, Sattolly, Achola and Rajaoli.

In 1739, the church of Porim was probably the first to fall into the hands of the conquering Maratha army as it advanced from the East (via Vajreshwari) towards the Fort. According to Fr. Conti, a new church was immediately built on the foundations of the old one: in the compound of the church he found a stone from an old cross which carried the year "1783" marked on it, the year of the re-building of the church.

The Jesuits left when the Marathas took over Bassein, but ten years after the signing of the peace treaty between the Portuguese and the Marathas, that is in 1749, we find Fr. Pedro Francisco
Colaco, a secular priest, in charge of the parish of Porim (Humbert I:144). The secular clergy continued to care for the parish until March, 1949 when the parish was “returned” to the Jesuits. Before that, in October 1943, the village of Gokhivera had been detached from the parish of Manickpur and erected into an independent parish. In 1974, a chapel was built at Umela (Naigaon), dedicated to OL of the Immaculate Conception, to cater to the needs of the Catholics of that village.

II Parishes Founded under the Archbishop-Bishop of Damaun 1886-1928

With the Maratha invasion and occupation of Bassein in 1739, the foreign missionaries had to leave Bassein (and Salsette). The Marathas, however, allowed the parishes to be looked after by the indigenous secular clergy. The period between 1739-1886 marks the decline of whatever had been zealously built up in the previous two centuries. It may be called the Dark Ages of the Church in Bassein. The secular clergy, slender in numbers, strove to serve the Christian community in the 9 parishes of Bassein as best as they could.

The renaissance of the Church in Bassein may be said to begin with the signing of the Concordat of 1886, when Bassein became part of the new diocese of Damaun. By that date all the 9 churches in Bassein had either been re-built or renovated in one way or another.

These 42 years under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop-Bishop of Damaun saw the founding of two new parishes in Bassein: St. Peter at Koliwada and St. Francis Xavier at Giriz.

ST. PETER, Koliwada (1913)

The old fishing village of Koliwada in Portuguese times lay just outside the great Fort of Bassein at the southern tip of Bassein. Its Catholics would then have attended services at one of the churches within the walls of the Fort. After the Maratha conquest in 1739, when the churches within the Fort together with the Fort had been destroyed, the Catholics of Koliwada came under the