

THE VERY REVEREND URBAN DE HASQUE, S. T. D., L. L. D.,
PIONEER PRIEST OF INDIAN TERRITORY

By Velma Nieberding

Urban, Alphonse, Marie de Hasque was born the third son of Joseph Alexander de Hasque and Cornelia Carpentier, in Antwerp, Belgium, on July 16, 1875. He was one of ten children, six boys and four girls. His father was one of the principal sugar refiners of Antwerp and two sons of the family still carry on the business under the name of "Raffinerie de Hasque, Limited." His ancestors can be traced to the principality of Liege in the province of Limburg since 1300. He was of noble birth.

Urban de Hasque had never intended to become a missionary to the American Indians. Yet, it was his role, not only to make Catholic history in a land that was but a name on a map to him, but to finally preserve it as the official historian of the diocese he served.

His early education in Belgium was planned with the thought of serving in the Belgian Congo as a missionary. He studied for nine years at Our Lady's College in Antwerp, under the Jesuits, then graduated in Philosophy at the College de La Paix, at Namur. In August, 1894, he went to the Novitiate of African Missions, the Pere Blancs (White Fathers) at Algiers and Carthage. But the hot climate made him ill, so he was sent to the residence of the Pere Blancs at Rome to continue his studies until his health should improve. Some months later he returned to Carthage but his health failed again. That was when he made the decision to give up his dream of Africa and turn to missions in a more temperate climate.

Accordingly, in 1898, he enrolled in the American College at Louvain and followed classes at the famous Catholic University there, founded in 1425. He had talked with a young missionary Bishop who had come to Belgium to interest priests in becoming missionaries to the American Indians. This was Bishop Theophile Meerschaert who had been sent to the Indian Territory in 1891. Confronted with the monumental task of administering to the vast territory with but a few priests to help him, the energetic Bishop made frequent trips to Europe to persuade well trained priests to carry on the work of organizing new parishes and building churches and schools, as well as to secure from foreign benefactors of his diocese the financial assistance needed for such projects.

On July 15, 1900, Urban de Hasque was ordained a priest and left immediately for the United States. Sailing on the Red

Star liner, *Southwark* he landed in New York on October 2, 1900 and reached Guthrie, Indian Territory on October 10.

The young priest had from childhood been interested in Indians, having seen Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and later at the Antwerp World's Fair in 1894, Pawnee Bill and his show.¹

Father de Hasque's first assignment was as assistant pastor at Hennessey. He was instructed by the (now) venerable Monsignor G. Depreitere who had been in the United States since 1895, the first Belgian priest trained for the Indian Territory. Father de Hasque was appointed as pastor of the Holy Name of Jesus Church, at Chickasha, in 1901. Here he began his duties as a missionary to the Indians in this part of the Indian Territory.

Since his childhood, Urban de Hasque had been intensely interested in history and geography and was an excellent scholar. In the library of his parental home can still be seen many books he received in college as first class rewards for these branches of knowledge. It is not surprising then that as early as 1902, he began to record the history of the Catholic Church in the Indian Territory.

He is credited with publishing the first parochial bulletin ever issued in the diocese (then a Vicarite). Dated 1905, the booklet was called "The official publication of the Holy Name of Jesus Church (Catholic)." It included a short history of the parish, listed parish organizations and carried "suggestions on the right way to conduct yourself in church." On its front, the booklet carried a picture of the little white frame church that had been dedicated on May 15, 1898, by Bishop Meerschaert.

The keen business ability that would later lift him to a high position as Chancellor of the Oklahoma diocese was almost immediately demonstrated at Chickasha. Confronted with the problem that the church possessed only a quit claim deed to a block of property with a two-story school building on it, Father de Hasque moved rapidly to put his new parish affairs in order. He had the church building (which stood on another lot) moved to the actual location of the property in question, then petitioned the Secretary of the Interior to appraise the entire school block to the Catholic Church.

At that time, fifty-eight years ago, the twenty-eight lots in the block were appraised at the sum of \$1,172! The full amount for this property was raised in the following years by annual bazaars put on by ladies of the Church. That same year the

¹ "When Urban visited a Wild West Show at the Chicago Worlds Fair he was enthusiastically greeted by some of the Indians and remarked to an amazed nephew who happened to be in the States, 'They are some of my best parishioners' "—Letter from Maurice de Hasque, Antwerp, Belgium August 29, 1956.

pastor bought for \$58.00 at a public auction, the northeastern part of the Odd Fellows Cemetery and established a Catholic cemetery in the Chickasha parish.

During this time the priest was giving much attention to the christianization and education of the Chickasaw Indians. In order to know them he traveled tirelessly through the hill country to visit them, at the same time attending seven small missions near Chickasha. It was during the difficult time preceding statehood and he had the added difficulty of overcoming a certain hostility to the White man among the older Indians. At the end of 1905, however, twenty Chickasaws were enrolled in the parish school.

In 1903, Father de Hasque returned to Rome where he received the Degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology. While there he attended the funeral of Pope Leo XIII, who had died on July 20, 1903 and his account of this magnificent and solemn occasion was retold many times during the years that followed.

He resigned his pastorate in Chickasha in 1912, at the request of Bishop Meerschaert, and was appointed Chancellor of the diocese, a post he was to fill for six years. During this time he was secretary of the first diocesan synod and compiler of diocesan statutes. It has been said that he financed out of his own funds the printing of the Statutes of the Diocese of Oklahoma, (a unique edition of some 400 copies) in 1912.

In 1915, Father de Hasque founded *The Orphans Record* which succeeded *The Indian Advocate*, a publication that had been established by the Benedictine Fathers at Sacred Heart Abbey, in 1888. *The Indian Advocate* had been discontinued in 1910 and, until the establishment of the *Orphans Record*, no Catholic press had existed in Oklahoma since that time.²

It was during Father de Hasque's term as Chancellor of the Oklahoma diocese that his zeal and knowledge were tested in what came to be known nationally as "The Sacramental Wine Case." Early in 1917, the Oklahoma Legislature had passed the Ferguson "bone dry law" providing that among other things, "It shall be unlawful for any person in this State to receive directly or indirectly any liquor, the sale of which is prohibited by the State, from a common or other carrier."

Not long after the passage of this Act, the Reverend John Gastel, a Catholic priest stationed at Guthrie, had occasion to order a supply of altar wine, whereupon the Santa Fe Railway, in all good faith, alleged that under the law it could not act as carrier since altar wine was a liquor.

²The *Orphans Record* merged with and became *The Catholic Home* in 1922; This publication became *The Southwest Courier* in 1924 and continued to be the official publication of the diocese of Oklahoma until January, 1960. It is now called *The Oklahoma Courier*.

Father de Hasque then brought suit in the District Court to compel the railway to deliver shipments of wine intended solely for sacramental purposes. The suit was unsuccessful. On December 24, 1917, in a decision rendered by Judge Clarke, the court held that according to the statutes, wine "even for sacramental purposes" was forbidden in Oklahoma. This decision, which would either have prohibited the Church from observing Mass in Oklahoma or would have forced the Church into a bootlegger role, was appealed to the Supreme Court of Oklahoma and on May 21, 1918, the court ruled that wine for sacramental uses was not included in the prohibition legislation. The decision, based principally on the intent of the Legislature, was considered an affirmation of the American spirit of religious liberty by those most concerned with the case. For his work on this case and his work on the "Statutes of the Diocese of Oklahoma," Notre Dame University this same year conferred on Father de Hasque the degree of Doctor of Laws.

Meanwhile the country was involved in World War I. In 1917, Father de Hasque received permission from the Bishop to join the Army as a Chaplain. He had been deeply grieved and concerned at the fate of his beloved Belgium during the war, particularly because of the part played by his oldest brother, Joseph. This young man, as Chairman of the Catholic Youth (a boys' organization) in Antwerp, had despite German occupation inspired thousands of young men to join the Belgian forces and had personally led many of them across the barbed wire, electrified fences of the frontier, to Holland. He had been arrested in the summer of 1915 and sentenced by German Court Martial to fifteen years hard labor. The end of the war in 1918 rescued him from the labor camp.³

³ After the war, Joseph de Hasque became city councillor in Antwerp; a member of the Chamber of Representatives of Belgium and later a member of the Senate. He was the managing editor of the *Gazet van Antwerpen*, the most important newspaper of the city when the Germans again invaded Belgium in 1940. He was immediately arrested and sentenced to a concentration camp, dying there of starvation during the terribly cold winter of January, 1942. This was the concentration camp, Sachsenhausen at Oranienburg near Berlin. The City of Antwerp has subsequently named a street for him, the one where stands the sugar refinery, of which he was chairman of the Board of Directors. It is called "Josef de Hasque."

Another brother of Father de Hasque, George had founded in 1911 the Baden Powell Boy Scout movement in the Flemish part of Belgium, as well as the Belgian Sea Scouts for which organization he had paid for several ships. He was arrested by the Germans for secret patriotic activities first in the summer of 1915, and later in the fall of 1918. He would have been executed by the Germans had not the war opened the prisons. He resumed his work with the Boy Scouts until his death in 1933. The youngest of the de Hasque brothers, Maurice, served as Belgian liaison officer to the British forces in Flanders during World War I; was wounded at Ypres. During the second World War he was an officer in the Belgian Secret Army and entrusted with the organization (under Nazi occupation) and command of the Liaison Service with the Allied Forces of the Antwerp Secret Army.

Hoping to be assigned to the United States troops that would liberate Belgium, Father de Hasque went eagerly to his first assignment at Camp Travis, Texas, in World War I. He had asked for overseas duty and was due to embark for Europe when a serious outbreak of Influenza occurred in the Army camp. His devotion to the sick and dying during this trying time was highly and publicly praised by his Commanding Officer.⁴

It was not until 1919 that Father de Hasque could obtain permission from the Bishop to visit his family in Europe. After his discharge from the Army he remained in the Reserve Chaplains Corps where he reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and served as Departmental Chaplain of the Reserve Officers Association of Oklahoma.⁵

Father de Hasque returned from Europe in 1920 and was appointed the pastor of St. Anthony's Church in Okmulgee. While there he made plans for a new church, the cornerstone of which was laid by Cardinal Hayes of New York on May 10, 1925.

Father de Hasque bought eight lots in the same year for a Negro parish in Okmulgee, and Father Daniel P. Bradley of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, came from Philadelphia to initiate the work of organizing a district congregation of Catholic colored in that city. On October 25, 1925, Bishop Francis C. Kelley dedicated the new Negro Church to the Uganda Martyrs.⁶

He wears fifteen crosses or medals including the three Belgian orders and several foreign decorations, including Commandership in the Order of Merit of Spain. In view of these facts it is not difficult to understand the intense patriotism and Military preoccupation Father de Hasque manifested throughout his long life.

⁴An extract from a letter by Colonel of Cavalry, T. M. Coughlan, Executive officer of Camp Travis Texas, dated July 10, 1919 reads: "Upon your Honorable Discharge from the Service and says in part, "At the outbreak of the Influenza epidemic in the camp early in October, 1918, and upon the request of the Commanding Officer of the Base Hospital, you were attached thereat for duty. Your work in this connection has been characterized by unremitting zeal and unswerving devotion to spiritual and material consolation of all the sick, irrespective of Creed. During the height of the epidemic you were on duty night and day for a period of three weeks and your activities included the administration of the Sacraments to four hundred Catholic officers and men, none of whom died without the last rites of the Church."—From the Files of Maurice de Hasque.

⁵During the World War I, nine priests of the diocese of Oklahoma were in active service, four with the French Army and five with the United States Army.—From an Historical Sketch by Dr. De Hasque, 1934.

⁶Because of his interest in Africa and because of his intense missionary zeal, Father de Hasque seemed to have a particular interest in the Uganda Martyrs—the twenty-two Colored who were martyred in Uganda in 1885. Father de Hasque possessed one of the only three relics of the body of any of these youths. He had obtained it from a friend who had been chosen as sponsor of the cause of the Beatification of the Uganda Martyrs.

Interrupting his parish duties during the years 1926-1929, Father de Hasque filled temporarily positions as Professor at American College, Louvain; Chaplain at Fort Sill; and Administrator of the Union City Parish.

He was constantly a builder. He had celebrated Duncan's first Mass in the home of John Weaver on December 12, 1902 and built the Church of the Assumption in that city, saying its first Mass on New Year's Day 1909. He built also a frame Church at Marlow which was dedicated by Bishop Meerschaert on November 22, 1904. Lindsay was a mission he attended from Chickasha from 1902 to 1912, and he was able to say the first Mass in the Church of St. Louis which he built there, two weeks before his assignment to become Chancellor of the Diocese of Oklahoma. He was the first priest to hold services in Waurika, his initial visit being noted as March 10, 1903. He began construction work on the Church there in 1915, funds having been obtained from the Catholic Church Extension Society. In 1929, he was sent to Oklahoma City where he served as inspector of Diocesan Schools until 1931 when he was appointed the Pastor of St. Rose of Lima Parish, in Perry.

Father de Hasque was next appointed Chaplain of St. Ann's Home for Aged in Oklahoma City. Still keenly interested in writing, he continued to work in the archives of the church, spending some time each day with filing and records.

In 1953, he was appointed the Chaplain of St. Vincent's Home. His health was beginning to fail and he suffered not only from arthritis but from diabetes and a heart condition. He talked often of another visit to Europe during this time, particularly as the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Geographic Society of Antwerp was to be celebrated in Belgium. He was asked, as a life member of the Oklahoma Historical Society to represent this society at the celebration, and he served also as a delegate for the National Geographic Society of Washington, D. C. The event, attended by representatives of King Beauvuoin and other notables was one of the highlights of Father de Hasque's long and eventful life. He wrote from Belgium, "As the senior of twenty-seven foreign delegates I was always given a place of honor and twice addressed the hundred fifty or more members in Flemish, French and English" (He spoke six languages fluently).

One of the last great charitable acts of his life was to assist in the building of a Church in Rhodesia, North Africa. The native priest had been helped for a number of years through the generosity of Father de Hasque who had purchased for him a

motorcycle on which to travel about his extensive African parish. With characteristic modesty Father de Hasque said little about the building of the Church. The present pastor is Father Titus A. Kapepele.⁷

On August 28, 1953, Father de Hasque presented to the National Geographic Society in Washington, a French Atlas of the United States which had been published in 1825. At the same time he presented to the Oklahoma Historical Society a rare map (1822) of the Arkansas Territory which included present Oklahoma at the time.⁸

On September 24, 1954, the priest who had served Oklahoma so valiantly and with such inspiration for fifty-four years, was called to his reward. God's book of life alone will reveal the record of his labors and sacrifices for the Church. He had seen its present growth in Oklahoma sown in tears and privation; had served under three Bishops and three Popes. He had been a citizen of the United States since 1905 but a part of his heart was forever with Belgium. He had been a great traveler, visiting in Africa, Italy, and most of the countries of Europe including Turkey, Greece, Portugal and Spain, the Azores and Canary Islands. He had visited Palestine, the Holy Land on a Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1910. He was in Egypt and Morocco and Cuba and Mexico. He had traveled extensively in the United States and had crossed the Atlantic ocean twenty-seven times by water or by air. So great was his knowledge, so devoted was he to the universal concept of the Catholic Church that he can never be considered other than a world citizen.⁹

But Oklahoma, the land where he labored for over half a century, claims him now and mourns his loss. He was buried from Our Lady's Cathedral, Oklahoma City and a young man whom Father de Hasque had encouraged to become a priest, Monsignor Stephen Leven, (now Auxiliary Bishop of San Antonio) preached the sermon. Bishop Eugene J. McGuinness was the celebrant of the Requiem Mass.

In Antwerp, Belgium, a memorial service was held in Father de Hasque's old parish church attended by friends and

⁷ "He (Father deHasque) had a letter from the Bishop of Africa with pictures of the Church and parishioners taken the day the Bishop dedicated the Church. On the back of the pictures he had written 'Your Church and Parishioners.' "—Letter from Mrs. Margaret Lally, St. Ann's Home, May 19, 1955.

⁸ *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, Winter, 1953-54, Notes and Documents.

⁹ All material in this biography, unless otherwise noted, is based on material in the files of the author and data furnished by the brother of Father de Hasque, Monsieur Maurice de Hasque, Antwerp, Belgium.

municipal authorities. The United States was represented by the Consul general and by the Antwerp Post of the American Legion with two flags as was the Belgian National Federation of Veterans of World War I. At the end of the service both the American and Belgian anthems were played, the congregation standing at attention, deeply moved—"May his soul rest in peace."