

The Missionary Oblate



Pope Francis kisses the crucifix of St. Eugene de Mazenod, the Founder of the Oblate Congregation, worn by Father Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, OMI, the new Oblate Congregational Leader

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The Missionary Oblate

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The present Issue of the *Missionary Oblate*
is respectfully dedicated
to

Father Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, OMI,
the newly elected Oblate Congregational Leader

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Authors are responsible for the views expressed in their articles

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Editorial

THE HISTORIC ARAGALAYA

The year 2022 in Sri Lanka was noted for the eruption of a national protest, **Aragalaya**, against a Government that had failed to promote the development of the people and of the country, thereby creating a very serious socio-economic crisis bereft of hope to feed the people, and to cure their sicknesses.

The main causes attributed to the socio-economic crisis: the ban on chemical fertilizer for agriculture, making food production decline, lack of fuel for fishing, tax cuts favouring the business groups, which affected the government revenue causing budget deficits to soar, external debt, continuing non-essential infrastructure projects financed by debt, fall of foreign exchange reserves to pay foreign debts, loss of fuel, loss of cooking gas, loss of electricity and of medicine, skyrocketing of basic commodities, causing malnutrition and hunger and economic mismanagement by the Government led by Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) etc.

Unable to bear up the pain and psychological stress caused by the oppressive and de-humanising situation, some Religious leaders including the Catholic priests and Consecrated Religious supported the peaceful protests and the peaceful protesters publicly, staying with them, like a buffer between the security forces and the protesters in order to avoid violent confrontation between them, calling also for a political system-change, until organized

thuggery was unleashed by certain groups, disrupting the peaceful Aragalaya.

The Catholic bishops' Conference and the Conference of Major Religious Superiors in Sri Lanka stood with the young men and young women of Aragalaya, who were fighting for social justice, supported also by some professionals like the professors of the Universities, the lawyers and the doctors.

However, here's a question which needs to be posed: Did the above-mentioned historic Aragalaya make the ordained ministers and the Consecrated Religious who wanted system-change in Sri Lanka to discern also the sign (Aragalaya) prayerfully in the light of the Word of God and make decisions / choices in their style of life? This question is posed because there are already signs of discomfort manifested by many Sri Lankan Catholic lay faithful against certain ordained ministers in the Church in Sri Lanka, who are caught up by the spirit of affluence and living in comfort zones and in monetary gains. They also point out that these presbyters are more concerned about beautifying and embellishing the church - buildings rather than 'building' the church-people (People of God) who are struggling at the moment in Sri Lanka for a better quality of life.

The faith-commitment of the early Christians made them practice evangelical poverty (Acts 2:44; 4:32) and concern and care for the economically poor (Acts 2:45; 11:29-30). The leaders of the early Church and St. Paul were also concerned about the economically poor (Gal. 2:

10), imitating Jesus (Mk 6:36-37). St. Paul animated the Christian communities of Antioch, Corinth, Galatia and Rome to share their meagre resources with the poor Christians in Judea (Acts 11:29-30).

The ordained ministers and the Consecrated Religious in Sri Lanka need to return to the sources (*reditus ad fontes*), namely to the Word of God, following the 2nd Vatican Council and the Synodal way of Pope Francis, in order to live under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and struggle for social justice, adopting a simple lifestyle. Jesus said, *“If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me”* (Mt 16:24). *“The Son of man has nowhere to lay His head”* (Lk 9:58). Jesus did not offer a very comfortable way of life through the acquisition of consumer goods but a simple life-style that would grant inner joy (Jn 15: 11-12) through a life lived out of selfless love manifested through deeds of service to God’s creation (human and infra-human beings). The seed must die to give life and the candle must lose itself in order to give light.

The Consecrated Religious men and women, need to remember that they have publicly and visibly vowed to live a life of evangelical poverty, a simple life-style and to work for social justice, assisting the economically poor and avoiding a comfortable life-style which would reflect the spirit of worldliness and not the spirit of Jesus Christ. They are called to be witnesses, not mere teachers and preachers. Pope St. Paul VI in his encyclical, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no 41, had pointed out in these words: ***“People listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, or if they listen to teachers they do so because they are witnesses”*** (emphases added).

**Address of the Superior General
delivered during the Audience
of the Holy Father
with participants in the 37th General Chapter
3rd of October 2022**

English translation of the original Spanish text.

Holy Father, and our father, Pope Francis,

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in our 37th General Chapter greet you warmly and with great gratitude for receiving us today in this audience. We come to express our communion with you and with the entire Church. We are 78 Capitulars engaged in evangelizing the poor and most abandoned people in 70 countries around the world. We are inspired by the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod who founded us in Aix en Provence, France in 1816. The theme for our General Chapter, Pilgrims of Hope in Communion, has been a very rich source of reflection, motivation and call to conversion for our missionary lives.

Your Holiness, your ministry as successor to St. Peter has inspired us in our commitment to the mission of the Church. During this General Chapter we have been very much in harmony with your call for a synodal Church and we have been engaged in various ways in the synodal process in the Church as well as which have lived during our General Chapter. We have heard your call to be *una Chiesa in Uscita*. Your writings, especially *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), *Laudato Si'* (2015), *Gaudete et*

Exsultate (2018), Querida Amazonia (2020) and Fratelli Tutti (2020) have inspired us throughout our General Chapter. Likewise we feel invited to put into practice your call to work in the promotion of human fraternity and peace.

In our pilgrim journey toward the fullness of the Kingdom, we recognize that at times we have lost our way and we have not always been faithful witnesses to the Good News. Aware of our sinfulness and weakness, we have asked forgiveness of God and from the people we have hurt in the process of evangelizing. With a deep longing for our own conversion, we humbly join the pilgrimage of the human family, journeying toward communion with God and with all our brothers and sisters.

During this Chapter, the world's cares have come to us very closely: the war in Ukraine; the refugees of natural disasters and the devastation caused by the damage inflicted on our common home by the way we live; the violence in the cities and areas of drug trafficking; the various forms of persecution, religious, social, economic, etc. Even with all these shadows on the human family, this General Chapter has filled us with hope as we heard of many beautiful signs of God's saving power among us.

Your mission, Holy Father, as the successor of St. Peter, fills us with hope and with joy. We are filled with gratitude for this wonderful moment to be with you. We are here to renew the strongest bonds of communion and fidelity to you, Holy Father.

We ask for your blessing upon us, our entire Congregation, and all the laity, religious men and women, and priests who make our charism a part of their lives and make up what we call the Mazenodian family. May your blessing help us to renew ourselves in the spirit of the charism of St. Eugene, a spirit of daring to announce the Gospel to the poor and most abandoned at the margins of our society.

We are committed to pray for you and we ask for the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary upon you. With filial devotion, in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate. Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate.

Father Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, OMI
Superior General

“I urge you to be promoters of communion through expressions of solidarity, closeness, synodality and fraternity with all. May the Good Samaritan of the Gospel be an example and a stimulus to make you close to every person, with the love and tenderness that drove him to take care of the robbed and wounded man (cf. Lk 10:29-37). To make yourself a neighbour is a daily job, because selfishness pulls you in, pulls you down; to make yourself neighbour is to get out.”

Pope Francis to the Oblate Capitulants at the Vatican, on October 3, 2022.

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY
IMMACULATE**

on October 03, 2022

Dear brothers, good morning and welcome!

I am pleased to meet you, on the occasion of your General Chapter. I thank the Superior General – poor thing, taken from the desert and brought here to Rome! – for his introduction, and I wish serene and fruitful work to him and the new Council. And let us thank the Superior and the Counsellors who have concluded their service.

You are a religious family dedicated to evangelization, and you are gathered to discern together the future of your mission in the Church and in the world. You have chosen, for this Chapter, a demanding theme, very similar to what has been chosen for the Church's next Jubilee: *"Pilgrims of hope in communion"*. It is a theme that sums up your identity on the streets of the world, to which, as disciples of Jesus and followers of your founder Saint Eugène de Mazenod, you are called to bring the Gospel of hope, joy and peace. It is a world that, on the one hand seems to have reached seemingly unreachable goals, yet on the other is still enslaved by selfishness and full of contradictions and divisions. The cry of the earth and of the poor, wars and conflicts that shed blood on human history, the distressing situation of millions of migrants and refugees, an economy that makes the rich ever richer and the poor ever poorer, are some aspects of a scenario where only the Gospel can keep the light of hope burning.

You have chosen to be *pilgrims*, to rediscover and live your condition as wayfarers in this world, beside the men and women, the poor and the least of the earth, to whom the Lord sends you to announce his Kingdom. Your founder too was a wayfarer, at the origins of your religious family, when he went walking with his first companions in the villages of his native Provence, preaching the popular missions and restoring to the faith the poor who had turned away from it, and that even the ministers of the Church had abandoned. It is a tragedy, this, when the ministers of the Church abandon the poor.

Pilgrims and wayfarers, always ready to set out, like Jesus with his disciples in the Gospel. As a missionary Congregation, you are at the service of the Church in seventy countries throughout the world. To this Church, that the Founder taught you to love as a mother, you offer your missionary zeal and your life, participating in her exodus towards the peripheries of the world beloved by God, and living a charism that leads you towards the furthest, the poorest, those whom no-one reaches. Walking this road with love and fidelity, you, dear brothers, render a great service to the Church.

You have heard the call to rediscover your identity as priests and brothers united by the bonds of religious consecration. *Pilgrims of hope*, you walk with the holy people of God, living in fidelity your missionary vocation, together with laypersons and young people who share in the Church the charism of your saintly Founder, and who wish to play an active part in your mission. Saint Eugène taught you to look at the world with the eyes of the

crucified Saviour, this world for whose salvation Christ died on the cross.

You have already dedicated one of your preceding General Chapters to the theme of *hope*, when you heard a particular call to be witnesses to this virtue in a world that seems to have lost it, and that seeks elsewhere the source of its happiness. Being missionaries of hope means knowing how to read the signs of its hidden presence in the daily life of the people. Learning to recognize hope among the poor to whom you have been sent, who often succeed in finding amid the most difficult situations. Letting yourselves be evangelized by the poor you evangelize: they teach you the way of hope, for the Church and for the world.

In addition, you wish to be witnesses of hope *in communion*. Communion today is a challenge on which the future of our world, the Church and consecrated life depends. To be missionaries of communion, it is necessary first of all to live it among ourselves, in our communities and in mutual relations, and then to cultivate it with everyone, without exception. You frequently referred, during your Chapter, to the ecclesial pathway of this time, which is rediscovering the beauty and the importance of “walking together”. I urge you to be promoters of communion through expressions of solidarity, closeness, synodality and fraternity with all. May the Good Samaritan of the Gospel be an example and a stimulus to make you close to every person, with the love and tenderness that drove him to take care of the robbed and wounded man (cf. *Lk* 10:29-37). To make

yourself a neighbour is a daily job, because selfishness pulls you in, pulls you down; to make yourself neighbour is to get out.

In this Chapter, you have also often evoked your *commitment to the common home*, seeking to translate it into concrete decisions and actions. I encourage you to continue to work in this direction. Our mother earth nourishes us without asking for anything in exchange; it is up to us to understand that she cannot continue to do so if we do not also take care of her. They are all aspects of that conversion to which the Lord calls us continually. Returning to the common Father, returning to the source, returning to the first love that impelled you to leave everything in order to follow Jesus: this is the soul of consecration and mission!

May your Founder, the *charism* he transmitted to you, and his *missionary vision* be and remain points of reference for your life and your work; to stay rooted in your missionary vocation, above all by living the testament of your Founder, in mutual love among yourselves and in zeal for the salvation of souls. It is the heart of your mission and the secret of your life, and this is why the Church still needs you. In the immense field of the mission that is the entire world, may Jesus always be your model, as he was for Saint Eugène. Before the crucified Saviour, he decided one day to offer his own life so that everyone, especially the poor, might be able to experience the same love of God that had restored him to the path of faith.

This year you have celebrated the memorial of a special grace that Saint Eugène received two centuries ago, before the statue of Our Lady Immaculate in the church of the mission in Aix-en-Provence. This renews to you the invitation to take Mary as your travelling companion, so that she may always accompany you on your pilgrimage. Mary the pilgrim, Mary journeying, Mary who arose in haste to go and serve. After saying her “yes” to God through the archangel Gabriel, she departed in haste to go to her cousin Elizabeth, to share the gift and to place herself at her service. In this too, may Mary be an example to you, for your life and for your mission.

Dear brothers, I wish you a good conclusion to your Chapter, and I accompany you with prayer. I heartily bless all of you and your confrères, especially those who are sick and frail, and those who are in difficulty at this time. And you too, please, pray for me. Thank you!

Holy See Press Office Bulletin, 3 October 2022

“Being missionaries of hope means knowing how to read the signs of its hidden presence in the daily life of the people. Learning to recognize hope among the poor to whom you have been sent, who often succeed in finding amid the most difficult situations. Letting yourselves be evangelized by the poor you evangelize: they teach you the way of hope, for the Church and for the world.” Pope Francis to the Oblate Capitulants at the Vatican, on October 3, 2022

TURNING OUR SEARCH LIGHTS ON OUR SRI LANKAN SUFFERING MASSES

According to the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and UN World Food Programme (WFP), nearly 30 % of the Sri Lankan population, i.e., about 6.3 million people are experiencing acute food insecurity and more than 60 % of the Sri Lankan families are under-nourished.

“According to the UNICEF report, families are skipping regular meals as staple foods become unaffordable. Children are going to bed hungry, unsure of where their next meal would come from. Almost half of children in Sri Lanka already require some form of emergency assistance. There are already over 10,000 children in institutional care in Sri Lanka, mainly as a result of poverty” (*Daily Mirror*, September 22, 2022).

Malnutrition affects pregnant mothers, the children in their wombs and lactating mothers and their children. After the birth of children, due to the non-availability of medicine and medical / health care , they will be prone to sicknesses and death. If this poor situation is allowed to continue, the future of our people will be one of destitution.

“Food inflation has risen to 82.5 %. Prices of all rice varieties have gone up by 100 % -125 %. Dhal which was Rs 265 a kilo, is now sold for between Rs 464 and Rs 580. Dried sprats were Rs 933 per kilo last year and now sells for Rs 2,104. The price of wheat flour has risen by 328 % from Rs 98 last year to Rs 422 per kilo. The price of an

egg was Rs 18 last year and Rs 49 now”. (*Sunday Times*, Sept 18, 2022)

Food crisis is affecting also low and middle- income households in the villages and in urban areas. Other social categories affected are the Garment workers, the widows, the temporary workers involved in construction industry, the workers on tea and rubber estates who receive wages less than Rs 1000/= per day, the farmers by the ban on the importing agro-chemicals, the fishermen by the non-availability of fuel for several months, the unemployed, the under-employed and the widows who lost their husbands in the ethnic war.

Need to turn our search lights

We, the Christians, need to turn our search lights now on our suffering masses. In the 19th century the Catholic Church lost the workers / the masses because the Catholic Church was not concerned with their economic problems. In Belgium, in humble response to that sad situation, Fr. Joseph Leo Cardijn (later Cardinal) founded the Movement of the Young Christian Workers (YCW) and Fr. Leon Van Hoorde OMI initiated a Workers’ Community (Communaute de La Ploudriere) and in France, the Movement of the Priest-Workers began.

Will the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka lose our Catholic fishermen, our Catholic farmers, our Catholic Plantation workers, our Catholic industrial workers and our Catholic young boys and young girls who are looking for prophetic voices for justice and human progress from the Catholic

Church in Sri Lanka? If the ordained ministers and the Consecrated Religious are as much concerned about the economic problems of our people as they are of theirs, then the situation will be different. Prevention is better than cure.

The willingness of the people / the masses to endure destitution has come to an end. Jesus said that the poor will be always there. Sure, but not destitution! Destitution is a condition in which commodities fall short of basic needs, while poverty means a human being has just enough to survive.

Destitution is against human dignity.

Destitution is an evil. In the Lord's Prayer we say, "*Deliver us from evil*". Apart from those who want to make destitution a virtue, as a form of asceticism, destitution is an evil. Let us look at the situation of our people. People cannot accept destitution because it is against human dignity. Both the Second Vatican Council and St. John Paul II have insisted, "*Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare*" (*Gaudium et Spes* 22; *Redemptoris Hominis* 8).

As Christians, we have the responsibility to care for the people who are in a de-humanised situation in Sri Lanka. We cannot love God without loving our people in distress. **Our worship and liturgical celebrations will become mere rituals if they do not symbolize our Christian commitment (as individuals and communities) to**

rescue our suffering masses and enable them to lead lives worthy of human dignity, experiencing also equality and inclusion.

Fr. Emmanuel Fernando OMI

BE WITNESSES TO THE POOR

“Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Then do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him silken honours in the temple only then to neglect him when he goes cold and naked outside. He who said: ‘This is my body’ is the One who also said, ‘You saw me hungry and you gave me no food... What good is it if the Eucharistic Table groans under the weight of golden chalices, when Christ is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger, and then with what remains you may adorn the altar as well!” **St. John Crysostom** (349-407).

“As he gazed at the glorious gothic architecture, **St. Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090 – 1153) exclaimed, wealth is drawn up by ropes of wealth. The Church is resplendent in the walls, beggarly in her poor. She clothes her stones in gold, but leaves her children naked.”

“Part of the teaching and the most ancient practice of the Church is her conviction that she is obliged by her vocation – she herself, her ministers and each of her members – to relieve the misery of the suffering, both far and near, not only out of her “abundance” but also out of her “necessities”. Faced by cases of need, one cannot ignore them in favour of superfluous church ornaments and costly furnishings for divine worship; on the contrary it could be obligatory to sell these goods in order to provide food, drink, clothing and shelter for those who lack these things” (**Pope St. John Paul II** in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no 31)

Rethinking the Catechetical Ministry in Sri Lanka

Prof. Dr. Shirley L. Wijesinghe

It is with a deep sense of appreciation of all those engaged in the catechetical apostolate that I wish to begin this page. Thanks to the dedication of the catechists guided by the parish priests and directors at different levels, much has been achieved in the field of catechetics. At present, the main thrust is on imparting religious knowledge and less on catechetical formation in the sense of helping children to evolve a spirituality on their own. Many parishes devote their energies to cover the school textbook which alone is insufficient to reach the objective of catechetical formation. Hence, I wish to propose the following structural change giving priority to catechetical formation without neglecting the study of the school textbook.

There is a need to have two syllabi for catechetics, one for catechetical formation and the other, the given school textbook. The priority should be given to the former without neglecting the latter.

Catechetical Formation

Catechetical Formation is meant to help children develop their own spirituality. I wish to propose the following in view of achieving this objective with the participation of children from Grades 3 to 11. These are spiritual exercises and recommended to be limited to 45 minutes.

Week 1: Sit with children for spontaneous prayer (but with the same group without mixing groups as it is a help to create confidentiality among children). The focus here is looking to the past with PRAISE and THANKSGIVING and to the future with HOPE.

Week 2: Bible sharing – Present a text of the Bible, and let the children see how the text resonates in their life. This is not a commentary on the passage, the children will be asked to say only the message of the text that speaks to them personally. They should not be forced to share the promptings of the text as there could be days when nothing strikes them, and there could be moments when the text says something too personal to be shared with others. But they can be encouraged to share with the group the promptings they are comfortable with. From the point of view of faith, this is the moment of the Holy Spirit who blows into the hearts of these children calling for change, conversion, renewal and in turn opening a hopeful future to each and all in the context of a tiny ‘ecclesial community’ that they are.

Week 3: Storytelling, drama, painting, singing, a liturgical dance, writing a monograph on a recent experience and relating it to an incident in the Bible or a relevant film on a Biblical, Liturgical or Theological theme.

Week 4: A Doctrinal Exposé

Week 5: In some months there are five weeks and in those months an exposure visit could be organized. This could

be an opportunity for Catechetics of Ecology and Catechetics of Peace and Interreligiosity.

Study of the Textbook

The study of the school textbook is vital for the children who do not have religion classes in their schools and also may be for the children who wish to have a second reading of the school textbook as an extra help. But this may not be necessary for the children who have good teachers in their schools. Hence, this should be left optional. In fact, some children complain of confusion when the teaching methods employed by the catechist is different from the school teacher. Following the norms of psychology of education adhered to in the school curricula, the duration of the class should be limited to 40 minutes. This could be supplemented by a few seminars conducted in the course of the academic year, if more time is needed to cover the syllabus.

Catechetical Legacy of a Missionary

The present writer attended the parish catechetical programme under a single parish priest throughout his childhood years. The good missionary, **Fr. Yves Rozen, a French Oblate** invested a lot of energy in the catechetical apostolate. He began catechesis with Grade 3 students, may be because he was aware of the complexities of teaching religion to Grades 1-2 children and the level of competency of the catechists of the parish. (The educationists show that teaching Grades 1-2 demand multiple competencies such as singing, dancing, painting,

storytelling and a basic knowledge of psychology and general science. Hence, the present writer recommends that teaching catechism in the parishes begin with Grade 3 students).

The catechetical programme of Fr. Rozen included two sessions, one on Tuesday afternoons (45 minutes) and on Sunday afternoons (45 minutes). He was equipped with slides and posters and the Sunday class was usually a slideshow. He himself prepared the first communicants for eight weeks on daily basis teaching them in the first hour of the school timetable.

Since most adult Christians do not have the opportunity to follow an adult catechetical programme, what is retained as transmitted Christian tradition in the life of most adult Christians is what they had learned in the catechism class by the tradition bearer called Catechist.

“Send them away, said the apostles to Jesus. But **Jesus replied**, “Give them something to eat yourselves” (Mk 6:36-37).

Synod: Church leaders welcome Document for Continental Stage

As the Church gears up for the continental phase of the Synod on synodality, local Catholic Church leaders are encouraging the people of God to continue walking together in the three-year synodal process to discern more deeply what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today.

By Vatican News staff reporter

The Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) of the 2021-2024 Synod on Synodality is a useful tool to reflect further on the issues emerged from the Diocesan phase, and therefore to discern more deeply what the Holy Spirit is telling the Church at this time, according to Church leaders in various parts of the world.

The **Working Document** presented on Tuesday in the Vatican is the result of a group reflection on the syntheses submitted to the Vatican by 112 Bishops' Conferences and 15 Oriental Catholic Churches of the questions raised during the local and national listening sessions held earlier this year, plus reflections from 17 out of 23 Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, from the men's and women's international unions of superiors general, and from Catholic lay associations and movements.

Entitled "Enlarge the Space of Your Tent" (Isaiah 54:2), the DCS highlights a wide range of issues emerged during the local sessions, including the desire for greater inclusion expressed by many people who feel unwelcome

in the Church, or undervalued: women, young people, people with disabilities, the poor, those who are divorced and civilly remarried, single parents, and LGBTQ people.

Most submissions also included a call for greater participation by all Catholics in the liturgy, working to ensure that it is less “concentrated on the celebrant” and reflects more local cultures. Many reports cited “clericalism” as an obstacle to being a “synodal Church”. The abuse crisis was also brought up.

Synod: Voices of the excluded heart in the Document for Continental Phase

Walking together as Church

Bishop Daniel Flores, chairman of the Committee on Doctrine of the US Catholic Bishops’ Conference (USCCB), who has been shepherding the synodal process in the United States, welcomed the DCS, saying it is “a profound reflection that brings together the hopes and concerns expressed by the geographically diverse communities within the universal Church and that it will be “fundamental” in the ongoing discernment to be carried out in this second stage.

For his part, the President of the Canadian Bishop’s Conference (CCCCB), and member of the writing team for the Canadian National Synthesis, noted that the Working Document “invites us to continue to meet, discuss and question, in a spiritual and prayerful context, in order to bring our Church to where the Spirit is leading it.”

“We have all experienced that this ‘walking together as Church’ does not end; but it does have a goal: to create a space for the mission of every baptized person.”

Canada and the U.S. joining together in the Continental stage

For the Continental Stage of the Synod, the USCCB the CCCB will be joining in holding ten virtual Continental Assemblies, in late 2022 and early 2023. Representatives from each diocese in the United States and Canada will be attending one of these assemblies to reflect on and discuss the DCS. Discussions will then be brought together in the North American Continental Synthesis and submitted to the Holy See by 31 March 2023.

According to Richard Coll, executive director of the USCCB’s Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development, who was appointed in June 2021 to coordinate the effort of the U.S. bishops for the Synod, “The North American Continental Stage will create opportunities to engage the diversity of the People of God in the Church in North America in continued listening and meditation on the content and the reflection questions proposed by the Document for the Continental Stage.”

Discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today

Archbishop Eamon Martin, President of the Irish Bishops’ Conference, has also welcomed the publication of the DCS and encouraged the faithful in Ireland to read it.

“Overall, the document gives us a glimpse of what people from around the universal Church are thinking about their participation in the mission of the Church at the beginning of this third millennium,” he said.

Archbishop Martin will join the Irish 13-member delegation attending European continental Assembly taking place in Prague, Czech Republic, from 5-12 February 2023. According to the Archbishop of Armagh, the upcoming discussions on the document in the Irish dioceses ahead of that Assembly will help better discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church at this time.

“It will be interesting to identify those areas of commonality and diversity, as well as to discern more deeply what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church at this time.”

A three-stage process

Formally opened by Pope Francis on 10 October 2021, the Synod on Synodality - typically a month-long meeting of bishops at the Vatican - has been redesigned in this instance as a three-stage process, beginning with local consultations carried out at a national level in dioceses across the world, from October 2021 to April 2022, followed by a continental phase, which will last through March 2023, and finally by the universal phase with the bishops gathering in Rome for the 16th General Synod.

Pope: Synod Assembly of Bishops to be held in 2023 and 2024

The Synod was originally planned for October 2023, but on 16 October, Pope Francis announced that it will be extended for an additional year to allow more time for discernment and a greater understanding of the concept of synodality as a key dimension of Church life.

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Help the poor to help themselves

“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.”(Chinese saying).

Evangelizer and Fisherman

An evangelizer had gone angling. For about the 100th time he threw the line into the sea. So far he had caught nothing. It was then that he saw a young fisherman coming towards him. Evangelizer thought of another type of fishing. He stopped the fisherman and asked him, ***“Have you heard about Jesus Christ?”*** The fisherman answered the question with a question, ***“Have you caught any fish?”*** Evangelizer said, “No, not for days.” The fisherman then said, “how can you, sir? You stand too much on the periphery. You don’t like to wet your feet. I am a fisherman, sir, and when I want to fish I get my fishing gear and launch out into the unknown. I face the storm and the waves, sun and rain, fight with the sea and risk my life. But then sir, I do catch fish.”

As the fisherman went away, evangelizer traced his steps back to his posh car and drove away sad because he knew that he could never launch out. He was trained for a different life. He was trained to preach and not launch out, not to risk and not to die. (Author unknown)

THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF OBLATE PRESENCE IN PAKISTAN

The Oblate Delegation of Pakistan celebrated the Golden Jubilee (14 Feb 1971-14 Feb 2021) of its presence in Pakistan on 16 February 2022 at Mazenod College, Lahore. The Holy Mass at the College was presided over by Papal Nuncio in Pakistan His Excellency Christophe Zakhia El-Kassis along with Fr. Khan Paulus OMI, Delegation Superior of Pakistan, His Eminence Joseph Coutts, Archbishop Emeritus of Karachi Diocese, His Grace Sebastian Francis Shaw OFM, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Lahore, His Excellency Samson Shukardin OFM, Bishop of Hyderabad Diocese, Fr. Inayat Gill OMI and Fr. Vernon Derrick OMI. Beside the whole delegation membership, many priests and religious from Lahore and other dioceses shared the joy of the occasion.

THE OBLATE MISSION IN PAKISTAN

The Beginnings

At the invitation of Dominican Bishop Benedict Cialeo of Lyallpur Diocese (Faisalabad Diocese since 1977) and with the recommendation of Fr. Leo Deschatâtelets (1899-1974), the then Superior General of the Congregation (1947-1972), **Fr. Lucien Schmitt (1921-2007), the Provincial of the Province of Ceylon (1968-1974) accompanied his three energetic pioneer Oblates namely late Fr. Lester Silva (1939-), Fr. Job Basil Silva (1939-2022) and Fr. Joseph Theogenes (1939-2022) to West Pakistan from Sri Lanka. They arrived on**

February 14, 1971. These three pioneer Oblates were infused with the charism of their founder, St. Eugene De Mazenod, and the motto of the Oblate Congregation, “*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me. Pauperes evangelizantur*” which means “He has sent me to evangelize the poor. The poor are being evangelized.”

After studying Urdu, the national language, for few months in a mountain resort city in the north of Pakistan named Murree, the three Oblates came down to Lyallpur diocese and were assigned to serve in different parishes. They were put under the guidance of experienced local priests, in order to familiarize themselves with the language, culture, and lifestyle of the people. Fr. Lester Silva, besides being appointed Mission Superior of Pakistan, was assigned with Fr. Rufin Anthony (1940-2016), a diocesan priest, in Gojra. Fr. Rufin Anthony became the bishop of Islamabad-Rawalpindi Diocese in 2010. Fr. Theogenes Joseph was assigned in St. Anthony’s Parish, Chak 10/4-L, Antoniabad in Okara with Fr. James Archangelus, a diocesan priest, and Fr. Job Basil Silva to St. Pius X Parish, Chak Jhumra with a Dominican priest. Later Fr. Theogenes was appointed as the parish priest in Chak Jumra with a Dominican priest assisting him. The Oblate presence there was only for a few years.

In 1974 Sacred Heart Parish, Gojra was handed over to the Oblates and it served as the headquarters of the Oblates in Pakistan until 1985. The Oblates were also given the adjoining parishes, Immaculate Conception Parish, Toba Tek Singh in 1975 and Our Lady of Mercy

Parish, Chak 6/4-L, Okara in 1976, not too far from Gojra. On the one hand, the increase in diocesan clergy in Faisalabad permitted the Oblates to hand over Our Lady of Mercy Parish in 1982 and Toba Tek Singh in 1989 to the diocese. On the other hand, there was a decline in the number of missionaries and the expansion of Oblate mission in other regions of Pakistan, especially Multan diocese, had drawn its attention.

Having served for 25 years from 1971 to 1996 with commitment, dedication and missionary zeal, the Oblates handed Gojra parish back to Faisalabad diocese, stating “We, the missionaries have built the parish, and now we move to another under-developed parish or we would start from the scratch in another area.”

Having left Gojra, the Oblates moved to St. Eugene’s Parish, Pir Mahal which was carved out of Immaculate Conception Parish, Toba Tek Singh on 15 October 1996. **Fr. Alfred Rayappu** (1941-2002), an Oblate Brother for 35 years, and ordained an Oblate priest in July 1996 in Multan, was appointed as parish priest. In these parishes, Oblates focused on mission, faith formation, development through Basic Christian Community Development Program,(BCCD), housing projects and education. With the death of Fr. Alfred Rayappu on 16 January 2002, Oblates left Pir Mahal as well, although for a short period Fr. Joseph Alex from the Oblate Juniorate, Multan was going for Sunday Masses. After leaving Pir Mahal, the Oblate presence in Faisalabad diocese, where all missionary work had begun and taken root, also ceased,

In 1979, the Oblate Mission in Pakistan was upgraded to the status of Oblate Delegation of Pakistan. Fr. Victor Gnanapragasam (1940-2020), who till then was the Mission Superior, became the Delegation Superior for two terms until 1985.

Setting foot in the Diocese of Multan

While apostolic service was at its peak in Faisalabad diocese, Oblates were invited to serve in other dioceses when bishops saw their missionary services. At the request of Bishop Ernest Bertrand Boland OP of the Diocese of Multan, in September 1978 the Oblates entered the diocese Multan and took charge of St. Joseph's Parish, Khanewal. In 1985, the Oblates shifted from Khanewal Parish to Ibn-e-Mariam Parish in Rangpur, with Derekabad and Azizabad as its outstations. In 1988, Derekabad was established as a separate parish with the name of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Azizabad being its outstation.

Oblate Fr. Temsey Croos (1940-1995) was appointed as its first parish priest who remained in this position until his unfortunate death in a fatal traffic accident on 27 December 1995. This area commonly known 'Thal Desert' is a government land. Christian families, expelled by their landlords opted to settle down on it with the hope of obtaining land rights from the government at some stage. They had no food, no clean drinking water, no roof, and no toilets. The Oblates came to their aid by providing them necessary things to cultivate land and earn for themselves. Besides that, the Oblates since that time have worked tirelessly to get the land rights for the

Christian community which has now turned the unproductive land into an arable land. Very few Christian families have got land rights while some are compelled to leave the area due to forced eviction and land grabbing by the powerful. Fr. Temsey built a gigantic '**Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine**' adjacent to the parish house, which has become a symbol of unity for the Catholics of the region. Presently the Oblates have bought a 15 acres land in front of the shrine and have started building a Catholic settlement called '**Mariam Colony**'.

After 40 years of its presence in Multan diocese, the Oblates took over another parish, namely St. Martin de Porres Parish, on 29 July 2018 at the invitation of the then Bishop Benny Mario Travas of diocese of Multan. It is located in the city of Hasilpur, 141 km from Multan in Southern Punjab. After signing of the agreement between the Ordinary and the Oblate Delegation Superior, **Fr Khan Paulus**, Fr. Akmal Patras (Parish Priest) and Deacon Daniel Sabir were the first Oblate appointments in the parish. The Oblates continue to serve in this parish with commitment and vigour.

Moving into Balochistan

The Order of Friars Minor (OFM) took over Quetta from Jesuits in 1935 and administered it till 1982. **In 1981 the Oblates moved into Quetta, at the request of Bishop Bonaventure Paul OFM** (1929-2007), Bishop of the Diocese of Hyderabad from 1971 to 1990. In 1982 the Franciscan Friars officially handed over the Holy Rosary Parish, Quetta to the care of the Oblates. This was the only parish which covered almost whole of Balochistan

province. Presently Quetta city has a population of 1,160,000 inhabitants. It was part of the diocese of Hyderabad. The diocese of Hyderabad covering an area of 278,529 sq km comprised three divisions in Sindh namely Hyderabad, Larkana and Sukkur and whole of Balochistan. About one-third of the Catholics in Balochistan live in Quetta, which was 700 km from Hyderabad. **Bishop Joseph Coutts, Bishop of the diocese of Hyderabad between 1990 and 1998, with the support of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples wished Quetta to be established as an Apostolic Prefecture and confided to the Oblates. The first request was turned down due to an acute shortage of personnel. But given the situation of Quetta, “neglected by both the Church and the government,” the offer was finally accepted by the Superior General (OMI Information #365, March 1998).**

With all the due consideration for the better interest of the Church in Pakistan at large and Balochistan in particular, **the Apostolic Prefecture of Quetta, consisting of the whole of the Province of Balochistan was erected as a separate ecclesiastical unit on 9 November 2001. The official promulgation in Quetta was made on 7 December 2001. Archbishop Alessandro D’Erico, the Apostolic Nuncio in Pakistan and the bishops of Pakistan, together with many priests, Religious and the laity were present on this occasion. On the same day, Oblate Fr. Victor Gnanapragasam was installed as the first Apostolic Prefect of Quetta.**

The Apostolic Prefecture of Quetta absorbed territories taken from the Archdiocese of Karachi and the Diocese of Hyderabad. It consists of the whole of the Province of Balochistan, the biggest Province, covering 44% of the land area of Pakistan, but sadly the least developed and thinly populated province. Major part of the province is covered with arid mountains, deserts and sand dunes. The border of the province touches Punjab Province in the northeast, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in the north, Sindh Province in the southeast Afghanistan in the West, Iran in the southwest and the Arabian Sea in the south. The province of Balochistan is rich in natural resources of gas, gold, silver, marble, coal, chromium, copper, uranium, platinum, black pearl, oil, valuable stones etc.

The Oblates in Quetta Prefecture along with the Salesians and the diocesan clergy and the Religious Sisters served the faithful of Balochistan with commitment and dedication. On 29 April 2010, on the feast of St. Catherine of Siena, the Apostolic Prefecture of Quetta was raised to an Apostolic Vicariate and entrusted the solicitude and authority again to the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. At the same time **Oblate Fr. Victor Gnanapragasam was appointed as the Apostolic Vicar and was ordained bishop on 16 July 2010.**

As regards the Christian communities in this province, they are Punjabis who migrated from the Punjab Province long ago and consider themselves people of the soil. Except for Quetta city where there is a concentration of Christians, they are scattered all over the province in small

groups for the sake of job opportunities. The majority of them are sanitary workers, but the situation is gradually improving with the impact of education. Quite a number of Christians in Quetta city are holding respectable posts in government and private sectors.

An important chapter in the life of the Oblate Delegation of Pakistan came to an end when Bishop Victor Gnanapragasam of Quetta Vicariate died at the age of 80 on 12 December 2020. “He was a humble and worthy servant of the Lord who during his eighty years of earthly life, dedicated nearly fifty-five years to priesthood and out of which almost eleven years to episcopacy,” Archbishop Joseph Arshad of Islamabad-Rawalpindi diocese said in a homily at Bishop Victor’s funeral Mass. The archbishop said further, “He was the follower of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd and a true son of Mother Mary.” Highlighting his love for the Church and his missionary zeal he continued, “He defended the Catholic faith and fought a good fight. As Church is missionary in its very nature, Bishop Victor was passionately missionary.” The archbishop praised Gnanaparagasam saying “He was a responsible person in all responsibilities entrusted to him either by his own Congregation or by the Universal Church. As Prefect he built the structure of the Prefecture and as Bishop, he created parishes and commissions and strengthened finances.”

The Oblates continue to offer their apostolic, missionary and administrative services in the Vicariate of Quetta under the leadership of Khalid Rehmat OFM Cap, ordained bishop on 25 March 2021. At present, the

Oblates are serving in the Holy Rosary Cathedral Parish, St. Pius X Parish and St. Eugene's Parish, Nawankilli. Besides these responsibilities, the Oblate priests namely Fr. Inayat Michael Gill and Fr. Basharat Exupear serve as Vicar General and Procurator of Quetta Vicariate, respectively.

Local vocations to the Oblate way of life

Speaking about formation, the Oblates took initiative to invite candidates for the Oblate life in late 70s, since many young boys were impressed by the life of witnessing of the Oblate missionaries and were drawn to become like them. **In 1979 the Oblates bought a house in Karachi which became the Oblate Scholasticate** for the students of philosophy and theology as both disciplines at that time were taught in Christ the King Seminary, Karachi. Earlier, the aspirants to join the Oblates would stay with the Oblate priests in the parishes and receive basic instructions regarding the Oblate way of life before being sent to Sri Lanka for the Pre-novitiate and the Novitiate.

Later to formalize formation, an arrangement was made with the Franciscan friars who accepted oblate candidates for their initial training in Franciscan minor seminary namely Dar-ul-Naim in Lahore before proceeding to Sri Lanka for further formation. At some point the Oblates realized that formation of the candidates to the Oblate life in Dar-ul-Naim was not meeting the required expectation. **So, in 1985, an Oblate Juniorate, a Minor Seminary of the Oblates was built in Louis Colony, Multan. Later, in 1997, the building of Oblate Philosophate was**

constructed in Youhanabad, Lahore, as the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan in 1990 had decided to shift faculty of Philosophy from Christ the King Major Seminary, Karachi to Youhanabad, Lahore. Classes of philosophy at the newly constructed St. Francis Xavier Seminary in Youhanabad began from 1 September 1994. Thus, a full-fledged Oblate formation program since then continues until today.

Parish ministry

Oblates began their mission in Faisalabad diocese with parish ministry and later expansion took them to the dioceses of Multan and Hyderabad in late 70s and early 80s. Besides having formation houses in the archdioceses of Lahore and Karachi, Oblates were invited by the Ordinaries to offer their missionary services in their parishes as well. Thus, St. Luke's Parish in the archdiocese of Karachi was handed over to the Oblates in 2006, while in the Archdiocese of Lahore Oblates were given Our Lady of Sorrows Parish, Kasur in April 2007 and Holy Spirit Parish, Sangla Hill on 14 September 2009. Oblates entered for the first time in Islamabad-Rawalpindi diocese by taking over Holy Rosary Parish in Gujrat in 2016.

As the Delegation was celebrating the 50th year of its presence in Pakistan, a historic event took place when Oblates set foot once again in Faisalabad Diocese after 18 years. It was in this diocese that all of its missionary venture had begun in 1971. By leaving St. Eugene's Parish, Pir Mahal in 2002, the last remaining station of

their presence, Oblates said goodbye to Faisalabad Diocese as well. Their return to this diocese was not in parishes where they had already offered their apostolic services, but in a newly carved out parish. With the successful discussion and agreement signed between Bishop Joseph Indrias Rehmat of Faisalabad Diocese and Fr. Khan Paulus, Delegation Superior, on the memorial of the Dedication of the Basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles, on 18 November 2020, Bishop Indrias Rehmat inaugurated St. Mary's Parish in Chak Nos. 36-37/2-RA, Okara. He welcomed the return of the Oblates to Faisalabad Diocese stating that the Oblates would offer their spiritual and pastoral services to bring the faithful closer to God while remaining faithful to their charism. Fr. Amanat Chaman as Parish Priest and Fr. Basharat Exupear as Assistant were appointed the pioneer missionaries.

Where do we stand?

In conclusion, one can divide the Oblate presence in Pakistan into six periods, comprising six decades with particular focus / foci of that period seeing the present status of the Oblate Delegation.

The first decade (1971-80) of Oblate presence in Pakistan concentrated on establishing itself according to a new cultural, religious, political and economic milieu focusing primarily on parish ministry. The Charism of the Oblate Congregation was translated into action through establishing Basic Christian Communities Development Program in parishes, faith formation of the parishioners,

witnessing life of community, and expression of Oblate charism. Towards the end of the decade expansion of Oblate Mission outside of Faisalabad Diocese took it to the neighboring Diocese of Multan.

During **the second decade** (1980-1990), together with mission, focus turned to formation. Besides important expansion of Oblates in the province of Balochistan in 1981, formation of candidates to Oblate life began in an orderly manner with buying of a house for scholastics in Karachi in 1979 and construction of Oblate Juniorate in Multan in 1985. Two local Oblates, Frs. Inayat Gill and Yousaf Gill were ordained priests during this decade, the first fruits of the Oblate mission in Pakistan.

The third decade (1990-2000) was a period of new hope and transition. Two more local Oblates Frs. Victor John and Abid Samuel were ordained priests. **Oblate Fr. Yousaf Gill was appointed Superior of the Pakistan Delegation in 1994.** It was the first ever appointment of the local as leader of the Oblates in Pakistan. Oblate Philosophate, a formation house for philosophy students was built in Lahore in 1997. This decade saw some setbacks too; the death of Fr. Temsey Croos in a road accident and three local Oblates namely Frs. Yousaf Gill, Victor John and Abid Samuel leaving of Oblate and priestly life were a big blow to the Oblate Delegation.

The fourth decade (2000-2010), ushered a period of freshness, rise from setbacks and despair under the leadership of **Oblate Fr. Joseph Alex as Delegation Superior** (2001-2008). Arrival of non-Sri Lankan

missionaries gave the delegation an international flavour, increase in local vocations at all stages of formation brought new life, priestly ordination of 15 local oblates was a big boost to the Delegation and the Congregation, and expansion of Oblate mission in Archdioceses of Lahore and Karachi gave missionary satisfaction. For the first time sending two Oblate Scholastics namely Khan Paulus (2007) and Gulshan Barkat (2008) to the Oblate International Roman Scholasticate, to study for the licentiate in Biblical Theology and Church History respectively, gave missionary confidence to the Delegation in Pakistan and at the Congregation level. As a whole this decade marked a period of stability, sustainability and healthy progress in the aspects of mission, vision and formation in the Delegation of Pakistan.

The fifth decade (2010-2020) continued to tread on the stability of the previous decade. Environment friendly projects like installation of solar power system in two of the formation houses and the Superior House were realized and transportation modes for the oblates were improved. 14 more local Oblates were ordained priests during this decade which made it possible to bring in local leadership in all spheres of the Delegation. This was a period of transition from foreign to local leadership, Fr. Khan Paulus being the second local to be appointed as Superior of the Oblate Delegation of Pakistan in 2017.

2020 marked the beginning of **the sixth decade**. It sees the Delegation drawing its attention to human and social development of Christians as a whole and Catholics in

particular by establishing institutions of higher learning in Youhanabad, Lahore, although Oblates educate students up to grade 10. Thus, Mazenod College for girls was established in 2020 while the foundation of Mazenod College for boys was laid on 25 August 2022 adjacent to the same building.

The present make-up of the Oblate Delegation Pakistan stands as follows; 33 priests (out of which 3 are Sri Lankans), 7 scholastics (of whom 2 are studying at the Oblate International Roman Scholasticate), 7 novices in Sri Lanka, 7 philosophy students and 18 Juniorists.

Fr Gulshan Barkat OMI

Superior,
Oblate Scholasticate,
Karachi,
Pakistan

GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS OF THE PRESENCE AND MISSION OF THE OBLATES IN BANGLADESH

The Beginnings

On October 17, 1972, **Cardinal Angelo Rossi**, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples (Prop. Fide) wrote to Very Rev. Fr. Richard Hanley OMI, the Superior General of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) requesting the help of the Oblates for the formation of the local clergy and for (the) missionary apostolate in Bangladesh.

In December 1972, **Archbishop Theotonius Amal Ganguly CSC** of Dakha, Bangladesh wrote to Rev. Fr. William Cagney OMI, the Assistant General for Missions, repeating also the call of Cardinal Angelo Rossi, pointing out the need for priests, to open a Major Seminary, and to take up some mission stations.

At the Colombo Plenary Sessions of the Oblates in January 1973, the acceptance of the two Asian missions of Bangladesh and South Korea was seen in the context of the Asian Mission strategy according to the position – paper prepared by Rev. Fr. William Cagney OMI, the Assistant General for Missions and Rev. Fr. Dalston Forbes OMI, the General Councillor for Asia-Oceania. Hence the definitive acceptance of Bangladesh Mission was entrusted to the Asia-Oceania Regional Conference

(AORC) of the Oblates held in Melbourne, Australia in February 1973.

On March 07, 1973, Rev.Fr. William Cagney OMI wrote to Archbishop Theotonius Ganguly of Dakha and to Bisjhop M. D'Rozario, the Secretary of the Bishops' Conference, informing them (of) the favourable response of the Asia-Oceania Provincials.

In view of sending the Oblate missionaries to Bangladesh, Rev. Fr. Lucien Schmitt OMI, the Provincial of Sri Lanka Province of the Oblates and Rev. Fr. D. Forbes OMI visited Bangladesh on May 19, 1973 and had a meeting with Archbishop T. Ganguly and prepared a plan of action for the Major Seminary and the missionary tasks. According to an agreement reached between them, the Oblates would teach in the National Major Seminary and help (in) the formation of the local clergy and the English-speaking parishes.

The Oblate General Council on June 01, 1973 accepted the Bangladesh Mission and named 10 Oblates for the new Oblate Mission in Bangladesh: Rev. Frs Philip Dissanayake, A.F. Marcelliar, Satkunam (Sri Lanka), Paul Howard (Canada), Hermenegild Doronila (Philippines), Gilles Gauthier and Carl Kelly (Canada), Henry Van Hoof (Belgium), Jerry Orsino (Italy), and Michael Leprince (France)).

On July 29, 1973, Rev. Fr. Philip Dissanayake arrived in Bangladesh, a land of 75 million inhabitants (the land twice the size of Sri Lanka), a land which was born out of

the pangs of a civil war, with untold sufferings, poverty, famine, typhoons.

When the National Major Seminary began on August 01, 1973 with 4 major Seminarians (2 Holy Cross scholastics and 2 seminarians), Fr. Philip Dissanayake OMI who started teaching there, was also Spiritual Director (1973 – 1976). Fr. Philip who arrived in Bangladesh with selfless love, to teach in the Seminary, had also (a) great desire to work in a nearby parish and to recruit candidates for the Oblate way of life since he had come to know that there were many applicants. At that time, **Fr. Monohor Anthony Corraya**, a diocesan priest became an Oblate and a few Seminarians, including **Bejoy D’Cruze** who is now the Archbishop of Dakha, joined the Oblates.

As Chef-de Mission of the new mission in Bangladesh, Fr. Philip had tried to pave the way for many to become Oblates and as specialists who would go to areas where others (would) will not go. But there was a lack of facilities for the realization of such a purpose during his stay in Bangladesh.

The pioneer Oblates and others, namely Fr. Andrew Charvet (France), Fr. Angelo Martyn, Fr. Emile Moraes, Fr. Rex Kulas, (Sri Lanka), Francis Gerard (India), Sean Coleman (S. Africa), Fr. Jacob Thiruchelvam (Sri Lanka), Fr. Loshington(Sri Lanka) and Bro. Kingsley Cooray (Sri Lanka), Fr. Bruno Rosseti (Italy), Fr. Paul Facht, Fr. Richard Wolak (Canada) also responded generously to the call to serve the people in Bangladesh, and they were committed to their missionary tasks, though

some worked for a very short time, teaching in the Seminary. These Oblates had come to a country of more than 75 million inhabitants, born out of a war, suffering due to poverty, sickness, famine and typhoons, resulting in deaths of thousands. The Oblate pioneers had to get acclimatized to the natural environment of Bangladesh. Since they succumbed to tropical sicknesses, some returned to their countries and others for multifarious reasons, were also compelled to return to their countries.

Of the ten Oblate Missionaries who went to Bangladesh, Fr. Henry Van Hoof, the oldest among the group, remained in Bangladesh and continued to work tirelessly with and Andrew Charvet and Fr. Monohor Anthony Corraya. Their apostolate in search of people, was on foot or by boat. At that time, the arrival of Fr. Angelo Martyn OMI from Sri Lanka on December 13, 1978 was indeed a blessing for the Oblate mission in Bangladesh.

The Oblate labour of love

A) Formation of the Clergy

Rev. Fr. Philip Dissanayake OMI, who arrived in Bangladesh from Sri Lanka on July 29, 1973 began teaching in the Major Seminary for a few years and had returned to Sri Lanka in 1976. During his stay in the Minor Seminary as Rector, a few seminarians had been attracted to the Oblate way of life, the first one being Henry Rebeiro, who was sent to India for the Novitiate as he could not get a visa to Sri Lanka at that time. Henry was to be of immense help when the Oblates were being

established in Bangladesh. He was a very knowledgeable, a practical, and a real go-getter. Seven candidates followed and were sent to Sri Lanka for the Oblate formation in the Novitiate.

In December 1978, Fr. Angelo Martyn OMI on his arrival in Bangladesh, worked in Sylhet and then inaugurated the Oblate Scholasticate in Dhaka in March 1980 in a rented flat. The Scholastics were like the leaven in that Christian community for two years, and then moved to a land where the present Scholasticate stands today. Though a tin shed without electricity and water service, this house of formation was the second Oblate property bought and was the beginning of the sinking of the Oblate roots in Bangladesh. Fr. Angelo was assigned to the staff of the National Major Seminary of the Holy Spirit and he taught Philosophy for many years in that Seminary. Six out of ten Bishops in Bangladesh have been his students.

The opening of the Oblate Scholasticate was a prophetic gesture. The number of candidates increased. During the Oblate Golden Jubilee celebration of their active presence and mission in Bangladesh, the Oblates can thank God for the gift of 33 native (local) Oblates, one of them an Oblate Archbishop (**Bejoy D'Cruze**).

Later, with a magnanimous financial contribution from the Oblate Province of Germany, a new Scholasticate was constructed in Dhaka in 2017 and with generous donations from different Organisations and donors, De Mazenod Girja and St. Eugene School were built on the same premises.

The Oblate Leadership of the Delegation of Bangladesh has made (an) effort to promote higher education and On-going formation of the local Oblates in order to serve the people more meaningfully and efficiently, according to the emerging local needs. The Oblate Delegation has sent abroad a few local Oblates for higher studies and also as missionaries to serve people in foreign countries

B) Ministry to and with the scattered

Having labored in different areas in the Archdiocese of Dhaka for nearly two years, the Oblates opted to minister in the vast region of Sylhet under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Dakha. In 1975, the entire region of Sylhet was divided into two sections. The Holy Cross Fathers continued to look after the district of Habigonj and a part of Moulvibazar district, whilst the other part which comprised Sylhet and Sunamgonj districts, bordering the Indian States of Meghalaya and Assam, which were inhabited by Indigenous communities and estate workers, were looked after by the Oblates. Sylhet became the real birth place of the Oblate missionary endeavours.

In 1975, guided by the Oblate charism, the Oblates began their missionary tasks in Sylhet town and Khadim Nagar among the people in the tea estates, namely the Khasi, Bagani, Mandi indigenous groups and the internal migrants, while living in a rented house at Baluchar. Later, the Oblates bought a piece of land, established a parish and built De Mazenod Church at Khadim.

In 1979, the Oblates took charge of St. Thomas parish at **Mugaipar**. It included 9 villages and 6 sub-stations. The parish after much development had 1500 boys and girls in a High School with 2 Boardings, one for the boys and one for girls. The Salesian Sisters managed the girls' boarding and also began a clinic for the tribals. Many Muslim women too came to the clinic, preferring the services of the Sisters and not the male doctors.

In 1985, the Oblates having bought a land, established a parish at **Lokhipur** in Moulvibazar district in the north-Eastern region of Bangladesh and later it became a full-pledged parish. The Oblates invested much money for the development of the infra-structure, expanding their pastoral care to many villages and tea estates. They built a High School, 2 Boarding Houses (for girls and boys), many Primary Schools and a small chapel in every village.

On June 27, 1986, the Bangladesh Mission was established as a Provincial Delegation of the Oblate Province of Sri Lanka by the Oblate General Council in Rome.

In 1987, with a view to recruiting College and University students, Bimol Costa who was on regency, opened a hostel for boys with a view to have a Juniorate, Fr. Andrew Charvet was the inspiration behind it. He also introduced a "come and see programme" which was followed by other Congregations. Later an Oblate Juniorate was opened in a rented house in Dhaka. Subash Costa who was on Regency took over and had a strict programme in the Juniorate, from where the students went

to Notre Dame College and much order was introduced. In August 1988, Fr. Angelo Martyn became the official Rector. In August 1991 Fr. Joseph Gomes, together with Fr. Emil Moraes, built an Oblate Juniorate at 24/A, Asad Avenue, Mohammadpur. The dream of Fr. Henry Van Hoof and Adrew Charvet, to have an Oblate Juniorate was actualized by Fr. Emil Moraes, the Delegation Superior of Bangladesh. Later, a section of the Oblate Juniorate was taken and turned into the Delegation House by Fr. Dilip Sarkar OMI for administrative purposes during his tenure as Delegation Superior.

In 2002, St. Anthony's Church, Rajai, a sub-station St. Eugene's Parish, Khadim became a full- fledged parish. Under this parish, there were 6 sub-stations, 2 tea estates. 6 Primary schools, the fruits of hard labour, were also constructed by the |Oblates. In 2004, it was handed over to the diocese.

In 2005, having served the Archdiocese of Dhaka and the diocese of Sylhet for 32 years, the Oblates under the leadership of Fr. Emil Moraes OMI, the Delegation Superior, **opened a new mission in the Archdiocese of Chittagong**, taking over the parish of Jamalkhan. In the same year, the Oblates began a mission Centre in the Chittagong Hill Trahts.

After taking over the huge area of Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Oblates turned Shanti Rani Church, Alikodom, a sub-station into a full-fledged parish. Different indigenous groups live there, some are very primitive. There are many

villages and many sub-stations in this parish. It's an area for new evangelization.

In 2009, the Oblates went to the diocese of Rajshahi under the leadership of Fr. Emil Moraes OMI, taking over St. Paul's Church, Katadanga and in two years it was turned into a quasi-parish. An Indigenous population live here and it has been a new evangelizing area. Each year many tribals become Christians.

In 2011, St. Anthony's Church, Rajai, a sub-station under St. Thomas' Church, Mugaipar became a parish. Later it was handed over to the diocese.

In 2013, St. Peter's Church, Lama, a sub-station of Alikodom parish was made into a full-fledged parish by the Oblates. More than 25 villages are taken care of by the Oblates.

C) The New Diocese of Sylhet

By a letter dated August 24, 2010, Cardinal Ivan Dias, the Prefect for the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples informed Rev. Fr. William Steckling OMI, the Superior General that Sylhet region would be separated from the Archdiocese of Dhaka and would be elevated to an Apostolic Vicariate and requesting the Oblates to take the Vicariate under their care.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh however favoured the formation of a diocese rather than a Vicariate. The Papal Nuncio to Bangladesh, Archbishop Joseph Marino worked very hard in erecting Sylhet region

as a diocese while Rev. Fr. Emil Moraes OMI, Oblate Delegation Superior collaborated with him very closely.

C) An Oblate Archbishop

On July 08, 2011, Sylhet region was made a new diocese with an Oblate Bishop, Bejoy D’Cruze. He was transferred to the diocese of Sylhet from the diocese of Khulna where he had served for 7 years. He was later installed as the Archbishop of Dhaka.

D) Collaborative Ministries

The Missionaries of Charity, Sisters of Charles de Foucoud, (Blue Sisters), Holy Cross Sisters, Salesian Sisters, Charity Sisters of Maria Babmbina, SMRA have walked side by side and worked with the Oblates.

E) Delegation Superiors

Fr. Henry Van Hoof OMI (installed on March 24, 1987 -1988),

Fr. Emil Moraes OMI (1988 –1998)

Fr. Angelo Martyn OMI (1998 – 2001,

Fr. Bejoy D’Cruze OMI (2001 – 2005),

Fr. Emil Moraes OMI (2005 – 2012),

Fr. Dilip John Sarkar OMI (2012 – 2017),

Fr. Ajit victor Costa OMI (2018 –

Profiles

Fr. Philip Dissanayake OMI

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Henry Van Hoof OMI

Fr. Henry Van Hoof OMI had an astounding gift for picking up languages. He spoke French, English, and Spanish without a flaw. His Latin, Dutch, German and Italian were almost as good. In Bangladesh, he mastered what he considered the most difficult language he had encountered, Bengali, and learned Khasi (a mountain tribe) language, too. His skills as a linguist were outstanding and his sense of humor was legendary. Fr. Henry, to his friends was a radiant and exuberant person.

Of the eight Oblate pioneers who went to Bangladesh, only Fr. Henry—by far the oldest (52 years) —adapted to the country and stayed. But others came and joined him later. Fr. Henry and the team at the beginning were at the service of Dhaka Diocese, teaching in the Seminary, helping the Parishes in Dhaka city and the surroundings.

Fr. Henry, an innovator in ministry, walked, travelled by small boats and worked with the poor. He used to drive his jeep to Dhaka from Sylhet and at every junction on the way used to draw the attention of the traffic police and salute each other. He had many friends who visited him from a long way to cheer him though not all were Christians.

It was the dream of Fr. Henry to do something for the youth. In 1987, he rented a unit of the ground floor of a house belonging to Mr. Paul Rebeiro and collected eight

college going boys. This was the beginning of the Oblate Juniorate.

And, at the time of his death, there were six Oblates ordained in Bangladesh with a good number of Scholastics and Juniorists, in Bangladesh.

On the 24 March, 1987, Fr. Henry had been installed as **the first Superior of the Oblate Delegation of Bangladesh** by Fr. Anselm Silva, the Provincial of Sri Lanka.

Fr. Angelo Martyn OMI (40 yrs in Bangladesh)

As already mentioned, Fr. Angelo Martyn on arrival in Bangladesh in 1978 was assigned to Sylhet to work with Fr. Henry and Andrew Charvet. He inaugurated the Oblate Scholasticate on March 01, 1980. He was also on the staff of National Major Seminary of the Holy Spirit where he taught Philosophy till his departure in 2019. He was the Superior of the Scholasticate, Rector of the Juniorate, a Delegation Councillor, a Major Superior of the Oblate Delegation of Bangladesh and the President of the Bangladesh Conference for Religious (BCR).

As Delegation Superior, with the consent of the members of the Oblate Delegation, Fr Angelo Martyn, an enterprising and a prayerful priest, a preacher and a lover of the poor and the needy, cancelled the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Delegation and of the Jubilee of his Priestly life and that of Fr. Monohor Corraya and shared the money with the poor. Fr. Angelo cancelled the debts of all the staff members of the

Oblate Delegation. He worked in the parishes for a few years in the Sylhet and Chottogram dioceses. Fr. Angelo Martyn spoke Bangla and also preached retreats in Bangla. He spent forty years in Banglaesh.

Fr. Angelo had been a spiritual director and counselor for the Seminarians, the priests and Religious Sisters. A cheerful Oblate, a joyful musician with a sense of humour, Fr. Angelo can sing and play many instruments and make the listeners also joyful. He has been noted for frugality and simple life-style.

Fr. Angelo had given the longest service as a missionary in Bangladesh spending 40 years (13.12.9778 – 16.2.2019) of his Oblate life.

Fr. Emil Moraes OMI (31 yrs in Bangladesh)

Fr. Emil Moraes OMI is a person of prayer and meditation. He drew inspiration for his homilies from his prayer-life especially in front of the tabernacle and had become a good retreat preacher for several Religious Congregations and institutions.

Fr. Emil was very sensitive to the genuine human needs of the people, especially of the tribals in many punjees (villages) and indigenous communities, working in the tea estates. Fr. Emil also committed himself to educate, form and train the illiterate individuals and groups to become conscious of their human dignity as human persons and achieve social esteem. He therefore started vocational Centres for young people and widows. He committed himself to educate the children

with the financial support of benefactors. He had a compassionate heart for the people who were suffering. He helped the sick to obtain medical care and attention.

As a Delegation Superior for many years, Fr. Emil had been also a visionary and a catalyst. He had consolidated the innovative enterprises of his predecessors, especially Frs Philip Dissanayake, Henry Van Hoof, Andrew Charvet and Angelo Martyn and had tried to be open to new challenges and adopt suitable means for the progress of the Delegation. Fr. Emil Moraes, the Delegation Superior, opened a new mission in the Archdiocese of Chittagong and had collaborated with the Papal Nuncio to Bangladesh to have a separate diocese of Sylhet.

Fr. Emil, who had been Delegation Superior of the Oblates in Bangladesh for nine years, had also initiated several apostolic projects in the dioceses of Chittagong and Rajshani. As already mentioned above, Fr. Emil was responsible for the establishment of an Oblate Juniorate for the promotion of the candidates for the Oblate way of life in Bangladesh.

Fr. Emile had the financial assistance of Sr. Eugenie Fujita, MMCCS of Japan as a great benefactress supporting him very much through her NGO named ESNAC (Educational Sponsorship for Needy Asian and African children) to initiate several socio-pastoral projects and programmes.

He had been a missionary in Malaysia and came to Bangladesh on January 11 1981. Fr. Emil had spent 30 years (11.1.1981– 6.12.2012) of his Oblate missionary life in Bangladesh.

Fr. Rex Kulas OMI (19 yrs in Bangladesh)

Fr. Rex Kulas OMI was a very prayerful, dutiful, responsible and silent missionary. He would not miss his regular prayer time. He took much care in preparing his homilies. A good musician, a good piano player and singer, he has taught both the Oblate Juniorists and Scholastics how to play the harmonium and guitar.

He was very much devoted to the teaching apostolate in the Oblate Juniorate. He had a good knowledge of the English language. He would prepare his lessons very well. He showed much loving concern for the students. He knew that the candidates in the Oblate Juniorate had to acquire a good knowledge of the English language since English is an international language and it is needed for the Oblates since they belong to an international Congregation.

Fr. Rex was a good formator and a good accompanier of the Juniorists. The Major Seminary in Dhaka also benefited from his store of knowledge of the English language. Seeing his students becoming priests gave him much joy. Fr. Rex Kulas loved to associate with the young Oblates. He never craved for social esteem and social prestige.

Many Convents benefitted from his generosity since he was readily available to celebrate the Eucharist in English. He reached out with joy also to the expatriates, especially the Sri Lankans.

Fr. Rex had spent 19 years of his Oblate priestly life in Bangladesh.

SR. EUGENIE FUJITA, MMCC

Sr. Eugenie Fujita, MMCCS was a great benefactress who supported the Oblates very much in Bangladesh in their commitment to Christ, the Church and the poor through her NGO named ESNAC (Educational Sponsorship for Needy Asian and African children).

Concern for the Seminarians

Her primary attention and concern was the seminarians, who according to her, are the hope of the future for the children of the poor. Moreover the sponsor parents had a caring heart for these seminarians. They were ready to support the seminarians for their studies during their formation period, which extends from primary school to ordination as priests. To her credit, the Oblates are proud to have many Oblates today in Bangladesh, some serving as missionaries abroad. We are proud to have one Oblate today serving as the Archbishop of Dhaka.

Concern for the Primary School Children

During Sr. Fujita's service in Bangladesh for more than 40 years, she had sponsored the education of more than 1000 students, in many villages and tea estates where the

children of the tribal people were neglected by the State. She had established small schools and educational centers in all these villages and tea estates.

Concern for Secondary School Children.

A selection is made carefully, from children who fared well in the school and promoted to the secondary schools in the missions of the Oblate Fathers. During their studies the students stay in the hostels run by the Oblate Fathers, most of them built with the support of her NGO named ESNAC. Many Secondary schools built by the support of the ESNAC are also supporting students of other faiths, like the Hindus and the Muslims.

Concern for College and University Studies.

A few boys and girls are selected from the above secondary schools and sent to the towns to pursue their studies up to college level, preparing to enter the University. The Oblates are proud to say that many students have entered into professional fields, becoming doctors and lawyers. Having benefitted from the ESNAC scholarship they are contributing to the welfare of their communities and the country at large.

R.I.P

Honorary mention must be made of the first local Oblates, **Fr. Henry Rebeiro and Fr. Alphonse Jengcham** whom the Lord had called to the eternal abode. Fr. Alphonse underwent a tragic and untimely death in a bus

accident. Fr. Henry Rebeiro died after a prolonged illness of diabetes.

Both have played a major role as pioneers providing tin sheds to multi-storey buildings, thereby laying the foundation for Oblate involvement in the education of the indigenous children. It was due to their daring adventure that there are so many professionals, Religious Sisters, priests and catechists from the indigenous community.

The involvement of Frs Alphonse Jengcham and Henry Rebeiro in **the formation of lay leaders and catechists** was very remarkable. Both laboured to consolidate the isolated catechists and form them into an organized group with needed norms and constitutions. They met them in groups, every month, in different parishes, giving them orientations, reviewing their activities and planning for the future. They were involved in the activities of the parishes especially organizing seminars in the dioceses.

Many of the catechists continue to be the living examples to the people of other faiths in their neighbourhood, also as teachers of their children.

It is indeed the work of the spirit to guide the Oblates, not knowing how to proceed, the prompting of the spirit becomes explicit as they meet to discuss future plans at their regular bi-monthly meetings that are attended unfailingly by all. The contribution of each and every Oblate is unfathomable but space does not permit the enumeration of their selfless achievements. The mission

is what it is because of the unwavering love of the Oblate Madonna who always inspires and guides them.

Fr. Emmanuel Fernando OMI

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75 years of Oblate life and mission in Japan

The Oblates in Japan are getting ready to celebrate their active loving presence and mission of 75 years in Japan. This occasion will be a kind of a grace for us as a Delegation of the Oblates of Colombo Province, Sri Lanka, our mother Province, where the Oblates are celebrating the 175th Jubilee of the active missionary presence of the Oblates in Sri Lanka.

The American Oblates, from the Eastern American Oblate Province, began their active missionary labours in Japan at the request of Bishop Paul Yoshigoro Taguchi, the Bishop of Osaka who was also Apostolic Administrator of Shikoku, a very poor area, in one of the most isolated Islands of Japan. The Bishop complained to the then Leader Oblate Congregation, Rev.Fr. Leo Deschateles that there was no missionary institute willing to come into this poor area. Hearing such a request, Oblate Leader said, ***“If no one else will go then we must”***.

Taking on the missionary challenge, the Oblates sailed from America in 1948 to Japan which was then destroyed and devastated by the 2nd World War. On the 4th of June, 1948, the above-mentioned mission was entrusted to the Oblates from Oblate Eastern Province of America, as their first mission, by Bishop Paul Yoshigoro Taguchi. The first Oblate Missionaries were Frs. Robert GILL, Leonard ROBITAILLE and Charles Mc BENNETT who left America by ship on November 1, 1948 and arrived in the land of the rising sun on November 29, 1948. Beginning their missionary work from there, Oblates worked

tirelessly in many ways, erecting churches, mission-houses and kindergartens, thus giving new hope to the people.

Later, many Oblate missionaries were sent from the same Oblate Eastern Province of America to continue the Oblate missionary tasks. While getting established as a missionary group, the Oblates began Houses of formation of the local clergy and a few Japanese young men came forward to share charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod, the Founder of the Oblate Congregation.

As time passed, Oblates from Belgium joined the American Oblates to continue the missionary tasks in Japan. As the number of Oblates increased, and when there were more than 30 Oblates (of Belgians, Americans and Japanese), the Oblate Leadership in Rome decided to form the Oblate Province of Japan. Later, a few Oblates from the Philippines joined the Oblate Province of Japan.

Social, economic and financial development of Japan began slowly, making Japan a secular State and the number of Oblate missionaries, coming from America to Japan and the vocations to presbyteral and Religious life in Japan, soon began to drop. At that time, the Oblate Eastern American Province had to care also for the Mission in Brazil.

The above-mentioned situation of the Oblates in Japan made Rev. Fr. Marcello Zago, the then Oblate Congregational Leader, to propose the idea of *“Asia for Asia”*.

Oblate Mission in Korea

In 1992, Fr. Marcello Zago, initiated the idea to start a mission in Korea, and eventually extend it to China. As a result, 2 Italian Oblates were sent to Korea. To support the mission begun by them, the Italian Oblates increased their number. Later an Oblate from the Oblate Province of Jaffna, one from the Oblate Province of Colombo, one from the Oblate Delegations of India and one from the Oblate Delegation of Bangladesh joined the Oblates in South Korea. The Oblate mission in South Korea belongs to the Oblate Delegation of Japan.

When the Oblates celebrated the 50 years of their missionary apostolate in Japan, the Oblate Province of Japan-Korea had 40 Oblates. Right now, the Oblate Delegation of Japan-Korea continues the missionary apostolate our pioneers began in the parishes and in the kindergartens. At the moment responding to new needs, we work also with and for the young men and young women, migrant workers, and advocacy, which includes working with the alcoholics and drug addicts, prison ministry, visiting detention camps, the homeless etc.

Becoming an Oblate Delegation

At the 35th Oblate General Chapter, the idea of restructuring the Oblate Provinces emerged and the Oblate Province of Japan became an Oblate General Delegation of Rome since we did not have at least 50 Oblates in Japan at that time. Having become an Oblate

General Delegation, we were requested by the Oblate General Administration to name an Oblate Province and attach ourselves to that Oblate Province as an Oblate Delegation. Responding to that call from Rome, and having spent time reflecting prayerfully, we appealed to the Oblate Province of Colombo to come to our aid and in 2010, the Oblate Province of Colombo, under the leadership of Fr. Clement Waidyasekara OMI responded positively. Later, a few more Oblates from the Philippines, India and also from Brazil (to serve the migrants from Latin America) also joined the Oblate Delegation of Japan.

Having become an Oblate Delegation of the Oblate Province of Colombo, we continue our own agenda since Japan is very much noted for its culture, language and patterns of life.

Rapidly Emerging Missionary Challenges

Thanks to the Oblate Provinces of Sri Lanka, India and the Philippines for continuing to collaborate with us by sending Oblate missionaries. However, we still need Oblates to respond to the many new challenges which are emerging daily in Japan. As we are celebrating the 75th year of Oblate missionary presence and labours, it is very necessary to think anew regarding our Oblate presence and mission in Japan.

Fr. Jude Peirisulle, OMI

ADIEU

to

FR. THEOGENES JOSEPH OMI (1939-2022)

& FR. JOB BASIL OMI (1939-2022)

Pioneer Missionaries in Pakistan

Fr. Theogenes Joseph was born on 26 January 1939, in a small town Achchuveli in Jaffna to Mr. Benedict Bastiampillai Joseph and Mrs. Margaret Nesaratnam. In his youth, he attended prestigious Catholic institutions, St. Joseph's College in Colombo 10 and St. Patrick's College in Jaffna. Responding to God's call for religious life in affirmation, he joined the Oblates and on the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1957, he pronounced his First Vows, and on the same day in 1960, he made his Perpetual Vows. He chose December 21 for his priestly ordination since St. Eugene De Mazenod, the founder of the Oblates was ordained priest on that day. After being ordained priest on 21 December 1964 by the Archbishop of Colombo, His Eminence Thomas Cardinal Cooray OMI at St. Lucia's Cathedral in Kotahena, he served in different capacities for seven years in various parts of Sri Lanka like Amala Utpavam, Kaytes, Mannar and Uylamkulam before setting foot in Pakistan.

Fr. Job Basil Silva was born on 29 July 1939 in Colombo to Mr. Handunnetti Maris Silva and Mrs. Conganigne Engaltina. He made his First Vows on 31 May 1962 at Mount Eden and on the same day in 1965 pronounced his

Final Vows at Oblate Scholasticate, Kandy. He was ordained priest on 7 May 1969 in the Church of Our Lady of Fatima by the auxiliary Bishop Edmund Fernando OMI of the Archdiocese of Colombo. Before setting out for Pakistan, he served at St. Sebastian's Church, Moratuwa and St. Mary's Church, Tudella.

After the invitation from Bishop Francis Benedict Cialeo OP (as bishop 1960-1976) of Lyallpur Diocese (now Faisalabad Diocese) was extended to the Oblates of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to serve in his diocese as he faced an acute shortage of priests in his diocese, a serious talk began to establish that mission. Initially Fr. Schmitt found it difficult to gather willing oblates. A turning point came when in April 1970 there were two annual retreats preached by Assistant General for Mission, Fr. William Cagney (1924-2000) to fathers of Ceylon Province in which he spoke on Pan-Asian Oblate Collegiality. This concept stirred the missionary spirit among the oblates and 'some of them came to see Fr Schmitt offering their services for Lyallpur', wrote Fr. Schmitt to Fr. Léo Deschatâtelets, the then Superior General on 3 May 1970. Were there among them the three pioneer oblates? The answer is 'It is not known'.

On 14 February 1971, Fr. Lucien Schmitt accompanied three young energetic Sri Lankan Oblate priests namely Late Fr. Lester Silva, Fr. Basil J. Silva (1939-2022) and Fr. Joseph Theogenes (1939-2022) to West Pakistan to serve in Faisalabad Diocese.

After their arrival in Pakistan, the missionaries went to a mountain resort town Murree in the north of the country to learn basics of Urdu, the national language of Pakistan. Having followed the language course, the three Oblates came down to Lyallpur diocese and were assigned to serve in different parishes. They were put under the guidance of experienced local priests, in order to familiarize themselves with the language, culture and lifestyle of the people. Fr. Lester Silva besides being appointed Mission Superior of Pakistan, was assigned with a diocesan priest Fr. Rufin Anthony (1940-2016) (later bishop of Islamabad-Rawalpindi diocese) in Gojra. Fr. Theogenes Joseph was assigned to St. Anthony's Parish, Chak 10/4-L, Antoniabad in Okara with another diocesan priest Fr. James Archangelus and Fr. Job Basil Silva to St Pius X Parish, Chak Jhumra with a Dominican priest. Sacred Heart Parish, Gojra was officially handed over to the Oblates in 1974 which became the headquarters of the Oblate Mission in Pakistan and Fr. Basil was appointed to serve in one of the substations. Fr. Theogenes was later appointed as parish priest in Chak Jhumra with a Dominican priest assisting him. In Chak Jhumra Oblates stayed for a few years and leaving that parish they took over Immaculate Conception Parish in Toba Tek Singh in 1975 and Our Lady of Mercy, Parish, Chak 6/4-L, Okara in 1976, not too far from Gojra.

Fr. Basil along with Fr. Victor Gnanapragasam served in both parishes at different times. The faithful of the parish still cherish memories of missionary activism in their parishes during the time of the Oblates. Oblates handed

back parishes of Our Lady of Mercy and Immaculate Conception to the diocese in 1982 and 1989 respectively.

Fr. Basil's vision started deteriorating which became an obstacle to his active missionary life and a year later in September 1990 he decided to leave for Sri Lanka for good. In Sri Lanka, he stayed in Oblate communities at St. Vincent's Home, Maggona and Dev Arana, Polwatta. From 2021 he resided in Marian Grove until he was called by the Lord to His eternal abode on 14 July 2022 after two-week long illness.

Speaking about Fr. Theogenes, he was an outstanding missionary with vision for the future. Being a devoted son of St. Eugene De Mazenod, he left nothing un-dared. He was ready to take risk in order to explore new ways and opportunities. He was a formidable administrator. When in June 1975 Fr. Lester Silva, the Mission Superior, decided to return to Sri Lanka for good, Fr. Theogenes assumed the responsibility of leading the Oblate Team in Pakistan and completed the remaining term of Fr. Lester until October 1977. As Mission Superior of Pakistan Mission, he continued to manage the Mission. Later when in 1979 Mission of Pakistan was upgraded to Delegation of Pakistan, he served as the Delegation Superior from August 1985 to August 1988. During his tenure as superior, Pakistan Delegation had notable and lasting achievements. In 1985, the Oblates shifted from St. Joseph's Parish, Khanewal to Ibn-e-Mariam Parish, Rangpur with Derekabad and Azizabad as its outstations in the diocese of Multan. In 1988 Oblates pitched their

tents in Thal Desert and Derekabad was established as a separate parish by the name of Our Lady of Lourdes, with Azizabad as its outstation. In August 1985, the foundation stone for the Oblate Minor Seminary was jointly laid by Bishop Patras Yousaf of Multan Diocese and Fr. Theogenes Joseph at Louis Colony, Multan. It started functioning from September 1986. Fr. Theogenes was proud to witness the first Pakistani Oblate Fr. Inayat Gill being ordained priest on 5 December 1986 by Bishop Patras Yousaf.

Fr Theogenes is held in high esteem in Pakistan for his efforts to implement the concept of Basic Christian Communities, phenomenon of the early 1960s, which sought a return to the grass-roots communities of the early Church. **Vatican II (1962-1965) talked about co-responsibility by abandoning the idea of a single normative culture identified with Western Christian Civilization and called for an incarnation of Catholic Christianity in the variety of the world's cultures (LG 1). After Vatican II, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) from the time of its very inception in 1970 supported the idea of Basic Christian Communities. Fr. Theogenes' pragmatic approach helped the Oblates as a team to be successful in executing the FABC's recommendations to create within parishes, mini-parishes, neighbourhood churches and grass-roots communities in the form of Basic Christian Communities.**

Fr. Theogenes helped the faithful of Gojra and Toba Tek Singh create inter-personal, ongoing relationships at village and *basti* level who would view themselves as ecclesial entities by coming together for regular meetings and seeing each other as the 'People of God' and the 'Body of Christ'. The Oblates added a word and called it Basic Christian Communities Development, commonly known as BCCD. It was a complement to the parish model of Church. The faithful of the same area would come together to share their faith, discuss their social and economic issues and sought to find solutions to problems on their own. These were, in a way apostolic and parish communities which provided services to the parish while holding to their distinct identity as an ecclesial unit based on their area/village or provenance. In a sense, Fr. Theogenes was able to forge the faithful in 'journeying together' through 'synodal way' of becoming a local, domestic, parochial church united with the Universal Church in faith, life and sacraments.

He was an educationalist *par excellence* who worked tirelessly to raise Catholic community through quality education, technical skills and human/Catholic formation. When Holy Rosary Parish, Quetta (a city in the Province of Balochistan) was handed over to the Oblates in 1982 by the Franciscans, Fr. Theogenes was appointed the first parish priest. From that time onwards most of his time in Pakistan he spent in Quetta. His contribution in the upliftment of Catholic youth is greatly lauded by the people of Quetta. He was passionate to bring the laity into the mainstream of the Church. He was to a greater extent

successful in implementing BCCD programme in Quetta as suited to the local milieu. A number of young men whom he educated, formed and groomed, hold/held respectable positions in government and private sectors which pulled them and their families out of poverty and raised their economic and living conditions. Although these people are coming close to the evening of their careers, they thankfully say, 'We have achieved this much for our families because of Fr. Theo', remark Mr. Augustine Gian, a former Principal of St. Francis Grammar School Quetta and Mr. Nadeem Bakhshi, an officer at UN World Food Programme in Quetta.

He was a spiritual guide to a number of priests and religious. The people looked to him as a model and gave him a title '*Baba ji*', a respectable and honorable moniker. As a member of the formation team for a few months in Oblate Juniorate, Multan, he employed his skills as a musician, an organizer, an educationalist and a visionary and contributed greatly in the human formation of young men who were on the way to offering their life to God as Oblates.

In January 2001, Fr. Theogenes was called to serve in the OMI General House in Rome as one of the administrative assistants. He served in the Philippines for a few years, where he underwent a successful open-heart surgery. Then he decided to return to the Oblate Province of Jaffna and worked as a secretary to the Provincial from 2016 to 2019. Then in 2019 he retired from active ministry and came to the Oblate Retirement Home in Columbuthurai,

Jaffna, where he kept himself busy by helping the Juniorists and the Scholastics in the neighbourhood in spiritual accompaniment. On 6 July he had a sudden stroke which resulted in paralysis and loss of speech. He was taken to the hospital but he did not respond to the treatment. On 11 July he was brought back to the Retirement Home to be looked after. With breathing complication worsening, he breathed his last in the morning of July 13, 2022. The body was kept in the chapel of St. Joseph's Juniorate, Jaffna where Fr. Eugene Benedict, Provincial of Jaffna Province offered a Requiem Mass the same evening. The next day on July 14 at 10:00 a.m. Bishop Justin Gnanapragasam of Jaffna Diocese presided over the funeral Mass and last rites at the chapel of St. Joseph's Juniorate. It is interesting to note that Fr. Theogenes, the youngest son of the family was buried in the same tomb where the eldest son of the family, his brother Fr. Adrian Joseph OMI was laid to rest 20 years ago in the cemetery attached to the St. Mary's Cathedral, Jaffna.

Our Tribute

The Oblate Delegation of Pakistan pays tribute in utmost gratitude to Fr. Theogenes Joseph and Fr. Basil Silva, the pioneer missionaries, for their invaluable years of missionary life and apostolic service to the people of Pakistan. It is consoling to note that at the funeral Mass of Fr. Basil Silva, Frs. Vernon Derrick and Thyagan Fonseka (Sri Lankan missionaries serving in Pakistan), Frs. Eric Lakhman, Jude Angelo and Br. Felician

Fernando (Sri Lankan missionaries who have served in Pakistan) were present, while for the funeral Mass of Fr. Theogenes Fr. J.J. Edward (Sri Lankan missionary serving in Pakistan), Fr. Joseph Aloysius Roy (Sri Lankan Missionary who has served in Pakistan and Br. Felician Fernando were present in Jaffna.

In Pakistan Oblates came together to offer a Requiem Mass for the repose of the souls of these noble missionaries on 18 July 2022 in Our Lady of Mercy Parish Chak 6/4-L, Okara where both missionaries had served together at one point. Fr. Abid Tanveer, Vicar General of Faisalabad Diocese presided over the Holy Mass since Bishop Indrias Rehmat of the diocese was abroad and Fr. Khan Paulus, Delegation Superior of Pakistan delivered the homily. With the Oblates, there were a number of diocesan and Dominican priests along with Holy Family, Dominican and Franciscan Tertiary Sisters of Loretto to pay homage to these two Oblate missionaries.

You have been faithful servants of the Lord. May your souls rest in eternal peace and be counted among the saints!

Fr Gulshan Barkat OMI
Karachi, Pakistan.

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CATHOLIC NEGOMBO

by

S.G. Perera, SJ

(Continued from *The Missionary Oblate*, no 62, pages 73 -82)

“At three o’clock in the morning” writes Father Miranda, ³⁵ “I reached the house of our benefactor Modeliyar Don Alfonso Pereyra who was awaiting me, and from the information he gave me I learnt that the Christians of Negombo were so despondent and broken that they had already turned the chapels into go-downs (gudoes) and had no meetings for prayers etc; the Christians themselves told me that, had I delayed ten or fifteen days longer, they would have pulled down the chapels. I made up my mind to put an end to this evil by assembling the Christians of each street in its chapel, but it was more than in Colombo, for our adversaries, foreseeing that I would pass through Negombo, had spread their spies, and the ensign(alferes) of the fort who is a bitter enemy of the Modeliyar and is looking for an opportunity to work his ruin and not finding anything else, has reported that it was he who brought and harboured the Catholic priests and took them to Colombo, etc. and to make good his words, he has posted men in every direction, and every night the soldiers of the fort sally out into the streets and enter the houses on some pretext or other. This he has been doing and continues to do with great zeal as if it were his only occupation, and on that account he has been recommended by the Governor, the Dissawa and the Predikants. The Dissawa has promised fifty *patacas* and other rewards for my arrest.”

“I was thus running great personal risk; but on the other hand if I did not do what I intended, the cause of religion would assuredly run still greater risk; for, from what I could judge, and what they themselves admitted, they would have given themselves for reformandas at least nominally. Under these circumstances, I thought it better to expose myself and others like me to danger rather than let such a great detriment befall the faith and the Catholic religion; and commending the matter to God I set about paying my visits at midnight and assembling the principal men of each street and of each caste, I gave a short sermon as God inspired me; and after encouraging and confirming them to confess the faith and to continue the practice of meeting for prayer and other exercises as usual in the chapels, I withdrew at once without anyone knowing whither. Thus I made my rounds and so did the soldiers, but thanks to God we never met.”

“I am told, however that one night as I entered Grand Street (*rua grande*), there were three soldiers in hiding, and that, though they saw me pass and followed me, they could not overtake me nor find out where I had entered. At least such was the story told in the house of the Ensign Alferes who for that reason called me a Sorcerer, which rejoiced me greatly, being the name which the Jews gave to our God Jesus, Saviour of our souls. I really do not know whether the report is true, or whether it actually happened, but on that night I certainly was in Grand Street, and entered the chapel and afterwards went into a house where I remained an hour and a half with about seven hundred people who had assembled, and left the place safely without meeting a soul. The Alferes knew what I was doing and wrote in all haste to Colombo, doubled the watches, but it was all in vain, for such was God’s will.”

“Having visited the various places and instructed the Christians, I passed over, with God’s help, to the other side of the river and reached Caymel, which is in the territory of the King of Candia. Between Caymel and Negombo there is no other separation except a very narrow rivulet although the fortalice is about a league distant. Even in Caymel the Christians did not consider me at safety, for there were no vassals of the King of Candia there, and the inhabitants were people of Negombo who had come there for greater commodity and who tilled and cultivated the lands without any payment to the King or the Company. And though I had no reason to fear that they would come openly to capture me, lest they should cause displeasure to the King whom they have orders from Batavia and Holland to please. Gratify and serve, because it is to their great interest to keep his friendship and goodwill, yet I could not be safe against a surprise, for they could very easily come at night and take me, and give out that they took me within their own territory; and once I am in their power, where is the Christian who will have the courage or the boldness to say the contrary or inform the King? On the other hand the Modeliyar and the Christians told me to remain at Caymel with every possible precaution, for if I should chance to be taken, the undertaking was lost, and for that reason, if I went away, they could not carry out what they had begun, and the cause of religion would suffer greatly because of the fear which the Christians had conceived.”

“Considering all these circumstances, I judged my presence in Caymel necessary for two reasons; first for the sake of the Christians, and secondly for the sake of the Modeliyar, who, as the chief Catholic in Negombo, performs various offices in the church publicly before all the people, and some dissatisfied persons now accused him of it, and it is necessary that no proof should be forthcoming in the inquiry which will be held.

Accordingly I abstained from visiting the chapel which is on the banks of the river until we knew how things stood, and hid myself in the house of the Christians always changing my abode and sometimes omitting Mass. For greater security I had two huts built of leaves in two secluded places in the forests; and occasionally I betook myself to one of them, and calling the leaders of the people and of native soldiery, one or two at a time, I set to work now on one point, now on another as well as I could. I found them all courageous in my presence, but not all of them so in my absence.”

“However, I did not lose heart, for I felt that, great as was my unworthiness, God would not fail even to work miracles if necessary, and help an undertaking so much to His glory and the honour of the Catholic faith. I therefore besought Our Lord and His Most Holy Mother, (whose protection and the prerogatives with which God endowed her, these wretched people make the Christians deny by word): neither will the Mother of God fail to show herself a Mother of Pity to the Christians of this island, who, in all their needs and difficulties, invoke her aid, crying out “Madave,” which means “O Mother of God”; and though many children have been punished by the teachers of the heretical schools for making use of that invocation when they were flogged they will not give up their pious custom.”

“In this very river of Caymel it happened two years ago in the rainy season that a small dhoney with some people was carried into the sea by the force of the current under the eyes of all and no one was able to save it. There was in it a young man named Francisco who did nothing else but kept on crying out “Madave! Madave!”, and wonderful to say, though the boat, being a small one, capsized and all the other occupants were lost, Francisco alone, who did not know how to swim, found

himself safe on shore, the Lord knows how. One being questioned he said he knew nothing else except that he was put safely on land. Nearly all the chapels here are dedicated to Our Lady.”

“Three Captains came to Negombo to inquire into matters of religion, and certain other things concerning the Modeliyar: and the first witness they called was an Arache of their militia, named Simao da Crius, a man of 67 years of age and rather a bold person, thank God: for had he been otherwise and they had fallen upon someone who did not answer as he ought to do, many another, the greater part of the people, would perhaps have followed the same course, But our good Arache,(whose lascarin I often become when I have to go to Negombo even in time of revolts to give the Sacraments to some dying person) answered the question put to him with the greatest boldness, confidence, and courage, that could possibly be wished for.”

“He said he was a Roman Catholic; not only he, but that in the whole of Negombo there were no reformados, that even the children knew no other religion though they went to their (Dutch) schools; he mentioned all the chapels which were in Negombo, and the religious exercises performed there; and then in the face of the Captains he called another Arache a traitor, because being a Catholic, he gave himself for a reformado out of fear or stupidity. This was a sound slap to one of the Captains, Gregoria da Costa, who, though formerly a Catholic, had become a turn-coat for the sake of employment; and these renegades and some care more inimical to us than the Europeans and other Senhores of the state.”

“They asked him whether I had celebrated the feast in Caymel. He said that I did, and all Negombo was there, and that it was the feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God. They asked what

was done there on that occasion. He replied that he could not describe it as he had never seen anything like it before; that he could only say that one could witness things like that, fasting for eight days and nights, and not be tired of it. They asked who supplied meals to the Father. He replied that, for what the Father cared for food and things of the kind, the poorest man on earth would find it no burden to have the Father for guest. They asked him whether the Father was a white or a black. He replied that the Father was something white, but that he did not know to what caste he belonged; that he had however heard it said that he was a Brahmin. The good old man gave many other answers of the kind which were all taken down in writing.”

“The next day all the people were summoned, one person from each house. Those who lived in the territories of the King (of Candie) came promptly and answered all questions duly, not only acknowledging that they were Catholics, but also that they were Annaves in charge of the chapels, that is to say, those who instruct and conduct the exercises of the chapels, declaring their ministries unasked. The fervour which seized all on this occasion was something wonderful. Even the Cingalas, who have never met a Father or come into a chapel, went there forcibly and gave themselves out as Catholics, and when they were afterwards asked by the Catholics why they did so, they said they wished to be what they had said they were, because otherwise they had to give a pingo to the school master to get their children baptised in the Kirk, and that when they had a child by a woman who was not legally the wife, the Hollander Padre did not want to baptise it, and that the Portuguese Fathers baptised without any payment, and without inquiring whether the child was born of a legitimate marriage, or not, and that therefore the religion of the Portuguese was better than that of the Hollanders.”

“On the side of Caymel there are four chapels in four villages of Negombo and thither on the following day came the Dissava and the Predikant for their visit. A proclamation was made ordering the people to assemble, and the schoolmaster gathered some thirty-five persons, simple Chingalas and partisans of the school-masters, and instructed them to place themselves in front, so that when the predikant asked them of what religion they were, loud voices should answer that they were reformandos, with the intent of making the ignorant people do the same. When all were gathered the Predikant asked them what religion they professed. He repeated the question thrice, but not one answered a word. Thereupon the Predikant said that as they did not answer he understood them to be Catholics, and as he was turning to go, one out of the thirty-five, the brother of the schoolmaster, with two other Chingalas stepped out and said they were reformandos. God closed the mouth of the rest.”

“On hearing this I sent a message, with the result that, on the following day, when they visited another school, all were gathered together including the old people who had never been to the school and the Predikant seeing the multitude, suspected the cause and did not want to enter into the school, for in spite of all their proclamations they never succeeded in gathering such a crowd together. Wearied out with waiting, the men came out to breathe fresh air and straightaway the Predikant entered and gave orders to lock the door, but those who could managed to force their way in. He asked them of what religion they were, and all the people shouted out so loud as to be heard afar, that they were Roman Catholics.”

“Then turning to the school children who were on a side, he put them the same question. They replied that they were Catholics also. He then asked them whether they were not of his school. A boy of 11 or 12 answered that he was. Where were they

baptised, he asked them in his Church, they replied. Where did they live? In their (i.e. Dutch) territory. How was it that they were Catholics? Asked the Predikant. Their parents had taught them their religion, they replied. Finally he asked them: "In what religion do you wish to be?" "We wish to live and die Catholics," they replied. Put to shame by this he left for Colombo without baptising any one or giving any license for marriage."

"He had previously asked the Annaves the same questions which he put to the others, and they all replied in the same way. Finding that nearly all the chapels were dedicated to Our Lady, he asked them why they worshipped a woman like themselves etc etc. They replied because they thought that one who did not worship the Mother of God could not go to Heaven. He inquired very diligently whether the Mudeliya had given orders or helped to build any of the chapels, whether he brought the Fathers; but he received no information from them though they knew very well what he did for the Catholic religion in these parts. This being over, the Captains and the Dissava and the Predikant went away and up to the present they do not speak of what happened in Negombo."

"After the second Sunday of Lent I returned to Caymel, not quite to the satisfaction of Father Menezes, whose great love for me made him fear that some unforeseen danger might befall me, and if such a thing should happen he said it would be the ruin of the Mudeliyar and others, who as Fr.Menezes had come to know, would in such a case not hesitate to take up arms to rescue me from the enemy. But seeing that these were only considerations of future contingencies and knowing the needs of the Mission, I set out and arriving in Caymel entered the chapel with all publicity, and began Mission work first in the territory of the King (of Candia). While I was in hiding, my

presence, and even the place where I lived, was not unknown, all it only resulted in showing my pusillanimity even in these places, and in making coward of the Christians; but as soon as I came openly baptising, hearing confessions and blessings marriages, the people became little by little more courageous.”

“The Alferes wrote to the Predikants day by day what was done and how the people flocked to him but as his writing produced no effect the people began to come quite openly. The ceremonies of the Holy Week were performed as well as I could, and on Easter the attendance was so great that I think it exceeded the numbers on the feast of Our Lady. Some came even from Colombo, and as it is above a year since I attended to the Mission, there is a crowd for confession every day. All the children when the predikant left unbaptised are again in the Kirk, where I may say there is nobody now; last Sunday there was only four ignorant Hindu (Xindus) women, who do not know the difference between our religion and that of our adversaries.”

From this time forth the Catholics of Negombo continued to be recalcitrant and to refuse to attend the reformed Church. Again and again the Predikants reported “that among the natives many were imbued with the blind superstition of popery through the emissaries of Portuguese priests from the Court of Choromendal”; of “itinerant so called Roman Catholic Priests who are to be found in every village baptising indiscriminately all who come”; that “Popery prevailed in Negombo”; “that the reformed church met with increased opposition from Popery,” “that its emissaries were in all places drawing away the people”: that “it was difficult to discover and apprehend these emissaries”; that “their influence had so far increased that several Sinhalese refused to answer certain questions of the Catechism out of which they were taught alleging that they

were Roman Catholics”; that “parents refused to send their children to school, which was due to the influence of Roman Catholic priests and that their emissaries who spared no intrigues to draw away the people.”³⁶

Baron Imboff thought that this was due to the inefficiency of the means they employ. “The Romish priests do the Company much injury” he wrote. “They are zealous, and closely united. We can never put them down till we send more efficient teachers.”³⁷ This reflection eventually led to the establishment of a normal school in Colombo.



