

## Sri Lanka and Pakistan: Apostolic Missions for the Church

Although Iâ€™ve already mentioned our work in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, I wish to go a bit deeper into some of the aspects of our mission work as teachers. I will try not to repeat myself, but feel it important to point out what was especially needed of us at this time in the Church. We attempted to fill the special needs of each area assigned to us and the special apostolic work to be done in each place confided to us.

The four missionaries who had first come to Sri Lanka in 1911 had quickly diminished to only one. Two had returned to France, and one had died shortly after arrival. In looking back at that initial start, it became more and more evident that the Lord had done us a very special blessing by leaving us the best one of the initial four. He proved to be a dominant figure, experienced, and dedicated to succeed at all cost. There would also be a good number of missionaries from France, Germany, Spain, and England who had come specifically to help in Sri Lanka and to help the founding Marist Brothers. Our only remaining Brother quickly became the central figure of this young Province, and the respected father of this mission. In all this I refer of course to the dedicated Bro. Francis Anthony.

Brother Anthony was a thoroughly dedicated French Marist who had taken sound roots and was an example of thoroughness and unquestioned dedication to the task of making this new foundation a successful apostate for the Christian education of youth according to the directives and teaching of the Marist Founder Champagnat. He loved his apostolic undertaking and was so dedicated to everything Singhalese and to new horizons that would help them grow that he was chosen to lead the Province during this initial period of growth. Under him the Province grew, the number of schools increased, and eventually some of our own graduates became priests and Bishops and are now leaders in the work of the Church for Catholic education. Young candidates were trained to succeed in their studies, to aspire to the religious life, and to join in the work of the Church.

Actually his greatest contribution was the training of future leaders who would be able to take his place and carry on the work with courage and inspiration. He had trained the Sri Lankans to become Marist Brothers, to become teachers, and later on, his word was the most frequently heard calling for training Sri Lankans as Marist missionaries. I can say that Brother Anthony hounded me at every visit, asking for the start of Marist missionary work in India. That was his dream, and he lost no time or effort to push and encourage that foundation. I must admit here that he not only convinced me to get started in India, but that he volunteered to go there himself.

During my visitations to Sri Lanka at least three times I took the opportunity to visit Mother Teresa of India to ask her opinion regarding the proposed mission. She told me that Indians well-trained in hard work were capable of working wonders. She repeatedly reminded us that Indians could stand sacrifice, for they had suffered a lot.

I promised Brother Anthony that we would do all in our power to get Marist vocations started in India, and he promised prayers to guarantee that success. Brother Anthony was really the great power behind the Indian mission, and his courage and example stimulated me even if he knew that he could never go himself as a missionary. He volunteered to help train young Sri Lankans for the missions in India. I am now convinced that what was done for India was due in part by Brother Anthonyâ€™s prayers and by the dedication of our early missionaries such as Brother Raphael, an Italian, who looked after our first candidates in India not as the Superior but as the Prefect and disciplinarian. Sri Lanka had a sacred missionary as Superior and a Prefect determined to have the young candidates absorb the solid Marist spirit. It is a bit strange in looking back to find that eventually Sri Lanka would not in fact take over India but would be invited to start its own mission in Pakistan. I would like now to point out a few key houses that have endured the test of time.

Our Ladyâ€™s Hermitage is possibly the oldest of the Marist houses in Sri Lanka. It was where we first started and had candidates for training and also had a residence for the older Marist Brothers. It served as a residence for the newcomers as well. Later it became our quality chicken farm, providing food for the elderly and training jobs for the young. Our first Marist trainees all started here and learned farm work. A number of young chicken farmers were trained here and later developed their own farms. In more recent years it also became the site of Novitiate training for candidates to the Brotherhood and has always been a sort of place where the old-timers and the young candidates mixed and absorbed that precious Marist spirit.

We have schools in various cities of Sri Lanka but perhaps the one with the greatest enrollment was our Marist Stella College at Negombo, which has graduated thousands of fine young men who now have high offices in business, politics, and clergy. In more recent years the Provincial headquarters of the Province was also established there, and its proximity to the Columbo Airport makes it a proper residence for Marist visitors. We pulled out of several schools for various reasons but still have some five or six outstanding schools all serving the poor class of their various areas. Marist Stella of Negombo as well as schools at Kalutara, Kotte, Ja-Ela, Nugegoda, and a technical school in Negombo are the main school activities of the Sri Lanka Province. Besides this, the Sri Lankan Province has two mission schools in Pakistan: one in Peshawar and the other in Sargodah. I wish to pay a tribute to the Province by saying a few words on its two mission schools in Pakistan.