

## Marist India – “The Birth of a Marist Mission

One cannot even refer to the foundation of the Marist India mission without mentioning our beloved Bro. Francis Anthony, who was the oldest member of the Sri Lanka mission. I remember him drumming in my ears each time I visited Sri Lanka that we needed to set up a mission in India, and it surely must have been his prayers and sacrifices that brought it all about to reality. India with its vast population had long before been an attraction for various missionaries, and we did not have any intention of replacing any other order.

It happened that some of our Marist Brothers from Sri Lanka and some of the graduates from our Marist Stella College were already registered at the Jesuit St. Joseph College. On one of my visits to Sri Lanka, Brother Anthony told me of one of our Marist Brothers and suggested that since I was going to visit our men there already, it would be a good occasion to look into the matter of accepting a mission there. One of our students was already there, and his parents wanted me to visit him in their name, so I promised to pay him a visit.

I was greatly impressed by the work being done at St. Joseph’s College and knew that we could not easily send in just anyone at all; it would have to be someone well-referenced and capable of carrying the burden of studies. Our Brother who was studying there raved about the place and teachers and assured me that he was very happy. It was what happened during my visit that precipitated a much longer visit than I had originally planned. Our Marist Brother told me that he was asked by one of the seminarians at the college to please ask if his visitor from Rome could also grant him an interview. I hesitated at first for I surely had no intention of getting involved with the Jesuits by interfering in their work and speaking with one of their seminarians. But I figured that it might not involve anything but just listening and encouraging. I agreed to see him.

The young seminarian was studying to become a priest, and it just so happened that it was his uncle who was the Superior of the Seminary and the local Bishop. He had brought the lad to the seminary to start his studies for the priesthood. He told me that he had a problem and would like to consult me in all confidence. I assured him that I did not want to get involved in a problem with the Bishop. He assured me that all he was seeking was advice. He wanted to consult me as I was a religious and from Rome.

We set a time for the interview, and I soon found out that it was something serious. To make a long story short, he told me that the priest in confession had told him that he should leave the seminary and go home. He had told this to his uncle, the Bishop, who became angry and told him to forget what the priest had said and carry on. The young man told me that he just wanted another opinion as this was a matter of conscience, and he wanted to tell me his story and then hear my advice as to what he should do. He was looking for a third point of view. I suggested that he should be asking this of a priest, but since he had told me his problem, I suggested he consult another priest at the college and to seek his advice. If he was advised to stay, then he would have two such decisions from priests who better knew the life of a Jesuit. If he were told to leave, then he would have the force of a second decision. Although he kept pushing me for a decision and put me in a bit of a dilemma, I firmly advised him to seek the advice of another priest of his order whom he respected, and then make the decision on his own.