

St. Charles Joseph Eugene De Mazenod and the pioneering missionary efforts of the Oblates in Sri Lanka

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The Oblate¹ phase of the Apostolate in Sri Lanka began with Mgr. Orazio Bettachini. Mgr. Orazio Bettachini was an Italian and a member of the Oratory of St Philip Neri in Città di Castello², was born in 1810, in Piogena, near Città di Castello. After his ordination he engaged in parochial work in his native diocese for approximately two years before entering the Oratorians³. He arrived in Sri Lanka on 28 November 1842⁴. He volunteered for remote missions and was thus posted to various difficult missions. While in the mission of Kandy, he met the only other European, Father André Reinaud⁵ who arrived in Sri Lanka in the beginning of March 1844. Even after leaving the Oblate Congregation, he remained in contact with the Congregation, and its Founder, Saint Eugene de Mazenod⁶, who referred to him using a soft term ‘poor child’. It was this Father André Reinaud who introduced the Oblates to Orazio Bettachini.

Sri Lanka had been juridically under the Portuguese ‘*Padroado*’⁷ since 1557. Pope Gregory XVI promulgated the erection of the Apostolic Vicariate of Ceylon⁸ in the brief ‘*Ex munere pastoralis ministerii*’⁹ on 3 December 1834. The Goanese Oratorian, Vicente do Rosario¹⁰, was appointed its first Vicar Apostolic¹¹, and was succeeded by another Goanese Oratorian, Gaetano Antonio Mulsuce¹². Meanwhile,

Pope removed the Apostolic Vicariate of Ceylon from the Portuguese *Padroado*'s jurisdiction entirely by the Apostolic Letter '*Multa praeclare*'¹³ of 24 April 1838. The zealous Oratorians with Saint Joseph Vaz¹⁴ in the lead, who had kept the faith alive during the 'dark period'¹⁵ of Catholicism in Sri Lanka, was facing extinction. The new Goanese Oratorian recruits were as a body not the men of the calibre required for the times. The Catholics' dissatisfaction is understandable, as evidenced by their petition to Rome on 1 December 1842 for European missionaries¹⁶. The Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*¹⁷ learned that the Oratorians alone would not be able to respond to the pastoral needs of the people for a number of reasons, they seriously considered looking for a number of missionaries from Europe. Therefore, it sent Father Orazio Bettacchini to Sri Lanka where he arrived on 28 November 1842. *Propaganda Fide* wanted to improve the situation of the Church in Sri Lanka and preferred an Italian Oratorian, for the post of Coadjutor because there was little chance that other Europeans would be accepted by the Goanese Oratorians. In this context, *Propaganda Fide* chose Father Orazio Bettacchini, nominating him on 17 February 1845¹⁸, and assigning him to oversee the Northern region, with residence in Jaffna. The other Goanese Oratorians had not already accepted him, and thus, when the nomination reached Sri Lanka, they resented it. They made life difficult for him by taking orders directly from the Vicar Apostolic himself. Realizing that he could not peacefully exercise his episcopal duties, Mgr. Orazio Bettacchini decided to bring the matter to *Propaganda Fide* himself. At this juncture, the *Propaganda Fide* appointed Mgr. Orazio Bettacchini Vicar Apostolic of Jaffna¹⁹ in 1847 while he continued to serve as Coadjutor to the Vicar Apostolic of Colombo. However, this post of Coadjutor ceased in 1849²⁰.

In the meantime, he was unable to find the necessary recruits to man his Vicariate among his own in Lombardy or elsewhere, except for a solitary Brother Erminio Guidi²¹. Father André Reinaud's mention of the Oblates was in his mind, while visiting in Europe he met the Bishop of Tulle who suggested him to meet the Bishop of Marseilles and provided him with the clue to his approach. The trip to London was unsuccessful. On his return to Rome, he stayed with Mgr. Eugene de Mazenod, the Bishop of Marseilles and Founder of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and conversations were prolonged far into the night. He struck the right chord, his entreaty was in these words: "Monsignor, I assure you that it is a matter concerning poor souls, very poor, the most abandoned, the most unfortunate on earth. Have pity on them and give them some missionaries. If your Oblates do not come, they will perish. In the name of Mary Immaculate save them!"²²

The Founder who had 'a heart as large as St. Paul' could not resist the words 'poor', 'the salvation of souls', and 'the whole island to be converted'.²³ He was labouring under the vision of the entire island being evangelised by the Oblates. He sent his best men, at the head of whom was Father Stephen Semeria²⁴, a Lombard, earlier working with the saintly Carlo Domenico Albinj²⁵ in Corsica and among the Italian waifs at Marseilles, Father Joseph Alexander Ciamin²⁶, a French, Father Louis Mary Keating²⁷, an Irish and a fresher, Brother Gaspard de Stephanis²⁸, a Piedmontese, once a Carthusian and now an Oblate lay brother. The band reached Galle on 28 November 1847, accompanying Mgr. Orazio Bettacchini.

As soon as they arrived in Colombo, Father Stephen Semeria received a letter from Father André Reinaud advising him "to be watchful of certain European missionaries, to avoid confidences, to remain as cold as an Englishman, and

to avoid mentioning that we were religious.”²⁹ However, Father Stephen Semeria did not think it wise remain ‘cold’, let alone hide the fact that they were Oblates. He wrote in his diary, “It would be like hiding behind our thumbs and going about things the wrong way³⁰”. In his diary, he also wrote, “From the day of the arrival on the island, I began to suspect that some of the European priests would not readily accept us, especially when they learned that we belonged to a religious congregation”³¹. This suspicion was partly confirmed by Father André Reinaud’s advice.

Father André Reinaud who gave him this advice met the Oblates in Colombo and pressed the case for going to Kandy, emphasising the advantages of doing so. However, this would contravene the orders of the Founder, who had agreed on condition that they would be placed under the jurisdiction of Mgr. Orazio Bettachini and not under the Goanese Oratorians of Colombo to which Kandy now belonged. The Founder was completely ignorant of the geography of Sri Lanka. When Mgr. Orazio Bettachini approached him, Kandy was under his jurisdiction. However, by the brief ‘Pro Apostolici Muneris’³² of 17 September 1847 ceded it to Colombo. Father Stephen Semeria who had intended to settle in Kandy and had been ‘given orders to that effect’ by the Founder was obliged to change his plans. It seemed that Father André Reinaud wanted to move the Oblates according to his personal advantage.

Oblivious to what lay ahead, Mgr. Orazio Bettachini and the Oblate team left Colombo for Jaffna on 2 February 1848, travelling by sea and arriving in Mannar on the 4 February. Even before they reached Jaffna, Mgr. Orazio Bettachini had broken his promise to the Founder to work in pairs by assigning Father Joseph Alexander Ciamin alone to the Mannar-Mantote mission. He provided him with a catechist to help with the

language. After spending three or four days in Mannar, the others set off again for Jaffna via Kayts. Father Keating was then sent to the Batticaloa mission. Fathers Semeria and Stephanis remained in Jaffna.³³

At that time, the Jaffna Vicariate³⁴ comprised of the northern, north-western, eastern and north-central provinces of the island. It included the areas of Point Pedro in the north, Trincomalee and Batticaloa in the east, Chilaw in the west and Kurunegala in the south. The Vicariate extended as far west as the Kaimal River³⁵ and as far east as the Kumbukkan River, which formed its boundary with the Colombo Vicariate. This meant that there were ten missions in the Vicariate: Jaffna, Valigamam, Kayts, Mannar, Mantota, Kalpity³⁶, Chilaw, Point Pedro, Trincomalee, and Mullaitivu. The three stations of Negombo mission were also within the periphery of the Jaffna Vicariate, but the *Propaganda Fide* soon changed the boundaries and transferred them to the Colombo Vicariate. At the same time, the Batticaloa mission was transferred from the Colombo Vicariate to the Jaffna Vicariate³⁷.

There were eleven priests serving this large territory, six of whom were Goanese Oratorians and five of whom were Europeans. Of the Oratorians, one had recently passed away and another was very ill.³⁸ The only one Goanese Oratorian, Father Miguel Filippu Mascarenhas³⁹, opted to remain in the Jaffna Vicariate. The Founder granted Father Stephen Semeria full juridical authority to decide on matters relating to the Congregation in Sri Lanka. The first Europeans to arrive were Italians. All European missionaries were referred to as 'Italians'. The Goanese Oratorians caused problems on one side. On the other hand, there was internal strife between the French and the Italian religious congregations. The Jesuits also came into the picture later.

One of the Oblates' earlier projects was connected to the proposed seminary for native clergy. Father Stephen Semeria outlined a plan to foster native vocations and engage professors who knew English. Some curious details from his diary are worth noting. "Our Indians⁴⁰ have an astonishing ability to learn languages, though they have some difficulty learning their own". "For a novitiate, our Indians must be led with vigour. They are deceitful and proud"⁴¹. Mgr. Orazio Bettachini consented to the project, and the Founder was asked to provide two additional personnel, but in his generosity, he sent three: Fathers Frédéric Mouchel⁴², Félix François Leydier⁴³, and Jean Le Bescou⁴⁴. Instead of being assigned to the seminary, the newcomers were sent to distant parishes, and once again, Mgr. Orazio Bettachini went back on his word. His position was easily understandable. His biggest problem was the lack of missionaries to support such a vast territory.

Mgr. Orazio Bettachini was never a master of the situation. After Father Stephen Semeria left for Negapatnam and Pondichery, India on 22 May 1848, to study the Jesuits' method of running colleges and to request Jesuit personnel to manage a seminary for indigenous candidates⁴⁵, a conspiracy was formed to remove the Oblates. Some wanted secular priests to be in charge of the Vicariate. The Spanish Cistercians, Fathers Freilano Oruna⁴⁶ and Firenzo Gracia⁴⁷, chiefly the latter, opposed the Oblates and wanted the Jesuits. They prevailed upon Mgr. Orazio Bettachini to write to Marseilles to stop sending the Oblates from being sent there. There were a group of undecided individuals who finally decided in favour of the Oblates. An English Jesuit, Father William Strickland⁴⁸ who had arrived under the pretext of collecting funds, was exploring the possibility of establishing a Jesuit college⁴⁹. He wanted Father Stephen Semeria to be sent far away to the

outstations. However, none of the plans came to fruition. On the contrary, Mgr. Orazio Bettachini made Father Stephen Semeria his secretary, and subsequently appointed him Vicar General in 1851⁵⁰. Meanwhile, amid this factionalism, Father André Reinaud was stirring things up by asking the Oblates to return to Kandy. However, Mgr. Orazio Bettachini, sprang a surprise by inviting the four Jesuits who had come to assist with Father Stephen Semeria's seminary project, to take charge of the Kayts and Mannar missions.⁵¹ The role of Father Stephen Semeria in this complicated episode remains enigmatic. One can only imagine the plight of the Oblates in this state of confusion.

The Founder's passionate love for his sons was always stronger than his rational side. He saw things from a distance and only had Father Stephen Semeria's information. He was angry and upset, calling the English Jesuits' conduct 'horrible' and he wrote to Father Jan Philipp Roothan,⁵² the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, to tell him about Father William Strickland's actions. Eventually, the storm blew over. Father William Strickland, who passing through Marseilles begged Mgr. Eugene de Mazenod for pardon. The Founder instructed Father Stephen Semeria that the four Jesuits should be received without resentment.⁵³

Just as one problem was solved, another arose, throwing everything into confusion. The schism that began in Colombo in 1843 spread to Mantote in 1849, eventually affecting the entire Vicariate. It was an ongoing issue that paralysed the work of the missionaries and tore the Vicariate in two. The Goanese Oratorians were the culprits, chiefly resenting the idea of transfer from *Padroado* to *Propaganda*. Some of these caused endless trouble for the missionaries when they were referred to as 'Italians'. It is doubtful whether

the people should be blamed. The simple people had been brought up to be loyal to their priests. They were neither theologians nor canonists, and could not understand the difference between '*Padroado*' and '*Propaganda*'. To them the new missionaries were intruders. This conviction dominated their thinking. Their instinct to act collectively under the leadership of their village chief meant that large groups followed the schismatic priests like sheep. Unfortunately, this division occurred just before the missionaries arrived. With their limited knowledge of Tamil, the missionaries neither understood the mentality of the people nor were able to explain the new position of the Vicar Apostolic clearly to them. Their missionary task consisted exclusively of establishing legitimate juridical rights rather than getting involved in a spiritual renewal.

Mgr. Eugene de Mazenod, the Founder, found it difficult to understand the complicated and sensitive situation in the Vicariate, even though Father Stephen Semeria had been sending him long and detailed reports. He always thought Father Stephen Semeria's answers to his questions were vague. He did not understand the south Asian way of thinking. The analysis of Sri Lankan psychology and of the social conditions that Father Stephen Semeria, a sharp observer sent him, could not help but confuse him. In Jaffna, any violation of the long-established rights of the people resulted in division. There was no desire to encourage Goanese Oratorians to fuel the fire. In this situation, the Founder wanted conversions and rationalised that his sons were toiling fruitlessly when there was so much dissent within the flock itself. He kept on asking, 'when will you begin winning over infidels', 'battling idolatry and infidelity?', 'new Christians in a different mould are what I want'. The poor pioneers were to be pitied as they were caught in between the local difficulties and the zealous Founder.

The climatic conditions, especially in the north of the country in regions such as Mannar, Batticaloa, Mantote, Trincomalee, as well as on the Islands and in the jungle areas of the Vanni, were detrimental to the health of the pioneer Oblates. There were frequent outbursts of cholera and epidemic to which many a missionaries succumbed. The first victim was Father Felix Francois Leydier in 1851 at Vadiry, at the age of 30. This was followed by Father Joseph Alexander Ciamin in 1853 in Jaffna at the age of 33, Father Victor Lacombe⁵⁴ in 1855 at Mathagal at the age of 29, Brother Robert Bonaventure Byrne⁵⁵ in Jaffna at the age of 23, and so too Brother Paul Stephen Poorey⁵⁶ the first native Oblate 1861 at the age of 37. These events convinced the Founder to agitate for the restructuring of the Vicariate to incorporate salubrious regions and gain a presence in the Vicariate of Colombo. His letters to Mgr. Alessandro Barnabò⁵⁷, Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide* on this matter are very revealing⁵⁸. He envisaged the whole of Sri Lanka under the Oblates, pursuing this course with unflagging vigour and impatience, wishing perhaps that it would be realised in his lifetime⁵⁹. But alas, this was not to be. At least he had set this ideal.

Convinced that his sons should be in a position to work more effectively and enterprisingly, the Founder felt that the entire Vicariate of Jaffna should be entrusted to an Oblate bishop. He urged the need to appoint Father Stephen Semeria as the successor of Mgr. Orazio Bettachini.⁶⁰ The secretary of the *Propaganda Fide*, Mgr. Alessandro Barnabò was supportive of this idea. Although *Propaganda Fide* yielded to his arguments in 1857, Mgr. Orazio Bettachini flatly refused on the grounds of his youth and vigour. The Founder pursued the matter tenaciously with him. And, Father Stephen Semeria was appointed Bishop and Coadjutor and consecrated by the Founder himself at the Chapel at Mount Olivet in Marseilles on

17 August 1856,⁶¹ assisted by Mgr. Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert⁶² and Joseph-Bruno Guigues⁶³, both Oblates.

Though there were scattered achievements by the Oblates during the decade he spent in the background, Mgr. Stephen Semeria took full control of the Vicariate following the death of Mgr. Orazio Bettachini on 26 July 1857.⁶⁴ Having served as his secretary and companion in administration, he familiarised himself with the needs of the diocese. Mastering the language of the people, he issued a pastoral letter in Tamil on 12 August 1857⁶⁵ a month after his succession. He recognized the need to rejuvenate Christianity by preaching of 'missions'⁶⁶, as practiced by his Oblate Religious Congregation. Some were sceptical, but he ultimately proved himself right.

He went straight into the fray with a group of preachers, including himself. As a test, the first place chosen was Kayts⁶⁷ rent by internal dissension and hostility towards the bishops and his priests. Nowhere could he have expected a worse reception. They did, however, offer him opposition to prevent the missionary from entering the church. But he was undaunted. The mission lasted forty days. He directed the exercises himself and was ably assisted by Father Ernest Christopher Bonjean⁶⁸ and Father Constant Chounavel⁶⁹. He travelled to the main centres of his Vicariate making inroads into Valigamam in 1857 and Neduntheevu after Kayts. Trincomalee – Batticaloa in 1858, Jaffna & Mantote in 1859, Chilaw & Bolawette in 1860 and other places were visited in turn, with the missionaries spending one to three months in each place preaching, catechising, hearing confessions and converting schismatics, Hindus and Protestants. Mgr. Stephen Semeria wrote at length in his diary about the amazing success of the preaching of missions and the great renewal.

He conveyed these glad tidings to the Founder to delight him and remind him of his early feats and thrilling missions in Provence. The primary purpose of the Congregation had not lost its vigour.

The next in the line of his project was Catholic education. Twelve years ago, he proposed the idea of a seminary project, and he had not deviated from that original plan even in 1860. The aim of his school was to prepare Christian laymen, lay apostles, and finally, those who would take the longest time to train, aspirants to the priesthood. He issued a pastoral letter⁷⁰ on 'The Education of our Catholic Youth' and reinforced the 'Jaffna Boys' Seminary' with recruits from Ireland with a good knowledge of English. The seminary training of the Oblates was not intended for teaching. Nevertheless, he utilised these brothers and priests to raise the standard of education to a level that would not be inferior to that of any Protestant school, which had the advantage of being established in the second decade of the nineteenth century. The 'Female Seminary' for young girls was staffed by the Holy Family Nuns of Bordeaux, who had been affiliated with the Oblates in 1858. The regeneration of Christian education, chiefly the work of Father Ernest Christopher Bonjean, attracted widespread public attention, even prompting the Protestant daily newspaper 'Examiner' which had a large circulation to give prominence to his tracts on 'Education'. The Founder's joy knew no bounds when he received the pastoral letters on topics of education in both Tamil and English. His vision of the Oblate spreading across Sri Lanka was rekindle.

In a letter to Mgr. Stephen Semeria in 1860, the Founder insisted on the reunification of the two Vicariates⁷¹. He wrote, "To achieve this it would be necessary for you to be appointed

coadjutor with the right of succession to Bishop Giuseppe Maria Bravi⁷². However, Mgr. Stephen Semeria was ill with fatigue and fever as a result of his zealous labour, the Founder wrote on 27 March 1861⁷³ to Alessandro Cardinal Barnabò, Prefect of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*, to inform him of his intention and to suggest Father Ernest Christopher Bonjean for the Jaffna Vicariate. He also wrote, “Jaffna was unhealthy, and a move to Colombo would do Semeria good”. “We have missionaries of the highest calibre in the mission field... one such is Bonjean. He would have an opportunity to do boundless good in the Vicariate of Jaffna”.⁷⁴ In one of his last letters before his death he wrote to the Cardinal, “For the love of God, do not forget Ceylon or our excellent Bishop Semeria”⁷⁵. The Founder was determined to integrate the evangelization of the whole Island under his Congregation.

The Founder’s desire for this outcome must have emerged when the first batch of Oblate missionaries were sent to the Vicariate of Colombo. Both Mgr. Gaetano Antonio Mulsuce and Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi, his coadjutor, were completely opposed to the arrival of the Oblates in the Colombo Vicariate. As Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi had been granted complete freedom to make administrative decisions, he was concerned that the Oblates’ presence in Colombo would result in encroachment by the Jaffna Vicariate. He was faced with the dilemma of a shortage of priests and difficulties in recruiting personnel for such an extensive Vicariate. Having exhausted all other options, he approached the Oblates as a last resort. However, he wrote to *Propaganda Fide* for Oblate missionaries, but Italian Oblates, bypassing the Founder, which evidently displeased him. Nevertheless, the magnanimous Founder, Mgr. Eugene de Mazenod, overlooked his impropriety in asking Rome instead of him. Despite being apprehensive about the outcome, he decided

to send four of his sons to Colombo for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.⁷⁶ Fathers Adrien Duffo⁷⁷, Dominique Pulicani⁷⁸, Lallement Laurent J. Pierre⁷⁹, and Perreard Jean-Pierre⁸⁰ arrived in the Colombo Vicariate on 23 July 1851. They were assigned in various parts of the Vicariate. Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi wanted them to avoid any direct contact with the Oblates in the North.

Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi was not a 'second father' to the Oblates, despite his assurances to Mgr. Eugene de Mazenod to the contrary. He was too conscious of his own importance to allow a superior, fearing the creation of an 'empire within an empire'. Father Dominique Pulicani was appointed one *ad interim*. The innate fear was that if the Oblates were directed by a Superior from the north, they would inevitably and peacefully spread southwards and finally replace the existing Sylvestrines⁸¹. Consequently, visits from the Oblate Superior or that of his delegate from north were not welcomed. When Father Frederick Pompey Mouchel⁸² was sent to recuperate his health, he was instructed to report on the situation of the Oblates in the south. He was conciliatory in his observations, concluding that the situation was 'not so bad' as had been suggested. However, Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi was adept at presenting an acceptable façade, and he succeeded with Father Frederick Pompey Mouchel.⁸³

The Oblates were very eager and zealous. The Founder had consistently instructed them on his recurring theme of 'bringing back fallen-away Catholics, winning over Protestants and converting the pagans'. However, they lacked experience, so mistakes were bound to be made in the early stages. These were exacerbated in an environment where they were 'unwanted'. One such incident occurred at Pellansennai, where Father Lallement Laurent J. Pierre was

required to administer the last sacraments to a sick person on the opposite side of the Maha Oya, which formed the border between the two Vicariates. Since he possessed no faculties for territories belonging to Jaffna Vicariate, though the people on either side were of the same community, his refusal provided a convenient excuse for violent demonstrations and threats of schism, Mgr. Gaetano Antonio Mulsuce, however, took a different view and sided with the rioters.⁸⁴

The Oblates' religious activities and the new spirit they introduced when they became masters of the Sinhalese Language aroused the disgust and the wrath of the Goanese Oratorians, who were reported to be lazy and indifferent in their approach to administering the Sacraments. Denunciations and false reports about the Oblate administrators were circulated freely. Their zeal was considered 'scandalous' and the organised solemn First Communion was deemed 'sacrilegious'. Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi condemned these as 'intemperate zeal of the Fathers'. 'The Goanese priests, whose apostolate contrasted with that of the newcomers, agitated and denounced them. In response, Mgr. Gaetano Antonio Mulsuce went so far to threaten to suspend the Oblates in 1854. Representations were made to Rome, Mgr. Eugene de Mazenod, who was then in Rome for the celebration of the 'Definition of the Immaculate Conception' dismissed all fears as propaganda, and wrote back disapprovingly to Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi.⁸⁵

Added to these were the conflicts between the Vicariates, which were settled in favour of Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi, who wanted to be doubly sure of the priests' deputation by petitioning Rome. Two of the Oblates refused to sign the petition circulated by the Mgr. Gaetano Antonio Mulsuce and Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi. Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi

then denounced them to Cardinal Giacomo Filippo Fransoni, Prefect of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* (1834-1856) accusing them 'disobedient'. However, the Founder undertook to vindicate his sons by presenting the Cardinal Prefect with a different picture. Not to be outdone, Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi resorted to intrigue to make his voice heard in Rome. Adding insult to injury, he assigned the poorest missions to the Oblates, and the funds from the Propagation of the Faith were not shared with them. With their limited mass stipends, they were materially and morally destitute, and everything was done to demoralize them.⁸⁶

Due to these rivalries, difficulties and health issues, four Oblate missionaries had already died, and Mgr. Stephen Semeria was Sick ill with fever, the Founder made a case for establishing houses in Colombo, and for an exchange between the two Oblate Communities of the Vicariates. With the departure of Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi, it was only a matter of time before they succeeded in reaching Colombo, thought the Founder. Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi was kept him informed by the *Propaganda Fide* of all communications between Mgr. Eugene de Mazenod and Mgr. Alessandro Barnabò. While all these ecclesiastical politics were going on, Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi undertook a trip to Rome to strengthen his case with the *Propaganda Fide*, but he died at sea.⁸⁷ The transfer of Mgr. Stephen Semeria to Colombo and the Oblates' evangelization the whole of Sri Lanka were both left unfulfilled during the lifetime of Mgr. Eugene de Mazenod. Following Mgr. Stephen Semeria's death, Mgr. Ernest Christopher Bonjean succeeded him on 5 July 1868 in the Vicariate Apostolic of Jaffna. The Founder's dream of the Oblates evangelizing the whole of Sri Lanka was realized when Mgr. Ernest Christopher Bonjean became Vicar Apostolic of Colombo in July 1883.

Endnotes

¹ The term refers to the Missionary Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.).

² The Oratory of St Philip Neri in Città di Castello is referred henceforth here as Oratorian.

³ Cf. V. Perniola, S.J., *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The British Period*, vol.I, Tisara Prakashakaya Ltd., Dehiwela, Sri Lanka, 1992, p.301. (Henceforth referred to as British Period, vol.I.

⁴ Cf. Historical Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (APF) LDB, vol. 328 (1842) ff.690-691.

⁵ André Reinaud, a Frenchman, was born in 1813(?). He took his perpetual vows in the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate on 1 May 1830. Then he left the Congregation on 9 June 1844 and went to work in Baghdad. For some reason he abandoned the mission and left for Pondicherry; on the way he heard about the mission in Sri Lanka and arrived there. He was sent to the area of Kandy. He worked there with great zeal, and gained a good name. During this time, he tried to obtain more European Oblate missionaries since he knew that Mgr. Eugene de Mazenod at Marseilles, France, the Oblate founder, was interested in mission countries. But Propaganda Fide was not in favour of that idea as there were only Italian missionaries in Sri Lanka and they did not want to complicate matters. (Cf. Perniola, British Period, vol.I, p.439)

⁶ Charles Joseph Eugene De Mazenod was born on 1 August 1782, at Aix-En-Provence in France. He entered the seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris, and he was ordained a priest on 21 December 1811, at Amiens. He became the Vicar-General of the diocese of Marseille in 1823, titular bishop of Icosia on 14 October 1832, co-adjutor in 1834, became the bishop of Marseilles on 24 December 1837, consecrated by Pope Gregory XVI. He founded the Missionary Religious Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Oblates), received the approval on 17 February 1826 from Pope Leo XII. He died on 21 May 1861. He was beatified by Pope Paul VI on 19 October 1975, and was canonized on 3 December 1995 by Pope John Paul II. His feast day on the liturgical calendar is on May 21. (Cf. Dossier of Charles Joseph Eugene De Mazenod at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁷ ‘Padroado’ is a Portuguese word which means ‘patronage.’ For the great assistance rendered by the Kings of Portugal in the foundation and expansion of missionary activity in the territories under their jurisdiction, the Popes granted them and their successors some rights and privileges: i.e., the crown of Portugal was given certain prerogatives. These prerogatives were all summed up in the one-word ‘Padroado’.

⁸ Ceylon officially became Sri Lanka on 22 May 1972, when the nation adopted a new constitution that declared it an independent, sovereign republic.

⁹ Cf. *Iuris Pontificii de Propaganda Fide*, Pars 1, vol.V, p.119, Rome 1893.

¹⁰ Vicente do Rosario was born in 1770; ordained on April 11, 1793; arrived in Sri Lanka in 1804; consecrated bishop on December 9, 1838; died on April 7, 1842. (Perniola, British Period, vol.I, p.267.)

¹¹ The appointment was made as Bishop in partibus of Taumaca, in the General meeting of the Propaganda Fide on 22 November 1836. Cf. APF LDB col. 318 (1837) ff.628-630, in Perniola, British Period, vol.I, p.177.

¹² Gaetano Antonio Mulsuce arrived in Sri Lanka in January 1812; had been Superior of the Oratorian mission and Vicar General from June 1832 to April 1835, was appointed the bishop in partibus of Usula on 8th May 1843, became Vicar Apostolic of Ceylon on 24 May 1843, and died on 25 January 1857. (Cf. Perniola, British Period, vol.I, p.86).

¹³ Cf. Ernest R. Hull S.J., *Bombey Mission History*, vol.1, Bombay, 1927, pp.239-244, cited in Perniola, British Period, vol.I, p.238-243.

¹⁴ Joseph Vaz was born on 21 April 1651 at Benaullim, Salcette, Goa, India, ordained in 1676, died on 17 January 1711 at Kandy, Sri Lanka of natural causes. He became venerable on 13 May 1989 by Pope John Paul II, and then Pope John Paul II beatified him in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 21 January 1995. His cause having been pursued since 1737, Pope Francis canonized him in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 14 January 2015.

¹⁵ The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka faced a serious crisis under the occupation of the Calvinist Dutch rule from 1658 to 1796. This period is described as 'dark period' in the Catholic history of Sri Lanka.

¹⁶ Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol. 9 ff.10-11.

¹⁷ The 'Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide' came to be known as the 'Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples' in 1982. It is, henceforth, referred to as 'Propaganda Fide'.

¹⁸ Orazio Bettachini was consecrated as Coadjutor Bishop, in partibus of Torona, in St. Lucia's Church, Colombo, on 8 February 1846. (Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol. 11, f.177).

¹⁹ The Apostolic Brief 'Pro Apostolici Muneris' was issued by Pope Pius IX on 17 September 1847 to erect two independent Apostolic Vicariates in Sri Lanka. "One of them, called 'of Colombo' was to consist of the southern regions and the other, called 'of Jaffna', was to include the northern regions of the island." (Cf. APF Registro dei Brevi, vol. 5, ff. 264-266)

²⁰ The Congregation of Propaganda Fide gave Mgr. Orazio Bettacchini the fully-fledged jurisdiction over the Jaffna Vicariate by an apostolic brief on 13 August 1849.

²¹ Erminio Guidi from Città di Castello, Italy was an Oratorian. He who had not yet been ordained a priest joined Mgr. Orazio Bettacchini to go to Sri Lanka. He reached Sri Lanka on 28 November 1847. He was ordained on 26 May 1849 by Mgr. Orazio Bettacchini in Trincomalee. He died in Colombo in 1865. (Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol.12, ff.334-335, & Perniola, British Period, vol.II, p.488.)

²² Duchaussois, R.P. *Sous les Feux de Ceylan*, Grasset, Paris, 55 Ed., 1939. P. 75.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Stephen Semeria OMI, who signed in his Oblation formula as Stephany Semeria, was born at Coldirodi, La Colla in Liguria on 7 February 1813. He received his habit and began novitiate at St-Just, in May 1829, made his perpetual vows in May 1830, was ordained a priest at Notre Dame du Laus on 19 September 1835, was consecrated as bishop on 17 August 1856 as coadjutor, became Vicar Apostolic of Jaffna on 26 July 1857, and died on 23 January 1868 at Marseilles. (Cf. Dossier of Stephen Semeria at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome).

²⁵ Carlo Domenico Albini OMI was born in Mentone on 26 November 1790. He entered the major seminary of Nice in October 1810, was ordained a priest in 1814 as a secular priest. He met Father Eugene de Mazenod in July 1824 and joined his group. He went to Corsica in October 1835, died on 20 May 1839. He is honoured as the 'Apostle of Corsica'. (Cf. Dossier of Carlo Domenico Albini at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome).

²⁶ Joseph Alexander Ciamin OMI was born in Saint-Etienne de Tinee, Nice on 18 November 1820. He made his vows on 8 September 1847 at Notre Dame de l'Osier, having been ordained the previous year on 6 June 1846. He died on 10 November 1853 in Jaffna. (Cf. Dossier of Joseph Alexander Ciamin at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome).

²⁷ Louis Mary Keating was born in Drummond, Ireland in 1823. He began his novitiate on 31 December 1843 at Penzance, and made his vows in January 1845 at Notre Dame de l'Osier, and was ordained on 26 September 1847. (Cf. Dossier of Louis Mary Keating at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

²⁸ Gaspard de Stephanis was born in Montalto-Scarampi (Piedmont) in 1821. He made his vows in 1847. (Cf. Dossier of Gaspard de Stephanis at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

²⁹ Father Stephen Semeria noted these words in his diary for the year 1847.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² The Apostolic Brief 'Pro Apostolici Muneris' was issued by Pope Pius IX on 17 September 1847. (Cf. APF Registro dei Brevi, vol. 5, ff. 264-266 in Perniola, British Period, vol.II, p.290)

³³ Cf. Giovanni. B. Lingueglia, Un pioniere del Vangelo nell'isola di Ceylon, Mons. Stefano Semeria, o.m.i., Milano, P.I.M.E., 1941, p. 50.

³⁴ Some documents point out that it covered an extensive area of 13,542 square miles; and there were 50,500 Catholic population in 1850.

³⁵ The Kaimal River is the historical colonial name for the Maha Oya, a major river in Sri Lanka.

³⁶ Kalpity was in colonial era known as Calpentyn.

³⁷ The Papal bull of this rearrangement was published in February 1848.

³⁸ Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol. 12, ff.345-346.

³⁹ Miguel Filippu Mascarenhas was ordained a priest in Colombo 1843 by Bishop Gaetano Antonio. He was appointed a missionary to the North in 1844 and continued in that office till 1847. He, later, became a key schismatic. (Cf. Boudens, "Catholic Missionaries," p.49.)

⁴⁰ The word refers to the natives.

⁴¹ Father Stephen Semeria noted these words in his diary for the year 1848.

⁴² Frédéric Mouchel, born in Rouen (Diocese of Rouen) on 2 July 1802; ordained priest on 26 February 1831; oblation on 6 January 1832; departure for Sri Lanka on 29 April 1849; died in Jaffna on 19 September 1880. (Cf. Dossier of Frédéric Mouchel at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁴³ Félix François Leydier, born in Vialas (diocese of Avignon) on 17 May 1821; made his oblation on 18 September 1848 at Notre Dame de l'Osier; ordained priest on 18 February 1849 at Marseilles; departure for Sri Lanka on 19 April 1849; died in Vathiri (Jaffna) on 16 June 1851. (Cf. Dossier of Félix François Leydier at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁴⁴ Jean Le Bescou, born in Kerfeunteun, now Quimper (diocese of Quimper) on 19 August 1824; oblation on 10 March 1849; priest on 19 March 1849; departure for Sri Lanka on 19 April 1849; died in Jaffna on 17 June 1867. (Cf. Dossier of Jean Le Bescou at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁴⁵ Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol.II, ff.805-806 in Perniola, British Period, vol.II, p.504.

⁴⁶ Freilano Oruna, born in Cuba, Spain in 1815, joined the Cistercians in 1839, and offered himself to Propaganda Fide. (Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol.10, ff.505-506 in Perniola, British Period, vol.II, p.30.)

⁴⁷ Firenzo Garcia was born in the Province of Manica, Spain about the year 1815. He joined the Order of the Cistercians and offered himself to Propaganda Fide for missions. (Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol.10, ff.505-506 in Perniola, British Period, vol.II, p.30.)

⁴⁸ William Strickland was a Jesuit belonging to the Madura Mission. He was born in 1819, joined the Society of Jesus in 1838, was ordained priest in 1846, and went to the Madura Mission in 1847, reaching Trichilopoly on July 16.

⁴⁹ Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol.11, f.804 in Perniola, British Period, vol.II, p.503.

⁵⁰ Cf. Giovanni .B. Lingueglia, *Un pioniere del Vangelo nell'isola di Ceylon*, Mons. Stefano Semeria, o.m.i., Milano, P.I.M.E., 1941, p. 53.

⁵¹ Alexius Canoz S.J., the Vicar Apostolic of Trichinopoly, first sent his own vicar general, Fr. Castanier S.J., to Jaffna at the end of May 1848. And then Fr. Bruni S.J. came to the vicariate in January 1849 to replace him. In March 1849 Bishop Orazio Bettachini decided to give the missions of Kayts and Mannar to Jesuits. Thus, two Jesuits were sent by Mgr. Alexius Canoz S.J. to the mission of Kayts in May 1849. They were Fr. Fredric Rapatel S.J. and Fr. Vuillermet S.J.; but they remained in this mission only till the end of August 1849. Another two Jesuits who came to replace them on 27 August 1949 in the mission of Kayts were Fr. Frederic Maria Cortes S.J. and Fr. Silvain

Laurent S.J. Some others also came later but for short time until 1852 when the Jesuits withdrew all their men from the Vicariate of Jaffna.

⁵² Jan Philipp Roothaan (23 November 1785 – 8 May 1853) was a Dutch Jesuit, elected twenty-first Superior General of the Society of Jesus on the 9 July 1829.

⁵³ Blessed EUGENE DE MAZENOD, Letters to Ceylon and Africa 1847-1860, Collection: Oblate Writings IV, General Postulation O.M.I., 1980, pp.17-20.

⁵⁴ Victor Lacombe was born on 28 April 1826 at Beaulieu, Viviers, France; made his vows on 2 February 1852; was ordained on 3 April 1853; arrived in Sri Lanka on 22 May 1853; died on 22 January 1855 at Mathagal. (Cf. Dossier of Victor Lacombe at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁵⁵ Robert Bonaventure Byrne was born in 1837 in Ireland; made his vows on 21 May 1860 in Jaffna; arrived in Sri Lanka on 19 December 1859; died on 22 May 1860 in Jaffna. (Cf. Dossier of Robert Bonaventure Byrne at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁵⁶ Paul Stephen Poorey was born on 23 January 1824 in Colombo, was a head teacher in the Catholic school of the parish of Saint Antony's Church, Kandy and functioned as the sacristan, catechist, and choir-leader for fifteen years at the same parish. He was received into the Congregation on 11 November 1858 and began his novitiate, made his first Oblation on 12 November 1859 as the first Sri Lankan Oblate, and made his final vows in presence of Mgr. Stephen Semeria OMI two weeks before his death on 8 May 1861. (Cf. Dossier of Paul Stephen Poorey at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁵⁷ Alessandro Barnabò was born in Foligno, Italy on 2 March 1801. Ordained to the priesthood in March of 1833, he was vice-secretary of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide in 1847-1848, then secretary from 13 August 1848 until 19 June 1856. Created a cardinal in the consistory of 16 June 1856, he was prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide from 20 June 1856 until his death on 24 February 1874.

⁵⁸ Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol.17, f.1547.

⁵⁹ The Propaganda Fide refused to accept a change of boundaries for the sake of the health of the missionaries. (Cf. APF LDB (Indie Orientali), vol.351, ff.500-501.

⁶⁰ Blessed EUGENE DE MAZENOD, Letters to The Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide and to The Society of The Propagation of The Faith 1832-1861, Collection: Oblate Writings V, General Postulation O.M.I., 1982, p.108.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.111.

⁶² Guibert, Cardinal Joseph Hippolyte was born at Aix on 13 December 1802, took the habit on 25 January 1823, made the perpetual oblation at Aix on 29 December 1823, received ordination to the priesthood at Marseilles on 14 August 1825, was ordained bishop of Viviers on 11 March 1842, was appointed Archbishop of Tours on 4 February 1857, was appointed Archbishop of Paris on 19 July 1871, became Cardinal on 22 December

1873, and died in Paris on 8 July 1886. (Cf. Dossier of Guibert, Cardinal Joseph Hippolyte at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome).

⁶³ Bruno Eugène Guigues was born in La Garde (Hautes-Alpes), France, on 26 August 1805, received the habit in N. -D. du Laus at 2 August 1821, made vows in Aix on 4 November 1823, received priestly ordination in Marseille on 31 May 1828, received episcopal ordination in Bytown (Ottawa) on 30 July 1848, died in Ottawa, Canada, on 8 February 1874. (Cf. Dossier of Bruno Eugène Guigues at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁶⁴ Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol.16, p.340.

⁶⁵ Cf. Dossier Stephen Semeria at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome. ⁶⁶ The word 'mission' is used here to point out a course of sermons, house visits, and religious services conducted by one or more priests to revitalize the Catholic life of a whole community.

⁶⁷ Mission was held at Kayts from 19 September to 29 October of 1857. (Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol.16, f.759.

⁶⁸ Ernest Christopher Bonjean OMI was born on 23 September 1823 in Riom (Puy-de-Dôme) in the diocese of Clermont, Southern France. At the age of 19, he entered the seminary of Clermont-Ferrand. Nevertheless, he changed his mind and entered the Séminaire des Missions Étrangères in Paris in 1846, where he was ordained on 19 December 1846. Four months later, he went to India and worked for a decade in the mountain area of the Nilgrees in the Vicariate of Coimbatore. However, with the intention of entering a religious order he wrote to Father Semeria OMI on 7 August 1855 and requested to join the Oblates. He arrived in Sri Lanka on 28 November 1856, began his novitiate on 19 May 1857, made his oblation on 20 May 1858, became Vicar Apostolic of Jaffna on 5 July 1868, became Vicar Apostolic of Colombo in July 1883, became first Archbishop of Colombo on 6 January 1887, and died in Colombo on 3 August 1892. (Cf. Dossier of Ernest Christopher Bonjean at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome).

⁶⁹ Constant Chounavel was born on 9 April 1825 at Sanwurt, St. Die, France; made his vows on 16 January 1850 at Marseilles; was ordained on 15 February 1852 at Marseilles; arrived in Sri Lanka on 26 September 1852; died on 23 August 1923 at Borella. (Cf. Dossier of Constant Chounavel at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome).

⁷⁰ The pastoral letter was issued on 5 August 1860 (Cf. APF SCG (Indie Orientali), vol.17, ff.1451-1460)

⁷¹ Blessed EUGENE DE MAZENOD, Oblate Writings IV, pp.158-161.

⁷² Mgr. Giuseppe Maria Bravi O.S.B. was born at Monte Santo (Diocese of Fermo) in Italy on 6 December 1813. He joined the Silvestrine Order in 1830, took his solemn vows in 1831, and was ordained a priest on 19 June 1836, arrived in Colombo on 14 August 1845, was appointed Coadjutor in Colombo on 13 August 1849, died on 15 August 1860. (Cf. Perniola, British Period, vol.II, p.30 & vol.IV, p.373)

⁷³ Blessed EUGENE DE MAZENOD, Oblate Writings V, p.157-161.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid, in footnote of p.161.

⁷⁶ Cf. Diary of Father Stephen Semeria for the year 1851.

⁷⁷ Father Adrien Duffo OMI was born at Labarthe de Neste, diocese of Tarbes, France on 9 April 1827, made his oblation at Notre Dame de l'Osier on 21 November 1850, received ordination at Marseilles on 29 May 1851, arrived in Sri Lanka 4 June 1851, died at Marseilles on 18 April 1887 (Cf. Dossier of Adrien Duffo at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁷⁸ Father Dominique Pulicani OMI was born at Corte, diocese of Ajaccio (Corsica) on 19 December 1822, made his oblation at Notre Dame de l'Osier on 7 April 1846, received ordination at Marseilles on 2 June 1846, arrived in Sri Lanka 4 June 1851, became Vicar General in November 1869, died at Kotehena on 1 May 1893 (Cf. Dossier of Dominique Pulicani at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁷⁹ Father Lallement Laurent J. Pierre was born on 9 July 1825 at Charmoilles; made vows on 9 November 1850 at Notre Dame de l'Osier; was ordained on 29 May 1851 at Marseilles; and arrived in Sri Lanka on 23 July 1851. (Cf. Dossier of Lallement Laurent J. Pierre at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁸⁰ Father Perreard Jean-Pierre OMI was born on 26 October 1826 at Piers-Jusy, Annecy, Savoy, France; made vows on 14 May 1848 at Notre Dame de l'Osier; was ordained on 29 May 1851 at Marseilles; arrived in Sri Lanka on 23 July 1851; and died on 8 May 1879 at Kurunegala (Cf. Dossier of Perreard Jean-Pierre at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁸¹ The term refers to the Sylvestrines are a specialized order of monks within the Order of St. Benedict, using the post-nominal initials O.S.B. Silv. Founded in Italy in 1231 by St. Sylvester Gozzolini.

⁸² Father Frederick Pompey Mouchel OMI was born on 2 July 1802 at Rouen (Seine-Inferieure), France; made vows on 6 January 1832 at Billens Canton, Switzerland; was ordained on 26 February 1831 at Fribourg, Switzerland; arrived in Sri Lanka on 29 April 1849; and died on 19 September 1880 in Jaffna. (Cf. Dossier of Frederick Pompey Mouchel at Archivum Generale OMI, Rome)

⁸³ Cf. Diary of Father Stephen Semeria for the year 1851.

⁸⁴ Cf. Ibid, for the year 1852.

⁸⁵ Cf. Ibid, for the year 1854.

⁸⁶ Cf. Ibid, for the year 1854.

⁸⁷ APF Acta fol. 226, ff.182-183.