

# A SYMPOSIUM

**REV. FR. THOMAS O.M.I.**  
(1886 — 1964)

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
JAFFNA



**FOUNDER**  
**OF THE**  
**ROSARIAN CONGREGATION**  
**THOLAGATTY — VASAVILAN**  
(SRI LANKA)







PUBLIC LIBRARY  
JAFFNA.







*Hail Mary*

*To: M/s. Noolaham Studio*

# A SYMPOSIUM

*Prayerful Wishes and  
Priestly Blessings.*



*From: John B. Pachianathan O.C.  
(Prior)  
The Rosarians.*

**REV. FR. THOMAS O. M. I.**

**FOUNDER**

**OF THE**

**ROSARIAN CONGREGATION**

**THOLAGATTY — VASAVILAN**

**(SRI LANKA)**



# CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword	
1. God is All . . . . .	1
<i>By his Eminence, Cardinal Cooray o. m. i.</i>	
<i>Archbishop of Colombo.</i>	
2. Well Chosen . . . . .	5
<i>By the Rt. Rev. Dr. B. Deogupillai, Mis. Ap.</i>	
<i>Bishop of Jaffna.</i>	
3. A Sage of Asia . . . . .	8
<i>By the Rt. Rev. Dr. L. R. Antony, Mis. Ap.</i>	
<i>Co-ad. Bishop of Trincomalee – Batticaloa.</i>	
4. By their Fruits . . . . .	14
<i>By the Rt. Rev. Dr. O. Sevrin, S. J.</i>	
<i>Rtd. Bishop of Raigarh-Ambikapur.</i>	
5. Oblate Contemplative . . . . .	17
<i>Report of Fr. Thomas to the Oblate Gen Chapter (1938)</i>	
6. The Monastic Ideal . . . . .	25
<i>By a Rosarian priest</i>	
7. The Voice of the half-century . . . . .	34
<i>By the Rev. Fr. Claude Lawrence, o. m. i.</i>	
8. A Tribute . . . . .	5
<i>By Rev. Fr. S. Emmanuel, o. m. i.</i>	
9. A Witness to Christ . . . . .	54
<i>By Rev. Fr. G. T. Balasundram, o. m. i.</i>	
10. A Visit to Rome . . . . .	59
<i>By Dr. X. S. Thaninayagam, M. A., M. Lit, Ph. D., D. D.</i>	
11. A Man of God . . . . .	61
<i>By Rev. Fr. C. A. Joachimpillai, o. m. i.</i>	
12. A Guiding Star . . . . .	63
<i>By a Rosarian monk</i>	



			Page
13.	His Spiritual Daughters	.. ..	69
	<i>By a Rosarian nun.</i>		
14.	Friends in Need	.. ..	80
	<i>By a Holy Family Sister.</i>		
15.	A Moulder of Youth	.. ..	84
	<i>By S. M. J. Louis</i>		
16.	Guru and Guide	.. ..	88
	<i>By S. Thomanupillai</i>		
17.	A Seeker of Souls	.. ..	94
	<i>By C. X. Martyn, M. P. for Jaffna.</i>		
18.	Man of Vision	.. ..	103
	<i>By Frank Thuraisingham.</i>		
19.	The Retreat—Preacher	.. ..	112
	<i>By a retreatant.</i>		
20.	His Calvary	.. ..	127
	<i>By Rev. Fr. Em. Selvarajah, Mis. Ap.</i>		
21.	Prayer	.. ..	131





## FOREWORD

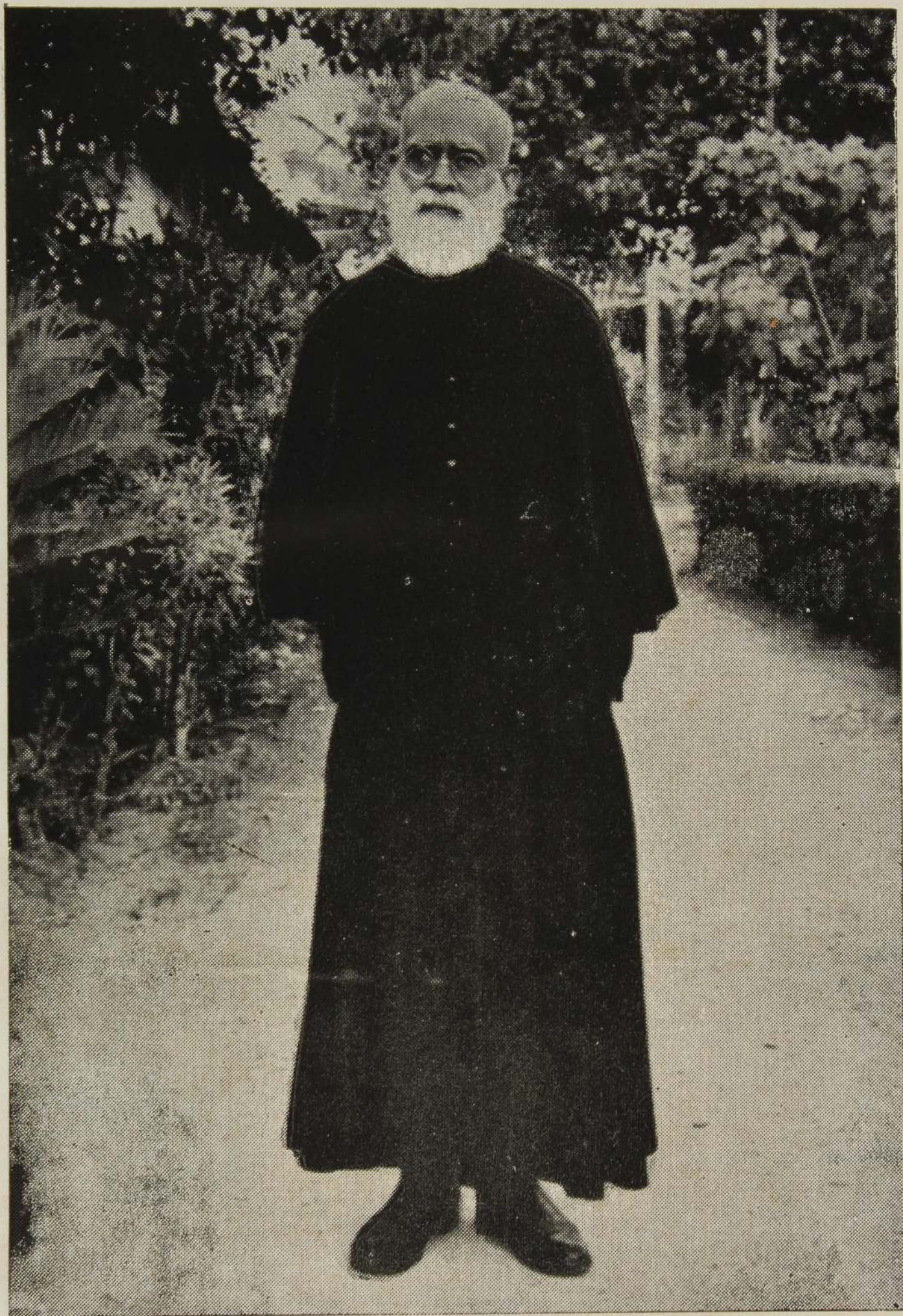
*This symposium is a humble attempt to rescue from obscurity a gem of purest ray serene; to gather from a monastery garden a hidden flower of great fragrance. The compilers of this booklet believe that such a gem should be allowed to shine, such a rose should be allowed to blush, not only in the cloister garth but should be given a chance to shed lustre and perfume outside the monastery walls. It is true that Father Thomas actually did have great influence for good on very many who were not monks or nuns; but it is felt that the heavenly wisdom that was distilled from his saintly heart and lips should not be allowed to die with those who were its recipients but should be given a permanent place in the hagiography and life of the Church. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven" (Matt. 5, 16).*

*This booklet, it is hoped, will be like a lampstand from which the light of Father Thomas' spiritual message may shine before many and help them to glorify God by a life of prayer and sacrifice.*

Rosary Ashram,  
Vasavilan,  
Sri Lanka,  
26-1-1974.

The 10th Anniversary of the death of Father Thomas.





*Rev. Fr. B. A. Thomas o. m. i.*

"You shall be fortunate. If you have this two-Fold Knowledge  
You are who is not. I am who is"  
(Jesus Christ to St. Catherine of Siena)







# *God is All*

**A**S the tenth anniversary of the death of Father B. A. Thomas O.M.I. draws near, it is heartening to find that due efforts are being made to save for posterity the particulars of his life-course and the purport of its message.

The present publication is proof enough ; eloquent, indeed, the wider the range of contributors. It has however, been preceded by the initiative of the Rosarians themselves in giving generous circulation to an authentic photogravure of the venerable man in the last days of his priesthood and ascetic career. Striking as the picture is, the text beneath it reveals even more faithfully and vividly the spiritual physiognomy of the Rosarian Founder—two lines, spoken, as tradition holds, by the Divine Master to St. Catherine of Sienna. They were not only frequently



quoted by Fr. Thomas; but, as vouched for by the retreat I was privileged to make under his direction while preparing for Ordination to the Episcopate, they had been fully assimilated by him to the point of becoming the pivot of the spirituality he lived personally and strove to communicate to those who sought his guidance in the way of a religious experience with its source and resources in the Christian Faith.

This last phrase is an important qualification. Assiduous and longtime student of Oriental Religious movements, respectful and appreciative towards their great leaders and exponents across the centuries, Father B. A. Thomas was uncompromising and unambiguous in his profession of faith in Christ-Jesus as the unique and only Saviour of all mankind and of all ages (past or future).

Jesus brings us Redemption (forgiveness of sin through the infusion of Grace) by the merits, of his Passion, applied to us through the Sacraments. Father B. A. Thoma's personal approach and spiritual direction were thoroughly dominated by this "Economy of Salvation." He emphasised Our Lord's redemptive action by stressing Mary's intercessory role at His throne, and our consequent need of recourse to prayer (liturgical and private), and penance. His insistence on the Rosary was a concrete and practical conclusion of these basic principles.

The Sacraments however are fruitful in us in the measure of our Faith. This brought to Fr. Thomas a strong stress on Our Lord as the "Author of our



Faith" (Heb. X 11, 2), Jesus as the revealer of His Father (Jo. 1—18). Always forthright and radical, Father Thomas went to the fundamental "announcement" the Divine Son has made to us of His Father (and of Himself): God's transcendent nature, His absolute rights over us. He found a telling expression, a powerful reminder of this fundamental truth in the words St. Catharine records as spoken to her by our Lord: "Thou art one who is not : I am the One who is".

With Father Thomas (and his disciples) this was not to be just a theoretical first principle, but a key maxim governing the whole of our quest of religious experience, of coming to the fruition of God-within-us.

In the Heavenly Father's Providence, he was destined to be not only a propounder of this way of the loving surrender of our nothingness to God's "Allness". The course of his life was to serve as an illustration of it for those in his immediate surroundings (and through history's diffusion) to many other souls. Through the play of circumstances, the trend of events, he was to be visibly reduced to the nothingness of any creature, the demolishing of prestige and personality. Then there would be set on his work (the twin Rosarian Congregation) the mark of its true origin : God's Supreme will and power.

By recoil, the work would bear the stamp of his rebuilt personality in Christ Crucified, the one who could do all things in Him who strengthened him (Philip, IV. 13).



With the passage of time and through illuminating studies like those in this "Symposium", as the mists clear and the heavy curtain of dark events rises, the true Father Thomas will stand out in his real stature, in the urgency of his message and the timeliness of his institutions.

We rejoice for the benefit that will accrue to those who see that day. May our prayerful wishes hasten it.

+ **Thomas Cardinal Cooray, o. m. i.**  
*Archbishop of Colombo.*

*Archbishop's House,  
Colombo 8,  
Ceylon.*





# *Well chosen*

I AM very happy to learn that efforts are being made to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the death of Rev. Fr. B. A. Thomas O.M.I., the venerated Founder of the Rosarian Congregations of Brothers and Sisters.

During the past hundred years and more, the Diocese of Jaffna and the Oblate Congregation of Mary Immaculate have been singularly blessed by God with illustrious Pastors, great apostles, outstanding scholars and saintly founders of institutions and Religious Congregations. A few months back we commemorated the 98th Birth Anniversary of Rev. Fr. S. Gnanaprakasam O.M.I., a great missionary and a research scholar of international fame. Now we commemorate the 10th anniversary of the death of a saintly Founder of two native Contemplative Congre-



gations, Rev. Fr. B. A. Thomas O.M.I., of revered memory.

On February 28th 1926, the great missionary Pope, Pius XI, issued his famous Encyclical Letter on the Missions, "*Rerum Ecclesiae*", in which he exhorted the Bishops in the Mission lands to encourage the founding of new native Religious Congregations, even Contemplative ones. After reading this Encyclical the Rt. Rev. Dr. J. A. Guyomar O.M.I., the then Bishop of Jaffna, called Fr. Thomas who had been interested in this matter for quite some time and commissioned him to make an attempt at founding a native Contemplative Congregation. The choice could not have been a better one. Fr. Thomas was already well known for his soundness of doctrine, piety, ascetical practices, zeal for evangelisation and inclination towards contemplative life. The tentative foundation of the new Congregation took place on February 2nd 1928, when the Bishop celebrated Holy Mass in the Church at Tholagatty and officially installed Fr. Thomas as Director of the six aspirants who had accepted God's call. After the initial difficulties the new Congregation began to flourish in Tholagatty and soon spread to some dioceses in India also.

From the very start Fr. Thomas was anxious to found a similar Congregation for women also. After three unsuccessful attempts he finally succeeded in founding the new Congregation for the Sisters with the generous assistance of Sr. Jeanne Marie of the Holy Family Congregation of Bordeaux, on September 8th 1948. This new Congregation grew faster than



the earlier one for men and has now spread to many Dioceses in Sri Lanka and India.

The saintly life of Fr. Thomas, his religious ideals, the life and work of the Contemplative Congregations he founded etc. deserve to be better known and appreciated, especially here in Sri Lanka. I hope and pray that the 10th anniversary of the death of Fr. Thomas will help towards achieving this purpose and serve as an instrument in the hands of God to attract many good vocations to the Contemplative Congregations he founded for the greater glory of God and the good of the Church.

+ **Rt. Rev. Dr. B. Deogupillai, Ap. Mis.**  
*Bishop of Jaffna.*





# *A sage of Asia*

**G**OD the Father Almighty, who created the world in His wisdom and love, raises up men in every age and clime to do His special work. One thinks of the patriarchs, prophets and kings of the Old Testament from Abraham to John the Baptist whose one purpose in life was to help God to carry out his divine purpose for the salvation of the world and to prepare the way of the Lord. Their purpose was achieved when the Saviour, the man God, was born. Then the heavenly Father raised up other men and women to continue his salvific purpose in the Church of the New Testament so that where the need was greatest there the needed person was forthcoming. Among this vast assembly of holy men and women one likes to think of Thomas of Tholagatty as occupying a not inconspicuous place. Was there a need in



the contemporary church of Ceylon—a vacuum to be filled by some man of God? There was. Although the Church had been established in Ceylon for well-nigh 500 years, the strictly cloistered and contemplative life was missing. More than one person has remarked that the spare, emaciated figure and austere look and strict life of Fr. Thomas have conjured up before the mind's eye visions of another John the Baptist. Perhaps the resemblances do not end there. Was it not the Baptist who pointed out to his own disciples the Lamb of God as He approached them on Jordan's bank?

And was it not Fr. Thomas who led his own monks in perpetual adoration of the same Lamb of God in the Eucharist? And as Mary and her Child were intimately associated with the Baptist so also Fr. Thomas joined to the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist the perpetual recitation of Mary's Rosary. Whether these comparisons be fanciful or not, it is certain that long before the actual establishment of the Rosarian Congregation in February, 1928, thoughts on the necessity of the contemplative life in Ceylon, a life of cloistered prayer and penance, had been simmering in the mind of Fr. Thomas.

The thing that brought them to the boil, so to speak,—the catalyst—was the publication of the encyclical letter of Pope Pius XI "Rerum Ecclesiae" in 1926.

In this letter the Pope asked that contemplative congregations be established in mission countries either by western contemplative orders or by the founding



of local congregations. Fr. Thomas jumped at the Pope's suggestion and grasped it with both hands, and his bishop Dr. J. A. Guyomar O. M. I. gave him every encouragement. So it came to pass that in the month of February 1928, Fr. Thomas and his six young aspirants made the memorable and historic ten-mile journey from the town of Jaffna to the hamlet of Tholagatty to start the monastic life in the old disused presbytery and church of St. Anthony.

My own first meeting with Fr. Thomas occurred when my parish priest, the late Fr. Abraham, had taken us, altar-boys of Karampon, to Tholagatty on our annual outing. The impression Fr. Thomas made on me, even at that early age, was so great that when I entered the minor seminary shortly afterwards I decided to join the Tholagatty monastery if there was ever any question of my leaving the seminary. The question never arose and I used to meet Fr. Thomas from time to time when we little Seminarians were holidaying at Myliddy. We used to walk the distance to Tholagatty, attracted thereto not only by the personality of Fr. Thomas but also by the good feed he always gave us.

But I came to know him much better when I did a memorable twelve-day retreat under his guidance to decide about my future before going to the Major Seminary. To be or not to be a monk—that was the question. There was I, a young man bursting with life, alone with the great Rishi for a specified six days recollection. The six days became ten and the ten became twelve when I had to tell Fr. Thomas firmly



that I was due at St. Bernard's major Seminary and that I would finally decide whether to become a monk after my philosophy course. At that time Fr. Thomas had high hopes that I would remain in the monastery. He used to tell me that he was a classmate of my father at St. Patrick's College and since my father had died when I was only 53 days old, Fr. Thomas became a real father to me during those twelve days.

I imbibed a little of his spirit and carried it with me to Rome in that same year of 1948. Then I began life in the Eternal City with the gospels for meditation and the autobiography of the Little Flower for spiritual reading as I had been advised to do by Fr. Thomas. It was really a foundation for my life in Rome for seven years when the thought of the monastic life at Tholagatty used to come to haunt me from time to time.

To be or not to be a monk—the same old question became insistant. On one side my parish priest advised me in favour—on the other hand my bishop urged prudence and to wait till I was ordained before taking any decisive step. The latter counsel prevailed. The die was cast. And looking back I can now see that the Holy Spirit had work for me to do other than in the monastic life. However I was privileged to be the Director of Tholagatty for four years and it was then that I understood more deeply the robust spirituality of Fr. Thomas, solidly based as it is on the gospels and a burning love of the Saviour. There was nothing sickly or sentimental about the type of spiritual life he inculcated in his monks. He was a



man of wisdom and knowledge. He had a sense of eternity. A filial love for and devotion to the Pope and a sense of the true church. As he grew older and weaker he might have succumbed to the ordinary defects of human nature but he rose above them by his deep faith and rock-like convictions. His first twenty or thirty years of monastic life with the monks were unparalleled in the history of the church in Asia. To this several of his collaborators will bear witness. Alone he trained them and sent them to the altar. And one of the greatest pains in his last days was that none of those Rosarian priests whom he had trained was available at the Mother House to continue his work.

When he was seventy-two years of age he had written on a piece of paper which I found in his prayer-book: "To-day I am 72: please do not kill any living being, even an ant". That shows how much he was united with his Creator and like St. Francis of Assisi he became a lover of nature and had the greatest respect for any creature of God. As St. Paul says, when we are in the state of grace we become one spiritual being with him, the Creator. St. Peter too says that grace is nothing but the state given by God to participate in His divine life.

The Eternal Father works wonders through his beloved Son throughout the ages. He has worked them too through Fr. Thomas, a beloved disciple of Jesus and Mary. The spirit of prayer and penance advocated by our Lady at Lourdes and Fatima was truly lived at this Ashram and although Fr. Thomas lived and died an Oblate of Mary Immaculate he was



the first to lead his monks in this prayerful and penitential spirit. In the last few years of his life his mind became clouded like the saintly father of the Little Flower. In the inscrutable designs of God may not these last few years of pain and suffering prove to be a source of future graces for his beloved Rosarians?

I should like to end this article with an anecdote. It was in the year 1965 in the month of October that the late Fr. S. Peter O. M. I. who was much interested in the work of Fr. Thomas, was preaching the annual retreat to the Brothers at Tholagatty. He was occupying the room just behind the chapel and I happened to be sleeping in the adjoining room with a window between the two rooms. One night I was awakened by some noise. I flashed my torchlight at the clock and saw it was 2 a.m. Then the sound was repeated and I could distinguish voices. Someone in a feeble voice said: "How are you Fr. Peter?" And I then heard Fr. Peter in turn say: "How are you?" At once I recognised the feeble voice as the voice of Fr. Thomas, the voice I had been listening to for many years. The fact that the Rosarian Congregation has flourished in Ceylon and India in both its branches for monks and nuns is an indication that the founder was not alone in his work but was the instrument in the hands of God to work for the good of the church in these Asian countries.

+ Rt. Rev. Dr. L. R. Antony Ap. Mis.,  
*Co-ad Bishop of Trinco—Batticaloa.*



## *By their fruits...*

I HAVE not had the pleasure of meeting Father Thomas, except once, for a very short time. I was impressed by his zeal and piety.

But if I am not qualified to write about his personal life, I have been a witness of his work for 18 years.

It was he who, at my request, sent a small batch of Rosarian monks to the recently erected diocese of Raigarh Ambikapur in 1954.

The new diocese was then in the throes of a grave crisis. Beside the many other vexations we were subjected to, an official "Enquiry into the activities of Christian Missionaries" was appointed by the M. P. Government. The Niyogi Committee went



round the whole area calling on all and sundry, to come forward to place their complaints against Missionaries before the committee.

The situation was extremely tense. In the meantime, the Rosarians arrived and quietly settled in a rickety, so-called monastery, at Namna, close to Ambikapur. They, apparently quite unconcerned about the hostile and feverish activities going on in their surroundings, began to carry out their life of contemplation, prayer, silence, penance and labour.

Their prayers must have reached heaven. The Niyogi Committee's findings were found baseless and irrelevant, and the sale of the Committee's Report was soon forbidden by the Central Government. The prayers, penances, and labour of the tiny unobtrusive community had a share in this unexpected result.

The Nishkalanka Ashram went on progressing, and slowly increased and developed. Gradually it began to be known and to exert a discreet and wholesome influence on the Hindu population. Hindus visited the Ashram to see the novelty of Christian monks praying and working in the fields silently.

The fruitful apostolate carried on by the missionaries in the villages all around is due, no doubt, to the unstinted labour of the Missionaries, but also, I am convinced, in great part to the incessant prayers of the monks of Nishkalanka Ashram. It is regrettable that contemplative life of the Christian pattern finds hardly any place in the directory of the activities of the Missions in India.



It is to the credit of Bishop Guyomar O. M. I. of Jaffna who initiated the Rosarian Congregation and to Father Thomas who carried it out, that nearly 50 years ago they visualised the need of Catholic contemplative life for a more fruitful apostolate in India.

+ Rt. Rev. Dr. O. Sevrin, s. j.  
*(Former Bishop of Ranchi  
 and of Raigarh Ambikapur)*





# *Oblate Contemplative*

**A** Report prepared by Reverend Father Thomas O. M. I. at the request of the Oblate General Chapter in Rome, in 1938.

The Rosarians are like the Trappists. They lead a life of prayer and penance. They are, at present, under the direction of an Oblate Father. It seems to be an anomaly that one who is of the active life, such as an Oblate, should be occupied with a religious Congregation which, like the Trappists, is devoted to contemplative life. The following lines will show that there is no such anomaly.

First of all, it must be observed that the Church in Ceylon and India has made remarkable progress during the last fifty years. The two dioceses in charge of the Oblates are among the most progressive dioceses in the East.



Nevertheless, it is a fact that only one tenth of the population in Ceylon is Catholic, while in India the ratio is one per cent. In the present circumstances, missionaries are confronted with two problems of great importance :-

1. How to convert Ceylon and India so as to make them Catholic lands, and
2. How to deepen the piety of the Catholics, so as to make them abandon the caste system ; and live a truly Christian life, not only *individually*, as a good many of them do, but *socially*, as active members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

If one only considered the innumerable difficulties in the way of conversion, particularly at present with the wide-spread influence of materialism, racialism and religious scepticism and, on the other hand, the deep-rooted tenacity of the caste system, one would declare that the problem is insoluble and give up the case as hopeless.

But defeatism is incompatible with belief in Divine Providence. The world, with all its changes and vicissitudes, is under the direct government of infinite Wisdom, infinite Goodness and infinite Love. The present state of the world is only a phase in the unfolding of the eternal designs of Almighty God. He permits evil in order to give His loving children an opportunity to prove their faith and confidence in him. Considerations such as these have



inspired a bold attempt to solve the problems forthwith, instead of waiting for something to turn up. This attempt has taken the shape of the *Rosarian Congregation*.

If it be asked how the new Congregation is going to solve the above-mentioned problems, the following answer may be given.

As for the first problem, it is frankly admitted that it is indeed hopelessly insoluble from a human point of view. So that point of view is altogether abandoned. A solution is proposed, which is sheer madness from the point of view of the world: *The Rosarians* will go forth, like David, to encounter their Goliath, the Rosary shall be their weapon, a penitential and contemplative life shall be their shield. For it must be here observed that the distinctive feature of the new Congregation is that its members recite the Rosary day and night, by turns, before the Tabernacle, without intermission.

With regard to the second problem, the method adopted is like that of "the back to the land movement" in England, and some other industrial countries. Every Rosarian House will be like an experimental garden or an agricultural colony. Comparatively a small number of generous souls are entirely withdrawn from the influence of the surrounding world, are thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Gospel, and are taught to live the Divine life, not only individually; but socially, in all its fulness.



Each house is to radiate its influence all around, as far as it is possible. And the result is committed to the care of Divine Providence. This is the ideal of St. Benedict, the Patriarch of the Monks of the West. According to him, a perfect monk is nothing more than a perfect christian. Each monastery is a school of christian perfection. It welcomes all without distinction, the nobleman and the serf, the scholar and the labourer, on one condition only: that they love and esteem one another and serve one another in Christ. You all know the part played by the Monks of the West in christianizing European society. What those monks have done in Europe, the Rosarians can do in Ceylon and India, if they too are animated by the same spirit.

It must be emphasized here that their object is not to supersede the work of the missionaries or parish priests; but to serve them in their fight against the powers of darkness, and aid them in extending the kingdom of God. The missionaries plant and water, like St. Paul and Apollo. The Rosarians serve to fertilize the soil by their prayers and penances. Now it is evident that the movement represented by the Rosarians is a result of the work already done by the Oblates in Ceylon; and it remains for them to foster that movement and turn it to good account for the glory of God. The interests of the Church are above all other interests. The Oblates justly glory in being always willing instruments at the hands of the Bishops who represent the interests of the Church. That is why an Oblate is occupied with the Congregation of the Rosarians.



The general end of the Congregation of the Rosarians is, of course, the same as that of other religious institutes—the sanctification of its members in the religious state.

Its special object is to work, by means of prayer and penance, for the conversion of the world in general, and for that of India and Ceylon in particular. That the Rosarians may effectively carry out this object, they consecrate themselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as loving slaves of His Immaculate Mother, and recite the rosary, day and night, without intermission.

The Congregation is meant for two classes of members, like that of the Trappists, priests and lay brothers. Their religious habit is a white cassock, with a white scapular and blue cincture.

They have to procure their material needs by the labour of their own hands: The lay brothers work for about eight hours. The priests too have manual labour; but they are to devote most of their time to liturgical worship and ecclesiastical studies.

The Rosarians observe perpetual silence, except on Sundays and certain feastdays, when they have recreation for an hour or so. They have also to observe a rigorous fast and abstinence.

Since a single catholic, who sincerely seeks God with an ardent love, gives more glory to Him and contributes more to the well-being of the Church than thousands of indifferent catholics who seek to serve God and the world at once, great care is taken to



give the Rosarians a sound spiritual formation, by means of instructions and directions suited to their capacity. The following points of christian doctrine are specially emphasized :

- a. Divine Providence, with its implications in regard to the details of our daily life with its trials and temptations.
- b. Christ, the Life of our soul, with its implications in regard to growth in holiness ;
- c. The Church, The Mystical Body of Christ, with its implications in regard to our dealings with our neighbour ;
- d. The need of our Lady's maternal intervention for our spiritual life.

The most consoling feature of the new Congregation is the unbounded confidence of its members in our Lady's maternal protection.

It is now (1938) ten years since the Congregation started with six postulants; and about five years since it was canonically established as a diocesan Congregation. There are now forty-three (43) professed members, representing about ten different castes. The total number of admissions, for the last ten years is eighty-six (86).

The Rosarians have only one house for the present. It is an old presbytery, meant for a parish priest and his assistant. Their chapel is an old parish church, with cracked walls and mud floor. The belfry is one of the branches of a mango tree. There



is an additional shed, recently put up thanks to the munificence of some benefactors.

Agriculture is to be the chief source of income for the Rosarians. They began by cultivating three acres of land; now, they have about six acres to cultivate. But it is believed that nothing short of fifty acres of land with a sufficient supply of water would meet their requirements. They have a little workshop for carpentry. They supply candles and altar-breads to a good many churches in the diocese. By these means, they eke out an existence which is, humanly speaking, in a precarious condition.

The spirit of the community is excellent. There has been no trouble at all on account of the mingling of different castes.

The health of the Rosarians had been quite satisfactory, until some of them were sent to Madhu, a place of pilgrimage in the midst of the jungles, in order to found a new house of the Congregation near the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Madhu. The attempt proved to be a failure, chiefly owing to the virulence of malaria; and the would-be pioneers returned after a couple of years, with their health very much impaired; and they are likely to take a good long time to recuperate their health.

Two attempts were made to start a Congregation for women on the same lines as that for men. Both attempts have proved abortive. But the project has not been abandoned.



At present (1938) the Rosarians are urgently in need of a house large enough to accommodate them all. They are also in want of a decent chapel; a plot of land; tools and implements for their farm and workshop.

Finally, the Congregation of the Rosarians is humbly commended to the prayers and benevolence of all the Oblates; and of the people, particularly of the children, under their charge.

The Rosarians cannot quest for alms; but they will gladly offer a special share of their prayers and penances to friends and well-wishers who come forward to help them out of their present difficulties.

They confidently abandon themselves to the merciful providence of Almighty God, Who has given them the happiness of being the servants of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary.





# *The Monastic Ideal*

**M**ONASTICISM is not a distinctive Christian phenomenon.

Many centuries before Christ, the ancient cultures both Eastern and Western have had their "Seekers of God" practicing asceticism and mysticism, alone or in groups, in search of the "Absolute" or the 'Self-Existent'. The common features among them one and all, were Prayer, Renunciation, Fasts and Abstinence, Celibacy, Obedience to Gurus etc.

In Christianity, since its very beginning, the intense search after God with the same radical renunciation of the world and a total and generous dedication as means to obtain the same goal was clearly manifest. By the middle of the IIIrd century A. D. these features of a single-minded purpose in life developed in the form of monasticism as a powerful movement which began to spread rapidly with the



growth of the Church herself. The fierce persecutions that raged furiously against the nascent church, saw not only the flowering of a galaxy of glorious martyrs from every social class, men and women, young and old, nobility and peasantry, but also a great number of heroic souls drawn from among them who ventured upon a life of prayer and seclusion, wishing to bear witness to the maxims of the Sermon on the Mount, taught by their Divine Lord and Master. Thus sprang up several forms of monasticism, of the eremitical, semi-eremitical and cenobitical patterns, with the common end in view viz. union with God by love, in prayer and contemplation in universal charity and unworldliness. The primacy of the search for God and Him alone, characterizes the ideal of the monastic life whatever form or shape it adopted and this remains always the proper charism of the monastic life in the church and in its further developments. It has recently been brought into new light by the rediscovery of the eschatological dimension of the Church at Vatican II and specially stressed in the Constitution on "the Church in the modern world," a Church "going forward in the search of a future and abiding City."

Now, coming to our own times, the lands of Sadhus and Sannyasis, par excellence, no one can gainsay that non-christian monasticism definitely has made great strides in its advancement, right through the ages, from Gautama Bhuddha and Mahavira of the VIth Cent. B. C. to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda of the XIX Cent. A. D. The number of Sannyasis and Sannyasinies, who have sought after



Enlightenment and Self-Realization in Ashrams and Mutts, is countless, let alone those who have renounced the world and dedicated their lives outside such Institutions with the same goal in view. These men have kept up the philosophy of life preached by their Founders and the general masses have looked to them for guidance in solving their own individual problems or those of the society at large right down the centuries to our present day.

Invariably here crops up a question. What has been the real impact of Christian monasticism upon these regions that one may term the Far East? The Gospel message had reached these shores from the very Apostolic times themselves. While Christian Missionaries who had carried the "Good News" to other parts of the world had left such a strong impact upon the various nations so as to beget a civilization by the name "Christian" in their midst, what have their counterparts, not less zealous, or holy or apostolic-minded, done to the adherents of these philosophies? What of the monastic nomadic missions themselves? It is said that Syrian monks who made their impact felt so strongly in the churches of the West, at times followed the caravans that journeyed East, to found Churches in Arabia, Persia, India, Central Asia and even up to China. What became of them and their Christian impact upon these peoples? Can any traces be found of these encounters?

No doubt these and similar questions must have arisen in the minds of many a priest or missionary



in our countries. Well, Father Thomas of the Diocese of Jaffna in Sri Lanka, an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, was one among them. From the very start of his priestly career he felt that the presence amongst us of indigenous Monastic Institutions, germinated and nurtured in this very soil, held the answer to the above dilemma. Only a true Christian Monastic approach, and that from the very soil itself could manifest to society at large the beauty of the Gospel tidings and the splendour of this hidden treasure:- Christianity has to be not merely preached but lived and that not individually alone, but collectively as well.

Fr. Thomas was in the habit of spending his college vacations at one of the sea-side churches and invariably in the company of one of his colleagues and intimate friends, Father Alfred Guyomar O.M.I. who in later years became the Bishop of Jaffna and Co-Founder of the Rosarian Congregation. Both shared the same views on this topic and began to offer special prayers to obtain greater light from Church Authorities for a speedy step to be undertaken to serve this vital need. While both became more and more convinced that Monasticism was a necessary and integral part of Christian evangelization and a sure answer to a more vigorous and fruitful Church, men were not wanting who thought of such ventures as out-dated and unpractical. They added that a simple and sickly priest like Father Thomas could afford to dream such pious dreams since he with his poor health would himself never realize such



a goal. A little anecdote in his life illustrates well the point in question. When "obediences" were served to the various priests of the diocese, it appears that most of them when they met Father Thomas, had this common remark to make. "Father Thomas, you have only one obedience and that is "St. Patrick's College." They had their own reasons for making that remark, of course, jocosely. It appears that the invariable advice given to him by his Superiors during his clerical training and by his Bishop after his Sacerdotal Ordination was "to prepare for a good death" and rightly so. He was so sickly right through and the only obedience given to him by the Bishop was to take the needed rest at the College, with special instructions to the Rector to take care of his health.

At this time, some sudden and dramatic changes took place. H. E. Dr. Henry Joulain O. M. I. died and was succeeded by Dr. Brault who, after a short reign, was succeeded by no other than Fr. Alfred Guyomar O. M. I. Even after his elevation to the See of Jaffna, whenever he and Father Thomas met, their talk invariably turned to the same topic of common interest to them both. They continued to offer special prayers for the same intention. One day Bishop Guyomar sent word for Father Thomas and as the latter entered his room the Bishop showed him the copy of a recently published Encyclical of H. H. Pope Pius XI "Rerum Ecclesiae." After all, the idea of monastic Institutions in the missions, is not just a



dream. It has the sanction of heaven itself. The Encyclical read: "Now, just as we heartily exhort the Higher Superiors of these Orders (the monastic Orders in Europe) in like manner, in season and out of season do we exhort you, venerable Brethren, Beloved sons, to take care that the practice of this austere life of contemplation may be introduced in the mission field and widely extended by the establishment of monasteries, for it is wonderful what an abundance of heavenly graces these solitaries will bring down upon your labours." The very Holy Pontiff, the very Vicar of Christ Himself wants it; a few days of silent prayer, serious study and reflection follow. The subject is indeed wonderful, the aim noble and lofty, but now who is to undertake the "Job?". At any rate, not Father Thomas. He knew more than anyone else his own utter helplessness, lack of talents and experience in this respect: on top of it, his physical infirmities, with the "supposed early death" fast approaching. Once again the Bishop sends for him. "You are my Bishop, who represents Christ and his Vicar on earth, to me. If your Lordship orders me to begin, I just simply obey." On the 2nd of February 1928, the first indigenous monastic Congregation of the Rosarions was inaugurated and blessed by H. E. Dr. Alfred Guyomar O.M.I. and Father Thomas O.M.I. was called upon to take charge of it, lead and guide it in that path as heaven directed him. A singular grace indeed reserved to him alone, according to the mysterious and inscrutable designs of Holy Providence from all eternity. During the life history of this humble Institute, periods of trials and temptations were not



wanting. When the evil forces, even from sources least expected, tried their level best to crush this humble Institute out of existence, as the late Dr. A. Guyomar mentions in his Introduction to the Rules and Constitutions, the "Hand of God" was there with it and hence it survived them all. Like the mustard seed of the Gospel, it began to grow steadily and spread out its branches, not only in Sri-Lanka, the land of its origin but also in India its neighbour and today invitations are not wanting for new foundations, from even distant shores. In this 45th year of the Institute, the spiritual sons of Father Thomas number over a hundred counting the Professed and the Postulants, distributed in 6 monasteries, while in the 25th year of its Sister-Institution the spiritual daughters of the same Father Thomas number over one hundred and fifty, counting the Professed and the Postulants distributed in seven convents.

As one of the special features of these two Religious Families founded in the present "Age of Mary", through the instrumentality of an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, in a Diocese under the special protection of our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary (Madhu), may be mentioned their singular devotion to the Divine Mother of God. Hour after hour, day and night, the Rosarians mount guard before their Eucharistic Lord, offering the infinite compassion of His Sacred Heart to the Eternal Father, on behalf of poor sinners, imploring the Heavenly Queen to obtain mercy for them, while lisping Her Sweet Name incessantly.



It is said that under Emperor Justinian, there existed eighty monasteries in the city of Constantinople alone. One of them proclaimed a "Ceaseless praise" to the Divine Majesty, the monks dividing themselves into several groups, sang the Divine Office in choir, day and night without interruption. Hence their name ACEMETES, "not sleeping." The Rosarians of Father Thomas, also may be called ACEMETES. Since following his special injunction, lisping the undying praise of Mary who takes up the refrain of the praise of the Triune God Himself in Heaven, they too keep a perpetual vigil before the Eucharistic Lord in the silence of the Tabernacle, as all praise to God "through Him, with Him and in Him."

In conclusion, the words of "Perfectae Caritatis" of Vatican II are noteworthy, "Communities which are entirely dedicated to contemplation, so that their members in solitude and silence with constant prayer and penance willingly undertaken, occupy themselves with God alone, retain at all times no matter how pressing the needs of the active apostolate may be, an honourable place in the Mystical Body of Christ, whose members do not all have the same function. For these offer to God a sacrifice of praise which is outstanding.....thus they are revealed to be a glory of the Church and a well-spring of heavenly graces." In this context, can we have the least shadow of a doubt as to the veracity of the saying of H. E. Dr. A. Guyomar O. M. I.



“Certainly the Hand of God is here”, in this wonderful achievement of a monastic Institution in our own missions, thanks to the prayers, sacrifices and a life long dedication of Father Thomas O. M. I. “the Muni of Thologatty.”

**A Rosarian Priest**





# *The Voice of the Half-Century*

**W**ITH seeming paradox, the most haunting voice of the Oblate half-century reaches us from the cloister, shrouded in silence.

Here is the stirring story, told in the rambling style of candle-light reminiscences at close of day.

Writing in our Annals in 1911 (Missions O.M.I., No. 196, pp. 445 ff.) Father Charles Beaud treated the Congregation to a deep and detailed explanation of an enterprise of his—the opening of a “Hindu Boarding” at St. Patrick’s College, Jaffna. Even if the occurrence were considered the domestic affair of a particular school, St. Patrick’s as the first Cath-



olic establishment for secondary education in Ceylon since the collapse of the Portuguese set-up in the mid-seventeenth century, St. Patrick's so closely linked with the work of the Oblates in this Island from the early days of Bishop Bonjean, could well impart to the scholastic event a significance for our Religious family and its missionary commitment.

Good Father Beaud sensed the surprise — the pained and troubled surprise, his announcement might very well cause the general reader of the Annals. Was the Church in Jaffna (read : the Oblates of North Ceylon) deviating from the avowed purpose of a Catholic College (even in mission lands) of providing Catholic children a Catholic education in a Catholic set-up and atmosphere? Already, it was known, a percentage of non-Catholics was on the students' roll as day-boys. Were they now to be taken on, even as resident pupils — "boarders" ?

If so, would not their presence involve a weakening of the Catholic "atmosphere" we claimed was the specific advantage of our own organisations ?

On the one hand, we would have to respect the freedom of conscience, and so the freedom of religious adherence, of religious practice, of our non-catholic charges (for even at that distance of half a century from the Second Vatican Council, our Fathers were not prepared to adopt the easier line followed by certain non-catholic missionary bodies of demanding at least external conformity from pupils of other denominations).



On the other hand, how would that tolerance affect our own children, especially in a country where, for historical reasons, Catholics have been kept as much as possible away from contact with other religions and even other religionists?

Without sweeping and therefore unfair condemnations of the moral character and conduct of children of other religions, might we not legitimately fear, for our own children, too early exposure to the impact of other standards of morality, of a mentality at best of merely natural and human goodness? That would spell the ruin of our Catholic schools: for it would mean frustrating their main purpose: the protecting of young Catholic minds from alien influences long enough, securely enough, for the peaceful development of an adult Catholic mind.

Father Beaud reassures his readers. "The Hindu Boarding" has been organised specifically to obviate these dangers, to steer clear of these disadvantages. It will be a completely self-contained unit. As "boarders," Catholics and non-catholics will meet only at play-time; and then regulations and supervision by the Prefect will ensure that there is no loitering, no forming of dubious cliques—only the healthy scrummage of the sports field, the open-air combining and opposing of youthful energies that go so far to mould character, to teach the game of life. Team spirit, fair play, acceptance of authority to rule or give a ruling—these were values as desirable or non-catholics as for our own: and there was an advantage for the country and for the Church that boys of both sets should learn them together on the



sports green, to live up to them later in social and political relations. Outside of recreation, non-catholics and Catholics would meet, as hitherto, in the class-rooms for lessons. The disadvantages in that could not be greater than those the young aspirants to the Priesthood of St. Martin's Seminary could be liable to in sitting on the same benches as the future stalwarts of the laity in the various professions.

Within their own hostel (at a convenient distance from the Catholic boys' quarters) the boarding life of the Hindus would be organised on terms compatible both with freedom of the individual conscience of the pupil and the religious convictions and commitment of the staff. As Father Beaud pointed out, it would be a matter of daily tact, sincerity and earnestness of purpose.

Regulations and a time-table, however carefully and wisely drawn up, could at best provide a framework. The role of the Boarding Prefect would be decisive. Even among God's priests, he would have to be a God-send.

Father Beaud's report of 1911 covers the first four years of the Boarding's history. It mentions that there are two priests in charge at the time of writing.

Just who they were and how long they functioned, a fuller history of the establishment must tell us. In ignorance of such basic facts it is elementary to refrain from any appraisal of these Prefects' abilities and achievements. With pardonable partiality to our own hero, how-ever, we hasten to introduce him as the



providential man—his predecessors in office having all the respectability of Precursors, all the merit of preparing the way, or at least holding the fort till his arrival.

### *A God-send*

Who was he? A year after Father Beaud's article appeared, St. Patrick's College received reinforcements for its Oblate staff. The one who concerns us here was a gaunt young priest, straight from St. Bernard's Seminary-Scholasticate (catering at that time for the Jaffna students as well). His deep-set dark eyes peered out on the world, with a penetrating yet far-away look. At the Seminary, his companions used to call him the Philosopher. In a year or two, a bristly black beard would add to the impression of austerity one got at firstsight. Austerity, but not severity; for a gently melancholic light softened the piercing eyes. His voice bore the same marks of self-abnegation, compassion for others, quiet earnestness, a sense of mystery, the consciousness of a mission waiting to be fulfilled. Father B. A. Thomas was that man.

As far as his Superiors were concerned, he was a doomed man. Much as they appreciated his good qualities, the frailty of his constitution gave them hope of keeping him only five years or so. So Father Thomas himself recalls in a letter written round about his 70th birthday. (Letter to Father Pakianather C.R. A Rosarian Priest, 16 January 1955).

Just when was the new professor of St. Patrick's College assigned to the "Hindu Boarding"? Father



Beaud had stressed in his report that the Prefect had a delicate role and would require very special qualities. It would be reasonable to conclude that besides having aptitude and a taste for the work, he would have to be a man of some experience in the line. Failing such a ready-made man, the alternative was to train one; and the surest course of training was "in-service" with suitable guidance and support.

Now, in 1911, it will be remembered, there were two priests minding the Boarding. To replace one of them by the new arrival would not have been rash on the part of the Rector.

What personal recollections leave under no doubt is that by the end of 1922 Father B. A. Thomas had been associated with the Boarding so long and so closely that he was identified with it. Over the years, his insight into souls had become keener, and at the same time familiarity with the matter had given him greater deftness in getting down to the soul of the Hindu boy through the tangle of his prejudices, inherited or acquired ideas and customs and above all the reactions of a natural attitude of selfdefence.

"Oratione et experientia parva sagacitas". No one acted better on that indication of the Oblate rule than Father Thomas, young, mature or ageing. "We are trying it out", the old "Abbot" of Tholagatty would say later; and, most of the time, that meant he was trying it out on himself before prescribing it for his monks, even "ad experimentum".

But now as then, he left nothing to chance. Experiment was based on principles and facts; and



since souls meant for Heaven were the precious, priceless, "material" and objective, no pains could be spared perfecting that prior knowledge of principles and facts. From his early scholastic days our "Philosopher" was a tireless seeker of causes and effects. This habit would distinguish him throughout his life.

During his 16 years at the "Boarding" it had been particularly directed towards grasping the operative elements of Indian philosophy and religious thinking, of the Jaffna Hindu social set-up and its religious practices, and of its reactions to the Gospel message as well as to organised Catholic life.

It must also be presumed that complementing the scholastic psychology of his Seminary days, he built up an "empirical" knowledge of the subject.

Certainly by 1925 Father Thomas, by natural bent a philosopher, by inclination of grace a hermit, had "*oratione et experientia*" acquired the "knack" with young men, and prerequisite with boys. Indeed, it was with boys rather than young men he had to deal, when, during the vacation, he took us Seminarists of St. Martin's out for sea-baths at Kankesanturai, played the appreciative spectator when we made an impromptu staging of St. Stephen's Martyrdom and St. Paul's Damascus under the mango trees, or gamely invited us to take to the road on bicycles for the first time to accompany him on his exploration of Vasavilan.

All the time he was at St. Patrick's, Father Thomas took the classes in Tamil and Holy Scripture



for the upper forms. Those were the blessed days when candidates offered Religious knowledge as a subject for the Cambridge Junior and Senior examinations. Holy Scripture was the section chosen by Catholic Colleges and that meant a Gospel and, for the Juniors a part of the "Acts", with an Epistle of St. Paul for the Seniors. Father Thomas always took the latter and while his commentaries have been a boon for his pupils, he himself derived from this close, constant, contact with the text and thought of St. Paul much of his insight into the parallel mysteries of God's salvific mercy and the iniquity of man's rebellion and rupture.

On the other hand, perfecting his childhood grounding in the language and literature of his native Tamil, Father Thomas was, by the process, sharpening the tools of his apostolate and penetrating more deeply into the recesses of the South-East Asian soul of which he himself might otherwise have been an ill-defined, uninterested (and uninteresting) specimen.

## *Dialogue*

Looking back on these facts, one is led to reflect that if the "Hindu Boarding" found in Father Thomas its providential man of the half-century, guiding its destinies Father Thomas himself found in it the stimulus, opportunity and facilities for progressing towards the realisation of a plan of much greater dimensions and import, by which he will undoubtedly be best remembered.

Not that his achievements at the Boarding were paltry and few. As expressed by the founder Father



Beaud, the main objective in taking in non-Catholics as resident students was to break down prejudice and establish soul-full contact with them. In the language of Pope Paul VI and the Vatican Council II this is the *dialogue* that creates good understanding and throws a pontoon-bridge for the unpredictable workings of Grace.

Half under his breath, Father Beaud had dared to express the hope that, outside of all pressure and vulgar proselytising, some at least of the young friends would find the way to Faith and Fold, perhaps even later in life. To make sure that at all events the Boarders would not be given a colourless, "neutral" education, divorced from religious conviction its most potent factor, Father Beaud had introduced a Sunday course of instruction. Working on the basis of the acceptance of "one God, pure perfect Spirit", that he maintained existed in classic Brahmanism as well as in the conscience of his Jaffna Hindu pupils, Father Beaud says that in the Sunday instruction "we give them the necessary principles of philosophy adapted to their age. Gently we separate the truth these children hold, from the errors with which it is mixed. We teach them especially the necessity and requisites of prayer. We get them to pray and we leave to God's Mercy the inner working of Grace that, little by little, permits us to place before them the truth in all its fulness of light." "We hope", he adds, "that as a result of these talks and of the inevitable effect of the atmosphere in which our Boarders are placed, some of them here itself, others after leaving us,



will embrace the Truth as soon as they have freedom to do so."

Young Father Thomas, as we have seen, was all cut out by Divine Providence to carry out Father Beaud's delicate programme. We know for certain that in the 20's at least he was blessed to see the Rector's fondest hopes fulfilled. Of the "Hindu Boarding" neophytes, Jaffna has today at least three Oblate priests of long years of solid service.

To this result an initiative of Father Thomas, that the revered founder of the Boarding would not have dared to contemplate, powerfully contributed. To maintain the general tone and provide the Hindu students with a close-up of the Faith as it is lived, Father Thomas decided to have a small group of senior Catholic youths transferred to his Boarding. Hand-picked, they would form a leaven, and be a light. They would share the life of their non-catholic comrades completely. Only for their morning Mass, the Prefect himself would move silently through the dormitory and give each of them a call while their companions slept. By personal care and direction he strove to make them adult Catholics, convinced apostles. Devotion—a virile devotion—to the Sacred Heart was the "method" of this "active" training. As a group, they were seen on the First Friday of the month, when after the College Mass in the Cathedral (St. Patrick's had no chapel of its own in those days) the Prefect led his picked men before the Altar for the Litany of Reparation.



The men who have issued from those ranks have borne the stamp of that training for life. To our knowledge, at least two of them are Oblate Priests today. From the group too, Father Thomas chose the one he hoped would be the key-stone of his penitential Order of Contemplatives.

### *An idea matures*

The history of the "Rosarians" as he called them requires to be treated by itself and would run into a volume for the close on forty years of vicissitudes of its twin branches (monks and sisters) in Ceylon and abroad (in South India).

For our restricted purpose here, what matters is not how far and by what means Father Thomas has succeeded in his foundation, but what message he brings us still by this idea, for which for 40 years he lived and wrestled (with God, first; with himself, second; with all the rest, after); for which he breathed his last (26 January '64) in the dereliction of Calvary, the meek but assured "Consummatum est", the submissiveness of "in manus tuas!" and the filial challenge "Et Nunc, Pater, clarifica."

Briefly, then, Father Thomas' idea was this: what is *needed* today, because it is *missing*, is a locally adapted, locally founded penitential Congregation of contemplatives (men and women) for Ceylon (and concomitantly India.)

This idea had been maturing during the 16 years of hidden life as a teacher at St. Patrick's College and Prefect of the "Hindu Boarding." "Maximum



illud" of Pope Benedict XV came to him as a startling confirmation: "Rerum Ecclesiæ" of Pope Pius XI (1926) as a definite summons.

He could no longer hesitate. The project must be placed before the competent authority.

The Francis of Sales of Ceylon and, like him, "Seminator Casti Consilii", patron of every holy heroic dedication to God and souls, gentle Bishop Brault died almost before he could begin to give the best of his golden heart and rich experience to the problems of the diocese quite new to him.

After a full year's vacancy the See was provided for in January 1924 by the nomination of Father Guyomar, Rector of St. Patrick's College, a fast friend and deep admirer of Fr. Thomas.

Whether or not he was in the know of a definite project, the new Bishop was certainly conversant with Father Thomas' ideas, for both of them had been all along together at St. Patrick's. Looking back on events, one can clearly discover indications that, in a very short time, Father Thomas had won approval for the founding of his Congregation. Indeed, Bishop Guyomar had fallen in with the plan so fully as to make it his own.

At this level of a Diocesan undertaking willed by the Bishop, the main difficulties disappeared. In the first place, Father Thomas' position was clear: he was carrying out an assignment that, special as it was, remained within his normal duties as a missionary placed at the disposal of the Bishop. It



would not entail any essential change of his personal position as an Oblate.

It is a point of history, however, that throughout his long shepherding of the enterprise and, no doubt, from the very start, Father Thomas was particular to draw down on it the blessings of his Religious Superiors, to attach the Congregation of his creation to the Congregation his mother, and to endow it with some of the richest elements of the Oblate spirit and tradition. At an early date, he had it "affiliated" to us with a permanent obligation for the Rosarians to support us by their prayers and penances. The high-point of the forging of these ties was touched in 1937 when Father General (most Rev. Theodore Laboure) in the course of his Visitation of Ceylon, seeing things for himself, gave unstinted praise to the enterprise as "the most worthwhile undertaking of an Oblate in the Island."

As a sign of approval, in a way to place the matter (idea and realisation) before the whole Congregation for general edification, support and emulation, he moreover convoked Fr. Thomas personally to the General Chapter of 1938.

It was necessary to refer to these facts to press the point this essay wishes to make. Father Thomas' extra-ordinary undertaking, on diocesan authority as it was, was *de iure*, and *de facto*, fully and firmly within the Oblate context. Through one of us, it involved all of us. At the highest level possible, the Congregation committed itself (spiritually and morally) to provide the Rosarians through its son, Father



Thomas, with all the love, the wisdom, the holiness of a Founder. Organisationally, financially, canonically, Father Thomas' young foundation depended on the ecclesiastical superiors.

Through his enterprise, then, of an indigenous contemplative and penitential Order, through the convictions that prompted the undertaking, through the qualities of soul he revealed in the pursuit of the project, through the spirit, maxims and objectives he enshrined in the Rule and living practice of the Rosarian monks and Nuns, Father B. A. Thomas has uttered a word "in medio ecclesiæ," in our midst, "in gremio Congregations nostræ." The message survives him; and (God forbid the calamitous necessity) would survive even the extinction of his work.

### *That haunting voice*

To the mind of a nostalgic spiritual child, this is "the most haunting voice of the Oblate half-century". Is it fierce loyalty alone that claims it is the most potent voice of the period, the most significant for the generation that takes over?

In a period convulsed by war (hot and cold), by social strife, class hatreds and individual rivalries, a man the picture of Beatitudes spoke *Peace*... the peace of a soul pacified in the grace of Sonship through Christ Jesus.

In the screeching of jet-planes and space-rockets, in the hectic rush for immediate results, for tangible realizations through all too human means and methods, Father Thomas said: *Prayer*. No commonplace that, no stilted formula on the lips of a man whose whole person breathed communing with God.



In the hedonism of our day, the flight from hardship, the rebellion against poverty and pain, the very disciples' disaffection from the Divine Master's friendship, following and service, a slim frail figure whispered *configuration with the Crucified*, like Him vicariously "pro mundi vita". The voice was sweet and low, with a twinge in it as when before the Blessed Sacrament he led his Boarding group through the Litany of Reparation. There was boundless compassion in it for what it might cost each one of us, but the irresistible persuasion of one for whom, unmistakably, suffering was only another word for Love—its earthly nickname.

No! No grim forbidding prophet with voice of thunder, our Oblate Father Thomas. Those deep-set eyes still kept that world of earnestness of younger days, but more than ever they were flooded in a sea of gentleness, touched off by the foam-flakes of the erstwhile grisly beard.

To win adhesion to the Rosarian concept the Founder proceeded with his gentleness. To determine its demands, he used his earnestness.

For the penitential programme of silence, vigil, work, abstinence and fast, he took the Trappist rule as a tried criterion of what was commendable. However, he gave the prescriptions adopted a tone, a local colouring. Work was to be a joyous participation in the lot of most of our local people. According to the times, it would also be a reparation for the wrongs alike of capitalism and of the proletariat. The villagers would be associated in the



work of the monks, to gain something of its Christian spirit: they would also share in its material produce. Profit, however, would be ruled out; work would always remain subordinate to monastic mysticism. It should never be pushed to such a degree of productivity as to leave no margin for dependence on Divine Providence—on the alms of benefactors who would in turn reap spiritual blessings. As to abstinence, the strictly vegetarian diet would be a bridge of friendship with the Hindus and Buddhists of Ceylon (and India) and at the same time an acceptance, in holy substitution, of the privations demanded of them by their religious prejudices and taboos.

For prayer and contemplation, Father Thomas went to the Benedictines. (He did so literally in his visit to Bruges and Maredsous when convoked to our General Chapter of 1938). From them he took the choral chanting of the Divine Office, gradually evolving however an adaptation of Oriental ("Carnatic") chant for the pure Gregorian. This too, to span the gulf between us and our non-christian brethren and to consecrate to the Lord the fruits of the East.

In a great spirit of the humble-mindedness ("Fools for Christ's sake") that he wished should characterise the Rosarians, he set the common measure of contemplation at a meditative recitation of the Rosary, slow and punctuated.

Underlying this prudent choice of the common way, there was the very fraternal care to associate from within in the prayer of people out in the world, and vicariously incorporate it in liturgical worship. In



fact, in the cloister itself, those unable to follow the Divine Office (of the "Breviarium Romanum") would take turns to keep up the Rosary day and night before the Blessed Sacrament.

On the other hand, by adopting the Rosary as its formula of contemplation, the infant Congregation found itself in the good company of the Dominican Order that (by this method) has given the Church its great luminaries, Albert of Cologne and Thomas Aquinas.

By way of an over-all remark, it is to be noted that the Rosarians' programme, in whole and in detail conforms fully with the "Fatima Requests." Yet, it was determined before the "Message" of Francisco, Jacinta and Sister Lucy actually reached Ceylon. Even with the invocation of "Immaculate Heart of Mary, Refuge of Sinners," it had been "monitored" by Father Thomas' delicate, dedicated sensitiveness to Mary, Mother of the Church.

Let's hope and pray that the Blessed Virign Mary will ever continue to look kindly on this little corner of her Son's vineyard and to bless and make fruitful the mission of the spiritual sons and daughters of the Sage of Tholagatty.

**Fr. Claude Lawrence o. m. i.**





# *A Tribute*

*(From one of Fr. Thomas' co-novices who is still living)*

**F**R. Thomas' vocation was rather a late one. He was never in the minor Seminary. In the senior class of St. Patrick's College, Jaffna, his English compositions were characteristic. They were not merely correct in language but also full of practical lessons. After passing his senior examination he joined the major seminary and received the cassock in a few months.

As a scholastic (in those days the major seminary was in Jaffna) he studied philosophy under Fr. Bizien for one year and then he was asked to continue privately. At the quarterly examinations held by Bishop Joulain he always had a brilliant success and was lauded by the Bishop. After the philosophy course, he was sent to Mantote to help the missionary there.



Fr. Santiago. On his return to Jaffna from Mantote the diocese had its first visit from Archbishop Zaleski—the Apostolic Delegate. One day the Delegate took the seminarists to Oorany for a picnic and during one of the recreations he asked the seminarists to sing some Tamil songs. When he heard that Bro. Thomas had just come back from Mantote, he asked him to tell them something about the life of the people there. Bro. Thomas obliged. Especially he explained how the people of Mantote when sowing paddy used to sing songs. At once the Delegate asked him to sing one of the songs. Bro. Thomas was not a singer at all; but, in obedience to the Archbishop's request, he started—"ho, ho"—at once all the other seminarists burst out laughing. The Delegate and Bishop Joulain also joined in the laughter, and Bro. Thomas was happy that he was not asked to continue.

In 1907, January, the Brothers who wished to join the O. M. I. congregation were taken to Colombo to begin their novitiate. Bro. Thomas was one of them. For some reason or other the novitiate did not commence at once. There was a delay of more than a month. During this interval the would-be novices were taken to Pusselawa. The novice-master, Fr. Croctain O.M.I. was a strong man and a good walker. He would take the Brothers for very long walks. Bro. Thomas was not a strong man and was not a good walker. Often he would beg to be excused from the walk. But often enough through sheer obedience and desire to overcome his imagined defects, he would join in these long walks; but he would come back quite tired out and unable to move about for a few days.



The novitiate started on Feb. 2nd 1909. Bro. Thomas was an exemplary novice. On account of some physical weakness he was the only one of the novices who was allowed to smoke and if, at the chapter of faults, he was accused of some slight breaking of the rule, the novice-master would at once give him a penance of not smoking for some days. When the novitiate was over, he began the study of theology under Fr. Nicholas O.M.I. He was fond of discussing with the Brothers the subjects studied that day even during recreation. He was ordained on Jan. 6th 1912 and at once went to St. Patrick's College, Jaffna.

**Rev. Fr. S. Emmanuel o. m. i.**





# *A Witness to Christ*

THE proper study of mankind is man. In this age of space-flight the life-history of a scientist will provide a fascinating study. So also in the field of sociology, philosophy or psychology outstanding personalities have made their contribution to world history. In this article I am making a feeble attempt in the field of religion to deal with a personality first on the human level and in so far as he has had tremendous repercussions on my life, and second on generations of Patricians. I shall have to crave your indulgence if in the first-place I am obliged to press the personal note, as it is in the nature of a personal encounter that this study fascinates me.

Nearly forty five years ago, I entered the portals of St. Patrick's College, and almost immediately



came under the searching influence of Rev. Fr. B.A. Thomas. Both in the Hindu Boarding of which he was the Warden and in his Scripture class in the Senior Cambridge, God's light in his ineffable designs began to take shape. Having had my earlier education in non-catholic schools, I now came under the influence of a Catholic Institution that was both singular and outstanding. I am dealing with the history of St. Patrick's when Father Thomas' apostolate was shared by two other personalities, namely dear Father Mathews now deceased and Father Long of revered memory. The overpowering and first impression that struck one regarding Father Thomas was that one stood before a man who had a dedicated mission to fulfil. For one coming from Hindu upbringing, the image of the Father was that of a Rishi or Sanyasi. I was not yet in my twenties and therefore not completely free from the peccadilloes of youth. His supervision of the Boarders was of a stamp that only a person of Father Thoma's type could fulfil. While going to bed we saw Father Thomas moving slowly in the passage with his rosary in hand. One gets up in the early hours of the morning long before the signal and one yet sees the same figure, almost shrouded in mystery slowly under a dim muffled light again with the rosary in hand. I distinctly remember an over-powering impression he made on me, a young non-Christian mind. I had to choose between the two. Either he was a fake or he was a man sent by God.

I love to think of Fr. Thomas standing on the platform, now St. Patrick's Hall, and clapping with



rhythmic strokes giving the signal for us to rise. Here is an anecdote. I was playing for the College Football Eleven, and was cunning enough to avail myself of the opportunity to sleep longer after a College fixture. Then a bright idea would strike me as there were a few others yet resting in the dormitory. I would go to the warden's night dormitory, don his cassock and proceed to give the signal for rising in Father Thomas' inimitable way. When I had entered St. Bernard's Seminary for my scholastic studies, Father Thomas would write to me. "Once upon a time there was a Hindu boy in the boarding who used to play the fool by wearing my cassock. I then prayed earnestly that one day he may wear the cassock in good earnest."

In modern catechetical language Fr. Thomas was indeed an outstanding Witness to Christ. His life was a perpetual engagement in its inner depths, an incessant option for a higher ideal of perfection. Easy recipes and stratagems were left behind. As a versatile writer put it: he was John the Baptist come alive. The thing that was really contagious was the radiation of his whole life. Like his Divine Master he carried the invisible world about with him, in his face, heart, behaviour and actions. Permit me to proceed to his scripture class. It was at his feet that I grasped the first rays of light that streamed forth from the gospel story. This was no difficult task as the divine words took life on his lips, as they would have on the lips of the Divine Master, or on those of the apostle of the Gentiles. Generations of Patricians will cherish hallowed memories of his scripture notes. I thank



the Lord immensely that I have lived to see the good seed bearing fruit in the greatest upheaval of Vatican II, namely the biblical revival. It was the gospel story that sparked off a series of enquiry classes on the fundamentals of the faith with Fr. Thomas in that hallowed room, adjoining the study hall of the once Hindu Boarding. While I was being led to the baptismal font Father Long enquired what name I would desire and almost instinctively I called for Thomas. But Thomas was really Antony, but I held to Thomas, because I saw Antony and believed.

No story of Father Thomas would be deemed complete without reference to his work—the foundation of the Rosarian monastery. The future of the congregation is in God's hands, but it needed indomitable courage and the faith of a saint to undertake that work. Burning with zeal for the conversion of Ceylon he was convinced that the only way for its realization was a life of penance and prayer. He lived his life in the supernatural, full of power for good and strong in its purpose of sanctity. I remember going to his room at Tholagatty during the first months of its foundation. It was doubtless a period of experimentation; but I noted one thing. Fr. Thomas would first try out on himself any new act of penance he initiated before imposing it on others. A picture of charity, understanding and humility, he carried with him the weakest in the community. "The mad man of Tholagatty" as he was called was truly a "fool for Christ's sake." Little wonder that the Brothers and Sisters loved him so much in life and in death his memory is their only solace. The last



months he spent at Bishop's House were a fitting complement of his long life. It was a period of unmitigated suffering, yet accepted with deep Christian fortitude. It was a sight for men and angels to see this venerable priest making his way of the cross, sometimes twice a day, literally ploughing his way from one station to the other. When I asked him one day why he undertook this rather exhausting exercise so often, he replied that this was his greatest consolation in his declining days. A few days before his holy departure I stood by his bed side. The lips that once uttered wisdom now remained silent. He could hardly talk. He grasped my hand and would not let it go, until Brother Infirmarian with difficulty obtained my release.

Dear Father in God, you seem to be yet moving in our midst along the corridors of Alma Mater, your spirit hovers around us. Do hold me firm once more in that love with which you burned for your Crucified Master; and in the love of Mother Mary who must have held high her lamp and at last lifted the latch of the gate and brought you into heaven, a priest for ever.

**Fr. G. T. Balasundram o. m. i.**



# *A Visit to Rome*

I never had contact with Father Thomas when I was a student at St. Patrick's College. He had already left St. Patrick's and begun his ashram at Tholagatty. Occasionally, the Boarding Master, Father Charles Navaratnam, used to refer to him and to his work, and the reputation of Father Thomas at St. Patrick's was that he was a great muni who had no equal. It was in the years subsequent to 1935 that I met him on a number of occasions. Our first long meeting was in Rome and in Castelgandolfo when he was on a visit to Europe to study contemplative societies, as well as to see the Holy Father, Pius XI, and obtain his blessings for his ventures. I believe it was in the summer of 1939 that he was in Rome. I was then a priest and was permitted to visit him when in Rome. Father Thomas was looking forward to a private audience,



but he did not have one. He, however, was one of a special audience at which he asked the Holy Father to bless his Rosarian Monastery and its inmates.

Father Thomas spent a day with us at Castlegandolfo at the villa of the Propaganda College. The Ceylonese students which included the then Father, now Bishop Deogupillai as well as Father Karunakarar enjoyed his visit immensely. We introduced him to our international community, and his views and replies on many important questions made our friends regard him as an oracle. In private conversations with him I was so deeply impressed that I ventured the opinion that Father Gnanaprakasara and Father Thomas were two of the most distinguished ecclesiastics in all Asia. Father Thomas was obviously impressed by the contemplative monasteries he had visited and by the intense catholic life of the laity in some parts of France and Belgium.

When I returned to Ceylon in 1940, I used to visit him now and then for spiritual direction. I found him very modern in his thoughts, very liberal and very open-minded. He was a great intellectual and his approach to problems was always intellectual. In 1950 when I was in the U.S.A. I found it possible to obtain for his monastery some financial help for which he was very grateful. My knowledge of Father Thomas is very meagre, but I admired in him his intellectual spirituality and his broad-minded and modern approach to spiritual problems.

**Dr. X. S. Thaninayagam,  
M. A., M. Lit., Ph. D., D. D.**



# *A Man of God*

**F**ATHER B. A. Thomas passed away on the 26th of January '64. In him, Ceylon lost one of its greatest sons. The Oblate Congregation lost an exceptional missionary who understood the necessity of missionary adaptation, and strove to practice it in the most difficult field of monastic life. The church lost a minister of Christ with the rare virtue of simple dedication for the community and the world lost a man of God.

The former Superior General of the Oblates, Very Rev. Fr. Leo Deschatelets, speaking at the International Scholasticate in Rome about his visit to Ceylon, told the students from all over the world, "if you wish to see a real saint, you must go to Tholagatty. One finds in that old man all that is usually associated with sanctity. Everything about him responds to our common conception of a man of God."



Such a description coming from one who has seen so much of the world and of men is no doubt a great tribute. The truth of the tribute is further confirmed by the fact that like most holy founders, the Founder of the Rosarians suffered much during the last years of his life on earth. The cross which weighed most heavily on him was to be torn away from the communities which he had founded. Here too, he has given us all the supreme lesson of detachment even from one's own good work.

May his soul rest in peace, and may the memory of his oblation of love, be a blessing to his brother oblates who mourn him.

**Fr. C. A. Joachimpillai, o. m. i.**





# *A Guiding Star*

**R**EV. Fr. B. A. Thomas O. M. I. was a priest of God, whose total dedication to the Creator and His children, has borne the most remarkable fruits. Soldier of Christ he really was. More, Our Lady had given him a very high position in her own army of Rosary devotees. Placing all his trust in God, he gave himself to the task entrusted to him by his Bishop, and launched into what the world may call madness and proved himself a man of God.

The founding of a Congregation that would launch into contemplative life, in a mission land, where the Catholic population is less than 8 percent was itself a herculean task. But Father Thomas had to guide souls, he had to govern as a wise father; daily he had to feed more than a hundred mouths even without a rupee as steady income. He had to



be spiritual director not only to his monks and nuns but also to hundreds of others. He bore up with the weaknesses of his own spiritual children, he was undaunted before reckless criticism; he faced a world that was fast losing faith and which in large part did not believe. Through all this he shone out with beaming faith, with patience unruffled, with the wisdom of the sage. Though he did not get the backing that he desired, he was firm in sticking to the views of the Sovereign Pontiff that prayer and penance were more and more needed and he lived an exemplary life. He was not only a guiding star to his flock, but also an excellent model to copy.

I had the good fortune to come under his genial influence and the privilege to count myself as one of his spiritual sons, though not an accomplished one. Early in 1950, I came to make a spiritual retreat under his guidance. The way he set about training the will to turn to God and face life, attracted my attention. With the grace of God, his act of humility broke the ground to get me a place under his roof. His way of training the will is noticeable in the act of humility that he had compiled and given to us, his spiritual children, as the means that would keep us in proper balance to achieve the high ideal of a contemplative life.

Father had qualities that go to make a successful guider of souls—firm but understanding, confident but humble, observing and correcting but never rash. He led us, his flock, by reason of his piety, wisdom, compassionate understanding, readiness to come down



to our own level to win us better, and above all, by a wonderful paternal love which endeared him to us, so that each one of us could say, he loved me as my father.

When we were troubled in mind, he would say, "When the mind is disturbed, the devil makes the most of it, therefore cut short thinking of your trouble at that time. Your feelings, your emotions, and your thoughts depend,

1. On the prevailing weather and state of health:
2. On the success or failure encountered during the day :
3. On the temperament of the people who come into contact with you :

But never mind your experience ; say mentally, "Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in thee' or, 'Immaculate Heart of Mary, Refuge of sinners, pray for me'.

Resolve to renew these two mental ejaculations many times, with every beat of your heart. Never mind the disturbing thought, however long it may last. Do your thinking when tranquillity prevails.

The triumph over sin and the infinite merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ are yours if you accept Him, love him and serve Him. Surrender yourself to Him, especially after Holy Communion and continue to cling to Him and glorify the Father through the Son-become-man and remaining with us to deify us.



God knows what we are and will hold out his paternal hand to us in a difficult step. Let us strengthen our resolve daily; let us allow God to mould us; He is the sculptor. He must strike where He wills. His will knows no 'way.' He will triumph and make us triumph, no matter what our failures, difficulties, disappointments, crosses may be.

If the crosses are accepted in a spirit of penance and offered to the Eternal Father, in union with those of the Redeemer, they will bear fruit unto eternal life. If we understood the merciful designs of God to make a purgatory purification from the crosses, we should rejoice over God's designs. It is not suffering that is bad, but suffering without beneficial results. We must share his sufferings, if we are to share his glory."

Father used to stress often that though men knew prayer and penance to be essentials in the spiritual life, they preferred to find excuses because of the rough road they would have to traverse. Seldom do we realize that life is strewn with the splinters of the cross. Whether we like it or not, we have to set limits to our desires. God, our heavenly Father, has regulated and ordained everything for our good. If we learn to accept the crosses as coming from the hand of God, and intended for our benefit, we would profit by them.

To choose the religious life in the Rosarian Congregation is to embrace the life of the spirit in a special manner. Religious training under the hands of Father Thomas provided an impetus to accept



the challenge to be spiritually heroic. The Rosarians have to mount guard before the most Blessed Sacrament, by turns, and recite the Rosary for the conversion of the world. We have also to do our own chores—wash dishes, sweep, milk cows, work in the garden or kitchen, all the while living a life of prayer. The humility instilled into us by our Founder made and makes the above tasks common place.

Fr. Thomas had a great compassion for the poor and the needy. Though in dire need to buy property, to put up buildings, and to provide for the members of the congregation, he made it a point to help the poor of the neighbourhood by offering the men work in our farm and he treated them well. He trained the boys of the neighbourhood in carpentry so well, that it is common knowledge that round about Rosary Ashram there are many skilled carpenters.

He valued everything in its relation to God and the good of man. He patiently listened to the trials related to him by his many admirers and counselled them. He had compassion on them, he raised their hopes, he consoled them, and helped them even financially. No matter how terrible the story of his caller was he would always succour him and guide him to place his hope in God and in our compassionate mother Mary Immaculate.

A great devotee of Our Lady, he endorsed the saturday devotion, he arranged for strict fast on saturdays in honour of Our Lady and got his spiritual children to sing the ejaculatory prayer, "Immaculate



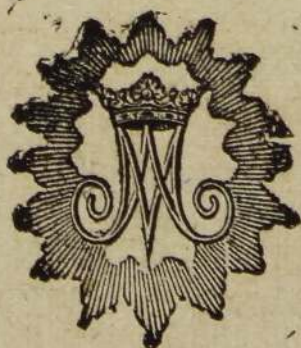
Heart of Mary, Refuge of sinners, pray for us" in Tamil, several times a day. He laid it down as a custom in the Ashram, that when any of the monks wanted to speak to him, the caller should knock, Father would then say "Ave" and the caller should add "Maria" and enter the room. This practice came to be known even to the children of the neighbourhood, so much so that they were in the habit of greeting Fr. Thomas with "Ave Maria." He would speak to them lovingly, make the sign of the cross on their foreheads and find out whose children they were and how they fared,

Man of strong faith he always gave priority to prayer and spiritual remedies to avert impending disaster. He used to stress the fact that God freely gives us life at every moment. It is for us to use intellect and will to glorify God.

Frugal in food and drink, a lover of poverty and self-denial, Father often made reparation in his flesh for what others owed God.

May his spirit animate us his spiritual children every moment, so that we too may be men of God like him.

**A Rosarian Monk**





# *His spiritual daughters*

NOT knowing where to start in writing about our Founder and our Congregation we humbly make an attempt with the Founder's own words spoken to us in his conferances. He told us that he was sickly during his training for the priesthood and fearing he would not live to see the normal end of his studies, his Superiors got special permission from Rome to anticipate his ordination. After his ordination the doctors gave their verdict to his Superiors. "This young man has not long to live, send him somewhere to lead a quiet, retired life". He was sent to St. Patrick's College, Jaffna, where he remained for many years. It was while he was there that he used to go for walks during the holiday season with another teacher in the College, Rev. Fr. Guyomar, who later became Bishop of Jaffna.



Our Founder went on to tell us how he used to talk about his sand-castles to Fr. Guyomar. How fine it would be if there were contemplative monks and nuns in Ceylon, sons and daughters of the soil to fulfil the duty of prayer and penance and thus to contribute to the increase of the Church and for the welfare of mankind. A few years later our Founder's dream-castle came true. Fr. Guyomar was now Bishop and one day he called the Founder and showed him a new Encyclical, "Rerum Ecclesiæ", just issued by Pope Pius XI. In this letter to the Bishops the Pope was asking for the erection of contemplative monasteries in mission lands. Bishop Guyomar at once ordered Fr. Founder to start one. With unbounded confidence in God, our good Father began the Brothers' foundation in Feb. 1928.

### *The Shaky Beginnings*

Later on in the same year - 1928 - Fr. Thomas began to do the same for a Sisters' Congregation. It was the first of three unsuccessful attempts. It was only the fourth attempt that succeeded when the Bishop officially inaugurated the congregation on August 22nd 1950. The first attempt was made a few months after the Congregation of the Rosarian Brothers was started, when some girls from the neighbouring parish of Vasavilan asked Fr. Thomas to teach them how to pray like the Rosarian Brothers. Seven of them were accommodated in the dilapidated mission-house of Vasavilan and were asked to follow a rule similar to that of the Brothers. Fr. Thomas visited them daily to give them instructions and to



see to their spiritual and temporal needs. He was father and mother to them, but he could not stay with them as a mother. After a short trial, this tentative convent was closed in 1930.

It was during this first attempt that the Vasavilan aspirants were transferred to a rented house in Jaffna town for a short time owing to the harassment by the girls' parents and relations.

The second attempt was made in 1935 when one, Miss Kendal, a Jewess from Austria came here through Palestine and was given hospitality by the Holy Family nuns of the Jaffna convent. This time a group of young women was installed in Jaffna and the Founder went cycling from Tholagatty several times a week to give them instructions and to attend to their material needs. It was during this period that occurred the incident he used to relate to us. One day as he was cycling to Jaffna, he met an ugly, miserable-looking beggar on the road. Giving him a disdainful look our Founder passed on his way. But immediately feeling himself guilty, he went back and mentally abasing himself before the beggar, gave him an alms realising vividly that it was only by the mercy of God that he himself was not in the same position. The Austrian Jewess left after a short trial and the Holy Family nuns and Fr. Thomas helped her to return to Europe.

The third attempt was made a few years later when a young woman from Belgaum, Goa, who had been prepared for some time by a sort of correspondence course, came here to start a convent of Rosari-



an sisters. Before long she was joined by two more young women, one from Mangalore, the other from the original batch of Vasavilan girls. Fr. Thomas got the necessary permission from the Bishop of Jaffna and installed them in a shanty put up on a plot of land donated by the chief men of the village of Vasavilan. Both the Indian girls left after a few months as they found the Rosarian life too hard for them. The Vasavilan girl remained alone. However she was soon joined by another girl from the original batch and they asked Fr. Thomas to give them another chance. He allowed them to live in the shanty. Five more girls joined them in the course of 1946 and 1947. In 1948 the Bishop of Jaffna got a sister of the Congregation of the Holy Family to help Fr. Founder in establishing a convent of Rosarian sisters. The Holy Family sister, known as Sr. Jeanne Marie, was in poor health when she took charge of the nine aspirants as their Mother Superior on the 8th of September, 1948. It is thus that Our Lady's birthday became also the birthday of the Rosarian Sisters. Fr. Thomas encouraged the sickly Mother with these words:- "My dear child; you will enrich the new congregation by your sufferings and you will be a powerful instrument in the hands of God". The attempts and failures described above only served to show us the patience, perseverance and confidence in God of our dear Founder. This new community was accommodated for the time being in the old mission-house of Vasavilan (which had served the same purpose for the first attempt) until such time as a new house was built in place of the shanty. Fr. Thomas himself came daily to offer mass for this little community and again in the



evening to give them conferances and for lessons in Latin which was needed in those days to chant the Divine Office. Very soon adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was begun in the Church of Vasavilan. There were no doors to the church at that time so the Blessed Sacrament was reserved for the night in a small safe behind the main altar. The Sisters and the Mother took night adoration in that place.

It was about this time that Fr. Thomas spent one month or so in Bishop's House, Jaffna, in prayer and meditation to write the rules and constitutions of the Congregation.

### *The Founder's Ideals*

The ideal and spirit of the Congregation that he always set before us was the supreme importance of prayer and penance. Every man, he said, born into this world must render to his Creator the supreme homage of prayer and penance. Millions are unaware of this immutable divine ordinance or simply ignore it and it is our high honour and rare privilege to offer ourselves as victims in union with Christ to make vicarious satisfaction for others, and especially to pray and do penance for the conversion of Ceylon and India.

He also wanted us to make up for the rampant materialism of the age and the social disorders caused by the caste system. To remedy this latter monstrous aberration he was anxious to accept candidates of all castes into the Congregation to live and serve together animated with Christ-like charity and reminded



us to make reparation for the insults and indignities offered to Our Blessed Lord in the persons of the poor, the lowly and the downtrodden. He treated with the same disinterested kindness rich and poor alike, catholics and non-catholics and everyone who came in contact with him spoke of his kindness and generosity.

Our Founder had a great desire to remedy the economic disorders and according to the lines laid down in the Encyclical, 'Quodragesimo Anno', he wished that his Congregation should make a substantial contribution to the social reconstruction of Ceylon and India.

As a small beginning he put this idea into practice by taking the poor, depressed classes to work in the monastery farms, workshops and gardens and looked after their spiritual and material welfare. Poor children were trained for their future Christian and social life. If he could only have had his way he would have converted the jungles of the Wanni and the vast barren waste lands of India into flourishing farms and smiling gardens to improve the conditions of the poor. We hope he will help his Congregation from heaven to succeed in doing this.

His love of poverty and detachment was evident in his words and actions. He depended utterly on Divine Providence for the maintenance of his congregation and taught us to do the same. He never talked about money when admitting a candidate but wanted only a sincere will to seek God alone. He never wanted to take part in Exhibitions though the



monastery farms had beautiful products and smiling gardens which visitors used to admire. His desire of helping the poor was even written into the Rule Book. "If there is any surplus after meeting the liabilities of the monastery, the third part must be devoted to works of charity." He was often deceived by bogus beggars but even when he came to know of it, it made no difference to his all-embracing charity. To sum up this side of his life, the predominant impression left upon us after several years of contact with him was that the love of God and charity to the neighbour were two shining lights in his heart and conduct.

## *Deep Foundations*

Fr. Thomas gave the first place in his Congregation to devotion to the Blessed Sacrament before which the Rosary was to be recited mediatively during the twenty-four hours of the day and night without interruption, the sisters taking the adoration in turn two by two. His ambition was to see a Sisters' convent or a Brothers' monastery in every diocese of India and Ceylon so that exposition of the Blessed Sacrament with meditated Rosary could take place throughout the whole year without interruption. But, although he wished to promote devotion to the Blessed Sacrament among the laity, it was not his intention that his monks and nuns should have their adoration in parish churches. To foster such devotion among layfolk he wanted to see in every Rosarian Ashram a chapel of their own with a separate wing for lay people to come for adoration. An example



of this sort of chapel has just been completed at the nuns' ashram of Amalivanam, Atchuvvely.

In passing it may be recalled that Fr. Thomas did not wish the Rosarian convents to have the grille or latticed screen as can be seen in some cloistered convents. He was keen on cloistered life for the nuns but the cloister was to be principally in the heart, although he did not object to four stone walls round the convent if funds permitted. Another firm foundation on which our Founder wished to build was the practice of humility. The practice of this virtue was to be the family likeness of the Rosarian Congregation. "My dear children," he used to say to us, "I ardently wish and desire for the sake of this virtue that you should acquire a twofold knowledge—a knowledge of God and a knowledge of yourselves. 'Lord! that I may know Thee; Lord! that I may know myself!' I strongly feel the absolute necessity of this fundamental virtue if we are to bring the light and grace of salvation to the souls of sinners and non-Christians because we are fighting against the reign of Satan the proud." And then he went on to quote the words of Our Lord in a vision to St. Catharine of Siena:—"Know you, my daughter, who you are and who I am. You shall be fortunate if you have this twofold knowledge:—'You are who is not; I am who is'. If you foster this truth in your heart, the enemy shall never be able to deceive you; you shall escape all his snares; you shall never do anything that would be opposed to my commandments and you shall acquire grace, truth and light."



Our Founder taught us to make the act of humility in three parts:—First, acknowledging our nothingness and utter dependence on God for everything, we should adore Him and rejoice in all his perfections and, united with the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the angels and saints, we should offer to Him for all mankind all their acts of adoration and love. Secondly, since we of ourselves are capable of nothing but sin, we should accept as only our just dues and deserts any disappointments failures and disgrace that we should happen to meet with. Thirdly, we should have absolute trust in Divine Providence in that nothing can happen to us by chance. There is no man on this earth who knows us and loves us as God does. Even we ourselves cannot love ourselves as God loves us. Hence we must put our whole trust in God, our merciful Father, as a child trusts its mother.

### *Light and Darkness*

His teaching on light and darkness he explained this way:—“If we observe the world carefully we shall find that it is constituted according to a definite pattern, a point of light surrounded by darkness. The light stands for knowledge and the darkness for ignorance. The light is given to us that we may act as rational beings in all the affairs of our life on earth. The darkness is permitted that we may exercise child-like confidence in God. Christ said:—“I have come into the world as a light, so that all those who believe in me may continue no longer in darkness” (Jo. 12-46).



“If we believe these words, there comes the need to do the will of the heavenly Father. How do you know this will or how can you know it before something happens? Here come the commandments, the counsels, the rules and constitutions of your Congregation, the commands of your Superiors. God may try to purify you as the iron is cleansed in the fire. If you are the children of light, whatever happens to you, you should try to glance towards the light. Once we know that trials and difficulties are the will of God, we should never question ourselves but accept them in a humble spirit.” Whenever a Rosarian went to our Founder with some trouble or difficulty, the first question he put was:- “Child! does God know about your difficulty? What do you think about it? Did you receive it from God or from whom? If you know it is permitted by the all merciful God all you have to do is to stretch forth your arms and welcome it. You should never ask questions. Instead of looking at the drain through which the water passes, you should look at the spring from which the water flows. Fix your eyes not on the trouble itself but on God who never wants to try us above our strength.”

Our Founder had this to say on his doctrine of the two hearts. “My dear children, keep in mind this fundamental truth, that none of us has escaped from the contagious inheritance of the consequences of the original fault. Since we are all children of the first parents, we have all received a heart which is ever inclined to evil. At our baptism we became the children of God by the merits of the passion and



death and resurrection of Christ. Hence we became members of the mystical body of Our Lord of which He is the head. Thus we get the privilege of using, so to say, the heart of Christ as our own. Therefore when we are disturbed by our passions and temptations, we should not be discouraged or linger on them and become entangled in them, but immediately we should offer the Heart of Jesus to the Eternal Father for all our defects and deficiencies and thus share in the holiness of Christ himself. Jesus by his passion and death and resurrection completed the work of our salvation. What we have to do is to receive this salvation from his loving hands and co-operate with it."

### *Ad Jesum per Mariam*

Our Founder's devotion to our Lady was very tender. He was fond of reminding us that we should hold her hand like a child whenever temptation beset us and to use this ejaculation frequently:- "Immaculate Heart of Mary, refuge of sinners, pray for us." He wanted his Rosarian Sisters to celebrate with special devotion all her feasts prescribed in the Church's calendar. And so it has come to pass that her sweet Presence has pervaded Our Rosarian life from the beginning, and we have all experienced her motherly protection. And now it is our fervent and daily prayer that she will ever continue to be with us, leading us ever onward and upward to her Son and through Him to heaven and the Eternal Father.



# *Friends in need*

ONE can never think of the saintly priest, Rev. Fr. Thomas o. m. i. without associating him with the contemplative Congregation he founded, the spiritual power-house of prayer and penance, and in the same strain one cannot consider the Rosarian Congregation of nuns, dissociating him from the pioneer patronage bestowed by the sisters of the Holy Family Congregation towards its firm erection and rapid growth.

After several unsuccessful attempts at founding a congregation for women with the same spirit and structure as that of the Rosarian Congregation for men, founded on the 2nd of February 1928, the divinely-inspired and long-cherished desire of Fr. Thomas was finally fulfilled on the 8th of September 1948 when its founder on the recommendation of the



Bishop of Jaffna, His excellency the Rev. Dr. J. A. Guyomar O. M. I. sought the assistance of the Sisters of the Holy Family, to shape his plans and bring them to fruition. The name of Fr. Thomas is, therefore, so intimately bound up with the name of the Rosarian Congregation of nuns that the history of either one or the other inevitably involves the Sisters of the Holy Family Congregation. To understand how this unique relationship could have been brought about, we must go back almost 40 years to the Holy Family Convent of Ilavalai.

In the year 1932, it was the happy privilege of the Holy Family Sisters and the Novices in the Mother House at Ilavalai to listen to the soul-stirring lectures and spiritual conferences given weekly by Rev. Father Thomas on saturday evenings. Thereafter being appointed the spiritual Director of the nuns by the Bishop at the incessant request of the Mother Superior, he visited them every Wednesday, to guide them in their religious vocation. The impact of this encounter with him was so great that the spirit of his deep spirituality, love for contemplation, and union with God imbibed from him, stood in good stead, especially those like Mother Salome, Sr. Augustine, Sr. Praxede, who were later called upon to associate with him in the training of the Rosarian Nuns.

When the fulness of time drew nigh to carry out God's designs to found the new Rosarian Congregation of women, Fr. Thomas approached the Provincial of the Holy Family Nuns through his Excellency Mgr. Guyomar, Bishop of Jaffna, for personnel to guide the



new aspirants in the new form of Religious Life. In 1946, Sr. Jeanne Marie, chosen by the Superioress General of the Holy Family, the Very Rev. Mother M. Raphael Perry, in consultation with her Councilors, could not be released immediately, due to her illness, although Rev. Mother Leonide, then Mother Sub-Directress in Ceylon, had made all necessary arrangements with Rev. Mother Anne Mary Quin when the latter visited the convents of the Holy Family in 1946.

On the 8th of September 1948, the day on which under the maternal care of our Blessed Mother, a fresh and steady start on the foundation of the Rosarian Nuns was made, Rev. Mother Sebastian, Superioress of Jaffna Holy Family Convent and Rev. Mother Salome, Superioress of Ilavalai Holy Family Convent, went with the still invalid Sister and presented her to Rev. Fr. Thomas and his spiritual daughters.

In the plan of divine providence the weakest instruments seem to have been chosen for the foundation of this Congregation. In December 1950 a nun of the Holy Family, Sr. Augustine was sent to help Sr. Jeanne Marie and also to prepare herself to take charge of the future novices. She remained there only for a few months and was replaced by Sr. Praxede who too did not enjoy the best of health. She was instrumental in forming the first two groups of novices from June 29th 1951. As a result of a serious operation she had to undergo in 1954, Sr. Rose de Lima replaced her for a short time.

The newly-founded Congregation had to depend on some generous souls not only for its spiritual



well-being but also for its physical existence as well. Chief among those who helped them during the first few years of their foundation were two Superiors of the Holy Family Convents—Pamplona—Spain, Mother Mary Emilia and Mother Mary Gabriel. These two provided them with all their requirements for the chapel, such as chalice, monstrance, altar linen, vestments etc. The Mother Superior General of the Holy Family gifted the altar for the chapel, besides giving many other material helps.

In the course of years, as the Congregation began to take root in different parts of the Island and India, Fr. Thomas again relied on the Superior of Bambalapitiya — Holy Family Convent, who was partly responsible for the establishment of the Rosarian Community at Tewatte, Ragama.

On the retirement of Sr. Jeanne Marie after almost 25 years of selfless service, Sr. Albina of the Holy Family, now directs the Rosarian Nuns, with the same devotion and love as that of their founder. With the grace of God, the Congregation has now progressed. They are in the process of preparing for their general chapter which will be held early next year. We hope and pray that they will bring forth the right orientations which the church asks from the contemplative nuns, so that they may be a leaven in the dough where they live and spread the Kingdom of God.

**A Holy Family Sister**



# *A moulder of youth*

**I**T is a rare privilege to come under the direct influence of good and holy men particularly during one's formative years. The effect never wears off because it is the work of God. It was my singular good fortune during my years at St. Patrick's not only to sit at the feet of a man sanctity but also to live and work, with him.

Of course, I did not fully realise it then. As a matter of fact, I did not take kindly to Father Thomas in the very beginning. Compared with the rest of the College Fathers who were mostly white, big-made and jovial, Fr. Thomas who was then the boarding master of Students' Home seemed to me almost a sinister figure with his dark unsmiling face, black beard, emaciated body and eyes



that peered through glasses. He was always pacing up and down the verandahs reading his breviary but keeping a watchful eye on the boarders. There was an air of mystery about him. He never seemed to have fun with his charges in contrast to our boarding master at St. Martin's, a charming and laughing French priest, who used to challenge us even to set fire to his luxuriant beard by throwing lighted matches into it.

When I reached the upper forms I had no option but to leave St. Martin's and to go over to the students' Home. Father Thomas welcomed me with obvious pleasure and gave me a few words of advice. I was surprised to find that he was not so formidable as I had imagined but was a kindly and very understanding person who was genuinely concerned even with my physical welfare. He advised me to drink plenty of coriander water and also to take a more active part in the games. Evidently he knew I had been in the "Ladies' Eleven" at St. Martin's.

It was edifying to watch him at close quarters. He treated all the boarders alike whether they were Catholics or non-catholics. He never had any favourites and seldom spoke more to one boy than to another. We never knew what he ate or whether he ate at all because he always went upstairs for his meals and returned quickly chewing a toothpick with an air of complete satiation but the talk among the boys was that he was a good pretender. If he ate, they argued, he would not be so thin. He was never seen relaxing in a chair. Although he



had a room of his own he slept in an enclosed cubicle in the boarders' dormitory. No boarder was ever known to have seen him entering or leaving the cubicle. Probably he went to bed very late and got out of it very early but the boarders felt that he never slept at all and had erected the cubicle merely to keep them out of mischief.

The talk among the boys about the acts of penance and mortification practised by Fr. Thomas was of course exaggerated but there can be no doubt whatsoever that he was preparing himself for his great work by hours of meditation and many acts of self-denial while at St. Patrick's. He always wore a woollen shirt under his cassock even in the warmest weather, the explanation being he had a weak chest. He never allowed his eyes to stray. He was not known to have close friends and was not on terms of familiarity even with his nearest relatives.

The vast majority of his charges at Students' Home were non-Catholics, mostly Hindus from devout and affluent families. These had a regard for him bordering on veneration. In his asceticism, mysticism, spiritual integrity and rectitude of character they found the qualities attributed to the holy men of their religion. The exemplary life of Fr. Thomas certainly polished and improved the image of the Catholic Church in their minds. Its impact on some of them was so profound that they embraced the Catholic faith in the teeth of understandable opposition. Two became priests, one of whom bearing the name Thomas is happily still with us and very active in the vineyard of the Lord.



On completing my studies at St. Patrick's I was appointed to its teaching staff and was also commissioned to assist Father Thomas at students' Home. This arrangement gave me much satisfaction as it provided me with an opportunity to work in closer association with the man I adored. Our relationship became more personal and he treated me with great kindness, consideration and trust. An example would prove to what extent he was prepared to make sacrifices for even the material interests of others. When he came to know that ethics was one of the subjects I was offering for London examination he began giving me tuition in that subject for one hour every night after the boarders had gone to bed. I wriggled out of the arrangement after some time as I was not as keen as he was to forego sleep.

When the time came for me to leave St. Patrick's and Students' Home for good I knelt before Fr. Thomas for his blessing. He thanked me for my work at Students' Home, wished me well in my new sphere of work and blessed me as he alone could bless. I was speechless with emotion and for a moment wondered whether I was taking the right step in going out into the world. Fr. Thomas seemed to sense my thought and patting me on the shoulder said deliberately "Do not worry. God will bless you".

S. M. J. Louis



# *Guru and Guide*

**I**T was only in 1940 that the writer was able to visit Tholagatty, although the Ashram had been established in 1928. During those twelve years its fame had spread far and wide, and in fact Father Thomas was invited to Rome by the Superior General of the Oblates to attend the General Chapter in Rome held in 1938 and to report on the work of the Ashram.

When I paid my visit in December 1940, the Ashram of Rosarian Monks had grown like the gospel mustard seed. That first impression has stuck in my mind. After a short prayer in the Rosarian Chapel, I and my wife went to pay our homage to the Superior. Father Thomas was happy to see us. In fact I was meeting him after thirteen or fourteen years. He took us to the parlour and ex-



plained to us all about the Contemplative Order. We were then taken round the premises and garden and shown the activities the monks were engaged in.

We saw for ourselves that agriculture was the chief source of income for the Rosarians. There was a small workshop for carpentry. The monks supplied candles and altar breads to a good number of churches in the diocese. By these means, they eked out an existence which was, humanly speaking, in a precarious condition. However to us at our first visit, everything looked pleasant and prosperous.

Father Thomas who had read deeply the writings of the founders of monastic orders in Western Europe would certainly have studied and pondered the Rule of St. Benedict. St. Benedict was able to base his spiritual fabric on a material foundation of great strength and simplicity. Each unit was the Monastery of the Rule. Economically, spiritually, fundamentally it was self-supporting. The Rule or Regulation laid down.

“The Monastery, if possible, should be so constructed that all things needful, such as water, a mill, a garden, provision for domestic crafts, should be within its bounds.”

How did Fr. Thomas make up his mind to be a contemplative and to found a contemplative congregation? Was it a sudden move or did a higher ecclesiastical authority order him to start one? When one reads the life of venerable Father Joseph Vaz it would be seen that from a very early age he had



been marked out for the priesthood. The writer does not know anything about the early life of Fr. Thomas, but during my five years at St. Patrick's College 1923-1927 as I listened to the senior students I came to know that Father Thomas was a man of prayer and penance, and that he used to spend long hours at night in contemplation and prayer kneeling on pebbles or lying on hard planks.

Father Thomas belonged to the Oblate Congregation, an active missionary institute, and in his report to the O. M. I. Superior General he points out the anomaly of an Oblate like himself being the founder of a contemplative order devoted to prayer and penance. By contrast one might go back to Father Joseph Vaz, founder of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri of Goa. An Oratory is a house of prayer but when the divine call came, he left for Sri Lanka as an active missionary. Although he felt the urge to go back to the Oratory yet he decided to stay in Sri Lanka to succour the abandoned Christians. His own words from his letter dated Jaffna, December 14, 1688 bring out the point clearly.

“For this reason and for the reform of my life I wish most earnestly to return to the cloister and live with that little flock under the eyes of Superiors and Brothers..... but when I consider the desolate state of this Christian Community in Ceylon I feel a greater desire and duty not to abandon it as long as I can be of help.”

Father Joseph Vaz did not want to abandon the persecuted Christians of Ceylon and return to



the cloister. Similarly Father Thomas would have been a very successful missionary, college professor or a preacher of retreats or an ecclesiastic holding high administrative posts, but he was convinced that a house of prayer such as he was contemplating would be a leavening factor in the community around the Ashram in deepening the piety of the catholics as well as influencing the conversion of Hindus and Buddhists in Sri Lanka and India.

Father Thomas may not have lived to see this during his life time, but recently in Ceylon and India the Rosarian Congregation is showing fruitful signs.

Let us flash back to the college period when Father Thomas was the warden of the students' home. An accurate character study of the Father has been given by the late Mr. S. M. Joseph alias Seemampillai, in his inimitable style in the "Bottled Sunshine."

"For several years he was warden of Hindu boys who throng to St. Patricks. During all these years one might have expected so religious-minded a person as Father Thomas to have repelled the young Hindus by his austerity and the fervour of his faith but strange to say that never happened. To them he was a Yogi, a saintly person, a Mahatma in the true sense of the word. He conformed to their standards and was as much a Man of God in their eyes as in ours."

When Father Thomas was warden and professor of St. Patricks, if anyone of us was in trouble it



was to him that we went. He was sought out as a confessor. He was guide and Guru not only to students, even priests young or old sought his advice. The great Rector, Rev. Father Charles S. Mathews O. M. I. was known to consult Fr. Thomas on knotty problems.

After he had established the Ashram many flocked to Tholagatty to seek his advice. He had a vast correspondence. Wel-known priests frequently wrote to him and visited him. Many distinguished visitors such as the Superior General of the Oblates and the Archbishop of Tuticorin and many highly placed non-catholics made their way to his Ashram. But economically speaking, the Ashram provided the barest necessities wherewith to keep body and soul together and, at certain periods, it was just impossible to feed the monks and run the Institution on the meagre produce so much so that the Bishop had, from time to time, to come to the rescue.

Towards the last years of Fr. Thomas' Superiorship there appears to have been a crisis financially, and drastic steps were taken to control the finances as well as the management of Tholagatty monastery. But drastic steps often have an unfortunate knack of treading on very tender corns and wounding intimate feelings.

Now began for Fr. Thomas and was to continue till his death a few years later what has happened to more than one Founder of a religious congregation. Younger men would arise and would supplant the Founders in the government and management of



the order. Sometimes high ecclesiastics—holy men and with the best of intentions—would set aside the Founders and appoint others to the seats of authority. St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Joseph Calazans were both ousted from the institutes they had founded.

So the Yogi of Tholagatty said good-bye to his beloved Ashram and spent the very few remaining years of his life at Bishop's House, Jaffna. In the recent fruitful signs of expansion in the Rosarian Congregation, we are perhaps witnessing the results of Fr. Thomas' Gethsemane. May these fruits continue to increase till every diocese in India and Ceylon has a Rosarian monastery or convent. Such was Fr. Thomas's ardent wish. Such is our fervent prayer.

S. Thomanupillai





# *A seeker of souls*

WHO among us who has known Father Thomas can fail to remember him? Which of us does not still feel the impress of his personality on us? Who can forget the whispering tones of his talk which encouraged, stimulated and inspired us in our failing or falling moments? Years may have rolled by, changing modes of life may have over-taken us and the society in which we live, but he taught us eternal truths, he impressed on us the changeless facts of life.

I met this hollow-chested, soft-spoken, deep-eyed man of God nearly half a century ago. I was then too young, too immature, too unexperienced to understand this man of another world, this dedicated son of the Church. He looked at me from beneath his thin-rimmed spectacles with a glow in his eyes that



almost affrighted me. I tried to avoid him ; he would not avoid me. He saw in me something I did not see in myself, nor could I know why he saw what he saw in me. He would not let me go. He wanted me to meet him in his room. I was a little alarmed. I plucked up the courage to go to his room.

He was then in charge of what was known as the Hindu Boarding in St. Patrick's College. Parents of the Hindu Community had great confidence in the discipline and up-bringing of children in the Catholic Schools. It is true they were handicapped by the inadequacy of competent schools of their own denomination to accommodate their children. Nevertheless they had faith in the Catholic priests to feel that they would do nothing to injure the faith of their children. Father Thomas felt that Hindu students should have a separate Boarding House. They were more free in their surroundings, they were given the food Hindu parents would like them to have. These students did not live in isolated camps ; they mixed freely with Christian boys in school and outside, but they were given opportunities to avoid the religious practices of the Christians and such other matters which were necessary to save embarrassment to the Hindu students. I believe the name Hindu Boarding was subsequently altered to Students' Home. Father Thomas was in charge of this home. His room was the centre from which the ideals of honourable behaviour, the principles of plain living and high thinking emanated and caught up the young and plastic minds of more than one generation of Hindu children.



Here was, as I have said, Father Thomas. I went to his room as requested by him. He talked to me about God and Divine Grace. I must confess I did not understand much, but I began to feel I was in the presence of somebody more than an ordinary human being; I began to think that here was a man among men who could understand the foibles and weaknesses of human nature. I began to see that philosophic-looking priests could understand worldly-looking pygmies. A new feeling grew upon me, a new sensation pulsated within me. He had made me put on a thinking cap; he had set my heart aglow.

Despite my delightful first experience, I feared to get close to him. I followed him from afar. But he pursued me closely. I was a little worried whether I was equal to what I feared may be his exacting demands on my freedom of action. In recollection I think I was what Francis Thompson had graphically expressed in memorable words in his *Hound of Heaven*:

“I fled him down the nights and down the days:  
I fled him down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears  
I fled him; and under running laughter.  
But he pursued me unobtrusively—With  
unhurrying chase, and unperturbed pace,  
deliberate speed, majestic instancy”.

This was the Father Thomas I had met. Before much time passed I had the privilege of his friendship and paternal guidance. He became my confessor and spiritual director. He expounded high ideas in simple



language which the minds of humble mortals like ours could understand. He unwrapped virtue from the artificial coils that made its attainment difficult. He made us feel what may sound somewhat paradoxical that it is easier to be good than bad.

He was a teacher in the school-but he was no normal teacher. He specialised in explaining the Gospels—the New Testament for the Cambridge Examinations. His introductory talks on the Bible were as interesting as they were instructive; up-to-date I remember them and I am influenced still by the penetrating insight which he gave us into the general framework of the Bible. It will be surprising, almost incredible, that his teaching of the Bible and the Gospels was set against an oriental background. This was at a time when the era of Nationalism had not dawned in this country. It has been asserted by knowledgeable persons that Mahatma Ghandi was as great an exponent of Christianity as the Christian missionaries because his approach to life and his conduct were largely conditioned by Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Father Thomas taught the Gospels but ever and anon he would expatiate on the Sermon on the Mount. To make us pass the examination was not his aim. To make us understand the spirit of the Gospels, the lessons of the New Testament, and the philosophy contained in these sacred books were his primary objectives. There was hardly a failure among the students in this subject, in fact many students reached the distinction standard, but his basic instructions penetrated our minds and created in us impressions that tended to fashion our future lives.



At this stage I feel I will be failing in my duty if I do not make some observations about his work as a teacher of Tamil. He was a pioneer in the field of teaching Tamil in the higher forms. Here again his object was not the examination but a consuming desire to inculcate in the student an abiding interest in his mother tongue which had been long neglected. This was the time when Denham, the Director of Education (subsequently a Colonial Governor) propagated the cry. 'English, and better English.' Father Thomas made classics like the Sacred Kural, well-known as the Tamil Veda of Tiruvalluvar, and Maha Bharatham look simple and easily understandable. In centuries the Kural has been in a sense 'the ethical Bible of the Tamil people.' Of this book it has been said that "as long as men love virtue for its own sake and esteem goodness as more precious than rubies, it will be treasured as one of the literary and ethical masterpieces of the world." It may not be out of place here to refer to one little couplet which then impressed me much, but which only years of experience have made me realise its true implications.

What is poverty, if the wife has worth ?

What is wealth, if she has no worth ?

The Tamil language and its literature, it is sometimes stated, were allowed to languish by the Christians. How can we forget men like Beschi, Pope, Peter Percival, Dr. Samuel Green, Dr. Winslow, Thamotherampillai, Kingsbury, Father Gnanaprakasaram and many others of that calibre ? The contri-



butions made by Christians and their missionaries to the growth and preservation of the Tamil language and its literature are substantial. Father Thomas did not reach the standard of those whose names I have mentioned. But he was animated by the same motive, the same object and the same desire, namely to keep alive in the minds and hearts of the Tamil students our great linguistic heritage.

The spiritual genius of Father Thomas could not be confined within the narrow limits of a mundane educational institution. He had a great vision to plant on our soil a spiritual institution that would create a spiritual reservoir of grace and goodness that would counter the materialism of the modern world. For this purpose with the assistance and concurrence of that great Frenchman, Bishop Guyomar, he founded the Order of the Rosarians somewhat on the lines of the Trappist Order in Europe. He chose the meek and the humble, the poor and the under-privileged. It was an Order that observed silence and spent its time in prayer, work and meditation. He chose Tholagatty as the seat of this foundation. He had eyed this place for some years because he used to spend part of his vacation time in the Church there.

After he undertook this pleasant but arduous work I met him several times. There was more a visionary than a missionary smile on his face. His customary sense of hospitality still remained in him. We were always welcome to a sip of the wines of various kinds prepared by the monks of this Order. This institution has had its ups and downs.



Some left because the life was hard and difficult, others left because they had not the calling for this type of life. Nothing daunted, Father Thomas pursued his ideal. It is not strange that sometimes his religious superiors did not see eye to eye with him. But I must say that Bishop Guyomar, even after he had relinquished the reins of ecclesiastical government, up to the time of his death, had implicit confidence that this fount of sanctity, this centre of spiritual devotion would radiate the rays of spiritual sunshine through dark clouds of temporary misfortune. Father Thomas was no financier; and in any human institution finances do play a part. He had trust in God the Giver and Preserver of all things. He knew that good takes time to get its roots. He believed in prayer as the source, the power that gives success. He believed in the lesson of the Cross—the Triumph of Failure.

Through the ebb and tide of events, through war and peace, through radical political, social and economic changes, this spiritual centre has a survival. It has weathered the storms and blights of human vicissitudes. It has now as its head a priest who was trained in this institution by its founder. It shows a strength and a vitality that make it a Divine Institution.

Father Thomas has gone to his Master. Whether he felt he had achieved his aim one cannot know. That would not have mattered to him. He moved as the Spirit within him urged him to move. He tried to fill what St. Paul has said, "that which is



wanting in the sufferings of Christ." The Divine and the human had to mingle. The Divine would lose its efficacy if those for whom the Divine descended to suffer did not share in the sufferings of the Divine.

Father Thomas excelled as a teacher; he was a leader who formed and trained men to meet the trials of life; he was a saintly priest who taught more by example than by precept; but his main contribution is the foundation of the Rosarian Order which will carry the torch of Christ and the blessing of his Immaculate Mother to all, He was a rare man who does not frequently appear in a generation. It was of men like him Mathew Arnold said:

Ye, like angels, appear,  
Radiant with ardour divine.  
Beacons of hope, ye appear!

.....

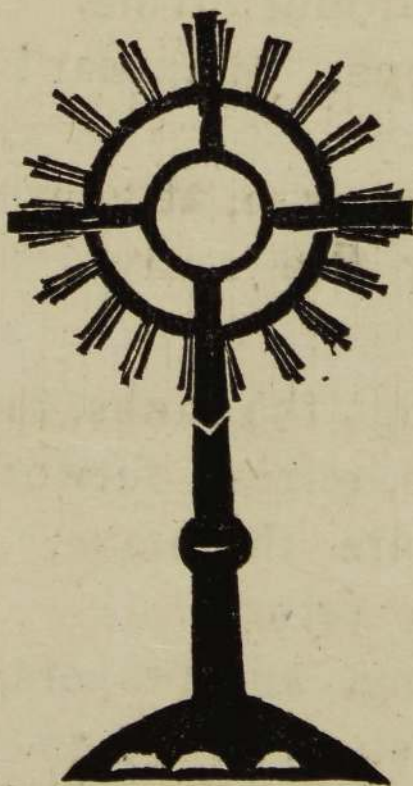
Ye alight in our van, at your voice  
Panic, despair flee away.

Ye move through the ranks. recall  
The strugglers, refresh outworn,  
Praise, re-inspire the brave,  
Order, courage return.  
Eyes rekindling, and prayers,  
Follow your steps as ye go.  
You fill up the gaps in our files,  
Strengthen the wavering line.  
Stablish, continue our March  
On, to the bound of the waste,  
On, to the City of God.



In our little Island he has founded a centre of spiritual devotion, a fountain of Divine Inspiration that will make its influence felt throughout the Corridors of Time.

**C. X. Martyn**  
**M. P. for Jaffna**





# *Man of vision*

**T**HE Holy Bible, in a sense, may be said to be the most dangerous of all books. Anyone coming under the influence of the holy utterances found therein, must give up everything he had hitherto cherished and start life anew along the narrow path that leads to paradise.

So did Saul of Tarsus when he heard the words from on high, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" So did Thomas when he pondered on the words "If thou lovest father or mother better than me, thou art not worthy of me".

Young Thomas, or Bastiampillai Anthonipillai, was the hope of the family. One fine evening, he went home from school and told his mother—he was his mother's darling—that he was going to join the



Seminary the next day. Nothing could influence his decision otherwise.....

The next morning he packed up his things and in spite of the tears of his mother, whom he loved most on earth and the protestations of his dear father, he went to the Seminary.

The life in the Seminary is like the hidden life of our Lord. Like his Lord and Master young Thomas was subject to the stern life and later to the sterner studies of philosophy and theology.

He was ordained at the age of 26. When the time approached for his ordination, he was in very delicate health caused by the rigours of priestly studies and the asceticism he had imposed on himself so early. Four ordinands were to be raised to the priesthood by Dr. Joulain, then Bishop of Jaffna. Of the four, Brother Thomas was like a "reed shaken with the wind". The prelate could not make up his mind to ordain Bro. Thomas, who was so delicate in health, that it was thought he would not survive even for a couple of years. But the earnestness with which Bro. Thomas pleaded with the Bishop, assisted with God's grace, which makes the weak achieve mighty things, made the Bishop consent to ordain him to the priesthood.

Of the four priests ordained at that time, the work of Fr. Thomas, the weaking, will by the grace of God remain a mighty and lasting monument of the Church in Jaffna and the East.



After the ordination, the first assignment given to the young priest was to be in charge of the non-catholic hostellers of St. Patrick's College. The hostellers ranged from the 1st year special to the London Matriculation classes. Any other priest would have looked upon the assignment as beyond his reach. But from his young days Fr. Thomas submitted himself wholeheartedly to the will of God as expressed by his superiors. He took over the assignment as a work of love and self-sacrifice. In addition to this he was scripture-master of the Cambridge Junior and Senior forms, and Maths, teacher of the middle forms, Father Confessor of the Seminarians and novice master to young Brothers, who were assistant wardens under him. Such a frail reed as he seemed to be physically, he carried out successfully the various duties he was asked to perform. As a hobby he put his hand to evangelisation work, and those who received religious instruction from him later became staunch Catholic laymen and devoted priests. His period as a warden of the hostel could truly be said to be a golden age of evangelical work at College.

Fr. Thomas was President of the Sacred Heart Confraternity at College, which met on the first Saturday evening of every month. This was a free forum for the upper form students, who trained themselves to be speakers on religious topics by reading papers, delivering lecturettes, which were moderated by Fr. Thomas, in his inimitable way of correcting errors, which the speakers thought were compliments to their efforts.



Every Friday afternoon between 12-30 and 1 p. m.—an unholy hour to others—was made holy by him, who led a band of young men in reciting the seven penitential psalms before the Blessed Sacrament in the Cathedral. At the start the penitential psalmists felt the exercise as a holy cross. The ringing voice and the intonation of the psalms as Fr. Thomas led each verse, made the cross a vivid, pleasant exercise rather than a cross. Everyone of those who participated in the exercise felt it a joyful assignment like the Cyrenian, who was forced by the Roman soldiers to help our Lord in carrying His cross, but whose unwilling task became a joy.

Father Thomas's method of driving the truth of Christianity into the minds of non-Catholics was a novel one. Normally he retired to bed about 10 p.m. after supervising the studies of the higher form students. Before he laid his head on the pillow, he trimmed his oil lamp a little brighter and wrote down four pages in an exercise book in the form of a letter to his children. In language and style these letters in a way resembled the letters of Nehru from prison to his daughter. Nehru's letters contained worldly wisdom in sweet tablets. Father Thomas's letters contained Pauline preachings in a form assimilable to young minds. They were like little feeds given by a mother bird to its young ones. No wonder then that there were no backsliders among his converts. As a warden of the hostel he was both a father and a mother to each one of the hostellers. Once one of the hostellers



was suffering from malarial fever which made him shiver and undergo much pain. Fr. Thomas knelt by the patient's side, stroked his forehead and spoke so soothingly to him that in the morning the boy got well and remarked to one of his friends: "Fr. Thomas is not a man. He is a muniver (ascetic). At his touch the fever and ague left me as by a miracle" He washed the sores of those suffering from itches. He saw that the weak children got special food. At the beginning of the rainy season, he saw that every hosteller had a cup of coriander-water as a night cap.

Beneath these multifarious activities ran a very strong under-current of asceticism which was to blaze forth at Tholagatty later. Even in the hottest weather, he never failed to wear a woollen shirt which was almost a hair shirt under his cassock. He would pocket any dainty served at the Fathers' table and pass it on to weak children. As far as he was concerned, the period of a decade and a half as a hostel warden was a period of probation for his later ascetic life.

Father Thomas was not only an ascetic but also a man of vision. He had dreamed for a pretty long time of the importance of the monastic life as a panacea for counteracting the spiritual ills that were setting foot in the country. He had paid serious thought to the scriptural text: "This kind can go out by nothing but by prayer and fasting." (St. Mark IX, 28). He had expressed prophetically to his closest friends: "There is a flood coming and nobody will be able to stop it." Few understood this



prophetic saying. He had full belief in monastic life for spiritual perfection. He had occasional discussions about the dire need of contemplative life with Father Guyomar who was professor in the College. Fr. Guyomar was elated with the idea and said he would be the first to become a member of such a monastery if ever it was started. Shortly after the publication of the Encyclical by Pope Pius XI in 1926 Mgr. Guyomar, then Bishop of Jaffna, sent for Fr. Thomas O. M. I. and told him to make an attempt to carry out the wishes of the sovereign Pontiff in regard to life in mission lands.

Before long Fr. Thomas got together some young men of a confraternity under the management of Brother Groussault, an Oblate Lay-brother, who had been for many years working with considerable success for the reformation of the life of Catholic young men of the working class.

The first batch of aspirants began earnestly to prepare for the work for which they as well as Fr. Thomas had only a vague idea.

In the meantime, the Bishop of Jaffna went to Rome in 1927 for his visit. On his return the same year, he told Fr. Thomas to go with his aspirants to an old mission house at Tholagatty, Vasavilan, a hamlet about 10 miles from Jaffna Town.

On the 2nd of February, 1928, the Bishop of Jaffna celebrated Mass at Tholagatty and installed six young men there, as postulants under the care of Fr. Thomas. At a later date said Fr. Thomas "It is impossible to describe how the postulants and I



struggled through the first year at Tholagatty and how the Rosarian Congregation gradually took a definite shape."

Critics were not wanting even among high-ranking religious men of the time. They said the monastery of Fr. Thomas was a mad venture.....the life was too hard in the climatic conditions of Ceylon.....the fast and discipline were too much for the monks .....the postulants would not persevere in their vocation for long.....

None in the Congregation felt the impact of the rigours of monastic life so much as the Founder himself. Frail as he was by nature, the life he practised as the responsible leader of the monks was so heavy on his body that he was reduced to a skeleton covered with the *religious habit*. Yet the fire of his zeal for the glory of God to be spread by the Rosarians through our Lady of the holy Rosary, burned in his eyes like the head-lights of a car. In spite of his burning zeal he fell so ill that his life was despaired of. An old and affectionate pupil of his, on a visit to his sick bed, remarked with tears in his eyes, "Father, a noble work you have started is in danger of sudden collapse." The patient with all his feeble energy propped himself up on his bed with a super-animated strength and said "If what I have begun is not the work of God, let it go."

God's work went on uninterrupted through the weak instrument as it were of what to human eyes was a dying Fr. Thomas, slowly but surely the founder of the Rosarian Congregation regained his health,



and the work was carried on with re-doubled energy and untiring zeal. Vocations from Ceylon were a trickle and those from the Tamil Nad were a shower, so that it may be said that it was an antidote to set back the 'flood' of iniquities of which he (Fr. Thomas) had prophesied.

The arid surroundings of the mission-house at Tholagatty became a fruitful oasis of vine and various kinds of grain crops. A drive or a ride along the scorching road that led to the monastery was amply rewarded by a chat with Fr. Thomas under the cool shade of the vineyard with bunches of grapes hanging temptingly all around. The visitor would be regaled with a glass of one of the many cordials brewed by the monks, and one felt that drink to be an elixir. All the time Fr. Thomas would be unfolding before the visitor his blue print of his future plans for the monastery.

Maintaining the inmates (the monks and the several other labourers) of the monastery was a financial nightmare. Here the prayers of the monks performed the miracles. When Fr. Thomas found that he had no money, orders and cheques came from grateful visitors mainly from the south. People from Jaffna would often take him a bag of rice, which would last for more than a month. His was a case of faith in the words of the Gospel: "Do not be solicitous about the morrow. Behold the birds of the air, they do not sow, nor do they reap, but their Father in heaven feeds them." Neither Fr. Thomas nor the monks thought of their personal comfort.

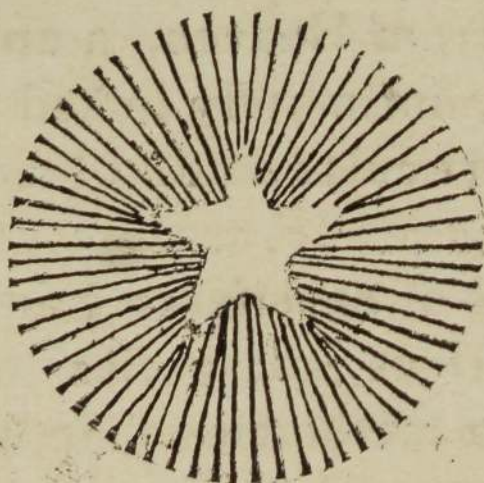


Throughout the day and the night the monks chanted the Rosary before the Blessed Sacrament. One could visualize the flood of grace falling on the work of the monks like 'Manna' of the Old Testament. This vivified their efforts to branch out in various directions.

The first branch was a nunnery begun by the Founder within a mile of the monastery in close proximity to the Church of our Lady of Mount Carmel.

This branch as well as the parent monastery have multiplied and houses are now to be found in other parts of Ceylon and also in our big neighbour—India.

**Frank Thuraisingham**





# *The retreat-preacher*

**P**REACHING retreats to Priests, Religious or Laity, either to groups or individuals, was a work very dear to the heart of Father B. A. Thomas O. M. I. the Founder of the Rosarian Congregation, because it was his strong conviction that a genuine decision on the part of a soul to make a good retreat and renew one's life, was a singular grace from Heaven, a unique call from its Heavenly Father, intimately linked with the eternal destiny of that particular soul.

Through years of experience gained in this mode of apostolate to various categories of people, Father Thomas evolved a method which in later life he named "Rosarian". Further he expressed his fervent wish that "every Rosarian Ashram shall have a House of Retreat and that the Prior shall take care that the



Retreat be conducted according to the 'Rosarian Method'.

To understand what this Rosarian Method is and what it is meant to achieve, certain preliminary considerations have to be borne in mind at the very start.

## *Prelude*

All men admit that life is a warfare, varied and much involved at times perhaps, but our life-span is too brief for any prolonged negotiation, considering the tremendous issues at stake. Before a proper evaluation is made of the pros and cons to decide upon the steps to be taken, in most cases death comes most unexpectedly and there is an end of it all. Hence time is a capital factor, calling for a quick action, the best and surest to vanquish the enemy, with all the energy that one can possibly muster, lest one succumbs, taken by surprise. There is need of a STRATEGY.

Now take the case of the so-called "modern-man." In general he has a sort of contempt if not a deep-rooted aversion for all metaphysical thought. He is fully convinced—rightly or wrongly, he does not care to look into—that all process of thinking finally leads to a veritable labyrinth, where only confusion and disillusionment prevail. He believes only in the individual, personal, concrete experience of daily life—only the theory of Existentialism is valid, no other criterion available for life.

In case the individual in question is a Catholic, he has his powers of reasoning supposed to be en-



lightened by Faith, yet very often the mere thought of a thorough analysis of the deposit of the Faith he holds, is just frightening; a bogey man dogging his entire earthly career with an inexorable question mark, ever present, never answered. There is no burning intellectual conviction to back him up to face a given critical situation fairly and squarely; there is just some sort of timid persuasion to help him "bury his head in ostrich-like fashion" to escape the issue.

Hence, in this almost universal predicament where the average man finds himself today, there is a crying need to discover and formulate a STRATEGY, based on common sense, easily grasped and applicable to all and every circumstance in life, whereby the human intellect concentrating upon just one or two fundamental truths of reason and Faith, allows the rational will in him to act vigorously on immediate confrontation with the situation, with all the energy it can muster at the moment and cling to it steadfastly, come what may. It is a matter of common experience that while the powers of the will are within our control always those of the intellect are not.

Further, to gain a deeper grasp of the so-called STRATEGY of spiritual warfare, one has to be very well acquainted with some of the guiding principles, psychological, moral, intellectual and supernatural, that govern this mode of approach in daily practice.

1. The most important psychological principle involved is the mutual and reciprocal inter-dependence of the human intellect and human will in their actions and reactions within the individual. Though the



traditional theory of the two faculties of the human soul, viz. the intellect and will holds as good as ever, their mutual relations are too mysterious and intricate to be classified into two water-tight compartments exclusively. As a consequence, in the daily routine of life on the one hand the love of what is really and objectively good, helps the intellect in the pursuit of truths in general, and in particular, enables it to attain them more easily and securely, while on the other, a depraved will turns out a great and insurmountable handicap to the intellect in the pursuit of true knowledge and even leading it astray with lamentable results. It is not uncommon that we come across an ordinary uneducated peasant, arriving at a very sound judgement with regard to solving a problem of practical conduct while his neighbour, perhaps a highly educated savant faced with exactly the same situation, commits a terrible blunder which he realizes only when too late. What is obvious to one is hidden to the other.

2. In human conduct, our intellectual ideas govern our practical judgements. From our judgements proceed our acts. Repeated acts form habits and the character of the person is determined by the good or bad habits he has acquired. Man is defined as a "Rational Animal" and hence every deliberate act of his has to be governed by the principle of right reason. Else every act to the contrary vitiates his true nature with dire consequences.

3. Further, it is common knowledge that the object of the intellect is truth, that of the will is goodness. While the former shows the way, the latter follows it.



In God, truth and goodness are identified in one ultimate Supreme Being who is infinite Truth and Infinite Goodness. Hence the rectifying of the human will as ordered by individual conscience, within ourselves, which is but the voice of God within ourselves, is of capital importance in the pursuit of true knowledge of oneself and one's own destiny in full perspective.

4. For a Christian, formal and deliberate conformity to the will of Christ, is the surest and most perfect way to the attainment of the full conformity to the Holy will of God, because in Christ, His human intellect is perfectly united with the Divine Intellect and his human will is perfectly united with the Divine will and that with the fervour and ardour of not a human person but of the very Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, the Divine Son. Hence the attainment of the perfect stature of the adopted sonship which is the destiny of every human soul created and redeemed, has to be achieved "through Christ, with Christ and in Christ" and Him alone.

Now, these few principles more than others should be brought home to the Retreatant, depending on the power of each one's capacity of grasping them, so that one is fully convinced of the universality of their application without any shade of doubt, to arouse in him a strong confidence in the mode of STRATEGY he is going to adopt in life as being based on unassailable truth, both natural and supernatural. God-become-Man, who is Truth Itself gives him the assurance of sure victory:—"I have



conquered the world", with the simple STRATEGY, the CROSS.

In the so-called Rosarian Method of retreat, three topics are given greater emphasis more than others. These are developed more at length to enable the Retreatant to draw the necessary conclusions from them with the view of ordering his daily life and study for himself their true validity when faced with a problem, arising from within or without.

### *God is All*

1. To serve as a starting point, the subject of one's own existence, which is a luminously self-evident fact, is taken for consideration. It is developed in all its aspects and life-implications. As this is the most fundamental certitude of common sense admitted by everyone even the man in the street, it is pointed out how it is impossible to take even one step in the right direction, let alone live a thoroughly rational life all through, unless one settles the question definitely once and for all, HOW DO I EXIST? Do I exist of myself or do I owe my existence to someone else who is Self-Sufficient? In this context one is asked to put aside for the time being the so-called mental gymnastics of the pseudo-philosophers and pseudo-scientists who can afford the opportunity and leisure to wrangle over such subjects such as life and origins of life for just the pleasure of wrangling itself with no reference to the day-to-day problems of life itself.

Once it is made clear to the mind that one is not a self-existent being but entirely dependent on



so many factors for being and existence then comes the next question; How am I to conduct myself in this state of utter dependence? I see myself placed in a world that is most mysterious in every detail. In the last analysis there can be only two essentially different attitudes for one to take. One flowing as a natural sequence from the conviction of the one who has realised and truly acknowledged that utter dependence upon the Self-Existent Being and the other who hasn't. For the latter, on one hand the world is anything but what is acceptable to reason, viewed in its political, economical, social and even religious setting. The world may be a tragedy, a comedy, a veritable nightmare, anything but rational. For the former on the other hand, it is all that and perhaps even more, yet one thing is certain for him, that it is the work of Infinite Wisdom, Who is Infinite Love itself. While the latter takes the attitude of a critic, making himself the centre, his reason as the measure and standard to evaluate things, persons and events, the former takes the attitude of a humble disciple, seeking hidden wisdom in the work of Infinite Wisdom. These two diametrically opposed attitudes taken by them, while leading one into greater and greater chaos, leads the other to unravel the mysteries which at first looked meaningless. It is then one begins to understand how the world is a marvellous piece of creation of the Divine Architect and how it is just a place of probation for man, pointing towards an abiding place of peace and tranquillity; how the entire set-up is so fitted to form and fashion within the heart of man, a child-like attitude of confidence towards its Heavenly



Father's wisdom, power and love. In no instance of our life, however dark, should this truth be lost sight of. No evil within us or without, should make us lose that unbounded confidence. Without His will or permission, nothing takes place. Even from evil He knows how to draw good. The words of Our Blessed Saviour; "Unless you become like unto little children....." just corroborate the truth of the subject under consideration. Thus the marvels of God's creation and the Truths of Divine Revelation give the soul a foretaste of the sweetness of the Eternal Bliss in the bosom of the Father together with the Son and through the Holy Spirit.

To enable one to realize this utter dependence of ours on the Self-Existent Being, God, at every moment of our lives, the following consideration known as the ACT OF HUMILITY among the Rosarians, is to be brought before our minds very frequently.

**Who is God?** :- God is the Supreme Being, who alone exists of Himself Who is infinite in all perfections; and is the ultimate source of all that is good and desirable. He knows me, loves me and seeks my well-being infinitely more than I do myself.

**Who am I?** :- I am NOTHING, capable of nothing of myself, but sin and folly I deserve nothing of myself, but disgrace, disappointment, instant death and eternal damnation.

**What is the ground of my hope and confidence?**  
This infinite goodness and mercy of God is the sole



ground of my hope and confidence to survive both in the natural and supernatural life offered me.

N. B. At times the realisation of this dependence may lead to a point of despair. Pluck up all the possible courage at one's disposal and prostrate oneself before God's supreme mercy and cry: "Lord, do not deal with me according to Justice or my sins; lend your ear to the humble pleading on my behalf, of the compassionate Heart of Thy Son, have pity on me. If it were a thousand times worse I have no right to ask WHY? All my hope is in Thy pure mercy."

### *Light and darkness*

2. This leads to the second subject of the Rosarian retreat, and it is popularly termed as the Doctrine of Light and Darkness. The idea is borrowed by Father Thomas from a Theological Treatise of Father Garrigou-Lagrange O. P.....

If one reflects with depth on the marvels of the entire creation, in whatever order they may be, whether material, or spiritual or natural or supernatural, one cannot fail to notice a definite pattern in each and everyone of them without exception. There is first the darkness and then comes the light to dispel it. At the very beginning of the creation of the material universe it was that, and that aspect continues all through. Those who have eyes to see the light can certainly see it and it will become brighter and brighter gradually. But beware. What is enchanting and invigorating for the healthy eye, may be blinding



and painful for the sore ones. There is always a point of light—the Creator's side and this is surrounded by a coat of darkness—the creatures' side. The light is there for man to act like a rational being and the darkness is just permitted so that he may be trained in a definite and particular fashion viz. a child. It is worthy of note that the material light and darkness that man experiences here on earth, may be termed "static" whereas in life it is "dynamic"; that faced with either of them in life, man is drawn into them with an irresistible force, the light turning brighter and brighter while the darkness growing thicker and thicker. In the end while the light may reach its full effulgence of brightness with its accompanying qualities of warmth, growth and subsequent development unto a rich fecundity, the darkness leads to a chain of doubts, and then onto total darkness and utter chaos, final disillusionment and final extinction of light. To illustrate the point in question, of how the acceptance of the light and the faithful pursuance of the same with diligence and patient determination leads finally to a new world of reality, hidden from the eyes of men, one may study the wonderful discovery of the famous French Archeologist, Champollion. The hieroglyphics and cuneiform writings of the Egyptian Pyramids conveyed no meaning for centuries to the thousands of spectators who had seen them not understanding what they stood for. But with the discovery of the clue to these writings, as a result of patient study and persevering diligence, what a wealth of historical data has been unearthed to posterity for the future development and progress which otherwise would have remained for ever a closed book.



Hence it is of capital importance that from the early use of our rational powers, we accustom ourselves to turn towards the light, however dim it may appear at the very beginning, and cling to it steadfastly, though it may be surrounded by a thousand enigmas which we may not be able to solve. In every happening there is the Hand of the Omniscient, Omnipotent and All-loving Father and there is a purpose of His, worthy of Him and His Infinite Perfections, in every detail of it. If one had not been trained to do so in one's early formative years, it may be more difficult in later life perhaps, but we are never too late; we can always begin, and let us begin now. Better late than never.

Further there are in every man, definitely implanted by God himself as he is His own creation, discernible in various degrees perhaps but found in all without exception, two innate cravings—for greatness and for self-importance. They need not frighten us nor should we try to distort them as they are meant by their Creator for something good.

Real greatness can be had only when it is according to truth, and the truth is that every soul, according to the eternal designs of its Maker, should share the sonship of the Heavenly Father with due rights to the realms of His Divine possessions. In truth one should assert that one is born for great things, heir to heaven, co-heir with Christ, His Divine Son, and that for all eternity. Compared to it all other so-called greatness is just paltry, not worth its name, not deserving even a thought for its pursuit.



The true importance of each and every soul lies in the fact that its vocation is **UNIQUE**, and there is no other similar to it in the entire creation, actual or possible, shared by no one, to be fulfilled by no other. God like an Omnipotent and All-Wise Gardener has deigned to cultivate in His garden, an infinite variety of flowers, each with distinct and unique shape, colour, size, scent, each to unfold a charm that no other can or is expected to unfold "star differs from star"... "many mansions in my Father's abode." Could a more important job be assigned to me or a more-important role chosen for me, is there anything on earth, that can stand comparison with it?

..... These are two clues in life, that should be kept in mind in pursuit of the two potent cravings within us, not to be destroyed nor distorted but given the proper orientation unto perfection according to His design in this world of Light and Darkness, for each and everyone of us here on earth.

### *The two hearts*

3. The third subject to be dealt with according to the so-called Rosarian Method of Retreat is named as the Doctrine of the **TWO HEARTS**—the heart of Christ and the heart of the sinful man. The expression "The Heart of Christ" is used symbolically and it denotes that whole and total reality, the Son of God-become-man, stands for both in relation to His Father from whom He is eternally begotten and to sinful mankind which He has come to redeem. In Christ his human intellect understands the utter dependence of his created human nature



upon the Divine and his human will recognizes it lovingly and whole-heartedly and that not with the ardour and fervour of a human person but those of Divine Person, the Second person of the Most Blessed Trinity. In that fervent recognition Christ offers his Father all the adoration, praise and thanksgiving that is His due, not only from the human race but from the entire creation itself, He being the Divine word through whom it was made and is being sustained every moment for the same end. He is not satisfied that He alone fulfills this supreme duty but extends a hearty invitation to every being endowed with intelligence and free will to join him in that act of worship to the Triune Godhead. Now that the human race is no more in that pristine state of innocence and grace, the act of grace assumes a special quality of being expiatory for what was denied to God by his creatures.

This invitation is extended to every man, even the greatest of sinners. Christ has called himself the Light, the Way and the Life and has clearly pointed out that there is no other. It is for man to accept that invitation with the total surrender of his own intellect and will to Him and live thereby or refuse to do so and perish for ever. It is a well-known fact of experience that our intellect is not always within our control and its vagaries can reach unlimited lengths but the will is always within our power however weak we might have rendered it through our own failure to set it right. Hence there is no circumstance under the sun in our life when we cannot turn towards Christ and unite our will with his, our heart with his.



There may be occasions when we cannot even experience the joys and peace of that act of union but the mere fact of our firm wish to do so has set things according to right order and the fruits thereof will be realised in due course. In fact every event in our life, nay including every temptation we are subjected to, bears this aspect of the invitation. Happy is the soul that is always vigilant and answers the call promptly and generously, "Jesus I love what you love; I hate what you hate." Now, to make up for the feebleness of the act of the beginner, the Founder used to add that one should repeat; "Jesus, I wish to repeat the same at every breath I take, every-time my heart beats, a countless million times, to-day, everyday of my life, till my last breath, for me, for each and every soul on earth....." This truth is based on the principle that the fullness of an act is made up by a series of repetitions of the same act and it is not so difficult to recognise who we are, how feeble we are and what we are capable of, from the sad experience of our past, with such lofty aspirations yet with such pathetic realizations. Thus the need of the renewals.

To make the Doctrine of the Two Hearts truly meaningful, the Founder used to insist on the reading of the Word of God, specially the Holy Gospels, in the spirit of Faith and Love, as they should be read. He used to tell the Retreatant how the Divine Architect, to realise his eternal design on us, sends His letter daily to us for us to read and understand His delicate and ornate workmanship. The Holy Gospels are just that. Hence the importance of



looking up to those inspired writings in that light of Faith, Faith of the entire Church following the outlines of His masterprice, Christ, from line to line, from page to page. The Retreatant is advised to read slowly and meditatively and to stop reading when he is confronted with Christ, like Disciples at Emmaus, at the Breaking of the Bread.....here is to be a banquet to be participated in, for the formal transformation unto the Christ-like image. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Heavenly Father is pleased only with His Son. Christ, and the Christlike; no other!

## *Conclusion*

As a last note, it should be added that the Founder wanted that the Retreat should take the form of a rehearsal of the Particular Judgement and hence a discreet preparation for a general confession, and a firm resolve for a thorough renewal of life according to the truths enunciated and explained during the retreat.

From the lips of the Founder a word about our Blessed Mother Mary, was always there as a fitting conclusion to his discourses and exhortations, at the beginning, during and at the close of the retreat. "Child, when you have anything that upsets you, worries you, dogging you at every step, perhaps day and night, don't mind the immediate reactions and feelings you experience, but just turn to your dear Mother, and try to whisper to Her: "Immaculate Heart of Mary, refuge of sinners, have mercy on me"—therein lies the secret of the entire Marian Theology, Mary by your side, when you are by Hers.



# *His Calvary*

**H**UMANLY speaking it was but right that even the saintly Father Thomas had to succumb to the obvious consequence of a life spent in rigorous fast and austerity. His health began steadily to deteriorate from the time of his Golden Jubilee Celebrations in January 1962, when he was 76 years of age. His condition caused much anxiety and he was removed to the Jaffna Hospital on the 1st of February 1962—from which time I was given the responsibility of looking after him by His Lordship, the late Bishop of Jaffna. He was taken to the Bishop's House on the 6th of February. Soon afterwards he took a bad turn for the worse and was given the last sacraments. He began to rally round from the next day and his health seemed to improve as he continued to stay at the Bishop's House



where the Rosarian Brothers were attending on him by turn. His stay lasted nearly two years but without any substantial change in his already failing faculties and memory.

If looked as if God had really abandoned his faithful servant or forgotten his existence as these two years appeared to be wasted years. Yet from what little I was able to observe, these were most important and fruitful years. It was truly God's own way of identifying the life of Father Thomas with that of His crucified Son, especially the last hours of Christ on the cross—a complete abandonment. Many of us expected that by some extraordinary and special sign, God would restore full health to the Father to enable him to continue his great apostolate of the Rosarian Vocation.

There were a few instances where this abandonment was clearly demonstrated both in his body and soul. One day he proved most difficult to manage. However much we tried, we were not successful in quietening him. Even strong drugs appeared ineffective. The late Bishop Emilianuspillai who was watching the struggle with Father practically the whole day and night, took me aside and related to me a similar incident that he had seen a few years before. It was while he was on his first visit to Canada in 1954. He happened to be near the place where the great and saintly Apostle of the Sacred Heart, Fr. Mateo Crawley was spending his last days. The Bishop had met him in his triumphant days, had even made a retreat under him.



But when he went to meet him, the priests there tried to persuade him not to visit the dying man as he would be in for a great disappointment. However he succeeded in going to him. He found a different father Mateo—like Fr. Thomas—most uncontrollable and difficult to manage. The Bishop said to me “You see, Father, God wants to have His way to the very last with those whom He loves”. This, he said, was something like a final purification before his return to the Lord—He also mentioned that many of us expected something extraordinary to happen to Father Thomas before or at his death. “But wait and see; there will be nothing like that; even his death to us will appear a very ordinary matter-of-fact scene.” He said Father Thomas would never have wanted anything out of the ordinary. When the end came, it was just as the Bishop had said. His last days and his death were exactly what he had tried all his life to live and preach to us—a life of utter humility, complete abandonment and true victimhood.

As the new year, 1964, began Father's condition steadily declined. On the 19th of January, his Lordship anointed him. On the 24th evening he appeared extremely weak and feeble. Dr. Lionel Joseph called on him and revived him a little with some powerful drugs. The two of his spiritual sons attending on him were ready with note books, and pens poised to write down what their beloved Founder may try to say as his parting words. But there were none. It was very unlike him to say anything extraordinary, as he had left everything

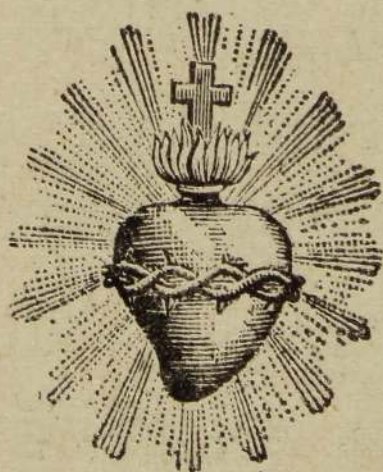


entirely in the loving hands of God. By the evening of the 25th he began steadily to decline into a Coma. There was no change till the end.

He breathed his last very gently, his breath hardly perceptible, at 1 a.m. on 26th January 1964.

It was very providential that I was so closely associated with him during his last days. It was a special experience which helped immensely during the six years I was called upon to guide the Rosarians from the year 1966 to 1972.

**Fr. Em. Selvarajah**





PRAYER OFFERED THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF  
REVEREND FATHER THOMAS O. M. I.

O Almighty and Eternal Father! your humble servant, Father Thomas, whilst he lived on earth, was truly a beautiful temple of the Most Holy Trinity and was entirely permeated by the Holy Spirit. His whole life was not only a perfect act of deep humility but also a powerful inspiration to all around him to practise this sublime virtue. It pleased Thee to inspire him to found the Congregation of the Rosarians with the Holy Eucharist as source and fountain-head. He dedicated his entire life unreservedly to the Mother of God.

We implore Thee most humbly, O loving Father, to grant this favour.....through Thy humble servant's intercession, so that he may be deemed worthy to be among the Saints of thy Church.

1, Our Father... 1, Hail Mary... I, Glory be to the Father...

Mother of the Most Holy Rosary, deign to honour thy servant on earth, Amen.

*Imprimatur* :

+ B. DEOGUPILLAI

*Bishop of Jaffna*

17-11-73

In obedience to the decrees of Pope Urban VIII, we hereby declare that all statements made in this work are to be interpreted in a Catholic sense, and that, if we anywhere make use of such words as "Saint" or "Miraculous", it is with no intention of anticipating the judgement of the Catholic Church and the Apostolic See, to which in all things it is our duty and our happiness to be submissive.



.....  
PRINTED AT  
ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PRESS,  
JAFFNA.  
.....







**Who is like unto God. *Ex. 15.11***

**Seek his face untiringly. *1 Chron 16;11***

**If Yahweh does not build the house, in vain the  
masons toil. *Ps. 127;1***

**Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ rules.**

**Here we are, fools for the sake of Christ.  
*1 Cor. 4;10***

**You have died, and now the life you have is  
hidden with Christ in God. *Col. 3;2***

**To Jesus through Mary.**