



Don Bosco Provincial House

Dungalpitiya,
Thalahena, 11504, Negombo,
SRI LANKA



Bro. Celestine Manuel

Salesian Brother
First Sri Lankan Salesian
First Salesian to die in Sri Lanka

Bro. CELESTINE Manuel, the first Sri Lankan Salesian, having lived his religious life for **58 years**, with a deep sense of gratitude to God, has gone home to receive his heavenly reward. Breaking the boundaries of life expectancy as postulated by the word of God, he lived to the mature age of 88. On August 04, 2005, this life bloomed to the full, spreading the sweet aroma of pleasant memories flooding us with admiration and challenging us to imitation.



A sparkling life story.

Bro. Celestine lived his life very fruitfully. He has gone through rich experiences and contributed much to the growth of the Congregation both in India and Sri Lanka.

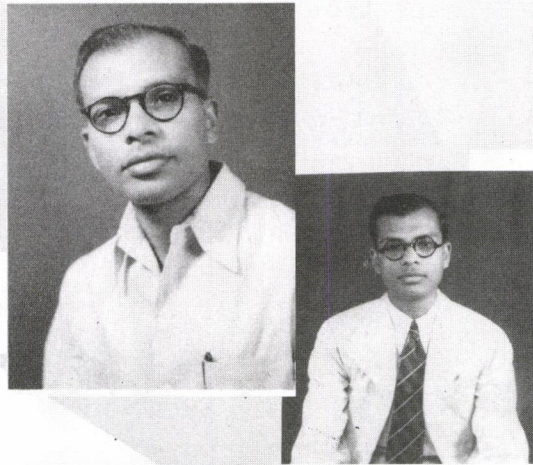
HIS EARLY YEARS:

Celestine Manuel was born on 30 December 1916 at Jaffna in Sri Lanka to Manuel Pillai and Margaret Sellama and was baptized on 13 January 1917.

His father passed away on 01, December 1927, when Celestine was just 11 years old. He took care of his mother and sister. He completed his high school studies at St. Patrick's College, Jaffna.

After completing his studies, he was working and would also write Morning Talks for the Radio Ceylon. When his mother died on 5th February 1943, he decided to leave his job, give away house and property and join religious life. His sister joined in 1931 the Holy Cross Convent at Jaffna and made her first profession on 19 January 1935. She passed away on 26 December 1984.

When he expressed to the **Bishop of Jaffna**, his desire to join a religious congregation, he suggested to him to think of joining the Salesians of Don Bosco and presented "the life of Don Bosco" and asked him to read it. He fell in love with Don Bosco and made up his mind to go over to the Salesians in India.



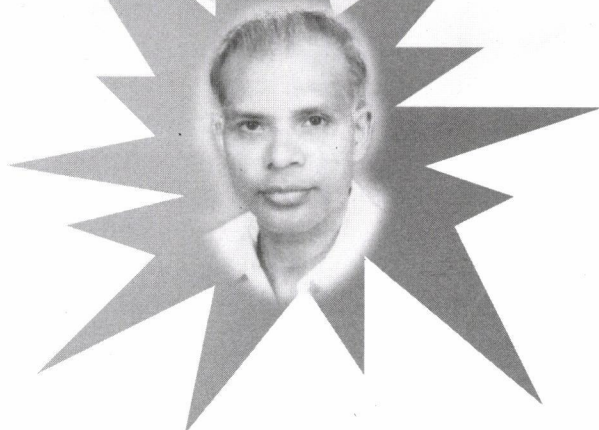
Rev. Fr. I. J. Emilianus Pillai O.M.I. Vicar general and administrator of Jaffna on 23-09-1944, wrote to the Superiors: " Mr. C Manuel is well known to me. He comes from a respectable family; his sister is now a member of the Holy Cross Sisters, a congregation that is doing much good. Mr. Manuel was my pupil and I have followed his progress for over 12 years. He is an excellent young man, full of faith and devotion and sincerely desirous of consecrating himself to God. He has the qualities necessary to become a religious. He has always shown good example to others."

He entered the Sacred Heart Aspirantate at Tirupattur in Tamil Nadu, South India on 23 December 1944. He started his novitiate on 15 May 1946 at Kotagiri and made his **first profession** on **24 May 1947** at Kotagiri. He became a Salesian coadjutor in 1950 and made his **perpetual Profession** on **24 May 1953** at Kotagiri.

Apostolic assignments

He had been serving God in the following institutions:

May 1948	- Aspirantate, Tirupattur
May 1949	- The Provincial House, Broadway, Chennai
May 1954	- Dominic Savio Orphanage
May 1955	- Aspirantate, Tirupattur
May 1956	- Don Bosco, Matunga, Bombay
May 1958	- Colombo, with Fr. Remery (8 Months)
May 1959	- The Provincial House, Broadway
May 1968	- New Provincial house, Citadel – propaganda Office
Dec 1971	- St. Joseph's Tech, Basin Bridge, Chennai
June 1972	- Citadel, Propaganda Office
June 1975	- Don Bosco, Egmore
May 1976	- Rinaldi Juniorate, Chennai
May 1977	- Don Bosco Aspirantate, Tirupattur
Oct 1977	- Amruthavani, Secunderabad
Sep 1979	- Manila, Philippines
May 1980	- Don Bosco, Tirupattur
May 1983	- Citadel – Catechetical Centre at Calcutta
May 1988	- Rome, Turin Pilgrimage
June 1988	- Don Bosco School, Egmore, Chennai
May 1989	- Citadel – Documentation Centre
May 1991	- Don Bosco School, Thanjavur,
May 1992	- Citadel - Documentation Centre
Jan 1995	- Don Bosco, Dankotuwa, Sri Lanka
Oct. 1996	- Don Bosco, Uswetakiyawa, Sri Lanka
Jan 1999	- Don Bosco, Kotadeniyawa, Sri Lanka



Author :

In 1975 Br. Celestine had authored a catechetical book: "First Steps in search of Truth'In the book review of the New Leader dated 18-05-1975, we read:" This book is solidly scientific – begins with a chapter on Science and Religion- and is based on research and new found archaeological evidence in Palestine" As a young Salesian he was keen on spreading God's message. He wanted to teach Catechism and wanted to be better qualified. He was one of the first Salesian Brothers to be sent for qualification to Philippines.



Bro. Celestine with his companions in Manilla

Specialized studies

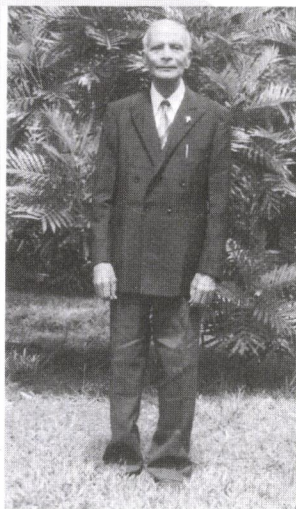
He completed the Pastoral Programme in Religious Education at The **East Asian Pastoral Institute**, Loyola Heights, **Philippines** on 06 April **1980**. He completed the training Course on Audiovisuals for Evangelization conducted by **Sonolux** Audiovisual Service, Manila, Philippines.

He did short diploma courses, between June and August **1980**, in Photo language, in Television Production and in sound slides production. He completed oneweek diploma courses in Film production and Radio Drama Production in the Communication Foundation for Asia.

For his final exam in Film production, he had produced a 10-minute Super 8 film on Child Labour.

LAST DAYS and Final Journey:

On August 03, 2005, he was rushed to the Hospital, at Ragama by Fr. Anthony Fernando and Fr. Ajith and admitted into the hospital for better care and medication. During his stay in the hospital he was constantly assisted by the brothers of Kotadeniyawa. On August 04, 2005 at 3.00 p.m., Bro. Celestine looked around the hospital room where he was resting and at the brothers who were assisting him, with a smile playing on his serene face, passed away peacefully.



The funeral mass held at the Marian shrine, Don Bosco Negombo on 06 August 2005 at 3.00 p.m. was presided over by Fr. Anthony Pinto, Provincial of Sri Lanka with the chapel packed with salesians, priests, students and people. The homily was delivered by Rev. Fr. E. Janze. Bro. Expedit Lobo from Chennai was present at the Holy mass. During the entrance rite, representing the lay brothers, Br. Lobo and Br. Gabriel carried a wreath and placed it on the coffin that was already overflowing with flowers. About sixty Tamil speaking students from Murunkan (Mannar diocese) were present with Fr. Dixon Fernando, director of Don Bosco, Murunkan and Fr. Solomon Kolandaisamy. The long and crowded funeral procession wound its way through the streets of Negombo to Kotadeniyawa assisted by the police force. Salesians, members of the salesian family, students and parishioners from salesian centres, priests and religious accompanied the hearse in numerous cars, vans and buses. People on both sides of the road looked with reverence as the procession went by.

Fr. Anthony Pinto, blessed the **new cemetery** and **new tomb** at DB, Kotadeniyawa. After the funeral oration by Fr. Varghese, Rector of the Philospohate, while Salesians, Boys and members of the Salesian Family sang the "Abide with me" the body was interned.



Salesians voice their sentiments.

Fr. Joaquim D'Souza, Regional Superior of South East Asia: "I knew Bro. Celestine when I was a boy in Don Bosco, Matunga (Bombay) in 1957, when he was in charge of the library and bookstore. He was always kind to me and lent me books on the lives of Saints to read. In that way, I believe, he had some influence on my vocation.

He was a great and humble Salesian, always cheerful and smiling. With his passing away the Vice Province of Sri Lanka and all of us have lost an authentic witness and apostle."

Fr. P. J. Sebastian sdb: "I have known Bro. Celestine since 1955. We have been together in several Houses in Madras and Sri Lanka. I have found him to be a sincere and committed religious and a true Missionary. He was full of zeal for spreading the Gospel and used his many talents for that. He was a tireless but quite worker. So much of progress in the Province of Madras in the area of buildings is due to the hard and systematic work of Bro. Celestine in the propaganda office. God grant him eternal rest "

Fr. Robson Barros writing from Brazil expressed his heartfelt condolences on the occasion of the death of “dear Rev. Bro. Celestine Manuel, whom I deeply respected. Called by the Lord, he gave all his energy and his brilliant talents unreservedly to the Congregation. Through his life, his words and the example of his life Bro. Celestine called people to love, patience and compassion.” *Fr. Robson had been a much- appreciated Salesian missionary for a few years in Sri Lanka.*

Fr. Jose Kuttianimattathil, Provincial of Bangalore in his condolence message said: “He was really a committed and exemplary Religious, who gave himself to the Lord to his last breath. We pray that the Lord may inspire lots and lots of Sri Lankan youth in order to take Bro. Celestine’s place in the Salesian field, and thereby strengthen the apostolate of the Salesians in your country.”

Fr. Tony D’Souza, former Provincial of Mumbai and Kenya, writing from Kuwait, said: “I lived with him at Kotadeniyawa, Sri Lanka from August 2002 to June 2003. Bro. Celestine came across as a **very observant and staunch Salesian** who had played an important role in his younger days in the propaganda office. Despite his age, he was **exemplary** in his prayer and community life, punctual and faithful to the community timetable. He did not allow himself any concessions and did not appreciate any fuss made over him. Though his exterior reflected a quiet and independent attitude, he was very respectful to authority and the first to apologize, whenever he was irritated and lost his cool.

He openly expressed his **love for Sri Lanka**, particularly Jaffna and the war-ravaged North. As he lies buried in Sri Lankan soil, inaugurating the cemetery at Kotadeniyawa I pray that he may obtain for the Vice province a fresh generation of young salesians and a lively educational presence in the North to benefit the countless youth of that region.”

Bro. Susith Milroy from Gerini, Rome, “I have happy memories of Bro, Celestine when I was in the Community of Kotadeiyawa. He was a man of silence and peace. Let us thank the Lord for the fatherly presence and the witness that our dear confrere rendered to our Salesian communities and for the formation of our lives.”

Fr. Paul Kachapilly - few fond memories of dear Bro. Celestine

I lived with Bro. Celestine for five years in the formation community of Kotadeniyawa. His presence in the community was serene and peaceful. The presence of an elderly confrere and a lay Salesian on the staff of the formation community had its own salutary effects in the formation of the Brothers in many ways.

Though advanced in years, he was eager to work. He was planning to start a propaganda for the Community and he began to take a few classes for the Brothers. But his failing health was hindering his sincere and earnest desire. Finally Fr. Benjamin Puthota, the Delegate intervened with these assuring words, "Bro. Celestine, you have worked hard in the past and now you must rest." With this loving intervention, Bro. Celestine calmed down, and confined himself, to a retired life.

But **the missionary in him** did not rest. Every superior who visited the Community was confronted with this question from Bro. Celestine, "When are the Salesians going to work in Jaffna?" This was a tormenting question for him and he felt that the Delegation was not proceeding fast enough in this direction. The superior of the Delegation once again roused up his drooping spirits by saying, "As soon as we open a presence in Jaffna, you will be a member of that community". He dreamed of that day but never saw it.

All his talents and abilities, he placed at the service of the community and tried to contribute his share in the formation of the Brothers. He used to put up beautiful notice boards for feasts and on other occasions. He told me that one of his aims in doing this work was to teach the Brothers in formation to display attractive notice boards. He also conducted some classes for the Brothers on artwork. As he was well qualified in English, he assisted the Brothers in elocution.



Bro. Celestine with his younger Sr. Philomena

He was faithfully present for all the activities of the Community and would contribute his own share of jokes and experiences in the family gatherings. In a fraternal way he used to point out to me some of my mistakes. He also used to suggest to me from his observations and experience certain guidelines for particular areas of formation of the Brothers. A man of prayer, often we could see him alone in the church in personal prayer. He used to make daily visits to the statue of the Sacred Heart, placed near the entrance to the Institute. He was a **Eucharistic soul**. One of his spiritual exercises was to unite himself with all the masses, which are celebrated around the world. He assured me that he was daily praying for the Community and for all its needs.

I have fond memories of this elderly confrere and am glad that I could spend part of my life in his company and also be of some assistance to him in the evening of his life. May his beautiful life continue to be an inspiration for all of us.



Inspirational Highlights

Bro. Celestine's life has many inspirational highlights. A reflection on a few of the outstanding ones will assist us in our day to life too.

Simple but profound life of prayer.

Bro. Celestine was often seen in deep prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. As many have observed he was actively present at the liturgical and Community prayer.

In his letter dated 5 May 1994, the Provincial wrote: "Happy to have met you during the second retreat in Yellagiri Hills. I was deeply impressed by your prayerful disposition and spiritual fervour. Thanks for sharing with me about yourself, your community Salesian life and your apostolate." He was a Eucharistic soul. His life was centered on the Eucharist, "united with all the masses celebrated round the world during the day" as he used to say.

A grateful heart

Every small deed done to him was gratefully acknowledged. Bro. Celestine was always grateful. When he left Chennai to join Sri Lanka, he was given a farewell about which he writes from Dankotuwa dated 30 March 1995: "I am very grateful to all the Priests for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which was offered exclusively for the Salesians in Sri Lanka. I mentioned this at the good night, and the Salesians and boys here were very happy. They express their gratitude through me. Well, I was so much moved by the most unexpected events of farewell that I can only say now ... You have said: "Celestine - we love you.

I reply: "Celestine - he loves you."

During his last years at the House of formation at Kotadeniyawa, everyone was impressed by his sense of gratitude. He was very appreciative of the love and care showered on him. Delicate as he was he did not want to disturb any one.

Respect for Authority

We are impressed by his respect for his superiors. All his letters stand witness to this. Though at times he had difference of opinion, once the superior made a decision he accepted it as a loving member of the community.

Fr. John Peter, who had been his Rector in more than one House said, "I admired him after a tense incident in the School Community. After that incident, he never showed a sign of grudge or ill feeling. He was even more available."

Evangelizing and Educating the Young.

From the moment he joined the Salesians he longed to teach catechism. He took pride in doing so. He wanted to equip himself ever better with visuals, as to be effective in his communication. He spoke with pride about his joy in teaching catechism to the boys of the orphanage at Tirupattur and for the aspirants.

Fr. M. M. Balaguer, S.J. Director General of the Communication Centre "**Amruthavani**, at Secunderabad after seeing Bro. Celestine for two days in his centre, requested the Provincial of Madras, to allow him to join the centre. On 11 September 1977, Celestine wrote to Fr. Benjamin, Provincial expressing his joy to work in this prestigious centre that brings "the Kingdom of God nearer to us." He wrote. "I feel that this was the apostolate I have been yearning for. If I am allowed to do this work, with your blessing, I think I will be happy."

Conclusion

Bro. Celestine has left indelible impressions on the Salesians of India and Sri Lanka. His life has added richness and beauty to the unique vocation of a Salesian brother. Contented and happy, with simple and grateful heart, living deeply rooted in the Lord, his life has enriched the lay dimension of the Salesian Charism. He will continue to live on in our hearts and minds. May his inspiring life be a memory and prophecy.

Fr. Anthony Humer Pinto sdb
Provincial Superior
Sri Lanka

