



College Second to None

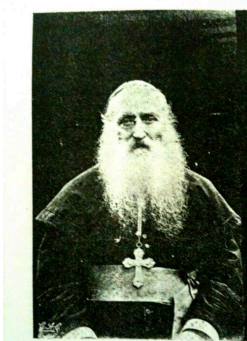
By Tommy Ganeshamoorthy

Source: Palm Fringed Coast by Rev.Fr.John W.Lange, S.J.

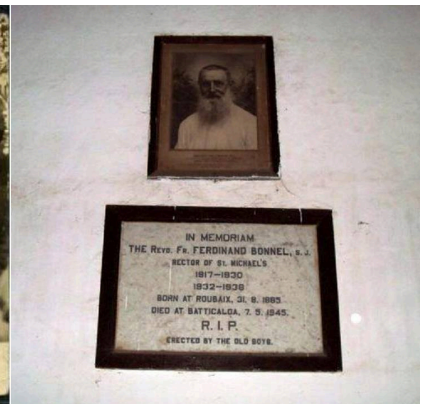
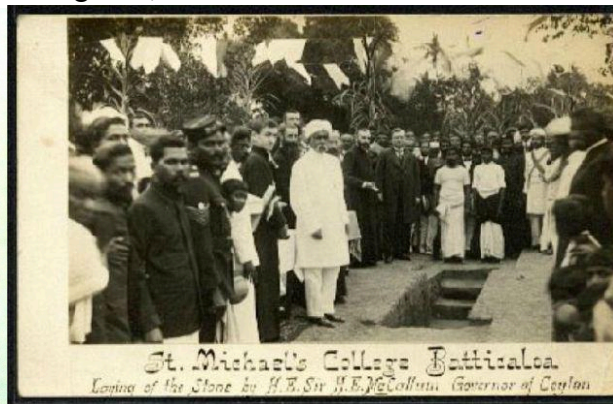
Part-I

1912 was the big year for St. Michael's College, a year in which the Catholic Diocese began to see its hopes and dreams realized after nearly Fifteen years of frustrating struggle and sacrifice.

"Batticaloa", Bishop Lavigne insisted, "**shall have a college second to none**". One thing that Bishop wanted to be assured of was a stable and competent staff for the college. He was short-handed with his priests and wanted to commit as few of them as possible to the actual work of the classroom. So, he applied for the teaching Brothers, and Marists Brothers agreed to come to Batticaloa. There were Five Brothers and their veteran Director, Bro.Pierre Leon, who taught for some years in Aden, was 29 years old; Bro.Lawrence was 18, Bro.Anthony 17 and Brothers Paul and Chrysostom were hardly older. The people of Batticaloa were fascinated at the sight of this group of youthful Religious, and their future pupils hardly knew what to make of "Swamis" who were just about their age. The Brothers were French (two Alsatians), and only the Director was fluent in English, so they had first to settle down and study the languages. The Brothers were housed in a bungalow opposite to the esplanade (later named as Weber Stadium) and named the bungalow, "Maris Stella".

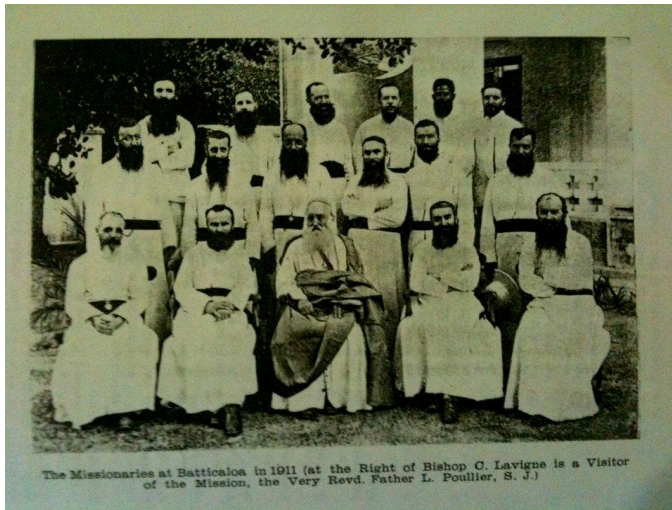


THE LATE BISHOP CHAS. LAVIGNE.



On July 16, 1912, the Brothers were present at the solemn ceremony of the laying of the corner stone of the new and great St. Michael's College. Sir.Henry MacCallum did the honours, and among the distinguished guests were H.R.Freeman, former G.A. of Batticaloa who had come especially for the occasion, C.S.Vaughan, G.A., Capt. W.M.F. Sandeman, A.D.C. to His Excellency, J.N.Tesseverasinghe, T.W.Roberts, District Judge, H.Bawa, Provincial Surgeon, and all the Maniagars, Adigars, Vanniahs,

Odears, Mudaliyars and other important people of the province. Mr. Joseph Abraham, veteran Headmaster of St. Michael's, knew that MacCallum held the order of the Grand Cross of St. Michael's and St. George, the motto of which *Auspicium Meliours Aevi* ("augury of a better age"), and he made these words the theme of his address, expressing a common wish that they would hopefully be realized in the new college. In his speech the Governor said: "I regret very much that His Lordship Bishop Lavigne is not present. His Excellency also made the statement that "what we want of Ceylonese boys is spirit and self-confidence.



The Missionaries at Batticaloa in 1911 (at the Right of Bishop C. Lavigne is a Visitor of the Mission, the Very Revd. Father L. Poullier, S. J.)



1. NEW BUILDINGS, FROM THE BOARDERS' 2. NEW BUILDINGS OBSERVATORY TOWER. 3. MACCALEUM HALL FOR SCIENCE. 4. MACCALLUM HALL—THE LECTURE-ROOM

The Old Boys' Association of St. Michael's had been started in 1909 by Fr.D'Arras, and Fr.S. Lazarus was its first President. In 1912, the college presented its first candidates for the Junior Cambridge examination in Colombo. The science hall, said to be the one of the best designed and equipped in Ceylon at that time, was blessed in a quiet ceremony in 1913, and named MacCallum Hall.

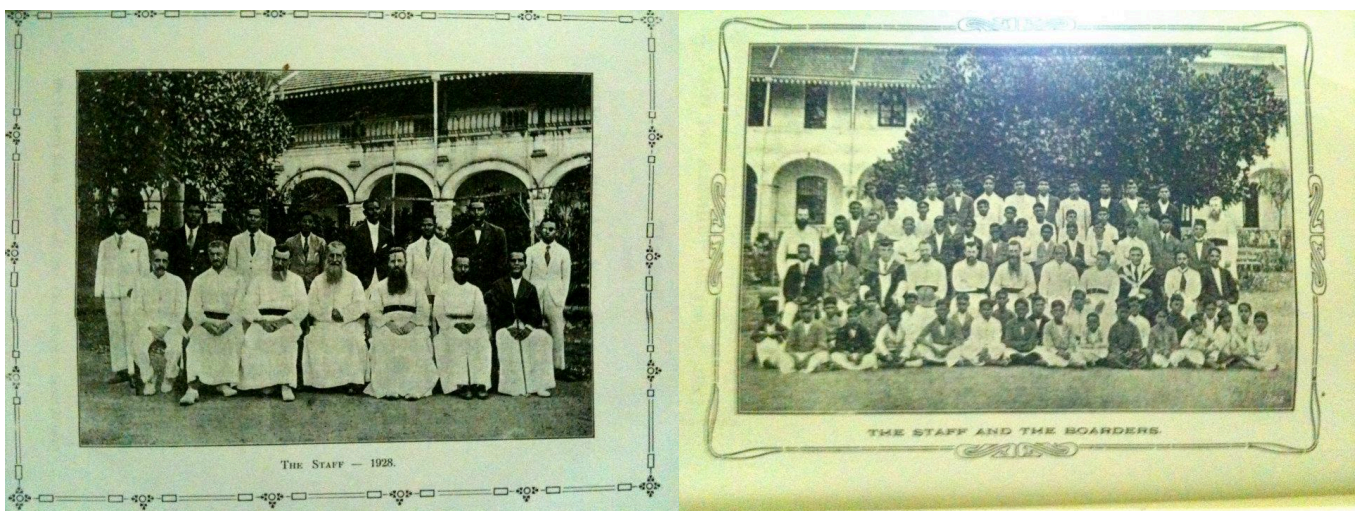
On January 25, 1915 St. Michael's College reopened for the year not as yet in its new quarters but with every prospect that, as Fr.Ferdinand Bonnel, Bro.Joe Wright and a dedicated work force toiled at the construction without a break. In the meantime, the results of the Cambridge examinations revealed that the college had 100% success in the Junior level and 5 out of 7 in the Senior, with one second class honours. In April, Governor Sir Robert Chalmers visited Batticaloa, but for reasons not known, declined to open the new classrooms. On May 3rd, Mr.Harward, Director of Education, did the honours. In his speech, Mr.Harward drew attention to the great struggle of the Fathers in financing the construction and said that they "faced obstacles with the same courage which our gallant allies in France and Belgium have shown in the field". Mr.Harward, in the name of the government, gave a gift of 5,000.00 rupees to the building fund. The building was still far from completion, but the shape of things to come was plain to see – fulfillment of Bishop Lavigne's promise that Batticaloa would have a college "**second to none**".

The administration section and Fathers' quarters were still under construction, but the classroom block and boarders' dormitory were ready. There were 150 boarders and 200 day scholars. Three Marist Brothers remained on the staff. Also on the staff were Mr.A.R.P. Leatham, who composed the College Anthem, Mr.M.A.L. Kariapper, Mr.K.Muttiah, a pupil teacher who would later be known as Fr.K.Aloysius-Mary S.J., Mr.E.R.Daniel, later to be Fr.R.Daniel S.J.. Six members of the college staff were former students and Mr. Joseph Abraham was continuing his fine work as headmaster. St. Michael's now had quite a respectable list of old boys who were settled in government posts and professions, and three of her old boys were priests in the diocese. In 1917, Mr. Joseph Abraham was awarded the *Bene Merenti* medal by Pope Benedict XV1 for his long and excellent service to St. Michael's College as its Headmaster.



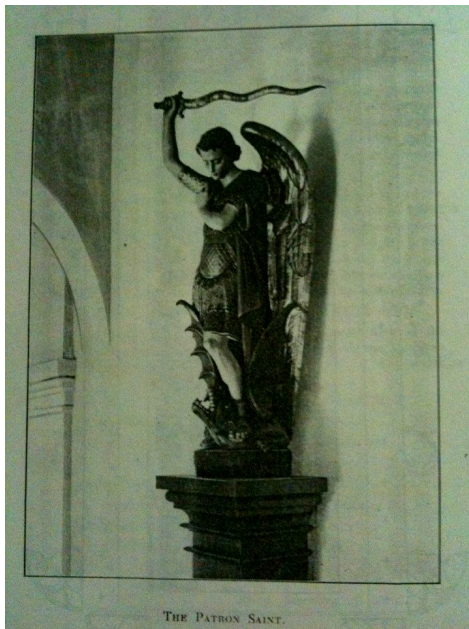
1923 was the Golden Jubilee year of St. Michael's. As the new building was not yet completed, the Fathers were reluctant to hold any elaborate celebrations of the event. By 1923, St. Michael's counted 93 old boys with Cambridge certificates- 67 Junior, 26 Senior. Now, the college was given the rank of Secondary School by the government, in recognition of the excellence of its chemistry and physics departments. St. Michael's pioneered in the introduction of electricity into Batticaloa as Fr. Bonnel had installed an electric plant, with Tudor batteries.

At the end of 1925, Mr. Joseph Abraham, veteran Headmaster of the college retired after 49 years of service. "The building", he said, "Which was dubbed a 'shanty' by Governor MacCallum has been replaced by a palatial structure, one of the finest in Ceylon". Mr. Abraham reminisced about the opposition the Fathers had encountered in the old days, the unhealthy rivalry, "which scrupled not to stoop to very questionable methods of 'boys-catching'".

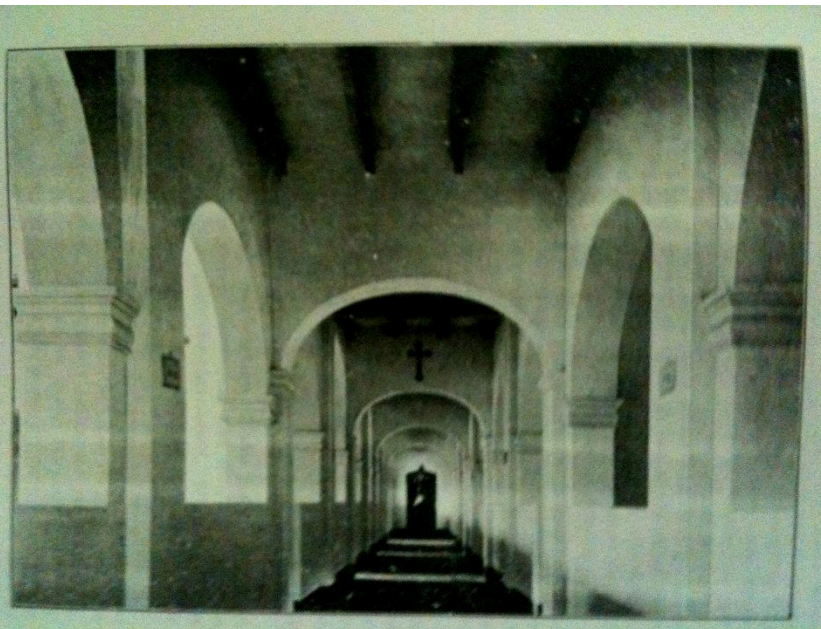


1933 saw the start of a new era of the diocese and St. Michael's college, when the Jesuit province of New Orleans in the United States agreed to help the aged missionaries of the diocese. Scholastic, John T. Linehan S.J. arrived on September 17th of 1933. In 1934, two more scholastics, John O'Connor S.J. and John Lange (Author of Palm Fringed Coast) arrived from New Orleans. In spite of the magnificent progress made in equipping St. Michael's college, it was still something pretty much out of the 19th century, and the brash young Americans, accustomed to the technological convenience of the United

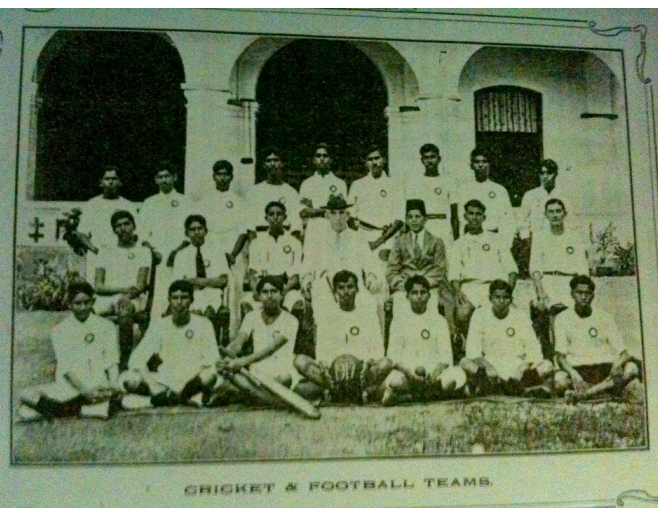
States, found things rather primitive in Batticaloa. There was progress, to be sure, but it seemed to have stopped many years back. Looking back now after thirty-six years, the American priests were quite unaware of what St. Michael's meant for Fr. Bonnel and other Fathers, unaware too of prodigious sacrifices they had made in order to bring the school and diocese to the degree of progress they had achieved. They had put their best years of their lives into their work, and the fact that they were not able to advance further, handicapped as they were not only by advancing years and declining physical strength but also by shortage of personnel and resources, was certainly not a matter of their choice. The Americans wanted to get things moving, to introduce American ways and bring things up to American standards. They would learn in the years to come, after they had encountered some of the obstacles and frustrations so familiar to the French Fathers!



THE PATRON SAINT.



THE SPORTS COMMITTEE
FOOTBALL AND CRICKET XI



CRICKET & FOOTBALL TEAMS



Part-II

The Fathers reported that “The boys of St. Michael’s under the leadership of the American scholastics are going in more and more for sports. We were not willing to take part in any inter-school competitions because of the excessive and ugly rivalry. But as our abstention was now being attributed to cowardice, we decided to compete, and started preparing. To buck up the opposition and give them a false sense of superiority, our best athletes appeared in public with legs and feet bandaged, limping badly; but on the day of the competition, the bandages suddenly disappeared, with all traces of lameness! In the meet, St. Michael’s gained 31 points, while the best of the other school got no more than 13”.

At the end of 1937, Fr.Emmanuel Crowther was appointed rector of the College. Fr. Ferdinand Bonnel, still Superior Regular of the Mission. Continued to teach, at the venerable age of 72, and at the same time took charge of Puliyanthivu parish from Fr.Dupont.

On May 7, 1945, at 10.30p.m., on the eve of the old feast of the apparition of the Archangel Michael, a few hours before the Nazis surrendered and peace came to the Western world, Fr.Ferdinand Bonnel quietly breathed his last within the walls of the splendid college he had laboured so hard to create. If ever there was a man who had completely spent himself in a life of unwavering dedication, it was this man of the Batticaloa Mission. His monumental work was the creation – and we do not use the word lightly! – of St. Michael’s College, and of practically everything in it. When MacCallum Hall was opened in 1915, it soon became recognized as the best science laboratory in any school in Ceylon. If the attention of his young pupils tended to wander occasionally, all he had to do was to stand at the blackboard and write two different sums at once with both hands! He enforced discipline in the school by exerting a kind of personal magnetism, rarely if ever resorting to the use of the cane. He had only to look at a disorderly class or group, and they would shrink into immobility. No stray dog or cattle would ever dare intrude into the college compound as long as Fr.Bonnel in his office.

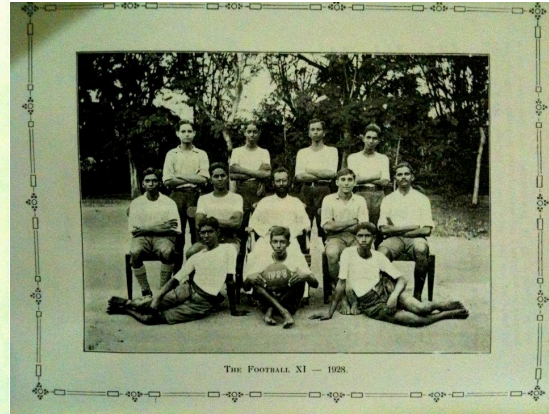
Three months later, the patriarchal Fr.Charles Bonnel was laid to rest beneath the trees at AaleadiCholai, beside his “Thamby”. Two dedicated men, because of whom, Batticaloa is a better place today. The Bonnel brothers were natives of France. The Bonnells had given five of their children to the service of the Church. For, besides the two Jesuits, there was a Carmelite, Benedictine, and a Bernadine among the children.

In 1946, two new missionaries, Fr. Godfrey Cook, S.J. and Fr. Claude Daly, S.J. arrived from U.S.A. Fr.Cook was appointed bursar of St. Michael’s and Fr.Daly was assigned to study Tamil. When Fr.Lang

returned from his holidays, four more Jesuits joined him and arrived on December 19th in Batticaloa. They were Fr. J.V.Sommers, the scholastics Peter Beach and Alfonso Marmol, and Brother E.J. Booth.



Rev. Father S. Marian.



THE FOOTBALL XI - 1928

On February 17, 1947, Fr.Santiago Marian, S.J. known also as Soosaimuthu passed away. He was born in Batticaloa and one of the first pupils of the Champagne Fathers at St.Michael's. Fr.Marian early realized the importance of a sound knowledge of Tamil for the ministry, and this at a time when study of Tamil was being neglected, if not discouraged, in the universal craze for English. By his own efforts, he became a scholar in his mother tongue and used this knowledge not only in the classroom where most of his life was cast, but as a great preacher all over the Mission. In both boys' schools, he was the first Ceylonese Principal.

On September 1st of 1947, an old boy of St. Michael's College, Alhaj Mudaliyar Ahmed Sinna Lebbe, became the first M.P. for Batticaloa. He was a proud Michaelite who was awarded with two Coronation Medals by George VI and Elizabeth II.

In September, 1947, Fr.Hamilton returned from a very successful begging expedition in the United States, bringing with him three more Jesuits, Fr. H.J. Weber, S.J., and scholastics W.H. Macnair. S.J., and J.J. Heaney, S.J... On October 9th, the veteran Brother Joe Wright was called to his reward. He was not the oldest of the missionaries of Champagne, but he had been a Jesuit for nearly 60 years. When he came to the Mission, Brothers did not wear cassock; and when people of Batticaloa saw this first Jesuit Brother of the Mission climbing roofs, laying tiles, felling trees and doing all the jobs a workman does in Ceylon they were highly intrigued with this 'European cooly' that the Fathers had brought from France! And a 'cooly', he remained all his life, never considering any work too exhausting or too menial and always ready to render any service to the Fathers, or to anyone else.

On July 31, 1949, Fr. J.V. Sommers, S.J. became the first American rector of the college. On September 4th of the same year, Fr.Fengler returned from his expedition to the United States, bringing four new missionaries with him: Fathers F.B. Ponder, S.J. and G.H. Raywood, S.J., Living Legend B.H.Miller, S.J. and E.J.Hebert, S.J.



On September 29th of 1955, Fr.George Raywood replaced Fr.Sommers as rector of the college on St. Michael's day. At the end of October, St. Michael's came into the news as the venue and host of the first All-Ceylon basketball tournament. It was a great success, and did much both for basketball in Ceylon and for St. Michael's.

In 1956, the Jesuits decided to close the boarding house as the enrollment of the college was growing and the space occupied by the boarders (nearly half of the total space) could be better used to expand classroom facilities. The boarders, in spite of the additional time given them for study, were not notably better academically than the day scholars; their care, moreover, was a strain on the manpower of the staff; and the boarding was a financial worry.

In 1957, Fr.E.Crowther, retired from the post of Principal and Fr. Raywood, Rector of the college became Principal-"Honorary", according to the arrangement made by the Education Department.

In 1959, St. Michael's College reached another milestone when a telephone was finally installed. Trincomalee and Batticaloa were now linked and the Bishop was also on the phone.

In 1960, Fr.B.H. Miller became Rector of the college and also been accepted as Vice-Principal by the Education Department. In June, a science exhibition was held at the college, where, in the best tradition of Fr. Bonnel, the science department was being maintained at its high level. The guest of honor was Mr.J.M.Morris, an American attached to the U.S. aid mission then functioning in Ceylon. The six little Morris children who came with their parents stole the show at the exhibition. In October, it was officially announced that the Government would confiscate ("Take over" being the term used, in an attempt to impart an aspect of legality to the move), all privately managed schools that did not opt to function completely free, that is without charging any fees or expecting any aid from the state. In November, Bishop Glennie had a meeting with Fr.Crowther and his consultants and suggested that the schools are very important and the Jesuits should make whatever sacrifices needed to keep them going, while at the same time a good occasion presents itself for a revaluation of our missionary effort in general. Bishop Glennie a little later issued instructions to the Clergy and Religious to guide them in dealing with the immediate crisis. He wrote: "We have no intention of taking any act of violence or any undemocratic action against the Government. But we continue to disapprove the 'Assisted Schools Act... Our Catholics as citizens of the state have a perfect right to show in a democratic and orderly manner disapproval of a law which they consider unjust".

On November 28th, the Prime Minister met all the Bishops and representatives of other Christian denominations. The Protestant ministers were in favour of the “take-over”. Sir Oliver Goonetilleke was at the meeting, and, in fact, took in charge of it. It was impossible to discover just what his position was. Officially, he strongly promoted the government position; privately he seemed to encourage the Bishops. The upshot of the conference was that the Bishops signed an agreement to evacuate the schools under certain conditions. Afterwards, the media published the agreement, but omitted all mention of the conditions stipulated by the hierarchy. And so the whole discussion was nullified.

When the Act came into effect on December 1, 1960, St. Michael’s and St. Joseph’s colleges would become private schools by choice of the management; and so would not be Government managed schools. In order to function as private schools under the Act, the schools had to agree to the following conditions: they must (a) follow the general educational policy of the Government; (b) maintain all facilities and services granted to the students before they became private; (c) levy no fees; (d) not reduce the accommodation for pupils; and (e) comply with the provisions of any written law applicable to such schools in matters of education. They must also keep the same staff and pay them the same wages. In other words, they would have a mighty task to do and have to learn to live on fresh air while doing it!

Having decided to keep the two colleges as private, non-fee-levying schools, the Fathers now had to cope with the weighty problem of how to finance them. It was decided to appeal to the people through Welfare Societies, Parents’ Associations and Old Boys’ groups. The Education Department had ruled that schools opting to function as private schools could accept only pupils of their own religious denomination. Non-Catholics already enrolled and those who applied to enter, appealed to the government. Eventually the restriction broke down. Not only that, but in a further move to cripple the private schools, the Department later ruled that no one could be refused admission! In appealing for aid, the school authorities were advised to stress that Catholic schools were within the national scheme of education, provision being clearly made in the Act for private non-fee-levying schools. The bottom line is, the private schools were being treated like outlaws. Also, they were warned that the collections should not be in the nature of fees, and that the accounts should be kept very carefully. The catholic position was that Government was defrauding Catholics of the taxes collected from them for education.

The people occupied and barricaded the schools, determined not to allow the government to seize them without a struggle. The curtain rose in 1961 to reveal hundreds of Catholic schools all over the island in a condition of siege, with mothers and fathers of the children living, cooking and sleeping behind the barbed wire in defiance to the government. There were holy hours, prayers, penitential processions. Five thousand mothers of all religious denominations assembled at the gate of the Prime Minister’s house, stood in the rain for five hours and went away without obtaining a hearing. Children, all on their own, came from outside Colombo to ask the Governor General for an interview. The girls were sent away in the evening, but the boys stayed on for twenty-four hours at the gates of Queen’s House. It was a very orderly gathering, and boys dispersed of their own accord when they found that some unruly elements were trying to introduce violence into the group. They were refused an interview by the Governor General.

Government conduct of the whole affair was a sorry mixture of stubbornness, evasion, subterfuge and lies. The details of the first education bill to be presented to Parliament were kept a closely guarded secret. No one including the government, seemed to know what was meant by “takeover” At first, “takeover” seemed to include not only the management of the schools, but also the buildings, equipment

and assets. Mr.Baduiddin Mohamed, Minister of Education, declared that it was immoral for anyone to ask for compensation! When the government found that public opinion was opposed to the physical take-over, it changed its front, and the first bill that was passed in October 1960 provided only for taking over the management. It was soon found that the Education Department had placed itself in a very anomalous position. It could not run a school on someone else's property against their will, without committing trespass! So managers were called upon to hand over the schools voluntarily, in the interest of what was being described as a "national scheme of education" – a thing yet to be defined. Buddhist schools had nothing to lose and everything to gain in entrusting to the Buddhist government; so they all handed over their schools. But not a single Catholic school was surrendered.

Part-III

The Jesuits felt that somehow they were keeping the faith with the old French Fathers who had toiled and struggled so hard to create St. Michael's College for the people of the Eastern Province. Rowdy elements in several sections of the Island wanted the government to forcibly evict the squatters who were peaceably occupying the schools. Rumours were then maliciously spread that the police and army were going to throw the squatters out by force. Most of those occupying the schools were fearless women.

The Prime Minister, Mrs.Srimavo Bandaranaike, at this stage turned over the "dirty work", as Mr.Baduiddin Mohamed termed it, to Mr.C.P.De Silva and left for India - on a pilgrimage! Mr. De Silva issued a strong statement to the press that the Catholic Bishops were very ungrateful for what had been allowed them in the first education bill! "The Government," he said, "regrets to note that its generosity and consideration had been grossly abused by certain proprietors". So a new bill was tabled in Parliament, to introduce further legislation to "take over" the ownership of school buildings. The new bill gave the Minister of Education the authority to "vest in the Crown" and property that he deems necessary for the running of any school, and he could do this by "an order that is final and conclusive and shall not be called in question in any court; and no compensation is payable in respect of any property by reason of such vesting". Another clause in the bill stipulated that any school that went private under the first bill must satisfy the Director of Education that the necessary funds to conduct and maintain the school will be available, and the school must be conducted to the satisfaction of the Director.

St. Michael's and St. Joseph's Colleges had opened their doors on the date set by the Department, as private, non-fee-levying schools. The convent schools were occupied by the squatters protesting the take-

over, so the girls were admitted to the two colleges, and some of the Sisters came along to teach and look after them. The two colleges were crowded to the rafters!

Bishop Glennie was still waiting to learn what financial assistance he could expect from the Society, but the Jesuits in the diocese now found that, with the added heavy burden of financing the two colleges, they were quite unable to give the Bishop the aid recommended by the Provincial. All that could be seen at this time were rather irregular specified gifts given to Jesuits in the parishes, usually in response to their begging abroad.

At the end of April, 1962, a carnival in aid of St. Michael's College was opened and proved a great success. There was a bit of a problem over the various games of chance that figure so prominently in these carnivals, but the organizers managed to satisfy the police that they were not committing an offense against the gambling laws. Members of the College Welfare Society gave generously of their time and labour to make the carnival a success.

In January 1965, Fr. Harold J. Weber, S.J. had been having trouble with his throat. A biopsy was performed and the verdict from the Batticaloa doctors was incipient malignant cancer. Fr. Weber left for the United States for treatment. It was a strange and disturbing thing to see Fr. Weber, whose powerful voice, even in what was for him normal conversation, resounded all day through the college, now silent. All Batticaloa was praying fervently for his recovery. The Daily News carried an article that paid tribute to his services in the field of sport and expressed the hope that he would return well and healthy to Ceylon. And, in fact, the American surgeons in New Orleans succeeded in removing the cancerous growth, without destroying Father's vocal organs, which gradually recuperated much of their former power. By July, he was back with his boys and his sports, a little hoarse, but lacking none of his enthusiasm.



On June 19th of 1967, Fr.Sommers dies in an accident. Fr.Joesph V.Sommers, S.J. was one of the first group of American Jesuits to come to Batticaloa. At the beginning of his term at St. Michael's, when the Education Department was trying to decide which of the boy's college in the town should be permitted to conduct Higher School Certificate classes, Fr.Sommers put on a publicity campaign for St. Michael's College among the people of the Eastern Province – to the great horror of Fr. Crowther, who regarded such vulgar sounding of one's trumpet as simply, in cricket terminology, "Rather bad form, old man!" Fr. Sommers marshaled every possible argument to show that St. Michael's was the best school in the Province, and stoutly maintained that he was not boasting but merely stating the facts. Whatever he undertook, he threw himself into it entirely. His enthusiasm was not always shared by his brethren, who generally could only marvel at it. No one ever slept through one his lectures or sermons. On the platform, he didn't just speak; he used every possible voice modulation, gesticulated hugely, danced and grimaced! Death is always unexpected, but the suddenness with which this fine Jesuit was carried away was stunning blow to everyone. A huge crowd accompanied the funeral cortege to Alaiyadi Cholai, delaying it so long that darkness fell before the burial.

On March 27, 1968, Fr. Joseph Mary, S.J. was ordained by Bishop Glennie at St. Mary's, Puliyanthivu, the ordination ritual being conducted in English. He and his twin brother, Alphonse Mary, were well known in the town, especially among the younger set. He was the second Batticaloa boy to be ordained in recent times after Father Guy Rajendram, who was ordained in U.S.A. in 1963.

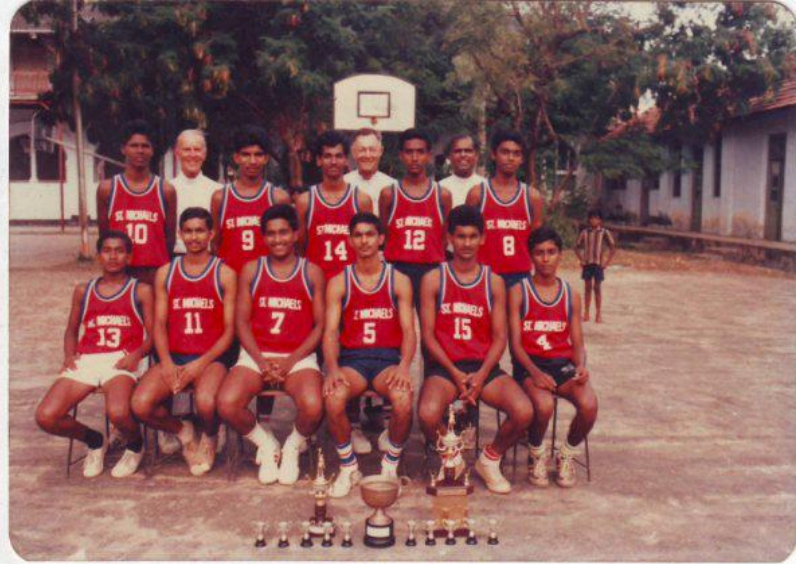
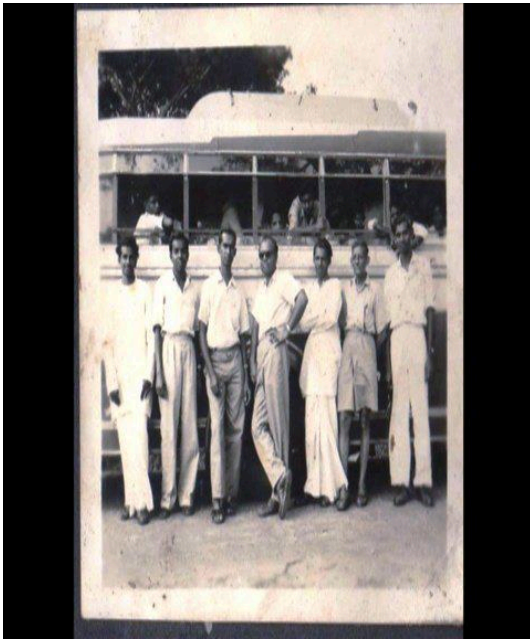


On April 8, 1969, Fr. Paul Satkunanayagam, S.J. and Fathers Alphonse Thiagarajah, Stanislaus Arulgunanayagam, Theophilus Ragel and Praxid Silva were ordained by Bishop Glennie.



In 1970, Bishop Glennie finished his twenty-third year in office. The task to which he resolutely set his hand in 1946, to build up a strong diocesan clergy, had met with success. 1970 finds him surrounded by corps of well-trained and promising young priests, Tamil and Sinhalese, men of the place, as well as from other diocese. The Jesuits no longer play a leading role in the work of the diocese. They have completed the primary task set to them according to the terms of reference given by the Holy See long ago. Trincomalee-Batticaloa Diocese is today a truly Ceylonese diocese. Its future growth is well assured.

Due to valiant effort of then Rector and Living Legend Fr. B. H. Miller made St. Michael's College to continue as a private non fee levying school. He succeeded in doing so for ten years with the financial support from New Orleans and the help from parents and well-wishers in Batticaloa. When all the options exhausted, the last Rector, Fr. Fredreck Leon handed over the college to the government on February 2nd of 1970.



Michaelites reside all over the world, excelling in every facet of society. Most of us recognize that St. Michael's College afforded us opportunities we could not otherwise have had. We owe our personal and professional achievements and success to the education we received at St. Michael's College. The Jesuits did not just give us the school education; they gave us a life, a powerful conditioning life from which only the "grinds" and rare sophisticates escaped without a moulding of character, intellect and complete reshaping of behavior

Together, we can influence the future of St. Michael's College by building a legacy that will maintain the name of our beloved College, strengthen its reputation, and always be the 'College Second to None' as Bishop Lavigne insisted in 1912,

