



**A REVOLUTION
OF THE HEART**

Contents

Timeline for The Marist Project	1
The First Steps in the Marist Story	2
The Revelation at the Shrine of Le Puy.....	5
The Pioneers of the Marist Project.....	6
Revolution of the Heart.....	15
Notes	16

TIMELINE FOR THE MARIST PROJECT



Storming of the Bastille - **THE FRENCH REVOLUTION** begins!

MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT is born

Births of the 3 other **Marist founders**

The Revelation of Le Puy to Jean-Claude Courveille

Jean-Claude Courveille begins to speak of **Society of Mary** in seminary

The newly ordained at Shrine of Black Virgin commit to founding the Society of Mary

The **MONTAGNE** boy's death

Death of **Marcellin Champagnat**

Canonisation of St Marcellin Champagnat

THE BEST IS YET TO COME...!



from Craig Larkin SM - 'A Certain Way'

The First Steps in the Marist Story

Such is the first step

The first significant event took place in the Chapel of Our Lady of Fourviere in Lyon on July 23, 1816. Twelve seminarians, aged between 20 and 34, climbed the steep steps to the top of the hill of Fourviere, and there, in the small chapel dedicated to Our Lady, they promised to work at beginning a new religious order in the Church: a group called "Mary-ists", whose work in the church would resemble that of the Jesuits, but whose approach or style would be unlike anything that existed in the Church at that time. Eight of these men had been ordained priests the day before this event. One of them celebrated the Mass, and the others received communion.

What had brought these men together and inspired them to embark on this enterprise? This enterprise originated in the seminary where these men were studying for the priesthood. But what was mysterious and vague was the way Jean-Claude Colin spoke about the origins of the project. He always seemed to speak in veiled terms, using sentences like: "It was foretold that the Society of Mary was to take as a model none of the congregations that preceded it; no, nothing of all that; but that our model, our only model, was to be, and indeed was, the early church".

I heard interiorly...

From 1842 onwards, Mayet, the early Marist historian, began in earnest to collect information about the beginnings of the Marist Project. Courveille's account threw more light on the story of Marist origins.

Jean-Claude Courveille was the seventh born of 13 children. He was born on March 15, 1787, the son of Claude and Margaret Courveille. During the Revolution, his parents hid in their home the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Chambriac, and Jean-Claude used to pray before it. At the age of 10 he caught smallpox which produced lesions of the cornea, causing blindness. It was this blindness that was miraculously cured at the Cathedral of Le Puy in 1809. Three years later, in the same Cathedral, Courveille had a spiritual experience through which he became convinced that Our Lady was calling him to begin a Society of Mary, just as there was in the Church a Society of Jesus. To complete his studies for the priesthood, Courveille transferred to the major seminary of Lyon in 1815, and began to spread his idea of a Society of Mary. He soon gathered round him a small group of followers. In this group were two men who were to play a major part in the development of the Marist plan. Marcellin Champagnat, fired by his devotion to Our Lady and his conviction that something needed to be done about the religious instruction of the children in the country areas,

reminded the group: "We must have Brothers!" And Jean-Claude Colin, already attracted to some form of Marian group before coming to the seminary, said, "As soon as M.Courveille manifested the project of the Society of Mary, I told myself: 'That suits you!' and I joined them."

Courveille was a strong and impressive personality, but he was also greatly burdened. Temperamentally he was somewhat unstable, and after some serious sexual scandals in his life, he eventually entered the Benedictine Monastery of Solesmes in 1838, and remained there until his death in 1866. Given the times and the public problems in Courveille's life, it is not surprising that his name was scarcely mentioned among the early Marists. Many in fact believed that he had died or disappeared.

The Dispersal



JEAN-CLAUDE COURVEILLE

was appointed as Curate at Verrieres in the western extreme. From the start he made efforts to put the Marist Project in motion. He attempted to set up an association of lay women there. Then, when he was moved to Epercieux, he tried to establish a community of brothers. During this time he kept in touch with both Marcellin Champagnat and Jean-Claude Colin. He was considered the central figure until 1826, when the first of his difficulties began. From then, he began to disappear from the story.



MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

was sent to La Valla in the south of the diocese. Called to the bedside of a dying boy who had no knowledge of the faith or of God, Marcellin's conviction that he had been given the commission to set up a branch of brothers was even more confirmed. Less than five months after his arrival at La Valla, he had invited two young men, aged 22 and 14, to begin the branch of brothers. Soon eight more arrived, the oldest 24, and the youngest 10.



JEAN-CLAUDE COLIN

was appointed to Cerdon, a northern outpost, where his brother Pierre was the Parish Priest. After a short time there, he spoke to his brother of the plan to form a Society of many branches: priests, religious brothers and sisters, and lay people. Pierre became enthusiastic and suggested that two young women whom he knew in the parish where he had previously worked, be invited to join them at Cerdon. In 1817, JEANNE-MARIE CHAVOIN and Marie Jotillon joined the Colin brothers in the parish of Cerdon. Jeanne-Marie Chavoine was to become the foundress of the Marist Sisters.

And so, at the end of 1817, eighteen months after the Fourviere promise, the group numbered four priests separated by a great distance, two young brothers at La Valla, and two young women at Cerdon. Already three principal characters have emerged: Champagnat, Colin and Chavoine.

Mary's Work

Within six years of the Profession of the first 20 Marists in 1836, the whole Marist enterprise already numbered 60 priests, 400 brothers, 100 sisters, and many lay people, spread throughout a dozen dioceses. By then, 41 of them had set out for the missions of Oceania, and one had already been martyred. In such a short time, and from such a small part of France, nearly 600 people had joined an enterprise, convinced that this would make a difference to their own lives. Furthermore, these people were driven to "go from place to place", even to go to the ends of the earth, convinced that this would make a difference to the lives of others. And despite Champagnat's conviction that they were just rough and unpolished stones, the Marists' preaching did make a difference to people's perception of the Church. Parishioners who had ridiculed and abused the missionaries at the beginning of their missions fell at their feet by the end. What was the secret? Statements by the pioneers reveal that their energies were mobilised by three convictions. In the first place, they believed that the name "Society of Mary" had been reserved for their time and for each of them personally, and that they were privileged to be "the first children of Mary." As well as that, they believed that living by Mary's attitudes of mind and heart was a particularly effective way of meeting what they saw as "the great needs of the people". And this, they believed, would make a difference to their own lives, to the lives of others, and to the way the church was perceived and experienced.

However, by 1842, it was clear that the plan of a many-branched Marist enterprise was impossible, and that each branch would need to be independent. Marcellin Champagnat had died in 1840, and the Brothers already had their own Superior General. We now follow the thinking of Jean-Claude Colin, the founder of the Marist Fathers: it was Colin who more than anyone else articulated what might be called the spirituality of the Marist Project. There is only one aim of Marist spirituality and that is to live the life of Jesus; and there is only one source of Marist spirituality, and that is Mary herself; but each of the original congregations, and each of the congregations that developed over the years, has added its own particular instruments and its own variations to this one theme.

As far as Jean-Claude Colin was concerned, and as far as the founding Marists understood, the project they were initiating was to be something new, and the Society of Mary was not to be modelled on any other religious Congregation. It was not to take up something that was already being done by others; it was to begin something new. This "new" thing came from a key fact and a key image shared from the start by those pioneers. The key fact was their conviction that they were the first group in the history of the Church to have been called by the name of Mary, to have been called "Marist". Historically, this could perhaps be disputed; but for that group of Marists it was an unshakable conviction: the name "Society of Mary" had been reserved for that century, and for that group: "we are the first of the children of Mary". To be called Marist was a source of hope, and also a challenge to take up a certain way of thinking and acting. That way was summed up in the key image which Colin put to his followers.

Mary in the early Church

For the first time in history a Religious Congregation appears in the Church, drawing its inspiration not from Mary in herself, seen as the embodiment of all the great virtues, but Mary seen always in relationship to Jesus, to the Church, and to the contemporary world. It was a very simple and clear idea: what would happen if a group of people built their way of thinking and acting around the model of Mary's presence in the Church? This indeed was something new, and it enabled Jean-Claude Colin to envisage - and to encourage Marists to build - a new Church, a Church that is different. But then, having taken this idea, he envisaged a structure to make it work: a body of priests, religious and lay people. And having envisaged this body, he presented it with a way of acting which would enable a "new church" to take shape. Colin envisaged a way of dealing with the world, not against it; a way which meant pushing the limits of mercy to the utmost extreme to ensure that everyone was able to be gathered into the Church, and no one was excluded, except those who wished to exclude themselves. When Colin presented his idea to Rome, he said that "people had never seen anything like it." And when Cardinal Castracane criticised the project as being something unheard of, he was exactly right. That was the whole point. It had not been heard of before. Perhaps even the founding members themselves had no real idea of what this new project would mean and where it would take them.



**The 'Revelation' at the Shrine of Le Puy
to Jean-Claude Courveille
Feast of the Assumption
15 August 1812**

Here is what I want...

I have always imitated my divine Son in everything.

I followed him to Calvary itself, standing at the foot of the Cross when he gave his life for our salvation.

Now in Heaven, sharing His glory, I follow His path still, in the work He does for His Church on earth.

Of this I am the Protectress. I am like a powerful army, defending and saving souls.

When a fearful heresy threatened to convulse the whole of Europe, my Son raised up his servant Ignatius (of Loyola) to form a Society under His name, calling itself the Society of Jesus, with members called Jesuits, to fight against the hell unleashed against His Church...

In the same way in this last age of impiety and unbelief, it is my wish and that of my Son, that there be another Society to battle against hell. One consecrated to me, one which will have my name, which will call itself the 'Society of Mary', whose members will call themselves 'Marists'...



THE PIONEERS OF THE MARIST PROJECT

Le Project Mariste

JEAN-CLAUDE COLIN
JEANNE-MARIE CHAVOIN
MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT
FRANÇOISE PERROTON

JEANNE-MARIE CHAVOIN



Theodore Chavoine was 20 when he married 19 year old Jeanne Vercheres on May 31, 1786. Barely three months later, their first child, Jeanne-Marie, was born. Two more children were born into the family. A country girl, Jeanne-Marie grew up with little formal education, but with a great deal of common sense and good judgement. The Chavoine family was close-knit, and Jeanne-Marie's childhood was secure and tranquil, even though these were the times of the French Revolution. By temperament she was an extrovert, for whom action was second nature. Being the daughter of the respected village tailor, and used to meeting people in her father's shop, she developed an open, friendly and outgoing attitude to people. In her adolescent years she was influenced by a seminarian, Jean-Philibert Lefranc, who used to come to Coutouvre in his holidays. He initiated her into the life of prayer, and she became a member of the Association of Divine Love, a group founded in 1806 by Lefranc "to foster a life of prayer and charitable works in a hidden way." Jeanne-Marie was drawn to the religious life, and had been invited four times to enter existing religious congregations, but each time she refused: she was looking for something less monastic. She was invited to Cerdon to talk with Jean-Claude and Pierre Colin about the Marist project. We have no record of what happened there, but evidently she knew immediately that this was where she was to belong, and before the end of 1817 she and her friend Marie Jotillon had arrived in Cerdon to begin their part of the Marist enterprise. Jean-Claude Colin saw the sisters as living an enclosed or semi-enclosed life. Jeanne-Marie envisaged them living a hidden life in the world and in the midst of apostolic activity of all kinds. This difference would eventually lead to painful conflict and misunderstanding between the two founders.

Father Colin, speaking of her one day, said:

"In all the three branches of the Society, she is the person with the greatest spirit of faith and prayer."

"...she has been favoured by grace from childhood; The Lord has imparted to her many lights concerning the Society and the virtues of Mary."

Contemporary Witnesses

Among the people who knew Jeanne-Marie personally or through others, here are comments from a former mayor of Jarnosse, a Marist priest, a Marist sister, and a priest from Jarnosse.

"...A fine woman, ready to come to the help of everyone." "...Intelligent, lively, very kind and large-hearted, ready to render service." "...She was kind, affable with everyone, and gained the affection of all who knew her. She was large hearted and when she helped anyone she did so generously." "...a woman of good sense and judgement, straightforward and large hearted. She resembled the women of her countryside, simple, wanting in certain forms of etiquette. But there were treasures of goodness and kindness in this woman."

Dormant Charism

It is only in comparatively recent years that Jeanne-Marie Chavoine has come into her own as Foundress of the Marist Sisters. Even at the time of her death few seemed to remember that they owed to her the very existence of a feminine branch of the Society of Mary as well as the strong, virile formation of the first generation of Marist Sisters. Jeanne-Marie's personal founding charism, as distinct from that of Jean-Claude Colin, lay dormant for years. It came to life only when, in 1954, research was started on Jeanne-Marie Chavoine's life, insights and specific role in the Society of Mary, a supernatural insight dating from that first meeting at Cerdon when the Marist project was explained to her.

If she could speak today...

Each of the three founding personalities lived their childhood during the French Revolution. But each one's experience of those events was different, and in this way they would act towards, and in, "The World". If Jeanne-Marie Chavoin could speak to us today, we could imagine her saying something like this:

"You know, in a village in France, many people pass by the tailors shop. You imagine what that meant for a little girl standing by her father, drinking in all the talk, getting to know all the people of the village. And during the revolution, people would gather each day to talk in frightened whispers about the news they had heard from the cities of Paris or Lyon. But in our village the Revolution did not have quite the same effect as in some others. There was no violence, no bloodshed... So, you ask what "the world" was like for me? The world, to me, was a friendly place, a place where you did things, where you acted for the Lord in a simple and matter-of-fact way. Hard work and no fuss. For me, imitating the family of Nazareth didn't mean staying in the house with Jesus and Mary and Joseph. Nazareth was the whole town, where Mary simply lived the life of the people - nothing extraordinary - and went about doing good... One thing you should know... After the Revolution in France many parishes kept big memorial books with the names of families who had hidden or helped the Priests in the troubles. Our family name is not there. After the Revolution, a poor broken priest who had signed the Oath and had become a schismatic priest wanted to come back and make his peace. He had nowhere to live; no one wanted him. Our family took him in, and he stayed for 17 years. I always remember that: doing works of charity when it's not fashionable or glamorous. That's the charity that counts. That's the way to live a hidden life in the world."

Jeanne-Marie Chavoin

JEAN-CLAUDE COLIN



When Jean-Claude Colin's parents married in 1771, his father Jacques was 24 years old, and his mother Marie Gonnet was not yet 14. Jean-Claude, born on August 7, 1790, was their eighth child. All told, nine children were born into the family. His parents owned and cultivated a piece of land, and during the winter turned to weaving. The home in which Jean-Claude was born was as secure and loving as any of the ordinary homes of Les Barbery where they lived, considering these were the cataclysmic times of the French Revolution. The Revolution and the subsequent Civil Constitution of the Clergy brought a split into the Church, separating priests who supported the Constitution from those who remained faithful to Rome. Jean-Claude's parents supported the clergy loyal to Rome. An order of arrest was issued against Jacques Colin who had openly supported the parish priest, Father Cabuchet. Jacques had to hide for a year; his house was boarded up and all his goods were sold. Both he and his wife suffered through this, and in 1795 Marie Colin died, aged 37. Jacques Colin died not quite three weeks later, leaving the children orphaned. Jean-Claude was put under the care of a paternal uncle, Sebastian, who lived at St Bonnet-le Troncy. Jean-Claude developed a scrupulosity which gave him much trouble, but which was in later life to make him sensitive and merciful to burdened people. His early experiences left him with an intense longing for a life of solitude and a desire to serve God alone. Since he could see no way of doing this while being caught up in the world, he decided to satisfy his desire for solitude by studying for the priesthood. It was in the major seminary of St Irene in Lyon that he came into contact with Courveille and the Marist project. Jean Claude's life is the story of a man touched by God in a remarkable way; a man whose temperament and personality, transformed by grace, enabled him to find a particularly effective response to the deep spiritual needs of his time.

Nothing remains of the house where Jean-Claude Colin was born, but a cross erected in 1936 marks the site. Rolling hills and carefully tended paddocks, where the hamlet's population of 600 made their living, still breathe an atmosphere of tranquillity and peace. To the left of this picture one can see the edge of the forest which played an important part in Colin's spirituality. He told Mayet on one occasion: "My one thought was to be a hermit; to go out and live in a forest, to be alone with God alone. "

The large house where his uncle lived still stands. Today it is a museum of early Marist history.

What did they think?

Three different people with three different perspectives give their view of Jean-Claude Colin. The first is Mayet, a contemporary of Colin, the second is a modern novelist, and the third is a present-day Marist.

At first sight, he appeared to be one of those good, little old country priests, very simple, very withdrawn, not knowing where to curl himself up to occupy less space, and at the same time, so abounding in goodness. I must add, however, that you felt he was a saint.

The Mayet Memoirs

He was a visionary man. I myself have seen the accomplishment of his vision in a tiny mission in Japan, in the South Pacific, in the lives of the dedicated men and women who still follow the rule of life which he laid down for them, and the merciful enterprises to which he pointed the way.

He was not in any sense of the word a liberal man, but he had a fund of compassion which still enriches the lives of his followers and of those whom they continue to serve.

They are in the best sense of the word liberal Christians. In them the paradox of the life of Jean-Claude Colin is resolved. They are the good fruit of a strange tree that reared itself gnarled and strong in the stormy landscape of the nineteenth century.

Morris West

Colin was the anonymous apostle, unnoticed because he was so like everybody else, easily approachable. For him, to go among people quietly without offending sensibilities or arousing opposition was a first principle of priest-people encounters. In the last analysis, Colin's true greatness was his ability to adjust himself to his own time.

Stan Hosie, sm

If he could speak today ...

Of all the founding figures, Jean-Claude Colin was the one whose life was most marked by the French Revolution. If he could speak to us today, we might imagine him saying something like this:

“They were searing times, especially for someone of a sensitive and timid temperament. Yes, I attended Masses said secretly in barns at night, or in houses where the priest without vestments said Mass into a cupboard, while the people were ready to act as if they were playing cards if the police came. I remember the priest disguised as a shoemaker hearing confessions in the cellar of a house. You know, of all the areas in the Lyon district our area was probably the one most torn apart by the split between those who supported the schismatic priest and those who supported the priest loyal to Rome. That's how I lost my parents; that's how our family was divided. It's no wonder that for me, 'the world' was not a friendly place at all. The world after all had killed our gentle King; it had killed my father and mother; and it would have liked to kill my God. You can see why I wanted to be unknown, to be hidden from the world to be alone with God alone was more important to me than anything else. But there was another idea that kept coming back to me like a constant master thought. What did Mary do in the Church after the Ascension? And what if we copied her way of life in the Church? Gradually, I came to realise that my call was not to be hidden from the world, but in the world. There were worlds to conquer, souls to save, and the best way to do it was by not imposing myself, by being unobtrusive, by putting myself in the shoes of others. How I came to this understanding, I'll never know. Only the grace of God, on which I depended all my life, could ever explain it.”

Jean-Claude Colin

MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT



Marcellin Champagnat was the first of the founding people to succeed in forming a Marist group, and his company of Marist Brothers became the fastest growing and the most numerous of the branches of the Marist project. This in itself explains a great deal about this most lovable of characters who did so much for the enterprise in his short life. From beginning to end, Marcellin was a practical person, and everything about him reflects this: the way he understood the ideas exchanged at the seminary, the way he responded to needs, the way he formed his Brothers. Much of this can be traced to his background. His mother was a woman of strong and robust faith, who more than once accompanied Marcellin on foot to the shrine of St Francis Regis at La Louvesc, when difficulties threatened his seminary studies. Marcellin's father was a farmer, who could turn his hand to many other trades as well. Marcellin was a child of the Revolution in more than one sense. He was born in the year of the Revolution, May 20, 1789. As well as that, his father welcomed the Revolution and from the start accepted its principles as a way to help the people. "Our rights were unknown, we have discovered them," he said as Colonel of the National Guard. "The new Constitution is written, now we must support it." As an official under Revolutionary governments, he was required to preside at the secular rituals prescribed by the Revolution. But at the same time, Marcellin's mother attended clandestine Catholic worship. Through his position in the town, Marcellin's father was able to save the Church in his area from some of the worst effects of the Revolution. Marcellin was the ninth of 10 children, and as he grew up, three events dramatically changed his life and formed him as a Marist, an educator, and then as the founder of the Marist Brothers. On one occasion, as a young boy, he witnessed the cruel scene of a teacher giving to a pupil a name which stuck and which caused the child to suffer ridicule from the others in the class. On another occasion he was present when a teacher dealt out harsh physical punishment to a pupil. And as a priest he was called to the bedside of a dying boy who had no knowledge of God or the faith. From these experiences came two great convictions in Marcellin's life: "We must have Brothers!" and "I can never see a child without telling him how much God loves him."

The loving relationship which Marcellin inspired in his young Brothers has continued to this day

Many portraits and statues have been made of Marcellin Champagnat. But three statues are of particular significance, not only because they are in places of historical importance for the Brothers - Marlies, La Valla, and the Hermitage - but also because they are carved from rock. If any man deserved to be called a man of rock it was Marcellin Champagnat. The greatest monument to his life and spirit is possibly the Hermitage, the large five-story building which Marcellin built with his own hands and the labour of his Brothers in 1824. The building was the Mother House of the Brothers, and was Marcellin's home from 1825 till his death. To construct the building, Marcellin had literally to carve into the rock face of the hill. The statue at La Valla (right) shows Champagnat with Gabriel Rivat, who, as Br Francois, became the first Superior General of the Brothers. Champagnat looks back to the house at La Valla which has always been looked on as "the cradle of the Institute." His hand is on the shoulder of Gabriel who looks down the valley to the world beyond and to the future.

Family environment

Thus it seems that Marcellin Champagnat spent his youth in a remarkable family milieu that would be of immense formative value to him. By no means destitute, the hard-working Champagnat family was obviously very prominent in the district of Marlies. Marcellin learned to bake bread, to work with wood, to build in stone and to roof a shed - in short, all the work required in the mill and on the farm, and all this was to prove most valuable to him in his future years.

What did they think?

The opinions of a former mayor of La Valla, some contemporaries, and his biographer, are worth recording: "...Father Champagnat was very well liked. Even when he left us to go to the Hermitage many of his parishioners used to go to him in their needs; almost all of them contributed something to help him build the house there." "...His confreres roundly criticised him when he began to work. People wanted to stop him on the grounds that to lead such a harsh and excessively poor life was not befitting the character of a priest. He himself did all the masonry when he built the Hermitage".

"..My father was a frequent visitor of the Brothers at the Hermitage. When he returned, we would always hear from him: 'What a heavenly place that Hermitage is, where men work, pray, live and love, where there is peace. Father Champagnat is always the first at whatever there is to be done; he is the most impressive of all the men there; he carries the others along with him because they all love him and venerate him so much.' "...As soon as he heard that anyone was ill, he went to visit them. Inclemency of weather, wind, rain, snow - nothing could stop him."

If he could speak today...

Marcellin Champagnat's experience of the world of the Revolution was different from Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn's and from Jean-Claude Colin's. If he could speak to us today, we might imagine him saying something like this:

"It's a painful experience being a late starter at learning. When I entered the minor seminary at the age of 16, I was well ahead of my classmates in age and well behind them in learning. But I'm glad now for that experience, because it made me determined to help others to get the advantages that I was deprived of myself. It's a wonderful thing to be able to free people from the things that hold them back: ignorance of God, sin, and lack of education. My experience made me convinced of the need for teachers who lived in a Christian way like Mary. That's what drew me to the plan of a Society of Mary, and there was nothing I wasn't ready to sacrifice for that plan. My father taught me a lot of things, and I'm a practical man like he was. I'm used to working with tools, you see, and used to finding the right tool for the right job. You need that; and you need to be able to make do with the material you have at hand. And when I'm looking for people for a job, it's the same thing. You have to try and find the right person for the right job; but you also have to use what you have at hand. If you can't find someone with two eyes, put in someone with one eye. But you know, it's all the work of Our Lady, and in the end, she will see that it works out. This world is the place where you can create things for God, carve new things for God, get great things done in modest ways. For me, humility is admitting the truth about ourselves, and using the gifts we have. Whether we have one eye or two eyes, it doesn't really matter. But it does matter to use the gifts we have and not hide them away."

Marcellin Champagnat

FRANCOISE PERROTON



In 1848 a Frenchwoman from Lyon embarked on board the Catholic Mission vessel L'Arch d'Alliance for an eleven-month voyage to Wallis, an island in the Pacific Ocean. Who was this intrepid traveller, and what made her undertake such a voyage at the age of forty-nine?

Marie Françoise Perroton was born in Lyon on 7 February 1796 to Eugene and Jeanne Anne Perroton.

Her father died when Françoise was fifteen years old and she found employment as a governess to the Marias family in Lyon. This post indicates that she must have received a reasonably good education.

As a citizen of Lyon, Françoise would have experienced the disasters that befell the city during the Revolution - more so than in other parts of France because of the opposition in Lyon to the Revolution and the Republic that it installed.

In was in this atmosphere that France underwent an amazing reawakening of the missionary spirit. Françoise herself was deeply affected for she tells us: "From 1820 ... I had my heart set on being one of those whom God calls to do the work of missionaries" [OPS Vol.1 Letter 25]. We also know that from 1820 she was very much involved with the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

My firm wish is to serve on the mission field for the rest of my life... my resources are meagre and the only thing I have of value is my good will.. Once I have arrived God will provide for my needs. I am confident of this for I do not wish for anything else than his glory and the salvation of those good people of Oceania for whom I will willingly sacrifice myself if it is what God wants of me...If God wishes for me to depart for the missions He will guide your reply.

So it was that one day in December 1846, a surprised Bishop Bataillon was informed that a middle-aged Frenchwoman had arrived on the L'Arch d'Alliance to work for the mission in Wallis. She remained in Wallis for seven years, alone, apart from the children she taught. The next five years were spent on the island of Futuna – still alone, until Sunday, 30 May 1858, a group of French women, all members of the Third Order of Mary, would come to join her and she herself would be received as a member of the same Third Order.

Françoise died on the island of Futuna on 9 August 1873 at the age of seventy-seven.

Marist Missionary Sisters

I am amazed at the confidence of the first Marists - had in the young ladies of Oceania. It is striking to see how soon they suggested consecrated life to them. Some of them became Tertiaries; others were formed into diocesan congregations. For many years they were guided by an SMSM; today they are completely autonomous:

* The **Daughters of Mary**, in New Caledonia and on Vanuatu, founded in 1875 by Bishop Vitte and Sister Marie de la Croix, approved in 1962.

* The **Sisters of Our Lady of Nazareth**, in Fiji, founded in 1891 by Bishop Vidal and entrusted to Sister Marie de Jesus, approved in 1950.

* The **Sisters of Nazareth**, in Bougainville, begun in 1930 by Sister Marie Ignace Schaal, with the encouragement of Bishop Wade. This congregation disbanded during World War II but reorganised in 1947 and was approved in 1962.

* The **Daughters of Mary Immaculate**, in the Solomon Islands; founded by Bishop Raucaz in 1935, scattered during the war, it was reorganised and approved in 1947.

These four congregations inherited the Marist spirit of the first missionaries. Today they are a forceful presence in their respective dioceses.

Claudine Nakamura, smsm

From the Letters of Françoise Perroton

My dear friends,

I see so much of my nineteenth century world mirrored in your own. If I could speak to you today to help you to deal with the violence and disasters your world is passing through, this is what I would say.

I would ask you to take time to discern what God is asking of you as Catholics. Then when the moment comes for you to act you will be able to respond. The moment may appear to you as something rather insignificant or as something rather magnificent. Whatever it is, it will resonate within you.

You need also to know that your initial enthusiasm may fade and you will experience loneliness, doubt even; but you will know deep down that you are where God wants you to be and, in faith, believe that what you experience is part of his plan for our world. You must keep alive within you that daily source of daring that marks you out as a committed Catholic.

Remember, too, that sufferings are never negative for those who believe - use them for the Church. I remember writing once in a letter that "I believe firmly in all the articles of the Creed, but of them all, I believe in the communion of saints in life and in death. [OPS Vol 1. Letter 7].

I would also like to stress that I set out as a laywoman as did those who followed my lead for a number of years. I used my own initiative in responding to the needs of the women in Oceania. Follow your heart even if it means leaving your safe zone and launching out into the deep with nothing but trust in Jesus and His blessed Mother.

May they bless you.

Françoise Perroton



A REVOLUTION OF THE HEART

Marcellin's spirituality and a contemporary identity for Marists
Brother Sean Sammon FMS SG
6 June 2003

History can be a wise teacher, but only if we are attentive students. At the end of the periods of change and transformation in the history of consecrated life, these three elements appear to remain: prayer, community and ministry...

Within the legacy of our transitions we will be better equipped for the challenging work of re-imagining our call as Marists – if we have developed the habit of prayer, a capacity to listen and a willingness to act – as Marcellin and the early Marists did - with courage and determination...

Eventually, the founder arrived at a point where he built his spirituality upon this solid base: love of God and of other people. He loved God in God's very human nature. Outgoing by temperament, Marcellin also loved people and enjoyed spending time with them. Aware that God chooses to be revealed in the persons and events of life, the founder came to understand that one way to a loving relationship with God was through loving relationships with others...

Several moments of crises early in Marcellin's life also appear to have been "stepping stones" in his process of personal conversion: his dismissal from the seminary at the end of his first year, the sudden death on September 2nd, 1807 of his friend, Denis Duplay, and a conversation about his need to improve his conduct held with the supervisor of the seminary, Father Linossier.

There can be little doubt that the death of Marcellin's mother, Marie-Thérèse, in 1810, contributed to changes in his spirituality. She had been instrumental in his vocational decision and supportive throughout his seminary formation. In 1809 he had written, "O my Lord and my God, I promise you to no more offend you, to make acts of faith and of hope, never to return to the tavern without necessity, to avoid bad company, and to lead others to practice virtue." A year later, we find him acting on his resolve.

During the process of his formation as a priest, then, Marcellin became more open to the power of God's transforming grace in his life. The Lord used some very human means to focus the founder's mind, heart, spirit, and energies on this one aim: loving Jesus and, in turn, helping others to do the same...

