



Any part of the world

When the 12 seminarians signed the pledge to found the Society of Mary in 1816, they did not clearly describe the activities of the congregation. The promise simply stated that they would dedicate themselves "in every way" to the salvation of souls. However, by the time Jean-Claude Colin came to write his letter to Pope Pius VII in 1822, outlining the plans for the Society, he had clarified the Society's aims, which would be to seek to care for the salvation of their own souls and those of others "through missions to non-believers and believers alike, in any part of the world." The Marist enterprise was to be a missionary enterprise, even for those who stayed in France. And even though Jean-Claude Colin never seems to have professed a personal desire to go to the foreign missions, this call to mission "in any part of the world" was explicitly part of the original plan. It was something which attracted and drew the energies of each of the branches of the enterprise. Some of Marcellin Champagnat's Brothers were among the first missionaries to go to the Pacific; and in a message about preparations for the departure of a second group of priests and brothers, Colin wrote to Champagnat's community at the Hermitage: "For me, it is so clearly something of a consolation to see the zeal of many among us who are passionately asking to be part of this second apostolic colony.... The problem that weighs on me is not one of finding workers, but rather one of making the choice; for in view of our numbers, we cannot allow every applicant to go." He may have been thinking explicitly of Champagnat, who Marist tradition says wished to go with the first band of missionaries. Colin persuaded him that he was more necessary at home in France.

A similar desire for the missions was felt among the Marist Sisters. One of the first Marist Sisters was Françoise Chanel, a sister of Peter Chanel who was on the first missionary expedition. In the two letters we have from Peter to Françoise, there is a hint of the future possibility of Marist Sisters in the missions. And in 1844, when he was sending news about France to the missionaries, Mayet told them that among the Marist Sisters "many sigh for the happy day when God will call them to leave everything to fly to the aid of their sisters...." A little later, Marist Bishop Epalle consulted the Pope about sending religious women to Oceania. The Pope replied that the time had not yet come. It was in fact soon to come.

The Mayet Memoirs "Let those who are leaving for Oceania imitate the apostles; let those who are staying in Europe imitate the early Church.... At the end of time the Church will be as it was at the time of the Apostles."
- Father Colin, September 2, 1848

The Pacific The Islands of the Pacific may conjure up for us today fantasies of sunshine, palm trees, white beaches and blue lagoons. Places for marvellous holidays. But Europeans of the latter part of the 19th century had quite a different image. These islands were, literally, at the very end of the earth, and many navigators had brought back horrifying stories of their experiences there. The authorities in Rome had long been anxious to set up a mission in this part of the world. In 1835 they asked a retired missionary, Father Pastre, to take on this immensely vast area. Pastre declined, feeling that his age and ill health would not sustain the demands. But at the same time he looked around to see if he could find someone else. He consulted Father Cholleton, one of the Vicars General of the diocese. Cholleton immediately thought of Jean-Baptiste Pompallier. Pompallier was one of the Marist aspirants, and in fact he had been the director of the group of Marist laymen who

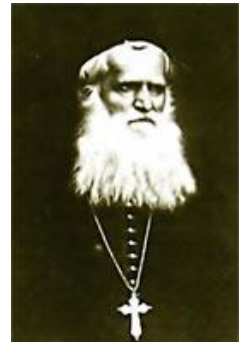
called themselves "Tertiary Brothers of Mary". He had also expressed a desire to go to the missions. He wrote to Jean-Claude Colin telling him of the proposal. Colin encouraged him to accept, foreseeing that this could lead to the approval of the Society by Rome. He was right. In 1836 the Society of Mary was approved by the Church, the election of a Superior General and the First Professions took place, and Pompallier was consecrated bishop. The missionaries packed their bags and prepared for departure. The four priests who departed with Pompallier represented exactly one quarter of the Marist priests in France. Along with them were three Brothers, and on Christmas Eve, 1836, they set sail from Le Havre for the vast unknown.

Three pioneers



A priest: Pierre Chanel was among the very first group of Marist missionaries to leave France in 1836. He was not one of the group of Seminarians who made the Promise to begin the Society in 1816, but he was among the group of first Marists who took their vows in 1836. Within months of his religious profession into the Society of Mary, he set sail for Oceania. After four years of seemingly fruitless work, Pierre Chanel was clubbed down and murdered by a group of men from the island of Futuna. Pierre Chanel is recognised as a Saint in the Church.

A bishop: Almost in direct contrast to Pierre Chanel, Pierre Marie Bataillon enjoyed exceptional success as a missionary. He too was among the first group of missionaries to set sail from France. He worked on the Island of Wallis, about 140km away from Pierre Chanel at Futuna. Bataillon cut an impressive figure with his long beard, his forthright approach, and the sheer force of his personality. In 1843 he was appointed Vicar Apostolic of central Oceania, with authority over the vast area of Wallis, Futuna, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji and New Caledonia. Bataillon made great demands on himself and his missionaries, who paid a high price in exhaustion and isolation. Jean-Claude Colin was aware of this, and soon tension developed between the two men, alike in their zeal for souls, but so different in their approach.



A brother: Both Jean-Claude Colin and Marcellin Champagnat had Brothers in mind for the Marist project, but their view of the Brothers' work was different. Colin envisaged a group of "Joseph Brothers", whose main work was to be practical helpers to the priests on mission. Champagnat saw his "Little Brothers of Mary" as catechists and teachers of children. At the start of the enterprise, the lines between the two groups of Brothers were sometimes blurred. Joseph-Xavier Luzy, for example, joined the Marists in Belley in 1833 as one of Colin's "Joseph Brothers"; but the records show that he made his perpetual vows as one of Champagnat's "Little Brothers of Mary". As a missionary he worked with Father Bataillon on Wallis Island. Like all the Brothers who went to the missions, Joseph-Xavier had to turn his hand to almost anything. In a letter to Peter Chanel in 1840, he described himself as "carpenter, baker, tailor, doctor and sacristan". Between 1836 and 1849, 26 Little Brothers of Mary set out for the missions of Oceania.

Marist Brothers' Constitutions Like the Church, our institute is missionary, and therefore we should have a missionary attitude like Father Champagnat who affirmed: "we are ready to work in every diocese in the world."

– Constitution 90
