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FRANCOISE PERROTON 2



In our last issue (no.8) I began telling you about an intrepid woman, Francoise Perroton. Inspired by a letter she had read in the Missionary Annals, she contacted the Marists through the director of the Third Order, Fr.Peter Julian Eymard. Then this unmarried lady, already forty-nine years of age but full of faith and determination, succeeded in working her passage across the world to the island of Wallis, in Central Oceania

We are in 1845.

Marist priests and brothers have been on Wallis

for nine years. Peter Chanel had met a martyr's death on the neighbouring island of Futuna a few years before. For the next twelve years Francoise Perroton would be the only European woman in the place. The Bishop received her reluctantly, insisting she at least don a religious style of garb to assure a status for this unmarried woman among the people. The young woman who had signed the letter that spurred Francoise to action, and her companions, welcomed her with joy. So did her father, the local "king".

What is Francoise facing into?

Well, from night one this is the end for her of that cherished European invention, "privacy", and the end of elementary amenities and basic commodities. Henceforth she will lie on a mat on the ground, in a hut by the beach, sharing with several other women. No bread, no wine, (farewell France !), no salt. Pork and various tropical vegetables, cooked when people could bother to cook, plenty of fish., if they could bother to fish ! Hens and eggs. Bananas, bread-fruit (green melons) and some other tropical fruit.

And the weather? 20 to 30 degrees, moist and enervating at all times, worst in the wet season. Of course no equipment to combat these discomforts.

Worst of all: besides the usual minor illnesses for which there were as yet no remedies, tropical maladies with flies, mosquitoes, fleas and other insects fostering fevers and poisoning the system, causing permanent rheumatism and infections. Newcomers suffered constant discomfort from itch. During the last fifteen years of her life Francoise suffered from elephantiasis, the malady of grossly swollen legs, and in the last four years she could not walk. Neither Francoise nor the young sisters who were to arrive twelve years later were softies, but four

had to leave Central Oceania, and the others suffered terribly. As late as 1870s, when Françoise was seventy-five plus, the provisions boat could often be so late that for six months she would be without flour, sugar, and other essentials.

The missionary.

Françoise had come all the way from France to respond to the letter Suzanne and the other women had sent from Wallis. They had already been instructed in the basics of the faith, baptised and brought into the Church by the Marist priests and brothers for whom they had great respect, But in their letter: they wrote: “if you love us, send us a few devout women to educate the women of Wallis...women to teach us different useful things”.

“If you love us”... Françoise began by gathering the women and three girls together, and then combining their teaching her the language, while she taught them with gestures and action ordinary feminine things: toilet, hair-style, ornaments, child care, songs, cooking, hygiene, care of the wounded and sick. She must do this over and over, while repeating the names of things, in a happy atmosphere of mimicry and laughter.

By force of necessity, since she was slow at learning the language, and women and children were always living in her hut by the beach or coming and going,, her ministry was accomplished by constantly being-with. Besides laboriously learning the language, if Françoise was to teach some house and mother crafts, then spinster that she was, she had also to learn motherliness from imitating mothers with their children. She succeeded in this very well.

In that permanently shared living Françoise gradually realised that something was happening. Besides speech, there are other ways of teaching, namely presence, details of day-to-day living, reactions, attitudes, work and minor services, personal prayer and prayer together in church. She would walk into peo-

ple’s houses as they did into hers. She would go with a group to visit the sick, to attend wakes, where she continued to learn customs and traditions.

A few girls soon joined the initial three to live permanently with her. Then still others continued to live with their families but came to “school” of their own accord and spend part of the day with Françoise and the others. After about three years there were as many as a hundred girls, of course not in the hut, but just beside by the beach if there were plenty of open spaces with shady trees.

Before leaving Lyons, Françoise had imagined how she would be setting up a school where she would teach rows of children and instill orderliness and Christian decorum in European fashion, and be associated with the Marist mission. Because this did not happen and she was slow in learning the language, we often find her in her letters deprecating her activity, as if it were really of no significance. In fact, her day and night presence among the people and the children proved a blessing. The native people were not “savages”. They had developed survival skills and had a certain artistic and religious sense. Unfortunately, “civilising” missionary activity sometimes meant bullying people into an intrusive whiteman’s culture. This did not happen with Françoise’s way. She taught the women what they had asked for : “certain useful things”, sometimes prompting their undeveloped talent into doing things she could not do herself, refining their relationships by her example, deepening their faith by drawing out their own instinct for prayer and song.

The women began to teach each other. Before she arrived, Susanne and another woman had learned to write, and some others to read: these now set about teaching the children and other adults who wanted this piece of know how. And they were all teaching Françoise too. Fr.Poupinel, the Superior General’s representative in Oceania in the 1850s and 60s, valued Françoise and her work, particularly for

the women. Among other things, he specially noticed how the women were now taking more and better care of their babies and young children.

When eventually the young sisters began to arrive, there was some effort to set up a “proper” school, but the sisters and even the priests and brothers now had to acknowledge that Françoise’s methodology was the most effective way. Although she was never formally foundress of a religious congregation, Françoise Perroton was to be in effect the deepest influence upon the way of life and relationship of that Third Order Regular, which would become the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary.

Bishop Bataillon was a formidable man, an energetic missionary. He realised Françoise was a valuable person, but really could not settle for her way of proclaiming the gospel. Nothing would do but for her to agree to taking three vows of religious life and formally signing up as a member of Notre Dame des Missions, a congregation founded after she had left France. “Formally” because she continued to mission as before, though in 1854 Bataillon moved her on to Futuna, where Chanel had given his life. There she was to live on a rocky promontory, ten mountainy miles away from the nearest port.. Given that her elephantiasis made walking difficult,... during the last four years impossible, .. we wonder at the extraordinary spirit which animated her.

“Amazing Grace”

We know a lot about the activities of the first Marist missionaries, and we so can know something about personalities and temperaments. However, when it comes to revealing feelings or their spiritual life they are in their correspondence, very true to that insight of Father Colin’s, “Hidden and as it were unknown” With Françoise Perroton, well, perhaps her social experience in Lyons where she had been received almost as a member of a middle-class family and was used to conversa-

tion with literary people, made it easier for her to express herself. Perhaps also because she was a lay woman.



Yet, as her social experience and relative freedom had allowed her to express her deep faith and sense of the Church’s mission by venturing out to Oceania on her own, so then they also made solitude a greater burden than the awful physical conditions. Of course she was continuously surrounded by people, but was for twelve years a lone European woman. Almost the only European men with whom she could have conversed were Marists. But the French religious mores of the time totally inhibited personal communication between religious men and women. (Peter Chanel, that gentle man, writing to his mother would nevertheless address her using the formal “vous”, and sign himself: “Chanel” !). Françoise (to be known as “Soeur Marie du Mont Carmel” if you please !), very much appreciated the spiritual guidance of Fr.Jouillon, the good sense, support and letters of Fr.Poupinel, but that had to remain the level of their communication. It is from a letter of Poupinel to the Superior General, that we read: “Mgr. Bataillon came across as heartless, without the least feeling towards poor Miss Perroton, and this shocked the people of Wallis.”

No wonder that seven years after arriving Françoise would write: “Shall I tell you all the pain that my solitude causes ? I do resign myself to God’s will, but I would rather his will was in harmony with mine. In my prayers I never asked him to send me companions, because I love my dear compatriots too much to wish any of them to come and suffer here, especially if only one should come.”

She had a fine sense of humour, and sometimes this would still show through, even while complaining. To Poupinel she writes: "You have a good opinion of me, but I can only hope the Supreme Judge thinks likewise...I do not know whether my dominant fault is impatience or discouragement; I am making marvellous progress in both every day. . . Your kindness consoles and encourages me in the isolation to which I am permanently condemned, though I am weary of the life I lead." Did Françoise ever decide she had had enough? Was she ever tempted to return to France? Yes, indeed. At least once, in 1858, after twelve years alone, she began to look for a boat to take her to Sydney, back home. A boat did arrive.., in it Fr.Poupinel AND four French women, the first of the "pioneers" Others were on the way. Of course, Françoise stayed. But by 1864 she

was again to be alone on her station for another six years, the others dispersed over the mission by the relentless Bishop Bataillon. Into her seventies she had nine girls in her house, and they were cooking for twenty-four every day. Then, one day, in 1871, unannounced, the youngest of the first sisters, Rose, arrived. A loving and experienced nurse she stayed with Françoise for her last two years.

From the heart, at seventy-six years of age she confided: "The chapel to which I go is my sole consolation. What would I be like if I did not have the adorable Eucharist with easy reach?" So there it is: the presence of Jesus within her life, the source of an amazing grace in an amazing woman.

Denis Green sm

MARIST MEMORIES OVER THE NEXT TWO MONTHS INCLUDE:

- 12th July The birth of St. Peter Chanel in 1803, in La Potière, near Cuet, South West France. St Peter Chanel was one of the first Marist missionaries to the South Pacific in 1836.
- 23rd July The Pledge of Fourviere in 1816, by a small group of 12 Marist Aspirants to found a society dedicated to Mary. Twenty years later in 1836 the Society of Mary (Marist Fathers) was approved by the pope.
- 2nd August Feast of St. Peter Julian Eymard, a Marist Father and later the founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers
- 4th August Feast of St. Jean Vianney (The Curé of Ars), who was also a member of the Marist Third Order
- 7th August The Birth of Jean-Claude Colin in 1790, in St. Bonnet-le-Troncy, a small village in the Beoujolais region of France. Jean Claude is the Founder and first Superior General of the Marist Fathers.
- 15th August Feast of the Assumption. On this day in 1812, the name and first idea of a Society of Mary came to Jean Claude Courveille at Le Puy on this feast day.
- 28th August The birth of Jeanne Marie Chavoïn in 1786, in Coutouve, a small village to the north of Lyons, France. Jeanne Marie is the Foundress of the Marist Sisters

MARIST LAITY CONFERENCES

Swanwick,
The Marist Laity conference in Great Britain took place in the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, England from Friday 27th to Sunday 29th April 2007. The Keynote speaker

was Jan Hulshof SM, Superior General of the Marist Fathers. For more information on the conference check out the Marist Way website at www.maristway.com for a gallery of pictures and the main points of Jan Hulshof's presentation. I am led to believe by the Irish Marist Laity who traveled to the conference

that a great time was had by all and that it was a most worthwhile experience with much food for thought to take a way and chew upon! In summary below are the main concluding remarks from Jan Hulshof's talk:

- a) A new Church for today should be a more true and sincere Church, more communion focused and participatory, a Church that in its way of living, thinking and acting expresses a deep concern for the poor and for their earth.
- b) This way of living, thinking and acting is the way of Mary, the Marian way.
- c) Members of the Marist Way and Marist religious need each other, not just the way they need brotherly relations with any community. Relationships within our Marist family are important in a different way. The way we support each other affects directly the nature of our Marist mission, the work of Mary.
- d) This work of Mary is: to be the support of the Church as it comes to birth in these latter days of pride, lust for power and greediness; to gather the people of God in its diversity represented by the branches of the Marist family. The Marist family is a sign of this Marian people and should therefore be open for religious and lay people, men and women, young and old, learned and unskilled, rich and poor, sinners and just. It should focus all its energy on increasing communion.

Western Regional Marist Laity Gathering (USA)

From May 25 to May 28, 2007, a gathering of Lay Marists was held in Santa Cruz / San Francisco, California at the Villa Maria del Mar Retreat House, Santa Cruz, California. The main presenter was John Craddock, SM from New Zealand. For the last eight years, John has been coordinator of Marist Laity, New Zealand Province, and so works with 60 groups of Marian Mothers and 50 Third Order groups of multi-cultural diversity. He was accompanied to the conference by his secretary, Jane Langham who gave a presentation on the Marian Mothers organization and by Anna Paea, from Tonga. Dennis Steik, Charles Girard and Edwin Keel (Marist

Fathers) also gave presentations. The theme of the gathering was "MARISTS, BEARING HER NAME" Growing like Jesus, with Mary and Joseph in Wisdom, Stature and Favor with God and People. For a summary of the conference held in USA check out the following website: www.maristlaity.com/recentevents

Update on the European Marist Laity Gathering in Turin

As mentioned in the previous Marist Links, a gathering of Marist Laity from the seven Marist Provinces of Europe is taking place in Turin, Italy from August 23rd – 27th 2007. On Sunday June 3rd most of those traveling to Turin met in Mount St. Mary's Milltown to prepare for the gathering. There are fifteen Marist Laity from Ireland going. Practical travel arrangements and accommodation were discussed, along with an initial look at the main topics for the gathering. The topics are:

- The laity's role in the Church and in the world today in Europe
- Hidden and unknown in the world: is it possible in today's society.
- Marist spirituality in everyday life (family, work, society) and in relation to our Christian communities.
- The identity of Marist lay people and their relation with the other branches: to what extent has Father Colin's dream been realized?
- Marist lay people: what perspectives for the future?

The group generated many ideas for an international prayer service, items for a prayer space and ideas for a presentation on Marist Laity in Ireland today. We wish all those traveling God's blessing and we pray that they will have a great time, meet many new friends from the Marist Laity European world and benefit greatly from the experience individually and collectively. We look forward to hearing all about it at some future gathering. For further information on the meeting in Turin contact Eileen McCann, 042 9331276, Nuala Fox 01 2876960 or Sr. Moire Ryan 094 9254133

SOME MARIST LAITY WEBSITES

www.maristway.com
 www.maristlaity.com
 www.maristlaityaustralia.com
 www.marianmothers.org
 www.maristfathers.org/mlaity

Marist Laity in Great Britain
United States of America Marist Laity
Marist Laity in Australia
New Zealand Marist Laity
Marist Laity in Ireland

HIDDEN AND UNKNOWN / THE HIDDEN GOD

I see our vocation, for us who have been educated in the spirit of the unknown and hidden, as lying in this acceptance of the two countenances of the hidden God. It entails, on the one hand, an intimate understanding of the secularised world and of its resistance to any image of God himself. It entails a sense of being silently buried in the ground, a sense of work which, as such, is not a proclamation of God; it entails a sense of the importance of a real human solidarity with all those people from whom we have hidden God. On the other hand, it means keeping faith in the hidden God, in the God who is far off; it means keeping up that hope of which Mary is

the sign for us, keeping up that prayer in which she persevered with the apostles until the coming of the Spirit. A maximum of understanding for unbelief and a maximum of faith are far from being opposed to each other; they come together in the person who truly believes. Bonhoeffer said: "We should get used to living in the world without the God hypothesis"; he thus expressed his refusal of an easy God, of God as a moral or emotional stopgap. At the same time, we have the testimony of the British officer who knew Bonhoeffer in the concentration camp: "Of all the men I have known, he is the one for whom God was real and very close to him"

(A Marian Vision of the Church: Jean-Claude Colin. Jean Coste, Maristica 8, P290)

ONE TREE – SEVERAL BRANCHES

Extracts from a letter from Jan Hulshof sm – superior general of the Marist Fathers



1. Until 1836 the image of the one tree and the several branches was unmistakable. The one tree pointed at the Marist project in its entirety, called Society of Mary. The branches pointed at the groups of fathers, - including the coadjutor brothers who from the beginning are part of our congregation, Sisters, Marist brothers and lay Marists.

2. But in 1836 Rome reserved the name Society of Mary for the fathers and from then on one had to explain that the one tree referred to the Society of Mary as a whole, as it was envisaged before 1836 and not to the fathers. Other misapprehensions also play their part. The one tree with several

branches makes some of us think of an enterprise with several divisions. This way of looking at things has no basis in history nor does it do justice to the uniqueness of each branch and to the personal charism of each of our founders.

3. Nevertheless, Champagnat, Chavoïn and Colin loved to speak of the common trunk. St. Marcelin put the branch of the brothers forward in an absolutely original way, but right up to his last Spiritual Testament he stressed the bonds of obedience and love which united the brothers with the one trunk. Mother St-. Joseph defended the identity of the sisters' branch, even to the face of Colin, but for her, part of the identity of the sisters was to be connected to the tree, and she did not hide her distress when Colin proposed to sever the sisters' branch from the tree. The Missionary Sisters were beyond the scope of the first Marists, certainly, but the charism of their lay pioneers, which was missionary and Marian at the same time, responded particularly well to the initial project, and so they came to call themselves Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary. Colin himself always stressed that by themselves the fathers could never achieve what the whole Society was called to do: namely, to assist the new Church into life, wherever it was coming to birth. The lay branch was for him not necessarily a work of the fathers, but it was and had to be a part of the tree, given as a bridge to go to souls as he said to the Chapter of 1872.

4. The Council of the Society of 2005 stressed the importance of sharing Marist life with lay Marists as one of the key elements of our renewal. The challenge for us religious as well as for lay Marists is to learn from each other what it means today 'to begin a new Church', not another Church, but a Church other than it is.

5. But being part of the Marist family directly affects the nature of our mission, the work of Mary, which is to gather God's people in all their diversity. And so we need to model in our own family the sort of communion we want to promote in the Church: a communion between young and old, men and women, laity and ordained people.

Jan Hulshof sm, (Superior General of the Marist Fathers)

ONE STORY, DIFFERENT CHOICES

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the pavement.
I fall in.
I am lost...I am hopeless.
It isn't my fault,
It takes me forever to get out.

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the pavement.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But it isn't my fault.
It still takes me ages to get out.

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the pavement.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ...it's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the pavement.
I walk around it.

I walk down a different street.

KAUTAHA O MALIA, A BRANCH OF THE MARIST TREE

Kautaha O Malia is a branch of the tree of the Society of Mary, part of the world wide Marist Family. This tree has many branches: the Fathers, the sisters, the Brothers and the Laity. Kautaha O Malia is one part of the Laity branch of this Marist tree. The branch is linked to Tongan Marists in other parts



of the world, like California and Australia, Wallis and Tonga itself as to all branches of the Marist Family throughout the world.

Over 160 years ago, Marist Fathers and Brothers, followed by Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary (who were originally members of the Third Order of Mary), planted the many branched tree of the Society of Mary in Tonga. Then in the 1960s and 1970s especially, Tongan people took this branch to many places in the world where they have settled. It has taken root. It is this transplanting that we celebrate. Twenty-five years ago,

Kautaha O Malia began in Auckland. For twenty-five years, Tongan-speaking Marist laity have spread to nineteen parishes and become a graced instrument in building up the Church of God. May the 600 plus member of Kautaha O Malia continue to thrive so that the work of Mary can be achieved by the Grace of God.

John Craddock sm.

TEN MYTHS ABOUT WORLD HUNGER.

At least 700 million people do not have enough to eat. Hunger is not a myth – but myths keep us from ending hunger.

Myth 1. *There's not enough food to go round.*
Reality: there's enough food in the world to make most people fat.

Myth 2. *Nature's to blame.*
Reality: food is always available for those who can afford it – starvation in hard times hits only the poorest, when natural events are the final push over the brink.

Myth 3. *There are too many people.*
Reality: Birth rates are falling rapidly worldwide; nowhere does population density explain hunger.

Myth 4. *It's a trade-off: the environment or food.*
Reality: Industrial agriculture is degrading soil and undercutting our food production sources. Environmentally sound alternatives can be more productive than destructive ones.

Myth 5. *The Green Revolution is the answer.*
Reality: The Green Revolution did increase productivity in the 1960's and 1970's. But technology cannot challenge inequality as the root cause of hunger.

Myth 6. *We need large farms.*

Reality: Small farmers achieve four-to-five times more output per acre; land reform can increase production.

Myth 7. *The free market can end hunger*

Reality: The market only works when poor people have money to buy food.

Myth 8 *Free trade is the answer*

Reality: In many poor countries exports of food crops have boomed, squeezing out food for local production, while hunger has continued.

Myth 9. *The victims are too hungry to fight for their rights*

Reality: Wherever people suffer needlessly they are also fighting for their rights. People in the rich world can help to remove the obstacles to those rights.

Myth 10. *All we need is more aid.*

Reality: Foreign aid reinforces the status quo and undercuts local food production in the recipient country.

Sources:

New Internationalist : www.newint.org

Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy USA: www.foodfirst.org

(Background watermark: The Marist Tree. A fresco in the Marist Brothers house at The Hermitage.)