

THE VOCATION OF THE PIONEERS

At the origins of the
Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary



We, Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary,
are heirs
of the pioneer sisters
who were inspired by the example
of Françoise Perroton,
and of those first Oceanians
who, in seeing their way of life,
desired also to give their lives to God
for the service of Mission.

In the beginning, stronger than anything else,
they heard the call from God for mission
expressed through the appeals from Oceania.
In response, they made the unconditional gift
of themselves,
confirmed through the vow of obedience,
profession in the Third Order of Mary,
community life according to the rule
given and received “as the expression
of the Holy Will of God” (Const. p. 11, 13).

These two paragraphs from the Prologue of our Constitutions reveal, in some way, the original kernel wherein are hidden in germ the essential elements of smsm identity and of a spirituality lived by our pioneers in their response to the calls of daily life.

A LONG JOURNEY

Heirs of the pioneers and of the first Oceanians

Those whom we call our pioneers are eleven women who set out from France for Oceania between 1845 and 1860 in order to be “auxiliaries of the Marist missionaries”, at the service of evangelization.

In the beginning, stronger than anything else, the call of God...

A letter addressed to the faithful of Lyon by the Christians of Ouvéa (Wallis) was published in the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*: “We are making still another request: it is that, if you hold us dear, you send us some devout women to teach the women [here]”.¹ **Marie Françoise Perroton** read there a personal appeal. Her heart was moved: was it the will of God that she set out? She prayed, took advice and her decision matured: “I have given the matter much thought, and my decision is final... My firm wish is to serve on the mission fields for the rest of my life”.² She set out. At the age of 49! Before leaving Lyon in that November 1845, she made a point of going up a last time to Fourvière where Fr Eymard, the Marist provincial, added her name to those of the Marist missionaries, in the heart that hung around the neck of the statue of Mary. It was a symbolic gesture she would not forget. On the *Arche d’Alliance* she joined those who were leaving for the missions confided to the Society of Mary.

Without her being aware of it, the primary elements of the smsm vocation were present in germ in Marie Françoise’s departure. Without her being aware of it, she had “**launched the movement**”. But for long years she would have to carry on alone in this service of mission. Alone for twelve years, “alone to endure times of extreme tedium”, and then, one evening in May 1858, “when it was dark”, three “Sisters of Charity of the Third Order of Mary”³ arrived in Futuna, guided by Fr Poupinel himself.

These women, who were sent to Oceania under the authority of the superior general of the Society of Mary, Rev. Fr Favre, with the agreement of the vicar apostolic, had been received into the Third Order of Mary, had made a vow of obedience and had received a short *Rule for the Voyage* from the superior general himself. Their rule for daily life would be promulgated in Futuna by the visitor of the missions, Father Poupinel sm, who wrote it and who officially received Marie Françoise’s profession in the Third Order. “Happy beyond all telling”,⁴ at the age of 62, she became ‘Sr Marie du Mont Carmel’ and would henceforth sign this new name.

Other groups, sent with the same commitment to the vicariates of Central Oceania and New Caledonia, followed.

The pioneers numbered eleven in 1860.

Very soon they asked for assistance from some of their pupils in whom they recognized zeal, generosity and talents. Inspired by the example of the pioneers, some of these pupils expressed the desire to live with them and, like them, to give their life to God for mission. From Futuna, Sara wrote: “Since the sisters have come to us we have considered them carefully ... and I desired sincerely in my heart to become like them in obeying God”.⁵ The pioneers believed in these vocations: “on these distant shores there are chosen souls called to the religious life”,⁶ Sr Marie de la Merci affirmed. For her part, Sr Marie de la Présentation did what she could “to assist the effects of grace in the hearts of these dear girls”.⁷ Sr Marie de la Croix gave herself to their formation with joy: “If before I die I am able to call my children my daughters and my sisters, oh! what a reward that will be!”⁸

This shared dream was to be realized. In 1867, Sara Fuasea and Silenia Tipai, both Futunians, left for Australia in order to prepare for religious life. In 1875 in New Caledonia, three young Melanesians were received as *Petites Filles de Marie* (Little Daughters of Mary). Other young women, from Samoa and Wallis, then from other islands, became with them, the **first Oceanian sisters**.

What heritage did these women leave and where is it to be found?

No foundational text exists... It is their lives that speak.

We have no text, coming from one or another or from several of them together, in which they gave a summary or a synthesis of the constitutive elements of their vocation and which could be considered as a foundational text. Within the group, none of them gave evidence of what could be called a founding charism. But all were convinced that they shared the same vocation and were **responding together to a particular call** that had enduring traits. They answered that call to the best of their ability, each one with her personal gifts and limitations.

It is their lives that **‘speak’**, from the joy of setting out to the gift matured in fidelity.

Our pioneers set out, rejoicing in their call. They opened the way. Almost without means, in faith and love, they made a beginning; with daring, relying on the strength of God: “for whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Co 12:10); counting on Mary’s help: “If... some good has appeared, this has been God’s work, and Mary’s kindness will have come to my aid”,⁹ wrote Sr Marie du Mont Carmel with conviction, and Sr Marie de la Croix confirmed: “She (Mary) does everything”.¹⁰ They tried to be faithful to the initial call in the concrete situation they were in, often a difficult one. They longed for the day when their life would be better organized and officially recognized as authentically religious, Marist and missionary, for their own sake and in view of the future.

That fact is evident from **letters**, their own and those of others who observed their lives and had responsibility towards them, in the Church or the Society of Mary. These letters speak of their efforts and failures, their joys and sufferings, as apostles in the service of evangelization, and in their community life. They tell of their

aspirations along with their disappointment at being so far from achieving what they wanted to live, and at the same time, their confidence in God and in Mary. These disclosures, surfacing freely through the pages, show indirectly but clearly the characteristics of **a spirituality incarnated in life**.

The **Rules** embody the directives given to these women as “the expression of the will of God and of Mary for them”.¹¹ The pioneers’ many allusions to the rules along with the expressions that come to them spontaneously indicate how much they had interiorized them.

The **Rule for the Sisters of Charity of the Third Order of Mary** was, as has been said, written explicitly for them by Fr Poupinel on Rev. Fr General’s order. In a few pages, this **Rule** expresses for the sisters the meaning of their vocation and the spirit that must animate them and gives some simple and precise orientations for their life and apostolate. It refers twenty-four times to the **Manual of the Third Order of Mary** which the pioneers received at the time of their departure from France. The **Manual** describes the spirit and advantages of the Third Order. It gives the rules common to all members and the particular rules for the different categories of Tertiaries. It includes pages of meditations on Mary, spiritual guidelines and prayers. For the pioneers, it was their ‘Book of Life’. As they read, meditated on and put into practice the **Rule** and **Manual**, their way of thinking and acting was gradually shaped accordingly.

A reading of the **letters** and **rules** together reveals significant elements of what the pioneers considered as their vocation, a vocation comprising three inseparable aspects:

- the radical gift of one’s life for mission
- as members of ‘the family of Mary’
- as religious.

A triple call or three constitutive elements of one vocation:

For Marie Françoise, the first, the forerunner, she who “launched the movement”, these three calls came successively. She responded to them generously and integrated them in her life with characteristic humour despite her age. “It is indeed late for a novice!”¹² she wrote, but she made her commitment.

For the other pioneers, these elements came together from the time of departure. Throughout the unforeseen events of their lives, their desire to see the particular form of this vocation recognized officially remained constant: a call to the service of mission, according to the spirit of Mary, as authentic religious and recognized as such.

For Mission

For Marie Françoise first, and for those who followed her, the call to mission was radical. Marie Françoise expressed it concisely in her letter to Captain Marceau.¹³ The others also expressed this conviction. Sr Marie de la Pitié wrote: “I am drawn on by an interior voice and this thought gives me hope that it is truly God’s will that we go to the Islands”.¹⁴ This call was first a gift received, an honour and a grace: “the grace of being called to spread the kingdom of God...”¹⁵ according to the wording of the *Rule* quoted by S. Marie de la Croix.

This radical gift for mission had two fundamental aspects: the ‘**departure**’ and ‘**the proclamation of the Good News**’. In the call recognized by the pioneers, there is something of God’s call to Abraham: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house...” (Gen 12:1), and of Jesus’ call to his disciples: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news...” (Mk 16:15, cf. Const. p. 30).

The *Rule of Poupinel* takes up these two aspects: “**Called to the honour of working to extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and to make Mary known to the ends of the earth...**”. Such is the goal, a source of pride and joy for the pioneers. They would have to keep this goal in their mind’s eye because isolation and difficulties lay ahead of them. Also, “they will take care... to ask themselves often: ‘Why have you come to this distant country? Why did you leave your homeland? Why have you renounced the most legitimate pleasures, the most delightful joys, of being with your Christian and dearly loved family? Is it not to dedicate yourself to the glory of God, to sacrifice yourself for the salvation of souls redeemed at the price of our Lord Jesus Christ?’”¹⁶

“**Go! leave...**” The ‘leaving’ is never finished. For them, it included being uprooted in all sorts of ways and often having to adapt over again. Frequently, their availability in obedience would make further demands, leaving the people with whom they had created bonds. Barely two months after their arrival, Srs Marie de la Miséricorde and de la Sainte Espérance had to leave their companions and the island of Futuna for Wallis where, after they had begun giving classes, they would again be required to move.¹⁷ It is not hard to find other examples. The faith expressed in their responses is noteworthy. When Sr Marie de la Présentation was called to leave the Ile des Pins (where there were so many ties binding her) for Pouébo, she wrote: “This dear Ouzélie, I left her in tears... However, I cannot really say very well which of the two feelings, sadness or joy in the light of faith, has been uppermost. I needed to receive a good shake-up to make me come out of my apathy, my spiritual lethargy... Here, at Pouébo, the way is open to me to run at a gallop on the royal road of the holy Cross...”¹⁸

The goal of their leaving everything and giving all was to participate in “**the proclamation of the Good News**”, especially through the Christian education of women and children. Near them, with them, it is in all the aspects of their lives that the young women are formed to be Christian: prayer, work, service, mutual respect, sharing of joys and difficulties, celebration of feasts, participation in parish life. When necessary, the pioneers contributed also to the formation of the young people and the catechists. Their vocation was apostolic, in a simple, direct contact with the people.

For that reason they were content to live very simply, sometimes in the poorest of conditions. On her arrival in Wallis, Marie Françoise lived in a Wallisian leaf

house with the girls entrusted to her. She slept on a mat like them and shared their food. The other pioneers also experienced poverty in their living conditions, surrounded by their pupils. Much later, Sr Marie de la Croix, then over 60 years old, would volunteer for Bélep, where she lived in a simple house, at the service of the leprosy patients exiled to that island. She and her young companion, Sr Marie St Jean l'Évangéliste (Agrippina Morduma, a Melanesian sister from St Louis, New Caledonia), were at the service of the lepers, washing them, nursing them and helping them to die well.

Zeal **“to extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ”** led them to “become all things to all people”, according to the expression of the apostle Paul (1 Co 9:22), repeated for them by Bishop Vidal.¹⁹ In the Ile des Pins, Sr Marie de Bon Secours, a nurse who “didn’t like teaching”, accepted to teach “44 young men who are going to be sent... to serve as catechists” and she added that this filled her “with joy and happiness”.²⁰ At Bélep, this island to which leprosy patients were sent, Sr Marie de la Croix did “everything possible for their bodies while preparing their souls”.²¹ In the same vein, her companion, Sr Marie St Jean, wrote on their arrival: “These poor people move one to pity, it is frightening to look at some of them. Nevertheless beneath these ugly bodies there is a soul to be saved and cared for more attentively than the body”.²²

In the theological thinking of their epoch, explicit conversion was thought necessary for salvation. But there was more to it. There was human compassion exercised on the spot by loving and selfless service: “that we may be the eyes of the blind and the feet of the lame, with the charity fitting such a beautiful task”.²³ At the same time the inner fire of God’s love impelled them to bring people into contact with Jesus Christ, the Saviour. Prayer supported and completed action. In another letter, where Sr Marie de la Croix speaks of the little ones suffering from leprosy she writes: “How to thank the good Lord for the change that has taken place in the behaviour of these children... thank you for the prayers you have offered... They have made their first communion and receive the sacraments often”. A little further on she adds: “For many months, these children only knew how to insult us... We have never heard anything like that... We have prayed, the Blessed Virgin has done the rest”.²⁴ Thirty years earlier, Sr Marie de la Merci was writing from Futuna: “I want to be more and more given to the good Lord and I want to prove to him that I love him, by doing everything I can to make others love him”.²⁵

Their burning zeal **awakened other apostles**. Around them the pioneers attracted assistants in whom they placed their confidence. From her first years in Wallis, Marie Françoise discerned among her pupils young women capable of helping her and also able to give the best of themselves in the service of mission. The same process was confirmed with other pioneers in Wallis, Futuna, Samoa and New Caledonia.

However, they knew that mission did not stop on the shores of their islands. They interested the children and adults in the **Work of the Propagation of the Faith**. Hortense, the future queen of the Ile des Pins, was proud to write: “The work of the Propagation of the Faith has been established here since Sunday.

We will now be united in great happiness to the faithful and Christians by the bonds of prayer and charity”.²⁶ Sr Marie de la Paix recounts how she saw her pupils arriving one day, each with a coin in their hand, that they wished to offer her in gratitude and the joy she experienced in seeing them accept to give this money for “the conversion of the infidels”.²⁷

In the same way, they elicited interest in their mission among Christians who did not set out themselves but supported them by their offerings and prayer. Despite the pressure of work and fatigue, they took the time and made the effort to correspond with members of the Third Order of Mary in Lyon, and with their friends, and benefactors, to thank them, to send them news and also to express interest and spiritual support. Before the term became current, this was an instance of ‘Inter-Church Aid’.

At Bélep, Sr Marie de la Croix wrote in her spiritual notebook: “Out of a spirit of **zeal** I must pray in a more universal way for all countries, all apostolic works, all those engaged in them”.²⁸ The influence of the *Manual of the Third Order of Mary* can be seen again here: “For Christians animated by zeal, it is not enough to be on fire with love for their God, they would want the same for all people. Over and over again, the cry, ‘*Holy be your name!*’ bursts forth from their heart more than from their lips”.²⁹

They lived all this with Mary, thanks to her help.

Members of the Family of Mary

Belonging to ‘the family of Mary’ was a lifelong source of joy, strength and consolation, giving the pioneers confidence and hope. In many ways they expressed their gratitude for having been “chosen by Mary”.³⁰

It was at the stopover in Tahiti, en route to Wallis, that Marie Françoise Perroton learnt from a letter of Fr Eymard that he had affiliated her to the projected Third Order of Mary. She gave free rein to her joy: “Thank you most sincerely, Father... How did you come to think of me?... My gratitude to God should be as great as the ocean”.³¹ The others, later on, expressed the same gratitude. “So here I am, really a part of Mary’s family. Yes, what happiness!”³² exclaimed Sr Marie de Bon Secours. And Sr Marie de la Merci wrote: “Nothing will ever be able to make me forget the extraordinary favour that our good Mother granted me in receiving me into her dearly loved family”.³³ The expression ‘family of Mary’ is found in the *Manual of the Third Order of Mary*. “Enter forever into the family of Mary”,³⁴ the priest presiding says to the novice during the profession ceremony.

Four of the pioneers had been Tertiaries in France: Sr Marie de la Paix, Sr Marie de la Merci, Sr Marie de la Présentation and Sr Marie Rose who had been one of the foundresses of the Third Order Regular of Mary in Jonzieux (Loire). The others were affiliated to the Third Order before their departure for Oceania and all left under the responsibility of the Society of Mary. For several, the call to mission had come first, sometimes going back many years, but it can be said that in their belonging to the Third Order and in the bond with the Society of Mary they found both support and

a spirit, like a garment made-to-measure to help them live what they sensed deep within their hearts to be their vocation.

The *Manual of the Third Order of Mary* gave orientations that corresponded exactly with their missionary aspirations: “The Third Order of Mary inspires... an ardent zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls”.³⁵

Poupinel’s *Rule* began with the comforting assurance that “by their profession in the Third Order of Mary, (*the sisters*) have become the privileged daughters of the august Queen of Heaven, and... they have acquired a special right to the protection of the Blessed Virgin who will watch over them, support them and love them with the love of a Mother”.³⁶ They were really convinced of this special protection and in all circumstances had recourse to Mary with childlike confidence.

The *Manual* and *Rule* provided a framework that moulded and sustained this constant recourse to Mary. Throughout the day they were invited to turn to her. In union with the Society of Mary, morning and evening there were “the three *Ave Maria*’s and the *Sub Tuum* or the *Memorare*” encompassing all humanity, the ‘just’ and the ‘sinners’, and morning, noon and evening, the community salutation, the *Salve Regina*. For the sisters, in addition, there were the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception, the Rosary and other prayers.

It was to Mary that the pioneers spontaneously entrusted the works for which they were responsible, their pupils, the sick people, the catechists and everything concerning the mission. They willingly attributed to her the good being accomplished. “I cannot do much not being able to speak but the Blessed Virgin... has already won the hearts of these people for me...”,³⁷ wrote Sr Marie de la Croix from Ile des Pins soon after her arrival. Sr Marie de la Sainte Espérance asked Mary herself to be the mistress of her new pupil and rejoiced in the progress achieved.³⁸ Examples abound.

The *Rule* asked the sisters to give Mary “all the honour of which they are capable” and to work “to imitate her virtues and to live her spirit...”.³⁹

The *Manual* was a valuable guide in this direction. Mary is properly placed as the Mother who leads to her Son. There is no confusion. It is clearly Jesus who is at the centre: “to imitate Mary is to imitate Jesus whose most perfect image she is; to put on Mary is to put on Jesus Christ; to be united with Mary is also to be united with Jesus...”.⁴⁰

The Marist priests also helped them discover and deepen the **Marist spirit** through religious celebrations, conferences, retreats, spiritual direction and personal correspondence. Sr Marie de la Croix too made several references to the superior general’s circular letters that she had read or was awaiting. In 1873 she commented: “So now our little Society of Mary is truly religious... I have prayed and had prayers said. Gratitude is a compelling need. Oh! may our dear Mother deign to anchor us firmly in her humility and make us live our dear vocation with a great fidelity”.⁴¹

The pioneers’ bond with the **Society of Mary** was not limited to the spiritual order. They had set out under the responsibility of the Society and they trusted in it for their present and future needs. It was to its superiors (Frs Poupinel and Yardin and

the superior general himself) that they had recourse in their trials, difficulties and uncertainties. They confided in them and asked for their help, advice, directives and support. Faced with important decisions, they turned to them. Whatever could separate or distance them from the Society of Mary, they carefully avoided.

Some situations were particularly painful. Sr Marie de la Merci's anguish is palpable in her long letter confiding to Fr Favre, Bishop Bataillon's insistence on taking her to Samoa "to found a novitiate for Oceanian religious". In a cry of distress, she declared her "resolution never to consent to what was against the Society's intentions", and she described all her worries, finishing by recalling his promise to her that she would always be "the child of the Society".⁴²

Several other pioneers would similarly resort to the judgement of the superiors of the Society of Mary before making a commitment in the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions, and again at the time of their withdrawal.

These appeals were not in vain. Our Constitutions refer with gratitude to "the constant concern of the Society of Mary"⁴³ towards them.

Religious

Marie Françoise was a lay woman when she set out. In fact, it was this independence that allowed her to respond to the call of the women of Wallis. Having arrived in Oceania, she does not seem to have looked for official signs of her commitment. She gave her life - simply and totally. However, when the first group arrived, she too accepted with great joy to be received into the Third Order and to become, at the age of 62, Sister Marie du Mont Carmel.⁴⁴

The others left as "Ladies of Charity" and "novices of the Third Order"⁴⁵ with the vow of obedience which "obtains for them the essential advantages of the religious life".⁴⁶ They had made the total gift of their life to God for mission, desiring to do his will in everything.

On arriving in Futuna they began to live together as a religious community, "as regular as canonesses".⁴⁷ To the best of their ability, they tried to be faithful to their profession in the Third Order, to daily Eucharist, to personal and community prayer, and to the spirit and practices proposed by their *Rule* and by the *Manual*. Like the members of every newly founded community, they lived as religious, without waiting for official recognition and adopted the external signs: religious name, habit and veil. Those who came later to Central Oceania and New Caledonia followed the same form of apostolic religious life, guided by the same rule and conscious of being united in the same vocation.

They realized that this was only a first step, as Fr Poupinel wrote to the superior general: "The sisters themselves are convinced that what has been done up to the present is a preparatory measure in this direction that they greatly desire (that members of our dear Third Order will be constituted as a regular community)".⁴⁸ Many letters confirm this. They wanted to be "real religious",⁴⁹ "to have the true title

of religious”,⁵⁰ “to consecrate ourselves once and for all... by the three vows of religion”.⁵¹ More than 100 references to this desire, reaching back to childhood for several of them, have been noted in their letters. “I wasn’t yet six years old when... I made a promise to Our Lord... that I would die a religious”.⁵²

What they were living was indeed only a preliminary stage. They had left their homeland. They had given all. But the difficulties encountered revealed what was lacking: organization, formation and an adequate preparation. Sr Marie de la Miséricorde expressed her hopes quite clearly in a letter to Fr Yardin: “The day I hear that we are members of a real religious community and have a rule and a superior, I will consider as one of my most beautiful days... I think that after a good novitiate and by continuing to receive encouragement and the help of the prayers of a whole community, the missionary sister will be more courageous in adversity”. All this, she specified further on, would be linked to the Society of Mary: “no matter how you arrange things, you will always find me very attached to the Society of Mary...”.⁵³

The priests were aware of the ambiguity and disadvantages of the situation of these women who had set out under the responsibility of the Society of Mary but through their vow of obedience were subject to the vicar apostolic. Moreover, they had no preparation for community life and neither did the priests who assumed the function of superiors in the places where they were assigned. It seemed necessary that they form “a society with its centre and superiors in France”,⁵⁴ autonomous as far as the sisters’ relations among themselves and their religious and community life were concerned. In several letters addressed to Frs Favre and Yardin in 1858 and 1859, Fr Poupinel went into these questions at length.⁵⁵

The superior general was himself very conscious of this necessity and of his responsibility with regard to the pioneers. In 1861, he met someone whom he judged suitable to take charge of the formation of women who would be called to set out for Oceania and also capable of helping to organize these members of the Third Order of Mary into a regular community. This person was Sr Marie du Coeur de Jésus, Euphrasie Barbier. The opening of a novitiate having been entrusted to her, a formation house was canonically erected in Lyon on 25 December.⁵⁶ The news was received with joy by the pioneers: “That news made my heart beat with joy and hope,” wrote Sr Marie de la Merci.⁵⁷ Sr Marie du Mont Carmel was “very happy to learn that a Third Order Regular has finally been established in Lyon,”⁵⁸ and Sr Marie de Bon Secours was “happy to learn this good news”.⁵⁹

But it was a long time before this hope would be realized. A number of the pioneers expressed their impatience: “The poor sisters of Caledonia have been living such a precarious existence for 8 years now, alas, without any proper organization... it’s impossible for any real good to be done either in our works or in our souls so long as we are in confusion like this”,⁶⁰ wrote Sr Marie de la Présentation. “It is impossible for me to live in this state. I am at the end of my strength, my courage and my patience,”⁶¹ Sr Marie de la Miséricorde declared. They had questions about the conditions of their admission that seemed difficult, all the while continuing to want to make a novitiate in order to learn the spirit of the Congregation and to become “real religious”.⁶²

For several of the pioneers, the initial exchanges of letters with M. Marie du Coeur de Jésus were marked by esteem and mutual confidence. They described their life as it was and told of their desire to prepare for a real religious life and “not only the appearances of it”.⁶³ However, they also expressed their astonishment with a rule that seemed to them incompatible with their apostolic life at the service of mission. “Sometimes I am anxious,” wrote Sr Marie Rose, “I don’t know what I will become. I want to do the holy will of God but I don’t know what that is yet. I see so many difficulties in being able to keep the rule of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions in these little islands of Wallis and Futuna that I don’t know what to think about it”.⁶⁴

In this way the pioneers lived through years of uncertainty, with joy and hope gradually giving way to anxiety and suffering, and at times a sense of abandonment. Several made profession, then withdrew from the Congregation of Religious of Our Lady of the Missions, yet remained faithful to their initial commitment. The separation entailed its measure of suffering.⁶⁵

When at last, after so many years, an agreement reached by the Society of Mary, Bishop Lamaze and the other vicars apostolic,⁶⁶ led to the decision to organize the Third Order Regular of Mary, they were able to live their consecration with the assurance of being recognized and approved by the Church. For the pioneers and the Oceanian sisters, and for those who had joined them, the way ahead was clear from then on.

Community living was both an aspiration and a challenge for the pioneers. They regarded it as an integral part of their commitment, giving thanks and telling of their joy when it was harmonious. “We get along well together: peace, unity and understanding reign among us”,⁶⁷ Sr Marie Rose was happy to write, and later Sr Marie de la Miséricorde wrote “My two sisters... are good, gentle and pious and I am very fond of them”.⁶⁸

Often it is true, they suffered and made one another suffer when they were two or three together. In community living, the lack of a common formation made itself felt, and still more, no doubt, the lack of someone with recognized authority to help them build community in the midst of the realities of daily life. They were conscious of this lack. A number of letters mention the lack of a real superior, “of a sister from France who would have made her novitiate”.⁶⁹

Often enough also, they were deprived of community because they were dispersed by the vicars apostolic to different places. However, they knew they were members of the same group, bonded together by the same vocation. They were united among themselves and in various ways manifested a real family spirit. They cared about the situation, health and future of the other sisters, showing compassion towards those who were going through trials. Sr Marie de la Sainte-Espérance expressed her sorrow at seeing Sr Marie Augustin going back to France “on account of a very sad illness”.⁷⁰ Sr Marie de la Croix wrote of how she was caring for Sr Marie de la Présentation who was very sick and cried out “every night”. She adds: “We keep watch with her and don’t leave her alone”.⁷¹ Sr Marie du Mont Carmel told of her readiness to welcome Sr Marie de la Sainte-Espérance back to Futuna, despite her difficult character, as “it seemed she wanted to return”.⁷²

A vocation takes shape and is affirmed

Throughout the years, the pioneers' determination not to give up any aspect of what they considered an integral part of their own vocation is clear. Although it was not easy, they found the strength to live in fidelity to God's particular plan for them, sometimes only after a painful period of discernment in the face of proposals made to them.

There is the well known episode of Bishop Bataillon wanting to put them in charge of a farm. In a letter to Fr Poupinel, Sr Marie du Mont Carmel commented: "But, as you may well imagine, the tough old Sr du Mont Carmel was far from weakening on the aims she proposed to herself when she left her country; poultry, cows or pigs never entered into her plans..."⁷³ It was to contribute to Christian education that she had come and, without refusing other services, her priority remained teaching and religious instruction.

Later, Sr Marie de la Pitié, in her turn (after Sr Marie de la Merci), told how the sisters of Futuna refused the same Bishop Bataillon's proposal to make vows before him for they wanted "to make vows to the Society of Mary and not to a particular mission".⁷⁴ Aside from such authoritarian behaviour, appalling to our way of thinking, what the bishop was doubtless manifesting more profoundly was a lack of understanding of the pioneers' specific vocation. He saw them as simply being at the service of his vicariate where he was in charge. They felt torn apart because they knew they owed him obedience yet they wanted to remain faithful to their deepest call, to the reason why they had left their homeland.⁷⁵

During the period of trying to provide an organization with the Religious of Our Lady of the Missions, their questions and reactions reveal their hesitations when presented with a form of religious life that seemed to them incompatible with their apostolic life. A quotation from Sr Marie Rose bears this out: "I have not given up wanting to be a religious... What is required is a non-cloistered congregation with an easy rule compatible with the needs of these countries".⁷⁶ Sr Marie de la Pitié and several others had similar reactions.

In a letter addressed from Sydney to Mother Marie du Coeur de Jésus, Sr Marie de la Merci very sensitively gave her reasons for leaving the institute: "In asking for my admission to the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions, my aim was to be even more completely devoted to these dear missions and to the Society of Mary. Now... circumstances have changed".⁷⁷

From New Caledonia, Sr Marie de la Croix also affirmed: "I don't want to be separated from the Society of Mary any more than I want to renounce the sole aim of my life, the missions. I don't want to be separated from them, not even by a hair's breadth".⁷⁸ In 1871, after having made known her decision not to renew her vows as a Sister of Our Lady of the Missions, she wrote: "here I am what I was before, a little sister of the Third Order of Mary,"⁷⁹ then, to Fr Poupinel: "I have hung around my neck... the medal, so beautiful and modest, of my true family".⁸⁰

Clearly, they did not wish to give up the possibility of explicit proclamation through catechesis and teaching, nor of contact with the people that a cloister would have made impossible, nor of the fundamental bond with the Society of Mary, and still less, the total gift of their life to God for mission. Here the three constitutive elements of their vocation, which would become the vocation of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, are quite evident: missionary, Marist and religious.

ELEMENTS OF A SPIRITUALITY

A striking characteristic of the pioneers was **their conviction of belonging to God and to Mary**. They knew they were **called and chosen** by a gratuitous and unexpected gift, despite their unworthiness, “to the honour of working to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ and to make Mary known to the ends of the earth”.⁸¹ This **call** was an anchor for the whole of their life. They were constantly trying to respond faithfully through trials, sufferings, misunderstandings or the monotony of every day. Humbly and patiently, in faith, they strove to answer that call through the course of their life.

Conscious of their weaknesses and deficiencies, they recognized their incapacity to answer such an exalted call but **Mary was there** and they had become her “privileged daughters”.⁸² With her help, they could face the obstacles and day by day learn to renounce themselves, to love more truly, and to entrust themselves to the infinite mercy of God.

Such was the heritage received from ‘their family’, the family of Mary. Doubtless they would have been very surprised if they had known that anyone would try to discover their ‘spirituality’ but signs of a spirituality are discernible and they are those of a **Marist spirituality**. The pioneers themselves spoke more modestly of ‘the spirit’ which they tried to internalize, allowing it to transform them.

Nevertheless, their letters reveal, like a backdrop, common traits in their way of responding to their particular vocation and these common traits can be regarded as **elements of a spirituality**.

Called by God

God’s call was clear for each of the pioneers. Each of them attested to the power of this call, her astonishment and her profound joy. Sr Marie de la Pitié recalls “a very special favour”;⁸³ Sr Marie de la Paix “an interior desire greater than myself”;⁸⁴ Sr Marie de la Sainte-Espérance of “the happiness I feel”;⁸⁵ and Sr Marie de la Croix of “the grace of being called”.⁸⁶ Their joy echoes the joy of Mary in her *Magnificat*: “He has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant” (Lk 1:48). Their response was a gift without reserve and the power of the initial call would be a light for the whole of their lives.

It was for **the glory of God** that they set out, for his glory that they worked, and for his glory also that they accepted difficulties. This motivation recurs like a refrain. In every situation of their lives, they sought **to do his will** even if, on occasions, they would have wished that God’s will accorded with theirs.⁸⁷ “Called to the honour of working **to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ**”, they felt committed to seek it by every possible means, in their life and apostolate, no matter what the cost, for “this inestimable grace has obligations”.⁸⁸

The glory of God, the will of God, the reign of God - the first three invocations of the Our Father really motivated the life of these pioneers, but in a way

that was somewhat ordinary, without special devotions or spectacular manifestations, at the very heart of their weaknesses, deficiencies and difficulties. Their letters demonstrate that God was first in their life and that he was their source, centre and Providence, the One they loved⁸⁹ with all the love of their heart. From the moment of their setting out to the end of their life, this same aspiration remains like a lamp faithfully kept alight.

The oil that kept **their lamps alight** consisted of all the practices of the spiritual life, the ordinary means offered to all baptized people, and, in their case, completed and reinforced by the recommendations to all Tertiaries in the *Manual* and to them in their *Rule*. They were faithful to prayer, adoration, the sacraments and the offering of their life given in obedience with the inherent renunciations, difficulties and joys. They prayed with their pupils and participated in the celebrations organized for parishioners. Contemplating the particular mysteries of the different feasts to which their letters make regular allusions, they found spiritual nourishment in the liturgical cycle.

The **Eucharist** was their primary source of strength. Their letters show how they lived the recommendation of their *Rule*: “They will seek in the Blessed Eucharist, the nourishment of this love [*of Our Lord*], of this simple and generous zeal that should distinguish them”.⁹⁰ Countless are their allusions to the ‘happiness’ of having been able to assist at Mass,⁹¹ or the suffering at having been deprived of it,⁹² or the joy of knowing that Masses had been offered for their intentions. Many also are their references to adoration and to the consolation they found in praying before the Blessed Sacrament.⁹³ Sr Marie de la Pitié wrote of the spiritual Communion she used to make in union with her friend at the hour the friend was participating in the Mass.⁹⁴ The Eucharist, “the heart... of the consecrated life,”⁹⁵ was certainly central in their lives.

As a consequence, they were to be “inspired by Our Lord’s way of acting and his attitudes”,⁹⁶ as their *Rule* exhorted them. In one of her letters, Sr Marie de la Pitié expresses the desire to be united to him in his offering to the Father: “crosses ... are lightened when, in offering our work to God, we keep in mind that he willed to carry the heaviest cross... and that he has given us the example of patience, gentleness and perfect resignation to the most holy will of his Divine Father”.⁹⁷

Endurance in faith

The radical gift of their life, expressed through their departure and commitment in the Third Order of Mary for the Missions of Oceania, was actualised day by day in faith. After the excitement of the beginnings, the pioneers learnt to persevere through the ‘long haul’ despite the poverty, fatigue and monotony... “You have already been told,” Sr Marie de la Croix wrote to a friend, “that in the missions all the charms of piety fall away, almost nothing will speak to your eyes, you will be left almost completely to your own resources, but your resources upheld by grace that is never lacking. Here there is only naked faith, but this faith produces a love that is stronger than death”.⁹⁸

In their lives there was no lack of **suffering**, doubtless the common lot of missionaries of the era. There were physical sufferings due to the climate and to illnesses contracted: Sr Marie du Mont Carmel wrote humorously of her big leg and of the foot she could no longer fit into a shoe so that it prevented her going down to the church.⁹⁹ Several made passing references to their chronic maladies.¹⁰⁰ Sr Marie de la Sainte-Espérance complained of “violent headaches and earaches”,¹⁰¹ aggravated when she felt the cold.

The local languages remained a barrier for several of the pioneers, for example Sr Marie du Mont Carmel who, already on in years, claimed never to have mastered the language.¹⁰² Sr Marie de la Pitié also spoke of “the difficulty of the Futunian language that I have a hard time understanding”.¹⁰³ In addition, there were the difficulties of communication by post, the shipwrecks, the letters and parcels getting lost: “The mission mail has been lost at sea”.¹⁰⁴ Solitude was something else they suffered: “One feels the isolation”,¹⁰⁵ and “if there is some little upset and you can’t talk about it, then the bag of nails gets tossed around in your imagination and all the points come out each one sharper than the others”.¹⁰⁶

At times they were tempted to discouragement: “... we would have all left. We have been leading a queer and sad life here at Lano,” wrote Sr Marie Rose.¹⁰⁷ Sr Marie de la Miséricorde asked M. Marie du Coeur de Jésus for “a short response that will restore my courage, alas! too often crushed”.¹⁰⁸

They had their share of the harassment to which the mission was subjected by the civil authorities, as often happened in New Caledonia, for example, the prohibition to teach and the suffering of seeing Christians submitted to humiliations and injustices. As Sr Marie de la Présentation wrote: “It is not only in China that the Church of Jesus Christ is suffering persecution... all our works are being hampered...”¹⁰⁹ [*Allusion to the difficulties of the mission under Governor Guillain, 1862-1870*].

Another source of suffering was uncertainty about their future, firstly the long wait to be organized into a congregation, then the anxiety as to whether they would be accepted as Religious of Our Lady of the Missions. Finally came the fresh trial of separation from this congregation because of the disagreement between it and the Society of Mary, their “true family,”¹¹⁰ and once again - uncertainty. In these circumstances, Sr Marie de la Croix wrote to Fr Yardin: “Ah! God will take care of the future. I think about it too... But will God who has sustained me until today let me down? No”.¹¹¹

A number of the pioneers also suffered the infirmities of old age. In her last years, Sr Marie de la Pitié became deaf and she suffered much from the cold but she saw in “the prolonging of our days... the opportunity to suffer” and to unite “our sufferings with those of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” adding, “they say that old age exempts a person from the pains of Purgatory”.¹¹²

Difficulties did not take the pioneers by surprise. As Marie Françoise had already written to Captain Marceau, they were ready to sacrifice themselves. They found strength in this deeply rooted conviction. Often in their letters they referred to

sacrifices they had made, that they were renewing or that they were ready to make.¹¹³ Sr Marie de la Pitié commented: “In order to win souls for God, many sacrifices have to be made... **the folly of the cross** brings its own consolation”.¹¹⁴ Sr Marie Victor (Silenia) testified that those were not empty words: “Sr de la Pitié is very old and it is admirable to see the patience with which she has made her sacrifice”¹¹⁵ [*leaving Maofaga to go to Vavau, in Tonga*].

“**God will provide...**”,¹¹⁶ wrote Marie Françoise. It was he who had called them, for him they had left their homeland, and for him they were where they were. The difficulties and the precarious situation they were in stimulated their faith and impelled them to cast themselves confidently into his arms. He was truly their **all**. He was there so they lacked nothing. Sr Marie de la Miséricorde described their little chapel as “very simple, very poor since there is nothing there,” but added “Ah! what am I saying? It lacks nothing, because the God of my heart is there”.¹¹⁷

With Mary, at her school

In the life of the pioneers, Mary was really ‘someone who was always there’, a presence unseen but loving and active. Firstly, as already mentioned, Mary was present in their prayer all through the day. They prayed to her in community and personally. They also prayed with her as did the apostles: they “were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers” (Acts 1:14).

All that they lived, they lived with Mary, certain of her help. In their responsibilities, joys and daily difficulties, and still more in their efforts to progress and bring their lives into conformity with God’s plan for them, they continually looked to Mary with boundless confidence. Sr Marie de la Paix wrote: “Well then, may God’s will be done in everything and I hope the Blessed Virgin, my good Mother, will always support me”.¹¹⁸

Sr Marie Rose recounted how, when feeling shattered by Bishop Bataillon’s decision to close the school so that the sisters could take charge of the farm, she regained her serenity in Mary’s presence. Unable to sleep, she went off to the church where she cried and regained her calm: “At the end I sang a couplet to my good mother: here I am alone, all alone with my mother, still in the church during the night... that did me good. I went back thinking that I knew I was doing God’s will”.¹¹⁹

The same confidence is found among the Oceanian sisters. “Don’t forget me before this good Mother. Ask her to help me become a good religious”,¹²⁰ wrote Sr Marie St Jean l’Evangéliste from Bélep. At an earlier date, when asking to be admitted to the novitiate, Sara had written from Futuna: “Pray to Mary for me, for she is the good mother of those who seek to imitate her”.¹²¹

“The spirit of the Third Order, the spirit of the Most Blessed Virgin” is “the path of sanctity” for the Tertiary and must “mark all her conduct”.¹²² The imitation of Mary in her humility, simplicity, modesty, gentleness, charity, obedience... is the work of a lifetime. The challenging words of Fr Colin included in our Constitutions

come to mind: “The spirit of Mary is something very delicate and very profound, which can only be grasped by sustained meditation and prayer” (p. 52; see also Const. 56).

It is an interior work, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and it remains secret. With the pioneers, what can be discerned through their disclosures is a vibrant desire to grow in this spirit. Their writings testify to the constancy of their efforts. Large in their own eyes were their failures and inadequacies so they felt keenly the distance separating them from their goal. “Very ashamed to see myself so deficient”¹²³ was but one of Marie Françoise Perroton’s continual laments. For her part, Sr Marie de Bon Secours wrote: “I desire... all the same to work generously to acquire the virtues I lack in order to merit to be recognized as a true daughter of Mary”.¹²⁴ In September 1894, Sr Marie de la Croix entered this reflection in her notebook: “Marist!... Love of the hidden life, charity, humility, simplicity, abnegation... My whole life is passing before my eyes... I am overwhelmed!... O Mary, o my Mother, save me!”¹²⁵

This appeal to Mary keeps resounding all the time like a cry of hope. Marked by their epoch, they tended to see their faults and to be excessively disturbed, it seems to us, by their sins. Certain expressions can surprise us or even shock us. But we see how the **Marist spirit**, their belonging to Mary helped them situate themselves appropriately before the infinite mercy of God. On two occasions, Sr Marie du Mont Carmel speaks of “having deserved hell” - which seems to us so inconceivable - but she hastens to add: “However, I am full of confidence because it is said that a true servant of Mary will never be lost”.¹²⁶ In December 1902, Sr Marie de la Croix writes in her spiritual notebook: “O my God, 2 [December] marks the end of my years of mission, the 44th is drawing to a close. I am almost crushed by the memory of my faults... your graces, my regrets... and despite all, confidence because Mary is my mother”.¹²⁷

Learning to love

What is asked for at Mary’s school is the great commandment of love: “**love of God** above all...; **sincere and supernatural love of neighbour**; a **holy and fraternal unity** among the members of the Third Order so that, following the example of the first Christians, **they have but one heart and one soul** in the love of Jesus and Mary”.¹²⁸

“If you love us...”,¹²⁹ was the expression used by the women of Wallis in their letter. Love is the fundamental law of the Gospel. The preceding pages show well enough how much the pioneers loved their pupils, the sick people and the whole population of the islands where they had been sent, giving their life day after day, even if they sometimes regretted that this love was not more spontaneous and more perfect, as Marie Françoise had already written from Wallis.¹³⁰ Sr Marie de Bon Secours confided in her turn: “Since his death, the Curé of Ars has obtained for me a very great grace from the divine mercy, that of loving our dear local people”.¹³¹

Among the pioneers themselves, it has been noted, for multiple reasons unity and harmony were not always easy but there are also positive testimonies as Sr Marie de la Miséricorde wrote: “All is well in our little convent; I am pleased with my

sisters. I love them, and I think they love me, too”.¹³² They persevered in their efforts. In the case of Sr Marie de la Croix, for example, her regular correspondence from Bélep with Sr Marie de Bon Secours, who had caused her so much suffering, testifies to a significant transformation and growth in sisterly love. “My dear old companion of going-on 34 years,” she wrote, “... Praised be God for all he has done... don’t stop asking him for his love for the two of us and all will go well: love and do what you will”.¹³³ Two years before, from St Louis, she had written to one of her former novices: “nothing can give me greater pleasure than to know you to be united as you are, my children. It is the only way to do some good. Be ready to forgive each other the inevitable hurts, forget yourselves in order to give pleasure to the other and love God in action”.¹³⁴

Towards intimate union with God

The expression ‘intimate union with God’ is not found in the letters of the pioneers but several confidences show the quality of their relationship with the One in whom they found joy, courage and consolation.

After the long sea voyage which brought her to Oceania, Sr Marie de la Miséricorde wrote: “Oh! how good it was in the Fathers’ little cabin, when we made our thanksgiving in the most profound silence. The half-hour passed very quickly... Ah! it was so good to be with the Beloved of my soul, I had so many things to say to him”.¹³⁵ Alone on the Ile des Pins Sr Marie de la Croix tastes this “absolute solitude... where, with Jesus and Mary, I find myself so much at home; for me this is real happiness, to ‘taste’ them only and where no external thing can distract me from their holy presence”.¹³⁶

Sr Marie de la Merci confides how often she was aware of the support of God when, just as she was about to embark for Oceania, she learned of her mother’s death. She wrote to Fr Yardin: “Oh, Father, if I have been strong and generous in embracing the cross in such a painful trial... it is to Mary our good mother to whom I owe it. God himself has also come to support me with his grace, and if he struck with the one hand, he caressed with the other... he consoled me...”.¹³⁷

Most of the time, though, they felt their own poverty, sometimes aridity. Sr Marie de la Pitié shared her profound longing: “Oh, what would be my happiness if I could render to my Saviour love for love”.¹³⁸ And Sr Marie de la Croix confided: “This morning, I was saying to Our Lord who had just entered into my desert (that is my heart): I see nothing, I feel nothing, I know nothing, but I want to be yours for the pure happiness of belonging to you”.¹³⁹

They were conscious of their human weaknesses and resistances. They knew that if union with God required an effort on their part, it is first of all a gift, a grace to be asked for. Repeatedly, they beg those with whom they corresponded to support them by their prayer. From Tahiti Marie Françoise had already written of their prayer being “an aid” lest she “be left behind on the path of the love of God”.¹⁴⁰ Many years later, Sr Marie de la Pitié also wrote: “Ah! how I would love to know how to pray and to pray as I should. But I am so weak and so cowardly that I call upon all the good persons for support and assistance in praying not only for me but in union with me”.¹⁴¹

At Bélep in 1896, Sr Marie de la Croix recorded in her spiritual notebook that she was asking Fr Colin to obtain for her “that spirit of fervour”, then she turned to Mary herself: “My good Mother... Inspire me. It seems to me that in our isolation we have **“to live more united to God”**.”¹⁴² Thirty-five years before she had had this searing intuition: “Our vocation is to be unknown, hidden in God. Our zeal, the quiet zeal of Mary without fuss... the silence of the heart of Mary, but deep down that fire that burns before God in secret”.¹⁴³

In the Church

Isolated as they were, a long way from Europe and the rest of the world, the pioneers’ attachment to the Church is striking. A number of letters illustrate this either through a spontaneous exclamation or on the occurrence of joyful or sad events.

“Like you, my dear Sister, I belong, despite my unworthiness, to our Mother, the Holy Church”,¹⁴⁴ Sr Marie du Mont Carmel proudly wrote to a young sister. On various occasions she would ask that money deposited for her in Lyon be put into Peter’s Pence, adding in one of her last letters: “I am pleased to think that my good Pope will have my last few cents; I shall die happy”.¹⁴⁵

Sr Marie de la Pitié, too, often mentioned her prayer for the Church and the Pope. She wanted news of him: “What we have heard said about the Holy Father worries us... may God watch over his Church. He will protect it as his beloved spouse but we are not without anxiety”.¹⁴⁶

Sr Marie de la Croix told of the moving gesture of Caroline, a girl of 19, who wanted to offer the Holy Father her small savings before she died.¹⁴⁷ Another example is that of the collection organised at the time of the First Vatican Council. The pupils of St Louis, who had no more than a few coins among them all, wanted to contribute to the collection organized to “spare poor bishops their travel expenses”.¹⁴⁸ In 1871, Sr Marie de la Croix wrote that she and her girls were making “a kind of perpetual adoration ... for the deliverance of the Pope and peace in France”¹⁴⁹ [*presumably a reference to the loss of the Papal States and the Franco-Prussian War*].

Do these examples not witness to the mutual support between churches begun by St Paul (cf. 1 Co 16:1-4; 2 Co 8:24-9:1)?

These concrete signs of solidarity show the spiritual bond uniting them with other Christians. Sr Marie du Mont Carmel wrote to a novice: “Courage, all of you my dear Sisters, I commend you daily to the good Lord. I am united in spirit with all your exercises of piety and charity, desiring to share in your merits... 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”.¹⁵⁰ This explains clearly what we can affirm was lived by the others also. There are numerous letters mentioning their interest in the life of communities or churches elsewhere and expressing a strong sense of mutual union in faith, in prayer and sacrifice.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

Our pioneers were not saints in a ‘beyond-our-reach’ sense. They were ordinary women, marked by their era with its greatness and its limitations. Their departure for Oceania was part of the great missionary wave of the 19th century. They shared the fervour, the convictions and the forms of devotion of their contemporaries. Like their compatriots, they believed in the superiority of western civilization. Ecumenism had not yet come to birth. They shared the spirit of rivalry that put missionaries of different confessions in competition with one another. Some passages in their letters need to be read in their cultural and historical context if they are to be understood correctly. But the fallout does not mask the astonishing fecundity of their life.

Filled with wonder at the ‘gratuitous gift’ of their vocation, they knew they carried their treasure in “earthenware jars” (2 Co 4:7). This profound consciousness of their weaknesses, their faults and inadequacies can sometimes seem to us exaggerated. But they did not bury the treasure entrusted to them. Humbly, but with determination, they sought the way to have it bear fruit. The Holy Spirit can work with inadequate instruments. Because they had answered God’s call with an “unconditional gift of themselves” (Prologue, p. 13), God used them. With faith and daring, they opened for us a way in the service of mission.

Their trials and difficulties also challenge us because they did not succumb to them. They lacked preparation but from the time of departure, and in all circumstances, they found their strength in God, as Sr Marie de la Miséricorde wrote on board ship on the way to Oceania: “I know I am nothing, that I can do nothing by myself, and despite that I hope to do something counting on God’s grace, the help of your prayers”.¹⁵¹ With joy, they believed also in Mary’s special protection. With confidence, they called on her help in order to stand firm in faith and grow in love. With humility and fidelity, they tried to live her spirit.

A return to our pioneers opens a way to hope.

By “a gracious choice”, we, in our turn, have been **gifted with the same vocation: missionary, Marist and religious.**

With this gift each of us, and all of us together, are entrusted so that we may bring it to fruition. It is the same treasure offered us.

Today still, **God** calls us. Today still, **the Spirit** goes before us. Today still, **Mary** accompanies us on the path of faith (cf. Const. 2, 10, 16).

Being faithful does not mean to repeat or make over
but to keep in our heart that first impulse
as a daily source of daring,
so as to respond to the calls of God (Prologue, p. 11).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Letter from all the Christians of Ouvea to the faithful in Lyon, 10.11.1842, OPS I, 8.
- ² Perroton-Marceau, summer 1845, MFP Letter 1, §1.
- ³ Mont Carmel-Favre, 08.03.1859, MFP Letter 9, §12.
- ⁴ *ibid.*, MFP Letter 9, §5.
- ⁵ Sara-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 03.09.1865, OPS II, 390.
- ⁶ Merci-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 20.04.1866, Letter 23, §3, OPS III, 418.
- ⁷ Présentation-Poupinel, 31.03.1867, Letter 16, §4, OPS III, 450.
- ⁸ Croix-Poupinel, 28.03.1874, Letter 164, §5, OPS IV, 635.
- ⁹ Mont Carmel-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 01.08.1862, MFP Letter 17, §2.
- ¹⁰ Croix-Poupinel, 29.06.1876, Letter 183, §3*.
- ¹¹ *Rule for the Sisters of Charity of the Third Order of Mary in the Mission of Central Oceania*, 1858, ch. 1, 3°, OPS V, doc. 4A (Poupinel).
- ¹² Mont Carmel-Favre, 08.03.1859, MFP Letter 9, §5.
- ¹³ Perroton-Marceau, summer 1845, MFP Letter 1, §1.
- ¹⁴ Pitié-Bioletti, 08.04.1858, Letter 6, §3, OPS I, 68.
- ¹⁵ Croix-Poupinel, 05.06.1859, Letter 10, §7, OPS I, 133.
- ¹⁶ *Rule of Poupinel*, op. cit., ch. 1, 4°, 5°.
- ¹⁷ Miséricorde-Guillot, 04.11.1859, Letter 13, §4, OPS I, 163.
- ¹⁸ Présentation-Poupinel, 03.03.1882, Letter 28, §4*.
- ¹⁹ *Rule for the Third Order Regular of Mary in Fiji*, 1892, OPS V, doc. 13A, introduction (Vidal).
- ²⁰ Bon Secours-Yardin, 28.03.1860, Letter 15, §5, OPS I, 186.
- ²¹ Croix-Forestier, 27.12.1895, Letter 423, §2*.
- ²² St Jean Evangéliste, torm - a sister, 23.10.1892*.
- ²³ Croix-Bon Secours, 25.01.1894, Letter 354, §5*.
- ²⁴ Croix-Ste Anne, 28.10.1893, Letter 343, §§2, 3*.
- ²⁵ Merci-Yardin, 26.07.1863, Letter 15, §4, OPS II, 315.
- ²⁶ Hortense-Poupinel, 12.09.1862, OPS II, 291.
- ²⁷ Paix-Yardin, 27.08.1860, Letter 12, §5, OPS I, 197.
- ²⁸ Croix-Spiritual Notes, 18.10.1890*.
- ²⁹ *Manual of the Third Order of Mary*, 1859 ed., ch. 1, p. 375-376.
- ³⁰ *ibid.*, 1857 ed., p. 5.
- ³¹ Perroton-Eymard, 02.08.1846, MFP Letter 2, §4.
- ³² Bon Secours-Yardin, 29.08.1859, Letter 9, §6*.
- ³³ Merci-Yardin, 29.09.1860, Letter 5, §2, OPS I, 204.
- ³⁴ *Manual*, op. cit., 1857 ed., p. 76.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 38.
- ³⁶ *Rule of Poupinel*, op. cit., ch. 1, 1°.
- ³⁷ Croix-Yardin, 20.02.1859, Letter 5, §5, OPS I, 120.
- ³⁸ cf. Espérance-Poupinel, 19.07.1862, Letter 18, §7, OPS II, 284.
- ³⁹ *Rule of Poupinel*, op. cit., ch. 1, 2°.
- ⁴⁰ *Manual*, op. cit., 1857 ed., p. 37.
- ⁴¹ Croix-Poupinel, 17.05.1873, Letter 155, §2, OPS III, 620, referring to a circular letter of Fr Favre, No. 50, 25.03.1873.
- ⁴² Merci-Favre, 15.11.1863, Letter 16, §§10, 12, 19, OPS II, 321.
- ⁴³ Prologue, Constitutions, p. 25.
- ⁴⁴ cf. Mont Carmel-Favre, 08.03.1859, MFP Letter 9; see also Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 30.10.1859, MFP Letter 11.
- ⁴⁵ Yardin-Poupinel, 11.11.1857, OPS I, 41.
- ⁴⁶ *Rule of Poupinel*, op. cit., ch. 4, 1°.
- ⁴⁷ Mont Carmel-a friend, Oct. or Nov. 1859, MFP Letter 12, §1; see also Mont Carmel-TOM, 26.06.1859, MFP Letter 10.
- ⁴⁸ Poupinel-Favre, 23.10.1858, OPS I, 99.
- ⁴⁹ Présentation-Poupinel, 21.09.1865, Letter 10, §2, OPS II, 391.
- ⁵⁰ Pitié-Poupinel, 12.02.1859, Letter 9, §2, OPS I, 117.
- ⁵¹ Bon Secours-Favre, 29.11.1860, Letter 21, §11, OPS I, 212.
- ⁵² Croix-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 29.06.1866, Letter 75, §4, OPS III, 426; cf. also Rose-Yardin, 17.11.1864, Letter 10, §6*; Paix-Poupinel, 16.05.1858, Letter 1, §2, OPS I, 77a.
- ⁵³ Miséricorde-Yardin, 14.06.1861, Letter 19, §4, OPS II, 234.

- ⁵⁴ Poupinel-Favre, 02.09.1859, OPS I, 150.
- ⁵⁵ cf. Poupinel-Favre, 23.10.1858, OPS I, 99; see also Poupinel-Favre, 02.05.1859, OPS I, 126.
- ⁵⁶ Canonical Erection of the Novitiate House of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, doc. 42, OPS V, p. 139-140.
- ⁵⁷ Merci-Yardin, 07.07.1862, Letter 13, §5, OPS II, 277.
- ⁵⁸ Mont Carmel-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 01.08.1862, MFP Letter 17, §1.
- ⁵⁹ Bon Secours-Favre, 25.05.1862, Letter 27, §5, OPS II, 273; see also Merci-Favre, 08.07.1862, Letter 14, §3, OPS II, 278; Mont Carmel-Yardin, 06.08.1862, MFP Letter 18, §1; Espérance-Yardin, 09.03.1863, Letter 26, §1, OPS II, 309.
- ⁶⁰ Présentation-Poupinel, 21.09.1865, Letter 10, §2, OPS II, 391.
- ⁶¹ Miséricorde-Bataillon, 23.06.1867, Letter 39, §3, OPS III, 457.
- ⁶² Rose-Poupinel, 30.06.1867, Letter 15, §8, OPS III, 459.
- ⁶³ Miséricorde-Poupinel, 16.05.1866, Letter 34, §2, OPS III, 422.
- ⁶⁴ Rose-Richard, 06.11.1871, Letter 18, §4, OPS III, 593; see also Miséricorde-M. du Coeur de Jésus, end of 1864, Letter 30, §3, OPS II, 358a.
- ⁶⁵ cf. Croix-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 01.04.1871, Letter 137, §§2-3, OPS III, 582; see also Croix-Poupinel, 02.04.1871, Letter 138, §2, OPS III, 583; Pitié-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 18.05.1880, Letter 70, §4, OPS IV, 759.
- ⁶⁶ cf. Historical Timeline.
- ⁶⁷ Rose-Poupinel, 20.07.1862, Letter 7, §5*.
- ⁶⁸ Miséricorde-Guillot, 04.11.1859, Letter 13, §6*.
- ⁶⁹ cf. Espérance-Yardin, 01.07.1867, Letter 41, §8, OPS III, 460; cf. also Miséricorde-Elloy, Sept/Oct. 1868, Letter 43, §4*.
- ⁷⁰ Espérance-Poupinel, 19.11.1862, Letter 24, §6*.
- ⁷¹ Croix-Colette, pfm, 01.08.[1886], Letter 264, §1*.
- ⁷² cf. Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 29.05.1867, MFP Letter 27, §9.
- ⁷³ Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 30.10.1859, MFP Letter 11, §8.
- ⁷⁴ Pitié-Favre, 14.09.1866, Letter 45, §2, OPS III, 437.
- ⁷⁵ cf. Miséricorde-Poupinel, 08.08.1859, Letter 11, OPS I, 145; see also Rose-Poupinel, 08.08.1859, Letter 2, OPS I, 146.
- ⁷⁶ Rose-Lamaze, 18.10.1879, Letter 22, §4*; cf. also Pitié-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 18.05.1880, Letter 70, OPS IV, 758.
- ⁷⁷ Merci-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 03.11.1869, Letter 36, §4, OPS III, 542.
- ⁷⁸ Croix-Poupinel, 05.05.1869, Letter 110, §2, OPS III, 521.
- ⁷⁹ Croix-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 01.04.1871, Letter 137, §3, OPS III, 582.
- ⁸⁰ Croix-Poupinel, 02.04.1871, Letter 138, §2, OPS III, 583.
- ⁸¹ *Rule of Poupinel*, op. cit., ch. 1, 4°.
- ⁸² *Rule of Poupinel*, op. cit., ch. 1, 1°.
- ⁸³ Pitié-Bioletti, 08.04.1858, Letter 6, §1*.
- ⁸⁴ Paix-Poupinel, 16.05.1858, Letter 1, §2, OPS I, 77a.
- ⁸⁵ Espérance-Favre, Dec. 1857, Letter 1, §1, OPS I, 50.
- ⁸⁶ Croix-Poupinel, 05.06.1859, Letter 19, §7, OPS I, 133.
- ⁸⁷ cf. Perroton-Eymard, 02.08.1846, MFP Letter 2, §4; see also Perroton-Eymard and Poupinel, 13.07.1853, Letter 8, §2, and Pitié-Rocher, 02.07.1861, Letter 24, §1*.
- ⁸⁸ Croix-Poupinel, 05.05.1859, Letter 10, §7, OPS I, 133.
- ⁸⁹ cf. Merci-Favre, 30.03.1868, Letter 32, §2, OPS III, 496; cf. also Croix-Berset, 05.07.1861, Letter 28, §10, OPS II, 237.
- ⁹⁰ *Rule of Poupinel*, op. cit., ch. 1, 7°.
- ⁹¹ Miséricorde-Guillot, 06.03.1858, Letter 4, §10*.
- ⁹² Pitié-Poupinel, 12.02.1859, Letter 9, §3, OPS I, 117; cf. also Croix–Ste Anne, Easter 1897, Letter 450, §3*.
- ⁹³ Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 29.04.1872, MFP Letter 56, §3.
- ⁹⁴ Pitié-Bioletti, 08.04.1858, Letter 6, §13*.
- ⁹⁵ *Vita consecrata – on the consecrated life and its mission in the church and the world*, 95.
- ⁹⁶ *Rule of Poupinel*, op. cit., ch. 4, 4°.
- ⁹⁷ Pitié-Saunier, 20.10.1860, Letter 21, 1*.
- ⁹⁸ Croix-Berset, 05.07.1861, Letter 28, §10, OPS II, 237.
- ⁹⁹ cf. Mont Carmel-Delaroche, 02.02.1872, MFP Letter 54, §1.
- ¹⁰⁰ cf. Espérance-Poupinel, 20.07.1863, Letter 28, §3*.
- ¹⁰¹ cf. *ibid.*

- 102 cf. Perroton-Eymard, 04.07.1848, MFP Letter 5, §2.
- 103 Pitié-Bioletti, 14.02.1859, Letter 10, §5*; see also Pitié-Poupinel, 02.12.1861, Letter 32, §3*; Miséricorde-Poupinel, 17.07.1865, Letter 32, §4, OPS II, 383.
- 104 Rose-Poupinel, 23.04.1869, Letter 17, §1*.
- 105 Miséricorde-Poupinel, 04.02.1860, Letter 15, §1*.
- 106 Pitié-Bioletti, 22.05.1867, Letter 47, §2*.
- 107 Rose-Poupinel, 04.09.1860, Letter 4, §2, OPS I, 199.
- 108 Miséricorde-M. du Coeur de Jésus, end of 1864, Letter 30, §9*; see also Miséricorde-Yardin, 14.06.1861, Letter 19, §6, OPS II, 234.
- 109 Présentation-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 08.09.1864, Letter 5, §4, OPS II, 344.
- 110 Croix-Poupinel, 02.04.1871, Letter 138, §2, OPS III, 583.
- 111 Croix-Yardin, 16.09.1870, Letter 133, §3*.
- 112 Pitié-Saunier, 19.07.1881, Letter 73, §§I, 4*.
- 113 Espérance-Poupinel, 12.03.1864, Letter 34, §4, OPS II, 329 [1]; see also Rose-Richard, 06.11.1871, Letter 18, §4, OPS III, 593.
- 114 Pitié-Maillet, 08.08.1880, Letter 71, §§2, 3*.
- 115 Marie Victor-Poupinel, 18.07.1883, OPS IV, 824.
- 116 Perroton-Marceau, summer 1845, MFP Letter 1, §1.
- 117 Miséricorde-Guillot, 04.11.1869, Letter 13, §6*.
- 118 Paix-Poupinel, 17.04.1859, Letter 3, §5*.
- 119 Rose-Poupinel, 08.08.1859, Letter 2, §3, OPS I, 146.
- 120 St Jean l'Évangéliste-Ste Anne, 26.11.1896*.
- 121 Sara-M. du Coeur de Jésus, 03.09.1865, OPS II, 390.
- 122 *Manual*, op.cit. 1857 ed., p.32.
- 123 Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 09.06.1869, MFP Letter 44, §2.
- 124 Bon Secours-Yardin, 29.08.1859, Letter 9, §6*.
- 125 Croix, Spiritual Notes, September 1894.
- 126 Mont Carmel-Poupinel, September 1862, MFP Letter 19, §6; see also Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 17.04.1873, MFP Letter 59, §2.
- 127 Croix, Spiritual Notes, December 1902*.
- 128 *Manual*, op. cit., 1857 ed., p.34.
- 129 Letter from all the Christians of Ouvea to the faithful in Lyon, 10.11.1842, OPS I, 8.
- 130 cf. Perroton-Eymard and Poupinel, 13.07.1853, MFP Letter 8, §1.
- 131 Bon Secours-Poupinel, 10.05.1860, Letter 17, §14*.
- 132 Miséricorde-Poupinel, 21.07.1877, Letter 64, §2, OPS IV, 690.
- 133 Croix-Bon Secours, 01.11.1892, Letter 319, §1*.
- 134 Croix-du Rosaire, 31.10.1890, Letter 296, §2*.
- 135 Miséricorde-Guillot, 06.03.1858, Letter 4, §10*.
- 136 Croix-Poupinel, 15.05.1860, Letter 20, §6*.
- 137 Merci-Yardin, 09.03.1859, Letter 1, §4*.
- 138 Pitié-Poupinel, 26.10.1861, Letter 29, §6*.
- 139 Croix-Poupinel, 10.12.1869, Letter 117, §2*.
- 140 Perroton-Eymard, 02.08.1846, MFP Letter 2, §4.
- 141 Pitié-Saunier, 19.07.1881, Letter 73, §3*.
- 142 Croix-Spiritual Notes, February 1896*.
- 143 Croix-Berset, 01.07.1861, Letter 28, §10, OPS II, 237.
- 144 Mont Carmel-St Jude, ndm, 26.02.1870, MFP Letter 48, §2.
- 145 Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 04.07.1870, MFP Letter 50, §2; see also Mont Carmel-Yardin, 10.07.1871, MFP Letter 53, §3.
- 146 Pitié-Maillet, 26.06.1861, Letter 23, §1*.
- 147 Croix-Poupinel, 14.09.1869, Letter 113, §9*.
- 148 Croix-Poupinel, 06.02.1870, Letter 119, §7*.
- 149 Croix-Poupinel, 02.04.1871, Letter 138, §4*.
- 150 Mont Carmel-François Xavier, ndm, 26.02.180, MFP Letter 47, §5.
- 151 Miséricorde-Favre, Dec. 1857, Letter 1, §1, OPS I, 49.

* unpublished text.