

The American Missions and the Early Marists: A pre-history of the US provinces

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In 1803 the United States of America bought Louisiana from France. That same year marked the birth of Peter Chanel who later wanted to become a missionary in that state or elsewhere in the North American missions, as they were then called. Sixty years later, in 1863, the first Marists, Fathers Bellanger and Gautherin landed in Louisiana.

This contribution focuses on those sixty intervening years and attempts something of a short pre-history of the Marist presence in the USA. There were a number of contacts between North America and the Society of Mary in France during those years, finally leading to the first ministry in St Michael's parish in Convent near New Orleans.

With the arrival of the two Marists the seed was sown and it developed into major provinces of the Society of Mary with important works, support for the Oceania and other missions, a tentative foundation in Colombia, as well as work in the academic field, in Marist research and also on the international administrative level of the worldwide Society.²

The traces of a pre-history do not necessarily anticipate later events, but indicate that North America was topical for the early Marists; and that the Marists were topical in the North American Catholic Church.

1 1803-1836: Marists aspirants and America

1803-1830: First contact

In the 19th century Catholics in the USA were immigrants and overall a majority of Caucasians.³ By 1820, Catholics were about 2% of the population; by 1860 this has risen to about 8%.⁴ At the beginning of the century, we find Catholics mainly in the North, Northeast, and Southeast. Two-thirds of the bishops came from abroad. The same was true for many of the clergy and religious. In 1808 the first diocese in the Mid-west was founded in Bardstown, Kentucky. Others followed with the growth of the States. On October 4, 1829, the Provincial Council of Baltimore sought to consolidate diocesan structures in the USA.

The year 1803 is our starting-point for this Marist pre-history. The Louisiana Purchase (*Vente de la Louisiane*) covered a territory of 2.144.476 km². Napoleon sold it for 15 Million US-Dollars or 80 Million French Francs (7 US-Dollar per km²). The deal was signed on 30 April, 1803. Today (2013) this would amount to something like 233 Million US-Dollars or 110 Dollar per km². The territory was the former French colony West of the Mississippi River, including the state of Louisiana and parts of modern Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota, as well as parts of Minnesota, North Dakota, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and even further, small parts of the Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.⁵ The US territory doubled in size!

¹ The idea to this contribution came to mind after my stay with the US confreres in June 2016. I would like to thank Marist Fathers Peter Janssen and Gaston Lessard for many helpful corrections.

² Philip Graystone SM, *A Short History of the Society of Mary 1854 to 1993*, Rome, General house, 1998, for a general survey on the US provinces, Province of Eastern Canada, and individual Marist houses and works. See Patrick A. Corcoran SM, *The Irish Province of the Marists. An Early History 1850-1870. A Provisional Sketch*, Maynooth, The Cardinal Press Ltd., s.d., for the Irish contribution to the pre-history.

³ See the general works on Catholics in the USA. With North America we refer to modern USA, although the political history is of course more complex. The pre-history of Marists in Eastern Canada deserves a separate chapter. Examples for general literature: Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (The Pelican History of the Church: 6), 1966 (1964). For French Church personnel going to North America: *Missionnaires catholiques français aux États-Unis 1791-1920*, in *Histoire & Missions Chrétiennes*, Paris, Karthala, No 17, Mars 2011. The Sisters of Sacré-Coeur for example worked in the States already many years when the Marists met them at St. Michael's Parish, Convent. This short contribution adds the Marist story to this survey.

⁴ Roger Finke – Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America (1776-1990). Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy*, New Brunswick, N.J., 1992, p. 54-144; This information I found via a search in Google.

⁵ Wikipedia, 'Louisiana Purchase'; accessed on 1 July 2016. Around the Congress of Vienna of 1815, proposals came up to give Louisiana back to France; cf Adam Zamoyski, *1815 – Napoleons Sturz und der Wiener*

The same year, on 12 July, 1803, Peter Chanel was born in France.⁶ He joined the minor seminary in Meximieux.⁷ The director, Matthias Loras,⁸ impressed the young Chanel and his friends Claude Bret and Denis Maîtrepierre⁹ to the point of considering a missionary life in North America, as Loras did. In France, the missions were known through French priests and religious who had gone there, and through reports in the *L'ami de la religion* (founded in 1814). 1829, November 1st, Abbé Loras embarked at Le Havre for the Louisiana mission, arriving on the 22nd December. He later became bishop of Dubuque in Iowa. Later, Peter said that when he celebrated his first Communion on March 23, 1817, he had made up his mind to be a missionary, possibly in America. He repeated this to Marie-Nizier on Futuna.¹⁰ Peter was ordained in 1827 for the diocese of Belley by Bishop Devie. On 23 January 1831, Colin wrote to Marcellin Champagnat: 'Several excellent subjects are seeking admission.' They included Peter Chanel. Chanel signed the Marist Consecrations at the retreat of 1831 and became director of Belley College in 1832. His missionary destination depended now on the fate of the Marist aspirants. His case shows that this group was already open to foreign missions before the Pope sent them to Western Oceania.

Meanwhile, in Lyon, another link with the North American mission was established. Bishop Louis-Guillaume Dubourg, the new Bishop of New Orleans, a Frenchman, had presented his issues in Rome and on his way back, stopped in Lyon in 1815. At the time, the see of Lyon was disputed – Cardinal Fesch, uncle of Napoleon, was in exile in Rome but had not resigned, and no successor had yet been appointed. Much influence lay with the acting vicars general. Dubourg got friendly with Jean Cholleton, future Marist.¹¹ In Lyon, Dubourg sought support for his mission, and Cholleton, Madame Petit, a friend of Dubourg from the US, and others organized a campaign to help. This would, owing much to Pauline Jaricot and Cholleton, evolve into the Association for the Propagation of the Faith, founded in Lyon on May 3, 1822. On September 18, 1829, the Pope issued a letter commending the Lyon-based missionary-support organization, to all Catholics. This organization will basically finance the future Marist missions in Oceania. Cholleton was made honorary vicar general of New Orleans by Dubourg in reward for help received in 1815.¹²

Cholleton at the time also accompanied the aspirants for the Fourvière-Pledge in the major seminary. After papal approbation in 1836, he was Colin's candidate as Superior General. In 1840, Cholleton joined the Society of Mary, led by his former seminarians.

Kongress. Aus dem Englischen von Ruth Keen und Erhard Stölting, München, C.H. Beck, 2014 (= *Rites of Peace. The Fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), p. 264.322.

⁶ Philip Graystone SM, *Saint Peter Chanel S.M. First Martyr of the South Pacific*, England, Marist Fathers, 1994.

⁷ Jean Coste SM – Gaston Lessard SM (ed.), *Origines maristes (1786-1836)* (= OM), 4 vols, Rome, 1960 - 1967. OM 4, p. 406-408, Meximieux: Loras, director from 1818 to 1824, encouraged seminarians to go to the USA.

⁸ OM 2, doc. 748, footnote 7: In 1818, Loras, future bishop of Dubuque in the USA, became superior at Meximieux. In 1819, Chanel, in 1822, Bret and Maîtrepierre entered there. In 1823, Loras probably shared with them his idea to go to the US. Loras left in the autumn of 1829 and wrote letters to them afterwards. Around this time, the three thought about the US-missions.

⁹ OM 4, p. 308-310, Denis-Joseph Maîtrepierre (1800-1872), in Meximieux with Chanel and Bret interested to join their former superior Loras in the USA.

¹⁰ Charles Girard SM (ed.), *Lettres reçues d'Océanie par l'administration générale des pères maristes pendant le généralat de Jean-Claude Colin, Textes revus, corrigés et ajoutés, 1836-1854*, 10 volumes, Paris, Éditions Karthala – Société de Marie, 2009-2010 (= LRO); LRO 6, doc. 814 § 13, June 1849: 1817, the year Marie-Nizier was born, Chanel said was the year he thought of a missionary vocation in America. Later he wrote to a friend that he will not go to America. Oceania is now the destination for his missionary vocation.

¹¹ OM 4, p. 230-233, Jean Cholleton (1788-1852), professor of the major seminary in Lyon, supports the Marist aspirants; in 1824 vicar general. In November 1817 he got letters from Dubourg making him a honorary vicar general of New Orleans. 1 August 1840, in register for Marist novitiate; later assistant for Marist Brothers; theological advisor for Bishop de Bonald, Lyon.

¹² Annabelle M. Melville, *Louis William DuBourg. Bishop of Louisiana and the Floridas, Bishop of Montauban, and Archbishop of Besançon 1766-1833*, Volume One *Schoolman, 1766-1818*, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1986, 380-381. Notice today the Dubourg-Building at St. Louis University, Missouri!

With a bishop in Lyon, priestly ordinations could be carried out. And so it came, that on 22 July 1816, Colin, Champagnat, Terrailon, and Déclas and others were ordained by Bishop Dubourg, at the time bishop of St. Louis, and later New Orleans.¹³

Not only this visit made North America a topic of interest in the major seminary at the time of the early Marists. Either in the major seminary or during his first appointment as priest, in Cerdon, Jean-Claude Colin read the work of Mary of Agreda, *The Mystical City of God* intensively. One of the stories around Mary of Agreda was her bi-location to work for the conversion of the natives in North America – in the middle of the 16th century!¹⁴

On 23 July 1816, twelve young men, some ordained, others not, climbed the steps to the sanctuary of Fourvière and made a promise to begin a Society of Mary. One of those who took the Fourvière-Pledge, was Philippe Janvier (1792-1866).¹⁵ Janvier did not become a Marist. By the end of 1817 he arrived in Louisiana, was in Detroit in 1819, and in Donaldsonville in 1823. In 1826, for health reasons, Janvier returned to France and became chaplain at the Fourvière hospital. Later he worked in parishes. He had contact with Champagnat and the Marists in Saint-Chamond.

In the early eighteen-twenties, Champagnat found himself in various difficulties. Local clergy criticized him for his work with the brothers. His first biographer writes: “To rescue it from the persecutions which threatened its ruin, he thought of asking to be sent to the American missions.”¹⁶ Champagnat also received a request from the USA for brothers in 1825.¹⁷

Among the points of crisis at the Hermitage was the presence of Jean-Claude Courveille (1787-1866), leader of the Fourvière-group. He left the Marist scene in 1829. Much later, people were asking where he had gone. There existed an oral tradition with the Marist Teaching Brothers that he had gone to America.¹⁸ This was not true. After staying in varying dioceses, Courveille became a monk of the re-established abbey of Solesmes in 1836, the same year Colin was elected Superior General of the Society of Mary.

1830 – 1836: From America to Oceania

In 1830, Colin was unofficially elected central superior of the Marist aspirants. The group had only their respective diocesan status. Still, it allowed Colin to work to establish the Society of Mary. In Belley College he gathered the Marist aspirants as members of the staff.

The intention in going to the North American missions was to convert the native people, the “Red Indians”. Other French congregations like the St. Joseph Sisters did go, but often found themselves ministering to the white immigrant population from Europe instead.

On 17 January 1835, Colin wrote to Champagnat that Jacques Fonbonne (1803-1886), another of the early aspirants, would go to St. Louis in the US in January 1836.¹⁹ Like Chanel Fonbonne or Fontbonne (as sometimes written) was also born in the year of the Louisiana Purchase. If the Marists had been approved earlier he would have joined the Oceania team. On 6 July 1836,

¹³ Melville, *DuBourg*, 380-381, and footnote; OM 1, doc. 45, 6 April 1816, minutes on minor orders; future Marists received minor orders from the bishop of New Orleans; Lit: François Trochu, *Missionnaires Lyonnais aux Etats-Unis*, in *Cahiers d'histoire* t. 3 (1958) 192-193. On 17 June 1817, Dubourg returned to the US and took seven priests or seminarians with him and a lot of money. See also Edward J. Hickey, *The Society for the Propagation of the Faith: Its Foundation, Organization, and Success, 1822-1922*, Washington, 1922.

¹⁴ Cf *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 132, 14 (1846).

¹⁵ OM 2, doc. 591, § 9; OM 4, p. 302; [Jean-Baptiste Furet FMS], *Life of Blessed Marcellin Joseph Benedict Champagnat (1789 - 1840). Marist Priest. Founder of the Congregation of the Little Brothers of Mary*, Rome, 1989, p. 115, note 23.

¹⁶ Furet, *Champagnat*, p. 115, note 23; OM 2, doc. 757 § 11.

¹⁷ OM 2, doc. 757 § 32, excerpt from Furet, *Vie*, 1856: Around 1825, Hérard, ex-missionary in the US and parish priest of Ampuis, offered the FMS to staff a school.

¹⁸ OM 3, doc. 859, 22 July 1883, Br Avit FMS, on the foundations of Courveille; he says Courveille left for America after 1829; Doc. 860 §, 1888, Br Théodose FMS, oral tradition on Courveille: he left for America; Doc. 860 § 8, after 1827, about Courveille: ‘maybe in America’; Doc. 863, 1889, questions on Courveille by Fr Detours SM: “6° Has Courveille left for America after the affair in St Antoine? That is what some say”; Doc. 873, c. 1893 (?), notes by Fr Detours for Avit, Courveille may have gone to America.

¹⁹ OM 1, doc. 331; Celebret for Fonbonne: OM 1, doc. 348; biographical note Fontbonne: OM 4, p. 280-282.

Fonbonne recalled his Marist links and wrote from St. Louis to ask for Marist Teaching Brothers for America.²⁰ Rosati, bishop of Saint-Louis, asked for him to come with some sisters of Saint Joseph. In 1848 he was the parish priest in Saint-Martin, diocese of New Orleans. Later he returned to France for health reasons.

Other French priests and religious left for America. In 1831, Benoît Roux (1801-1865), a fellow seminarian of Jean-Baptiste Pompallier's, first bishop of Western Oceania, left for Louisiana.²¹ Roux at some stage had been a Marist aspirant. In June 1831 he got permission to join Bishop Rosati in St. Louis. In 1848 he was back in France serving as parish priest. Babad, who had been a missionary in the US for some time, lived near the Marist aspirants gathered around Champagnat and Etienne Séon at the Hermitage.²²

Pompallier was asked to head a new mission territory, the vicariate of Western Oceania. One of its borders was the Americas.²³ While Valparaiso in Chili, South America, was to be a harbor to reach the new vicariate. That was the 'Catholic route' to the Pacific. The first mission band, Bishop Pompallier and the Marists, among them Chanel and Bret, left from Le Havre. Here we need to recall that the Suez-Canal opened only in 1869 and the Panama-Canal in 1914. The way to the Pacific took a year and went to the other side of the globe, round the Americas or later round the Cape of South Africa.

After all the planning and negotiations with Rome, Propaganda Fide, and the bishops in France, the Society of Mary received papal approval on 29 April 1836. One of their tasks was to send missionaries to Western Oceania, the youngest and furthest Catholic mission.

2 1836-1854: During the generalate of Father Colin

The Catholic Church in North America continued to grow, and this created the need for more personnel, institutions, and leadership structures. By 1840 there were about 663.000 Catholics which corresponded to about 4% of the population. In 1852 the Catholics were served by 1320 clergy.²⁴ The bishops asked for more clergy from Europe.

Among those asked was Jean-Claude Colin, Superior General of the Society of Mary from 1836 to 1854. In 1836 they had taken on the huge vicariate of Western Oceania and discovered that they lacked enough men for this charge. During his generalate, Colin received many requests for new foundations; among those, requests from Canada and from the USA.²⁵ The huge Colin-biography by Jean Jeantin has very little on the contacts with the USA during the generalate of Colin, only the request of 1844 to open a house in Panama.²⁶ In Europe, Colin responded to a proposal to open a house in London, and did so in 1850. Requests from Ireland and Scotland, he had to answer in the negative. In Latin America, Quito, Haiti, and Panama asked for Marists. And in North America, the dioceses of St. Paul, St. Louis, Dubuque, Galveston, Toronto, Oregon City, and others asked for Marists. The most frequent and most urgent requests came from North America. This had to do with personal relationships with local bishops of French origin. In Toronto, Armand de Charbonnel, a Sulpician, knew Colin. Charbonnel was in Lyon from 1826 to 1834. In 1839 he came to Montreal. In 1847 he returned to France for health reasons and struck a

²⁰ OM 1, doc. 397.

²¹ OM 1, doc. 397; biographical note: OM 4, p. 346.

²² OM 1, p. 961.

²³ OM 1, p. 818-819.

²⁴ Hubert Jedin (ed.), *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, Vol. VI/1, Sonderdruck, Freiburg, Herder, 1985, 561-571.

²⁵ Léon L. Dubois SM, *Requests Made to Father Colin for Foundations Outside of Europe*, in *Acta SM* 2, 9 (1952 - 1953) 15-21.

²⁶ Jean Jeantin SM, *Colin, Troisième partie, Les Missions de l'Océanie*, Lyon, Vitte, 1896, p. 33-35, « La mission des Cafres », here p. 35, last paragraph: « C'est pour la même raison qu'en 1844 il crut devoir refuser une autre mission, qui lui était proposée, à l'isthme de Panama, entre les deux Amériques ». The footnote refers to a letter to Fr Lagniet, 22 March 1844. It probably was to Fr Maîtreperrière however, cf CS 2, doc. 143.

friendship with Colin.²⁷ With Charbonnel, Colin talked about the need to have apostolic visitation in America, in Oceania, everywhere. Both agreed. This would strengthen the bonds with the Holy See, the Mother Church. Charbonnel at first refused to become bishop of Toronto, but accepted in 1849. He asked Colin for priests.²⁸ Colin, it seems, had made some kind of promise to him. Marists came to Canada only in 1929. They opened an Apostolic School in Sillery. Besides contacts with bishops, there were other reasons to consider America.

In 1838, Colin had asked for ships leaving from Bordeaux to go to Oceania via Valparaiso and be willing to take Marist missionaries on board.²⁹ In 1839, Colin wrote to Nicolas Soult, former general of Napoleon and then minister of war, listing the difficulties of the Oceania mission. Initially, the natives are as difficult as the old Gauls in their forests, but later the economic advantage for France will be considerable as it was now for the English and the Americans to have started dealing with these people.³⁰ He could refer to their experience in the recent New Zealand mission where the Marist missionaries and Bishop Pompallier had contact with English and American traders.³¹ The same Pompallier was reminded by Denis Maîtreperrière, assistant to Colin, not to be too demanding regarding personnel and money. The bishops in America struggle with the same difficulty.³² In 1845, Colin returned to the economic advantage argument in his exposé to finance the *Société de l'Océanie*. The missionaries in all continents should receive material support.³³

This material support was ultimately to come via the Procure in Sydney established in 1845. But one of the coasts of the Americas had also been a possibility.³⁴ To *Propagation de la Foi* in his report of 1846 Colin mentions the costs of the vicariate, including sending things from America or Sydney.³⁵ Mail and travel was sometimes routed through a country in South America.³⁶ In 1837, the first group with Bishop Pompallier stayed in Valparaiso, Chile. Pompallier hoped for help from the French naval bases in the Americas.³⁷ In 1842 and 1843 the missionaries mentioned passing America and proposed America as a route by which to send mail.³⁸ They did send mail and luggage through America. In 1844 Chevron complained to his family that his luggage was still there.³⁹

²⁷ OM, 2, doc. 665, December 1847, Eulogy of Colin for Bishop Devie; Colin met a French priest destined to become a bishop in the USA. This bishop said mankind is so weak and needs more than anything else mercy. Devie stands for this.

²⁸ Mayet, *Mémoires*, electronic version, 'Ce que la Société de Marie doit être vis à vis des Evêques (Paroles du P. Colin le 29 xbre 1847'.

²⁹ Gaston Lessard SM (ed.), "*Colin sup*". *Documents pour l'étude du généralat de Jean-Claude Colin (1836-1854)*, (= CS), volume 1, *De l'élection au voyage à Rome (1836-1842)*, Rome, 2007, doc. 37, 8 June 1838, Colin to Dominique Meynis.

³⁰ CS 1, doc. 100 § 7, 22 November 1839, Letter Jean-Claude Colin to Nicolas Soult.

³¹ CS 1, doc. 165 § 4, 9 May 1840, Letter Émile Franque to Jean-Claude Colin.

³² CS 1, doc. 302 § 7, 20 October 1841, Project of a letter by Denis Maîtreperrière to Bishop Pompallier.

³³ Gaston Lessard SM (ed.), "*Colin sup*". *Documents pour l'étude du généralat de Jean-Claude Colin (1836-1854)*, volume 2, *Du voyage à Rome au chapitre (1842-1845)*, Rome, 2009, doc. 273 § 5.7., 3 May 1845, Exposé by Jean-Claude Colin about the *Société de l'Océanie*, trade company in the service of foreign missions.

³⁴ Gaston Lessard SM (ed.), "*Colin sup*". *Documents pour l'étude du généralat de Jean-Claude Colin (1836-1854)*, volume 3, *Du chapitre de 1845 à l'été 1848*, Rome, 2011, doc. 31 § 6, 2 November 1845, Letter Jean-Claude Colin to Philippe Calinon.

³⁵ CS 3, doc. 79 § 6, 22 February 1846, Letter Jean-Claude Colin to Council of the Propagation de la foi, Lyon.

³⁶ CS 3, doc. 148 § 1, 11 November 1846, Letter Jean-Claude Colin to Cardinal Giacomo Fransoni, Rome.

³⁷ LRO 1, doc. 20, August 1837, Pompallier to Claude du Campe de Rosamel, about the French navy engaged in North America. Valparaiso was the French navy station for South America and practically for Oceania.

³⁸ LRO 2, doc. 141 § 1, May 1842, Lampila to Dussurgey; doc. 174 § 22, June 1842, Forest to Colin, on mail through Valparaiso; doc. 246 § 1, March 1843, Chouvet to Colin; LRO 6, doc. 711 § 1, June 1848, Br Jacques Peloux to Poupinel; he profits from a whaler leaving for America; LRO 9, doc. 1275 § 1, August 1853, Catherin Servant to his brother-in-law Fleury Séon.

³⁹ LRO 3, doc. 307 § 1, January 1844, Chevron to his family, baggage is still in America, with artificial flowers.

In Oceania, Grange pondered the religious situation of the different peoples, be it Oceania, Europe, or other missions like America.⁴⁰ Fr Comte also compared the mission work to different peoples.⁴¹ For their work they needed material help and America was a place where to look for it.⁴²

“Les forces des missionnaires s'épuisent faute de soins, et impossible de se procurer en Océanie les adoucissements à un tel genre de vie. Il faut recourir en Amérique; c'est ce qui donne à croire qu'un navire est indispensable pour notre mission...”

Material help was gained through the tireless work of Auguste Marceau (1806-1851), captain of the *Arche d'Alliance*, of the *Société de l'Océanie*. From 1845 on he sailed for four years visiting all Catholic mission stations in the Pacific and the Americas, bringing support and undertaking trade. The revolution of 1848 and other causes finally led to the bankruptcy of this unique commercial enterprise for the missions that Colin strongly supported.

Fathers Montrouzier and Chevron showed scientific interest in comparing the fruits and vegetables in different countries to describe what they found in the Pacific Islands.⁴³ Mondon did so when landing briefly in Bahia, Brazil, on his journey out.⁴⁴

The USA was present in the Pacific with growing political influence, in trade, and in business in general.⁴⁵ This was already seen in the early days of Chanel and Marie-Nizier on Futuna. From Futuna Father Mériaux wrote to Colin in 1849 about the wishes of Bishop Bataillon. One day Bataillon hoped to send Oceanians to America or to Rome to learn how to work as a printer. Printing presses, books and pamphlets were most important for missionary work.⁴⁶

Back in France, Colin was aware of events in America through the *L'Ami de la Religion* reporting especially on news from French bishops. In 1837, Bishop Forbin-Janson was the negotiator during a rebellion of prisoners.⁴⁷ In appointing a Marist as bishop in Oceania he had before his eyes the warning that bishops in America sometimes had difficulties in managing finance.⁴⁸ This was to be avoided of course. While visiting the Marists in the Angoulême region in 1839, Colin reflected on evangelizing in this de-christianized area and used a note from the work in America as an illustration.⁴⁹ He wanted Marists to evangelize without interest in financial reward. Father Petit, a missionary, had written that in a certain place in America it was given the Picpus Fathers to baptize only the poor – because of interest in money on the side of others. In Belley, Mayet met Bishop Flaget of Bardstown and Desgeorge, a Chartreux-missionary from Lyon. With Desgeorge he talked about the Society of Mary, foreign missions, home missions, and

⁴⁰ LRO 3, doc. 320 § 3, summer of 1844, Grange to Colin: “Les peuples de l'Océanie valent-ils mieux sous le rapport religieux que ceux d'Europe (et ce que je dis de l'Océanie peut se dire, je pense, de l'Asie, de l'Afrique et de l'Amérique)”.

⁴¹ LRO 3, doc. 366 § 26, June 1845, Jean-Baptiste Comte to Colin: “Les quelques mots que les prêtres laissent de place en place, de village en village qu'ils ne pouvoient visiter que d'époque en époque ne pouvoient pas féconder une terre qui n'avait pas auparavant été défrichée. Je sais qu'en Chine, en Amérique, dans la Nouvelle Galle même du Sud, les prédications faites de cette manière, et qu'on ne peut faire autrement, à défaut de prêtres, portent de grands fruits; mais les circonstances sont totalement différentes”.

⁴² LRO 3, doc. 334 § 15, July 1844, Isidore Grézel to Colin.

⁴³ LRO 5, doc. 598 § 43, January 1847, Montrouzier to Eymard, on the natural history of New Caledonia, differences with Europe; some type of passion fruit on the island is in the books of American origin; LRO 6, doc. 759 § 4, November 1848, Joseph Chevron to his family and friends: a type of haricot, originally from America, supports their diet.

⁴⁴ LRO 7, doc. 902 § 9, June 1850, Mondon to various confreres: Bahia, Brazil, a nature one does not even find in America as in United States they say.

⁴⁵ LRO 3, p. 482, 1845, Douarre to Colin about a trader; Doc. 449 § 21, 1845, Louis-Théodore Violette to Colin: English and Americans command at Apia; LRO 6, doc. 692 § 12, April 1848, Rocher to Poupinel: The *Arche d'Alliance* has no cargo from Sydney but hopes to find cargo along the coasts of America.

⁴⁶ LRO 6, doc. 851 § 12, December 1849, Fr Mériaux to Colin.

⁴⁷ Jean Coste SM (ed.), *A Founder Acts. Reminiscences of Jean-Claude Colin by Gabriel-Claude Mayet*, English translation by William Joseph Stuart SM and Anthony Ward SM, Rome, 1983 (= FA), doc. 229 § 1, c. October 3rd, 1842.

⁴⁸ FA, doc. 271 § 1, c. May 9th, 1844.

⁴⁹ Mayet, *Mémoires*, electronic version, ‘Son voyage à Angoulême en 1839.’

education as main ministry and that along with Oceania it was the moment to take on other foreign missions as well.⁵⁰

In December 1846 Lagniet, assistant to Colin, writes about the visit by Crétin, at the time vicar general of Dubuque and future bishop of St. Paul, Minnesota, asking for Marists because of their needs in Iowa. Bishop Blanchet of Oregon even ‘threw himself on his knees’ before Colin to plead for Marists for his diocese.⁵¹

In 1847, Bishop Loras, seminary director of Chanel and Bret, was bishop of Dubuque and asked for Marists for his diocese.⁵² In St. Paul, Bishop Crétin, a native of Belley, asked for Marists. In 1886, Archbishop Ireland, former pupil in Montbel, entreated and finally Marists came to St. Paul. Bishop Kenrick of St. Louis and Bishop Blanchet of Oregon City also asked for Marist priests.

In October 1848, Colin wrote to Father Morcel he would prefer a mission in Africa to one in America. But the Society is not strong enough anyhow.⁵³ In 1850, Father Poupinel wrote the report about the money the Marists asked from *Propagation de la foi*. It is a lot, ‘but little compared to what was spent over time for the missions in Africa and America. And in Oceania, there are still cannibals!’⁵⁴

America came again into view after the mission in New Caledonia failed twice and Bishop Douarre was willing to go there instead. Colin mentioned this idea to Fransoni in June 1850. Cardinal Fransoni as head of Propaganda Fide was in charge of foreign missions:⁵⁵

“Une mission en Amérique nous sourirait. Déjà plusieurs demandes nous sont venues de divers points de cette partie du monde. Nous les avons ajournées, parce que les missions de l’Océanie nous absorbaient”.

Father Bernin who was in Rome to discuss matters for the Marists in Oceania informed Cardinal Fransoni that Douarre could not accept anything that would dismantle the vicariate of Bataillon. He was willing to accept a bishopric in America or in Paraguay which could form a logistic centre for Oceania.⁵⁶ An alternative for Douarre would have been Samoa.

Father Mayet reported that a priest who had made a fortune working in America offered himself to Douarre as a missionary vocation. Douarre replied, well, you would need to take the three vows, poverty being one of these.⁵⁷

While Bishop Douarre was willing to work in America, Brother Optat (Pierre Bergillon, 1821, left 1851) had decided to leave the Marists. He left from Sydney to return to France but finally decided to stay in America when on his way back to France.⁵⁸

Bishop Jean-Marie Odin (1800-1870), bishop of Galveston, Texas (1847-1861, later of New Orleans, a Vincentian, on his way back from Rome visited Colin and asked for a Marist foundation in 1851. Colin wrote to Fransoni about it on 19 October 1851.⁵⁹ After the recent

⁵⁰ Mayet, *Mémoires*, electronic version, ‘Nota 16°X’.

⁵¹ CS 3, doc. 168 § 4, 23 December 1846, Letter Benoît Lagniet to Jean-Claude Colin.

⁵² *Notice historique sur les maisons de la Société de Marie en Amérique*, p. 7: “Dès 1847, Mgr Mathias Loras, depuis dix ans évêque de Dubuque (Iowa), demandait au T.R.P. Fondateur, des Maristes pour son diocèse ; il avait connu nos premiers Pères, lorsqu’il était supérieur du Séminaire de Meximieux (Ain). Vu le petit nombre des sujets, le Vénéré Père Colin ne put faire droit à cette requête”.

⁵³ Bernard Bourtot SM (ed.), « Colin sup ». *Documents sur l’étude du généralat de Jean-Claude Colin (1836-1854)*, volume 4, *De l’été 1848 à la démission (1848-1854)*, Rome, 2009, doc. 22, 6 October 1848, Colin to François Morcel.

⁵⁴ CS 4, doc. 149 § 15, 18 April 1850, Report by Victor Poupinel about the Marist Missions for Propagation de la foi, Lyon.

⁵⁵ CS 4, doc. 167 § 2, 12 June 1850, Colin to Giacomo Fransoni, and footnote 1: « L’idée d’une mission en Amérique pour Douarre dut être apportée par Bernin ; on ne la retrouve pas dans les lettres de Douarre (LRO docs. 861; 864; 883). Sur ce projet en Amérique voir CS 4, docs. 171 § 2; 176 § 4; 191 § 3; 192 § 3 ».

⁵⁶ CS 4, doc. 176 § 4, 2 July 1850, Letter Claude Bernin to Giacomo Fransoni.

⁵⁷ Mayet, *Mémoires*, electronic version, ‘X Monseigneur Douarre’.

⁵⁸ CS 4, doc. 240 § 3, 23 June 1851, Colin to missionaries of Woodlark; LRO, doc. 958 § 7-8.

⁵⁹ CS 4, doc. 264, 19 October 1851, Colin to Fransoni.

foundation in London he was sorry not to be able to send men right now to Bishop Odin. Odin would reiterate his invitation.

Odin won another recruit worth mentioning. Claude-Marie Dubuis (1817-1895) was born in Coutouvre, Loire, and ordained to the priesthood at Lyon in 1844. He came to the United States at the invitation of Odin and labored for many years in Texas. On October 15, 1862, he was appointed Bishop of Galveston, succeeding Odin who consecrated him on November 23 with Bishops Armand de Charbonnel and Jean Lyonnet as co-consecrators. Dubuis saw the diocese through the turmoil of the Civil War. He is the founder of the Sisters of Charity of the Word Incarnate. In 1881 he retired to his native France due to poor health, taking up residence at Vernaison. He is buried in the church of Coutouvre. The stained glass window above his tomb in the church of Coutouvre shows him and priests and religious from the village, among others Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn (1786-1858).⁶⁰

Colin was asked from different sides to establish a mission in America. However, after the disagreements with Bishop Pompallier in New Zealand he hesitated to take on a major new mission.⁶¹ Besides lack of personnel, Colin also regarded the missions of Oceania more difficult than those in America and he believed that the sufferings of the Marists in Oceania would bring the benediction of God on the Society of Mary.⁶²

The Americas were on the mind of the Marist leadership as a place for a possible foundation for another reason. They were searching for a logistical base for the Oceania mission. Colin did think of Mexico or Brazil or possibly California as a Marist centre to manage logistics and travel towards Oceania. Marists did visit South America on their way to the Pacific. The first group stayed in Chili and others had a break in Brazil. However, once the travel route switched to London and the Cape of South Africa this plan was dropped. Sydney became the logistical centre for the mission to the Western Pacific.

In this context mention must be made of a foundation Colin had agreed to but even so did not carry out for lack of personnel. The bishop of the Cape in South Africa had asked for Marists whom he got to know because they stopped there on their way to Oceania. Propaganda Fide supported this request. At the end Colin had to withdraw and nothing came out of it.⁶³

Many French clergy and Religious, among them future bishops, went to Canada and the US and took up missionary work and leadership roles. Some of those were personal friends or contacts of Colin, and other Marists. Searching for personnel, they would ask the Marist Superior General for support. Colin did not feel able to send anybody. He already had difficulties staffing Oceania and had to back out of the already accepted foundation in Southern Africa. During his generalate Colin made only a small beginning in the direction of English speaking areas, namely the house in London in 1850.

3 1854-1885: During the generalate of Father Favre

Julien Favre (1812-1885) extended the search for English-speaking vocations, mainly to staff the missions in Oceania, where many regions had become English colonies or zones of English influence. Favre opened houses in Ireland and England, a future resource of manpower for the United States. He was the Superior General who finally started a Marist mission in North America. The majority of the men were French. Some had learnt English in the Pacific or in London.⁶⁴

America occurred in the correspondence of his administration, for example in letters written by Father Poupinel, official visitor to Oceania. Like outgoing missionaries he mentioned the sight of

⁶⁰ Wikipedia, accessed 6 October 2017; leaflet Paroisse Ste Marthe du Nord Roannais, Église de Coutouvre.

⁶¹ CS 4, doc. 480 § 4, 5 June 1853.

⁶² CS 3, doc. 310 § 4, 24 January 1848, Words of Jean-Claude Colin; CS 3, doc. 350 § 2, 23 June 1848, Letter Jean-Claude Colin to Louis Perret.

⁶³ Yvan Carré SM, *Le projet de mission mariste en Cafreterie*, in FN 8-9 (2007) 20-36; Albert Kabala SM, *Colin, l'Océanie et l'Afrique*, in FN 8-9 (2007) 101-108.

⁶⁴ Graystone, *History*.

the North and South American coasts.⁶⁵ As a nation, the USA were an established element in the Pacific. King George of Tonga refused the Marists entry to his kingdom. He wanted to submit the case to the judgment of great nations like England or America, but Thomas, from the Wesleyan mission, said, this matter is not grave enough for such nations.⁶⁶

Although the Society was expanding, Favre also had to refuse many possible foundations. Among those were requests from the Americas:⁶⁷

1854, September: Scotland

1866, July: residence at Grands Lacs, Canada

1868 June: Residence at New Orleans, from the parish priest of the cathedral

1870, February: Major seminary at New Orleans, school at Galveston, Texas

1871, June: Major seminary of New York

1874, March: three colleges in Colombia

1878, August: major seminary Trois-Rivières, Canada; repeated in May 1879

1879, June: college at Sorel, Canada, repeated in 1880-1882

1882, March: mission for the Chinese in San Francisco; December, mission to the Indians at San Francisco

1884, April: college at Thérésiopolis, Brasil.

The repeated requests finally motivated the general to open a novitiate in Dublin, Ireland, for English-speaking vocations, necessary for Oceania and North America. Favre asked for money to be able to do so.⁶⁸

From 1860 on, the Society went through a phase of stability and new foundations.⁶⁹ The constitutions written by Favre received temporary approval from Rome. In 1861 statutes came out for the congregation. Three houses were opened in the US: In 1863 St Michael, Convent (parish), in 1864 Jefferson College, and in 1865 Algiers (parish). In 1865, a second house was opened in London, the French parish of Notre Dame de France.

Odin, archbishop of New Orleans had since 15 February 1861 asked for Marists again and again.⁷⁰ In 1862, he contacted Favre in person in Lyon. *Notice* writes:⁷¹

“In 1862, Mgr J.M. Odin, Lazariste, premier évêque du Texas, et transféré depuis un an au siège archiépiscopal de la Nouvelle-Orléans, fit au T.R.P. Favre une demande analogue, et il insista si bien qu’il eut gain de cause. Il offrait à la Société de Marie la paroisse St-Michel, à 50 milles en amont de la Nouvelle-Orléans, sur la rive gauche du Mississipi, et faisait espérer la direction du Collège Jefferson, situé à peu de distance de l’église, et possédé alors par une société civile. Deux Pères furent désignés pour cette mission : les PP. Bellanger et Gautherin ; ce dernier, employé depuis plusieurs années à l’église Sainte-Anne, à Londres, parlait bien l’anglais. Ils s’embarquèrent au Havre, le 2 février 1863, sur le voilier la « Sainte-Geneviève, » qui transportait à la Nouvelle-Orléans 60 Séminaristes recrutés en France par Mgr Odin et par Mgr Dubuis, évêque de Galveston, pour leurs diocèses respectifs. Mgr Dubuis, qui conduisait en personne cette pieuse troupe, sut communiquer à tous ses compagnons l’ardent enthousiasme qui l’animait. Pour occuper les loisirs de cette longue traversée, il se fit, avec nos deux Pères, professeur de Théologie pour tous ces jeunes gens. Après deux mois, la « Sainte-Geneviève » arriva à destination : c’était le 4 avril, au milieu de la Semaine Sainte”.

⁶⁵ Bernard Bourtot SM, *Victor Poupinel: Un père mariste au service des missionnaires de l’Océanie (1815-1884)*. Correspondance, vol. 2, *En Océanie (1857-1859)*, Rome, 2015, doc. 369 § 3; 16 September 1857, Report by Victor Poupinel about his journey to the Pacific; Doc. 370 § 2, 22-30 September 1857, Poupinel to Favre.

⁶⁶ Bourtot, *Poupinel*, doc. 429 § 8, 10 October 1858, Poupinel to Favre.

⁶⁷ Bernard Bourtot SM (ed.), *Julien Favre. Second supérieur général de la Société de Marie (1854-1885)*. *Documents pour l’étude du généralat Favre*, vol. 3 (1880-1885) *Annexes (doc. 1159-1289)*, Rome, 2012 (= LF 3), doc. 1285, *Les propositions refusées de 1854 à 1885 pour des fondations*, p. 1997-2002.

⁶⁸ Bernard Bourtot SM (ed.), *Julien Favre. Second supérieur général de la Société de Marie (1854-1885)*. *Documents pour l’étude du généralat Favre*, vol. 1 (1854-1866) (doc. 1-522), Rome, 2012 (= LF 1), doc. 214, 17 August 1859, Favre to Louis de Prandières, president of the Central Council of the Propagation de la foi, Lyon.

⁶⁹ LF 1, p. 449.

⁷⁰ LF 1, Introduction to doc. 400, 11 July 1863, Favre to Bellanger, St. Michael.

⁷¹ *Notice historique sur les maisons de la Société de Marie en Amérique*, Montréal, Librairie Beauchemin limitée, 1907, p. 1.

Favre sent Henri Bellanger, superior at Montluçon and Joseph Gautherin, London. They left from Le Havre on 2 February 1863 on the sailboat *Sainte-Geneviève*. On 4 April 1863, Holy Week, they arrived with Bishop Dubuis and others the bishop had recruited in Europe. They reached the continent during the time of the American Civil War (1861-1865)!

Father Henri Bellanger (1823-1879), from the diocese of Angers, began his novitiate at Belley in 1844 and was ordained in the same town in 1847. He had volunteered to go to Oceania. When called on to go to North America he gladly accepted. On 14 May 1865, he made his vow of stability. Father Joseph Gautherin (1824-1877) was a priest of the Belley diocese, ordained in 1848. Two years later he joined the Marist novitiate in Lyon. One of his appointments was St Anne's in London. On 26 September 1875 he made his vow of stability.

In the second group was one of the first twenty to make profession on 24 September 1836, Claude-Marie Chavas (1807-1874).⁷² He stayed in Verdélais for many years, was spiritual director, preacher of home missions, and entrusted by Colin with the ongoing formation of preachers. He had a great Marian devotion. On 2 September 1861 he made his vow of stability. In April 1864 Chavas reached London. On 29 May 1864 he arrived as a volunteer for foreign missions at St. Michael's parish. Chavas worked as confessor and as chaplain to the Sisters of Sacré-Cœur. With him came oral tradition right from the beginning of the congregation and personal knowledge of the founder and first Superior General.

With Jean-François Denis (1813-1870) came a man of tertiary education, something the Marists will later be known for in New Orleans for over a hundred years. Denis joined as a diocesan priest in 1841. He taught philosophy at Belley College, worked as a home missionary, at the major seminary of Digne, and there became the personal theologian of Bishop Meyrieu. He had to leave the major seminary of Saint-Brieuc because of his sympathies for the Comte de Montalembert. In 1864 he came to St. Michael's and then to Algiers, both in Louisiana. He made his vow of stability on 3 October 1864. Denis died on 24 November 1870, the first Marist to die in the US.⁷³

The first two lay brothers came with the second group on 1st of June, 1864. We do not know their names yet. On 10th of March, 1865, the general council in Lyon appointed two more brothers for America. Jean-Marie Plassard and Joseph Michard left May 1865 for America, parish of St Michael's.⁷⁴

Between 1860 and 1866 only members of the general administration and those destined for the foreign missions, for Oceania and now for America, were called on to make the vow of stability.⁷⁵

After his resignation as General, Colin followed events in the Society. He mentioned the death of Fr Denis in America (24 November 1870 in Algiers).⁷⁶ Two years later, Colin addressed the general chapter and spoke about a Society that has developed, that is not the same as in his days. It spread in Oceania, America, England, and covered the soil of France. This changed Society needs continuous prayer to its Patrons to preserve its spirit.⁷⁷

“Permettez-moi de vous communiquer un autre sentiment : Je vois notre Société qui n'est que d'hier et qui est déjà si répandue! Je la vois en Océanie, en Amérique, en Angleterre, et elle couvre le sol de la France. Tous les Maristes ainsi disséminés dans le monde, ce sont vos frères qui combattent les combats du Seigneur ; mais je vois aussi les dangers qu'ils courent de la part du démon, de la part du monde et de leur propre faiblesse. Je me sens porté à vous faire une proposition. C'est d'adresser des prières continuelles à Jésus Christ par l'intercession de Marie et de saint Joseph, afin que toujours la belle et angélique vertu se conserve parmi nous dans toute sa perfection”.

⁷² OM 4, p. 227-228. For Chavas: *Marist Biographical Sketches* (The Washington Province Historical Studies, New Series), 1989.

⁷³ Philippe Gobillot SM, *Jean-François Denis*, in *Marist Biographical Sketches* (The Washington Province Historical Studies, New Series), Washington, 1989, 45-60.

⁷⁴ APM, minutes of the general council in session.

⁷⁵ OM 3, p. 969. This is mentioned in the context of Fr David who was called by way of exception.

⁷⁶ Gaston Lessard SM (ed.), *Colin fondateur. Jean-Claude Colin de 1854 à 1875. Correspondance et autres documents*, Rome (= CF), 2014, doc. 411 § 3, 6 February 1871, Colin to Eugène Colin.

⁷⁷ CF, doc. 455 § 6, 1 September 1872, General chapter session, Colin addresses the chapter.

4 The first foundations in North America: Convent, Jefferson College, Algiers

During Holy Week 1863 the first Marists had arrived from France. Their first house and apostolate was the parish of St. Michael's, Convent, Louisiana, about 50 Kilometers from New Orleans.⁷⁸ They began on Pentecost Sunday, 18 May.⁷⁹ They came on a riverboat to Convent and found the presbytery locked and empty.⁸⁰

On 1 July 1864, with the arrival of Onésime Renaudier and Claude Chavas, Father Bellanger took over Jefferson College which was run down and needed a lot of repair work. It opened 8 September. The first community consisted of two Fathers and twelve pupils.

In November 1864, with the arrival of Fathers Denis, Bigot, Gouttenoire, Frayssinet, and the English scholastic Glynn, Bellanger could strengthen the new works. He decided to return to France to report and to discuss whether or not to accept the offer of Algiers parish next to New Orleans. This was accepted and the Marists went there on 4 June 1865. Algiers was an English-speaking parish. In 1870 Algiers became part of New Orleans. One of the later fathers was Antoine Pompallier (1839-1886), a nephew of Bishop Pompallier.

The new establishments required much correspondence and support. Bellanger asked for more men. Favre had to delay because of Oceania but sent a second group, Renaudier and Chavas, in May 1864 and accompanied them as far as London.⁸¹ In September, Favre wrote about a third group to come and about the difficulties of all the costs: building projects in France, Oceania, and now America. Glynn, the first native English speaker, came with Denis, Bigot, Freyssinet, and Gouttenoire in 1864.⁸²

The Marists arrived during the Civil War. Favre heard about the 'malheureuse guerre' that affected Louisiana from the Superior General of the Sisters of the Sacré-Cœur and asked Bellanger how the Marists fared.⁸³ After the Civil War, growth continued. Bishop Odin had urged the Marists to take on a parish in New Orleans and to run home missions. The problem was money: "La guerre a ruiné le pays et dans la paroisse Saint-Michel, riche et généreuse, il y a quelques années, aujourd'hui tout le monde est pauvre et nous recevons très peu de choses..." They also had to renovate Jefferson College.⁸⁴ Bellanger returned to France to report on the situation that in general was developing positively.⁸⁵

The foundations were the beginning. They were still administered by Europe, first as Anglo-Irish-American Province, then as American-Irish Province. On 25 March 1889, the Marist American Province was erected by permission of Pope Leo XIII. The first provincial, whose mandate began on 2 July 1889, was Father Benoît Forestier sm (1821-1906). He was in office until 1895. His successor was Onésime Renaudier (1837-1915), in office until 1901.⁸⁶ They were French and so were the majority of their confrères.⁸⁷ Houses of formation, new residences, and

⁷⁸ In 1809, permission was given to build a church in Convent. It was called St. Michael after a Michael Cantrelle who had done much for the area. Parishioners were Belgians and Acadians. Occasionally a priest from Donaldsonville came to say mass. Bellanger stayed for six years, Renaudier for twenty. The latter enlarged the church; *Reserve Eucharistic Day for Southern Section of Baton Rouge Deanery, March 27, 1938*, Souvenir Program, photocopy in APM 24369.

⁷⁹ Notice, page 1f.

⁸⁰ George J. Meiluta SM, *St. Michael Parish Church History 1722-1974*, typed, in a folder, copy in APM 224370.

⁸¹ LF 1, doc. 412, 14 February 1864, Favre to Henri Bellanger, St. Michael; LF 1, doc. 441, § 3.

⁸² LF 1, doc. 424, 28 September 1864, Favre to Henri Bellanger, St. Michael.

⁸³ LF 1, doc. 425, 10 October 1864, Favre to Henri Bellanger.

⁸⁴ LF 1, doc. 441, 7 April 1865, Favre to Louis de Prandières, Propagation de la foi, Lyon.

⁸⁵ LF 1, doc. 449, 15 May 1865, Favre to Henri Bellanger, Paris; Doc. 450; Doc. 458, 4 September 1865, Favre to Henri Bellanger, St. Michael.

⁸⁶ Lionel F. Beaudoin SM, *Mantle of Blue: A Half Century of Marist Apostolate. History of the Northeast Province of the Society of Mary, 1924 to 1974*, Boston, 1974, p. 1; *Biographical and Statistical Data Concerning Marists in America*, Washington D.C., 1947, p. 83; John W. Lynch SM, *Marists of the Past. Northeast Province, U.S.A., 1881-1986*, s.d. Graystone, *History*, p. 37-38, wrongly says Renaudier was the first provincial.

⁸⁷ Graystone, *History*, p. 38.

new apostolates followed over the decades. In 1907, the province numbered 103 priests, 4 lay brothers, and 3 scholastics. Until 1908 the USA was regarded as mission territory and therefore under Propaganda Fide. Since then, the USA Province belongs to a vibrant local church and an important part of the worldwide Society of Mary.

Conclusion

Traditionally, the beginning of Marist presence in the USA is taken from the arrival of the first two Marist Fathers in 1863.⁸⁸ Our intention was to search for ‘America’ on the horizon of the Marists before that particular year. Our starting point was the year 1803, the birth of Chanel and the year of the Louisiana-Purchase. Louisiana had been a possible destination for Chanel and others and became, coincidentally, the first Marist foundation in the USA.

The 19th century saw a revival of the missionary movement within the different Christian denominations. France joined this movement after the troubles of the revolutionary years were overcome. The Marists contributed to this movement. The same century saw a further major European expansion and emigration, with North America and the Pacific very much in the focus. And again, the Marists were involved.

The French missionaries spread news back home, and so the early Marists would know a lot about events, successes, difficulties, and failures. And Colin referred to some of those.

During Colin’s generalate the recently approved congregation was occupied with establishing itself internally and externally in France and from the start in the huge territory of the Western Pacific. Personal contacts and the communications with Oceania brought America to their attention. Before 1863, no real scenario of establishing a Marist mission was foreseen. At most, were a stop-over in South America and a vague idea of a logistic centre further north, Mexico or California. In the Pacific, the American presence grew and the Marists were in contact with beachcombers, traders, and seamen.

Former Marists like Brothers Optat and Colomb, leaving the Oceania mission, arrived in the US before an official foundation.⁸⁹

They were not the first men in contact with the early Marists to go to the States. Three of the early aspirants went: Janvier, Fonbonne, and Roux. Champagnat thought of going at one point. Others thought Courveille had gone to the States after leaving the Marist group. This establishes an important symbolic link for US Marists today back to the Fourvière-Pledge and time of the aspirants.

Colin said, ‘the Revolution killed my parents, my king (Louis XVI), and my God’. The territory in the States named after King Louis XIV, ‘the most Christian king’, traditional title of the king of France and a key word in the Fourvière-Pledge, became the territory of the first Marist foundation. But this was to happen after Colin’s generalate.

During the time of Julien Favre, second Superior General, the Society of Mary consolidated its structures in many ways and saw significant steps of evangelization, in particular in the English-speaking world.

The Marist Fathers came to the US to assist French immigrants, to work in schools, and to give home missions. This tradition continued into the 20th century in Diaspora regions of the South for example. The ‘Mantle of Blue’⁹⁰ was worn by mission bands for a long time. And because it was under Propaganda Fide, it counted as missionary work. It was the second biggest mission after Western Oceania for the Society at the time.

The requests came from Bishops, vicars general, and priests of French origin and familiar with Colin or some other Marist. The French connection was the major reason for these requests.

⁸⁸ *Notice*, p. 7, mentions the request made to Colin in 1847 and then the request by Odin to Favre in 1862, answered in 1863.

⁸⁹ Pierre Poncet (1816 – left 1845), coadjutor brother, missionary, Brother Colomb; On 13 October 1839 he made temporary vows for three years. He left for Oceania on 8 December 1840. He arrived at Kororareka on 15 June 1841 and stayed there until 1844, with a year in Auckland. He found himself unsuited to the life in the missions and returned to France in 1844. Poncet left the religious life in April 1845 and went to America.

⁹⁰ Beaudoin, *Mantle of Blue*. This cape typical for home missionaries was also worn by Marists in other provinces like New Zealand. An example of such a mantle is kept in Atlanta, Marist Archives.

However, there must have been more. Obviously, the young Society of Mary had already gained a certain reputation, one being their work in foreign missions. This recalls again the Fourvière-Pledge, to go to 'quavis mundi plaga', whichever shore of the world. Original missionary interest in America (Chanel, Bret) shifted to Western Oceania. The Marists experienced the shift from a mission directed to local people, the Native Americans, to the Caucasian immigrants. This happened from the beginning in the US and happened later in New Zealand and Australia.

Hence, this landing of Marists on these new shores illustrates different things. How did a new foundation come about? It was through the 'French connection', personal contacts the early Marists had with other clergy, some of whom had gone to the States. In the States, they needed personnel and they drew on their homeland which had many vocations, in particular missionary vocations, after the troubles during and after the French Revolution. Gautherin had learnt English in London. The others could start working with the French immigrants in Louisiana. The decision to take on Algiers, an English-speaking parish, shows their openness to the local situation. They did not come into established religious structures, in part not even established diocesan structures, and they did not know how their presence and project would evolve. They would surely be happy to see what has grown out of the seed they planted in the soil of Louisiana.⁹¹

An enduring need existed for more manpower. Favre could rely on more vocations and could finally answer the long-standing requests for a Marist house in the States. Colin had no men for further enterprises even if he would have liked to, as in South Africa. The need for English speakers had grown strongly. Favre reacted with his outreach to England and Ireland and so finally could answer the call to come to Louisiana.

We learn about the image of the young Society outside Europe: the French connection, foreign missions, education, and home missions.

Looking back into this pre-history, the Marists in the USA today can be proud of an important tradition on the symbolic level: men from Fourvière, Marist aspirants, one of the first twenty to make profession were among their pioneers. The origins speak about the profile, spirit, and mission of the Society. Very few started the venture. Their courage can still inspire us today.

⁹¹ A complete history of the US Marist province(s) would be a desideratum. For some data: *Biographical and Statistical Data Concerning Marists in America*, Washington D.C., 1947; John W. Lynch SM, *Marists of the Past. Northeast Province, U.S.A., 1881-1986*, s.d.; Beaudoin, *Mantle of Blue; Notice*.