

## New language

"Courage" is the best – and perhaps only – word to describe the common characteristic of those pioneer Marists who set out for mid-winter missions in the high back-country areas of Lyon, or who set out to the ends of the earth on mission to the Pacific people. It took courage not only to set out, but to carry through the consequences of their decision, particularly to adapt themselves to the life, the language and culture of the people they found there. When the pioneer Marist priests and brothers stood among the people of the Islands, everything around them reminded them that they were strangers: their appearance was different, their language was different, their mentality was different. They had to learn to understand the people, and to learn their language and way of thinking. And they knew there was no turning back from this mission. Françoise Perroton's experience was dramatic and demanded even more courage. Later in her life she wrote: "I thought in 1845 that I was going to do marvels in Oceania. There is no school here, I used to say to myself, so you will teach them to read, you will give catechism lessons to these poor little girls, you will have them learn how to love God and pray to Him, you will teach them devotion to the Blessed Virgin. What a beautiful work! I made beautiful castles, not in Spain, but in Wallis. Then after a year's travelling, I landed here. Now let's set to work, I said to myself. What a disappointment! I was 30 years too old; my old head has been able to grasp very little of the language. The result is that what I have been able to do is reduced to very little." Françoise Perroton underestimated herself. Not only did she start a movement of like-minded women who have followed in her steps, but something of her tough courage has been a characteristic of her followers. The same is true of those Marist successors of Colin, Champagnat and Chavoin. Marists who understand their life as mission realise that it is not an easy life, and that it demands as much courage and adaptability as it ever did. Even if they never leave their own country, they realise that the world they are living in is rapidly changing. They realise that they will need to adapt themselves to this new world, this new world of the young, for example, with its new language, its new way of looking at things, its new way of doing things. This is all a consequence of the decision made by their Marist predecessors – to set out and even set out again for the sake of the new Church which is emerging and coming to birth in our times.

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*Father Colin said at the end of the Retreat, "It is Mary who gives each one his mission, his task, the position he must fill. Just as her divine Son once entrusted a mission to His apostles, calling them His friends, telling them, 'Go, teach all nations' and to go their separate ways, just so this kind mother, at the end of time, says to us, 'Go, proclaim my divine Son to the world. I am with you. Go, we shall be still united.' What have we to fear? Let us all be 'cor unum et anima una' (one heart and one mind) in this divine heart, in the heart of our Mother. What happiness for us, to know that we are united, that we are sons of Mary!"*

*The Mayet Memoirs*

## Daring

When I read the French text of the Constitutions of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, I am struck by the presence of the word "*audace*" – daring. The word "daring" does not come as a surprise when used by women for whom "missionary service and the Marist vocation were but one single call". Missionary experience in the traditional sense of the word is well typified in the accomplishment of that exemplary pioneer, Françoise Perroton. It consists in overcoming obstacles which everybody agreed were insuperable. It is an accomplishment to which generations of missionary sisters have devoted their best talents and energy. I take as a symbol of it the fact of daring to train sisters as medical doctors and as dentists when they felt this would help the mission. Even today the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary stand on the frontiers that need to be crossed: inculturation, justice and peace, the promotion of women. It is only natural that when it comes to expressing the mystery of Mary's presence in the church, apostolic daring should be a component of their version of "*hidden and unknown*". Through them, this new note enriches Marist spirituality.

*Gaston Lessard, sm*



## *In the shoes of others*

When Marist missionary Jean-Baptiste Rolland arrived in New Zealand, he received a letter from Bishop Philippe Viard. The Bishop, in welcoming him, wrote: *"Once arrived in the diocese of Wellington, the missionary must learn the Maori language and the English language. He must forget that he is French, and dismiss all thoughts that could distract him from the only purpose for which he is sent."*

Marist historian Jean Coste, commenting on the courage of the pioneer Marists, said: *"There have been great Marists? Yes! They accomplished something really extraordinary in learning two foreign languages at the same time, Maori and English; in adapting to habits, ways of life so different from theirs and in bringing the Word of God to these new people. Let us be great Marists today. Let us ourselves learn the new language of our time, understand the reactions, the feelings, the way of life of those who are different from us; of this young generation who sometimes seem so far from us in their rejection of our artificial modern world, our affluent society."*

## *New world*

Each of us, in his own cultural setting, knows the tension and turmoil of the younger generation as they confront the values of their society, search for truth and meaning, seek for wisdom and guidance and affirmation. We know their anguish and bitterness, their disillusionment and anger, their disenchantment and apathy... as also their faith and hope and love, their generosity and even heroism.... Perhaps at times it seems terribly frightening, too, and there is a natural tendency to turn in on ourselves, to seek our own security. What gives us the courage to open our doors, to go forth with new inspiration and determination, is the same Mary, the same Spirit of the Lord, present in the midst of our communities as in the midst of the apostles.

*Letter from the XVIIth General Chapter  
of the Marist Brothers*



*The call which urged them to leave all resounds in our hearts today. Their source of strength to set out and persevere in mission also opens our path into the future. Being faithful means to keep in our heart that first impulse as a daily source of daring so as to respond to the calls of God.*

*Missionary Sisters' Constitutions Prologue*