

The Missionary Apostolate, 1836-1961

Marist Missionary work has been quite successful. This apostolate had its beginnings in the mind of the Blessed Founder. In 1636 he assign four brothers to accompany Bishop Pompalier and four other Marist Fathers to Polynesia. One of these priests was Saint Peter Chanel, who was martyred on the Island of Futuna (in the Gilbert Islands) in 1841.(26.) One of the brothers, Brother Marie Nizier, would have suffered the same fate had he returned an hour earlier to the site of the martyrdom.(27.) Two other brothers met with similar fates on these islands.(28.)

Blessed Champagnat often mentioned to his superior, the Venerable Colin, his desire to work in the missions. Although he was never able to do so, he did send to Polynesia every mission-minded brother he could spare during the last four years of his life. One of his great regrets was not to be in a position to send brothers to other mission areas for which help had been requested. Thus he wrote to the Bishop of Grenoble, France:

Tous les dioceses du monde entrant dans non vues; quant a NN. SS. lea Eveques respectifs voudront nous y appeler, nous noun empresserons de voler a leur aide et de noun y regarder toujours comme leurs tres humbles and tres soumis serviteurs.(29.)

The first request from North America came from Father Fontbonne of St. Louis, Missouri in 1837. Blessed Champagnat wrote a lengthy letter to this priest on the impossibility of sending brothers at that time:

. . . nous en enverrions avec plaisir en Amerique pour seconder le zele den bona missionaires, s'il nous etait possible: noun espeons que la divine Providence noun applinira les difficultes, et nous facilitera les moyens de parvenir jusqu'a t nous, lorsque le temps et les moments que le Pere a reserves a son souverain pouvoir seront arrives.(30.)

The Superior Generals who succeeded the holy Founder had to refuse brothers for five American schools before finally sending a community to Lewiston, Maine, in 1886.(31.) One year previous the first mission band had left for North America and arrived in Iberville, Canada.(32.) Since that tune Marist work in North America has developed into seven thriving provinces. The missionary apostolate can be studied in the appendix.(33.) What follows is the history of the Marist work in the United States.