

Brother Cesidius, 1885-1903

Brother Cesidius, the founder of the first Marist community in the New World, was born Regis Bruyere in the Vivarais section of France, on August 15, 1815. He entered the Institute of St. Genis Laval in September 1859. Six months later he was invested with the Marist cassock and given the religious name of Brother Cesidius, a name that was to be linked with seventy-five years of dedication to his congregation.

His first assignments sent him to Bourg Argental (1862-1865), and Charlieu (1865-1876). In 1876 Brother Cesidius was named director of the village school at Andance. Here he spent seven years marked by progress despite the vociferous and frequent attacks of anti-clericals in the locality.(8.) In 1883 he was assigned to the scholasticate community at Notre Dame de l'hermitage (Loire), where he continued his excellent work before leaving for the missions.

He was forty years of age, when in the summer of 1885 he left France for St. Athanase School in Iberville, Canada, and with five other brothers established the first Marist community in this small town. We have seen him as founder of most of the first Marist schools in Canada, as master of novices, and as provincial visitor of the young Canadian mission.

In 1893 Brother Cesidius was delegated to attend the Ninth General Chapter at St. Genis Laval, France. In recognition of his work in North America, the Chapter named him Provincial with more freedom to govern.(9.)

During Brother Cesidius' long administration (1885-1903) thirtyone schools and training houses received Marist staffs. Twenty-five of these were in Canada and six were in the United States. The revenues from these schools and especially from seven Marist boarding schools enabled him to establish houses of studies.

These houses of studies all originated at Iberville. For the past seventy-five years this original foundation has served as the clearinghouse for newly founded provinces. The Iberville Novitiate was opened in 1887. Five years later, Bishop Moreau of St. Hyacinthe, P.Q. wishing to help the brothers relieve the crowded conditions at the Novitiate, offered them a house, Villa Bedini and property to which a four story building was added in 1896. In 1963 a fire destroyed the new building which was rebuilt a year later.

The second house of studies to be established in Iberville was the juniorate in 1890. With the financial assistance of Canon St. George this building was erected to accommodate the increasing number of candidates. It became known as "Loupret". However, a few years later in 1903 it became the residence of the newly arrived brothers from France. The juniors were then transferred to the boarding school at Ruxton Falls, then, in 1904 to St. Hyacinthe. Iberville again welcomed them in 1911. A second juniorate had been opened in the meantime at Levis, near Quebec City in 1899.

An "Ecole Speciale" was also organized at Iberville in 1890, for special studies in English and pedagogy. Most of the brothers were left to study by themselves, until a scholasticate was organized in 1898. In that year the special group of students were transferred to St. Hyacinthe where they remained until the fire in 1903. They also returned to Iberville.(10.)

On the same property a "college" had been built in 1889.(11.) For twenty years this four story building served as a boarding school, until it was closed in 1910. Taxes were too high to continue a profitable operation.(12.)

Revenues derived from the boarding school and the salaries of the brothers in the parish schools proved to be insufficient to maintain the houses of studies. The training period was therefore curtailed, with the sad result that brothers were insufficiently prepared for teaching. The depressing effects of this situation caused a number of good men to leave the Congregation.

During Brother Cesidius' administration six groups of brothers were sent to schools in the United States. There they found problems similar to those in Canada. Besides the usual personnel and fiscal problems, a language new to most of them added to the hardships of these pioneers. Those brothers who were assigned to Franco-

American parish schools in Lewiston., Maine (St. Peter's, 1886); in Manchester, New Hampshire (Ecole Hevey, 1890); in Lowell, Massachusetts (Ft. Joseph's, 1892); in Lawrence, Massachusetts (St. Anne, 1892) found the use of French a help in adjustment. But in every one of these schools English had to be taught, and the teachers faced the problem of mastering the language.

In New York City, three schools were opened during this administration. The brothers arriving there either directly from Europe or via Canada taught in English. Moreover, it was imperative that those who were assigned to this city learn to master the language.

The staff at St. Jean Baptiste School, the first New York school was sent directly from Europe by the Assistant General. This school proved to be a great boon to the brothers. With the help of the Pastor, Father Tetrault, a small boarding school, St. Ann's Academy, was established in 1892. This Academy became a center of the United States Province for almost fifty years.(13.) A third school, St. Vincent de Paul Grammar School, obtained the services of three brothers from St. Arm's Academy in 1898. These three schools were advantageously situated in Franco-American parishes. Brother Zephiriny, the founder, of both St. Jean Baptiste School and of St. Ran's Academy communities hired Mr. John Corcoran to assist the brothers in their study of English. In 1895, the organization of a scholasticate at St. Ann's took care of many brothers who were exiled from France by anti-clerical laws.

As the Marist apostolate expanded under Brother Cesidius, great personnel and fiscal problems developed. To solve the latter a few brothers; were commissioned by the Assistant General to edit textbooks. The success of this venture set a tradition which is still carried on in the Canadian Provinces especially. Three years later another brother was sent to manufacture and sell biphosphate of lime in 1894. This activity brought in a steady income for many years. Eventually, however, this project was abandoned. Very little financial help could be sent by the mother province in France because of the political situation. Large sums of money were needed in France for traveling expenses of hundreds of French brothers, who as exiles, were assigned to do missionary work in South America,, Africa Asia, the Middle East, as well as North America.

In spite of these difficulties, Brother Cesidius saw the hand of God in the persecution of man. This persecution of religious in France turned to the advantage of the North American mission. As mentioned elsewhere the first effective anti-clerical measure to curtail the work of the brothers in France was the Law of Associations otherwise known as the Law of July 1, 1901. In the two years following that date thirty-two brothers left France for Canada. A second law which secularized the Catholic schools of France and dissolved religious congregations in 1903 brought ninety-nine brothers to join their fellow exiles in Canada and in the United States. A similar number arrived between 1904 and 1911. Brother Joseph Azarias in his history of the Canadian Provinces stated:

Disperses dans divers pays, nos Freres de France donnerent a notre Institut un essor merveilleux! Le Canada fut l'un des beneficiares de cet exode. Il recevait de 1885 a 1911, 374 Freres europeans auxquels il faut ajouter une vingtaine d'autres venus plus tard, meme apres la division de la Province (1911) et employes soit ici soit aux Etats Unis.(14.)

Another problem which Brother Cesidius had to cope with was the precarious health of many European brothers. They were overburdened with work, involved in the handling at times of forty to one hundred and fifty pupils in one class.(15.) French brothers often found it difficult to adjust to the new climate with its extremes of cold particularly in Canada. Brother Joseph Azarias stated in his history:

Le R. F. Leonida, Superieur General, visitant nos cimeties, d'Iberville et de Saint-Hyacinthe en 1948 se declarait navre de voir tant de jeunes religieux fauches a l'age de 18 a 25 ans: 60 freres, 8 novices, et 5 postulants! (1885-1911)(16.)

Many of these longed for their homeland, France. They had left it as missionaries either by choice or through the pressure of persecution. Their hardships have merited for them the respect due to dedicated men, whose toil laid the foundation for success in new surroundings. Among the pioneers was a French religious, Brother Felix Eugene, who was to be of great assistance to Brother Cesidius. He came from New Caledonia to become a

provincial visitor to assist Brother Cesidius from 1901 until 1903. In this capacity he was placed in charge of orientating brothers arriving from France.

The high incidence of ill-health and disease often led to untimely deaths. Two prominent men in the development of the Institute in North America, Bishop Moreau of St. Hyacinth and Canon St. Georges of St. Athanase, Iberville, died in 1901.(17.) To provide for the deceased, two cemeteries, one in Iberville and one in St. Hyacinthe, had to be provided.

Before the end of his administration, Brother Cesidius introduced several worthwhile Marist customs. One was a thirty-day retreat known as the Ignatian Exercises, for those brothers preparing to make their final vows. Six years later, 1899, the first brothers from North America left Canada to study at the Second Novitiate in Europe. (18.) Since that time every brother has had the opportunity to travel to Europe for ascetical and other studies.

In 1903 Brother Cesidius and Brother Felix Eugene traveled to St. Genis Laval, France, to attend the Institute's Tenth General Chapter. This significant convocation of superiors at this critical time formulated important directives which affected every member of the Institute. They were delegated by the Holy See to promulgate a new constitution for the Institute and to canonically erect autonomous provinces wherever possible.(19.) In conformity with the wishes of the Holy Sees an indult dated July 7, 1903 confirmed the canonical erection of four new provinces, one of which was the Province of Canada and the United States. Upon their return home, Brother Cesidius handed the burdens of government of the new province to Brother Felix Eugene, his successor. Brother Cesidius was then appointed as first consultor to the Provincial as well as director of the Novitiate -at St. Hyacinthe. In 1907 he succeeded to the directorship of the Juniorate at Levis where he remained until 1911.

In that year the Province of Canada and the United States was divided. Brother Cesidius was called upon to become the Provincial of the Canadian Province, in which capacity he served for three years. In 1914 he was again appointed director of the Juniorate at Levis, and in 1916 to the direction of the Novitiate at St. Hyacinthe. In 1921 at the age of seventy-six, he retired to the Provincial House at Iberville.(20.) There he died in 1933, at the age of ninety, one year before the golden jubilee of the arrival of the first Marist missionaries at Iberville. He was interred there among a group of one hundred and forty-six brothers who had preceded him in death.(21.)