

## **BASILE MOREAU**

### **Someone for whom the Associates are important**

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The status under **which** the Associates of Holy Cross are presently developing is not at all the one which was established by Basile Moreau at the time of its foundation. The beginnings were different as far as the organization, function and immediate objectives were concerned. However, there is continuity between the inspiration that gave birth to the Associates of Saint Joseph in 1837 and the spirit that animated the revival of the Associates following Vatican II.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of Father Moreau, lay people could belong to what was known as the Orders, the Oblates, the organization of the Third Order, and a variety of Brotherhood Organizations. Father Moreau and his contemporaries sought to create new formulas of association, something that was quite different.

#### The Associates of Saint Joseph, first orientation

The Associates of Saint Joseph, as perceived by Father Moreau, were linked to what we may refer to as «the first Holy Cross»: the Holy Cross of the Priests and the Brothers. All this, prior to the Sisters. What was it then?

In 1835, Basile Moreau had grouped the first Priests, then known as «Auxiliary Priests». The same year, at the request of his Bishop, he had assumed the responsibility of the Brothers of Saint Joseph, who had been founded fifteen years before by Father Jacques Dujarie.

In 1837, by an official decree, he gathered in the same community, the Priests of Holy Cross and the Brothers of Saint Joseph. Thus, Holy Cross was born...

In 1841, the Marianite Sisters will rise as a Community of Women, as an addition to the family of Holy Cross conceived by Basile Moreau. This family, in its religious meaning, was then, the onset of its providential history. The Associates, for Father Moreau, were to be a kind of extension of the Community or a support of the Laity.

What was the goal of having Associates?

When Basile Moreau accepted the responsibility of the Brothers, he felt that he had a double objective: first of all, he had to assure them of a religious as well as a professional formation. For this reason, the project was to call forth the Brothers who were missioning in the rural regions, call them each in turn, bringing them to Le Mans for a period of renewal and professional development. Secondly, he was also thinking of extending the time of Novitiate,

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<sup>1</sup> A revival which finds a certain thrust in the document *Gaudium et Spes*, and more recently in the Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II concerning the *Laity*.

making it more demanding for the candidates who wished to join the community. All this would require financial resources which were really not available.

It is then that Basile Moreau foresaw that lay Christians could possibly become Associates. They could help in his project through their prayers and through their financial generosity. They would be for the Brothers, not only benefactors, but excellent partners.<sup>2</sup>

At the very beginning, the Associates are members of a Fraternity<sup>3</sup>, whose Statutes are approved by the Bishop of Le Mans (as well as other Bishops)<sup>4</sup>, and later by the Popes, and enriched by them with numerous indulgences, according to the practice of that time. Such is the situation in the Church. The members of this organization must have a special devotion to Saint Joseph, and must be in good relation with the work of Holy Cross.

Their obligations will be very simple: Basile Moreau asks them to participate in the Mission of the Brothers in the following manner:

- pray in union with the Brothers (a few daily invocations as well as certain familiar prayers, namely Pater, Ave...)
- financial contributions, according to their means, in order to help for the well-being and the formation of the Brothers: minimal offerings for the benefit of the work they are supporting.<sup>5</sup>

It was very little but really indispensable for the success of the project.

These Associates, men and women, were recruited from village to village where the Brothers work, as well as parishes where the Priests of Holy Cross minister.

### Expansion and organization of the Associates

Within a few years, the Associates grew in number: according to the statistics of 1847, eighty groups were formed in parishes outside Le Mans alone. The documents of that time specify the work of the organization:

«The Associates are divided into sectors: each parish has a sector, and each sector has one or more leaders. These people receive the remuneration of the Associates and every three months or so, they give these offerings to the Superior of the Institution or to his Assistant.» They are known as the «Zealots.»<sup>6</sup>

The latter forms a council which facilitates good functioning as well as it fosters a good relationship with the Authority at Holy Cross.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Catta sees them as «charitable persons who, bearing the name of Associates of Saint Joseph, he (Basile Moreau) has assembled them to foster the Holy Cross Apostolate, a kind of Third Order».

<sup>3</sup> Basile Moreau had already established the Associates of the Good Shepherd and had them approved.

<sup>4</sup> In his circular 86, Basile Moreau names the Bishops of Le Mans, Laval, Angers, Rennes...

<sup>5</sup> Basile Moreau was inspired by the model created by the Foundress of the Propagation of the Faith, Pauline Jaricot.

<sup>6</sup> Most persons known as the «Zealots» are women. «Zealots» really means «zealous for the work accomplished.»

<sup>7</sup> The Associates were organized four years before the Sisters were founded.

## The Associates and their relationship to Holy Cross

The Associates of Saint-Joseph are present in the surroundings of Holy Cross in 1834, the year in which the Priests and the Brothers became one and the same Association through the Fundamental Act, under the authority of Basile Moreau. He now considers them as members of the religious family of Holy Cross.

In his Circular Letter of 1841<sup>8</sup>, a major document in the history of Holy Cross, Basile Moreau sets the Associates in their rightful place, when he says:

«the Brothers are supported in the expansion of their Institution by the Association that bears its name.»<sup>9</sup>

It is most interesting to note that the participation of the Associates in the Mission of Holy Cross stems from its roots. This fact is not negligible. As a matter of fact, the Associates are not an element whatsoever that came into being at a certain moment. The Association constitutes a reality that has come about at a time when the «mighty tree» was emerging.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, from the very beginning of Holy Cross, there has been between religious and lay Associates, a solidarity in the growth and mission of the young Congregation. Basile Moreau saw the Associates as collaborators, participants, to their measure and according to their means, to the expansion of Holy Cross.

This solidarity, well established according to the structures and plan of the mission, Basile Moreau willed it also to be an experience of Spiritual Life. Religious and Associates mutually support one another in prayer. The Associates, as we have seen earlier, pray with and for the religious; but there is reciprocity. In a document of the time, we find the utterance of the spiritual contribution of the religious:

«an Ave Maria each day by each member of the Institution; each Sunday, communion received by two Brothers; a Solemn Mass each year.»

At the Novitiate, there is a «daily prayer said for the Associates, remembering the living and the deceased.»

In this order of Spiritual Life, there is also Associate participation in religious celebrations of the community. As an example, let us remember the presence of the Associates at the solemn celebration of the Feast of Saint Joseph, the Patron Saint of the Brothers and of the Associates.

History equally reminds us of the participation of the Associates at the Feast of the dedication of Sainte-Croix Church at Le Mans, in 1854. For this occasion, a preparatory retreat had been offered to the religious and to the students of Holy Cross College; an «octave of sung Masses and Benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament» had been offered, «each preceded by a

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<sup>8</sup> Circular Letter no. 14

<sup>9</sup> Brothers of Saint Joseph - Associates of Saint Joseph. In the same year, in a Circular Letter - balance sheet giving the general state of his religious family, Basile Moreau notes «the zeal so well sustained by these ladies who form the council for this important project.» (Circ. 11, January 8, 1841).

<sup>10</sup> The Associates were organized four years before the Sisters were founded.

sermon.» During this octave, «spiritual exercises had been given to the Associates of Saint Joseph, namely: to the ladies, in the morning; and to the men, at night.» (Circular Letter, January 1, 1855).

On a certain day, the Associates participated in the feast.

### Annual Bulletin

In 1840, Basile Moreau created an Annual Bulletin which he referred to as «Spiritual Gifts»<sup>11</sup>. He did this in order to maintain a close link with the Associates and also to offer them the occasion of a certain formation. This Bulletin of which he was both the inspiration and the editor, contained about 100 to 150 pages.

Among other subjects, it included:

- a report on the life and activities of the Associates; announcement of events that concern them, making people aware of the death of persons who are members of the Association, etc.
- information on the Holy Cross community, its life and its mission. It presents news concerning foreign missions: Africa, Bengal, presence to the Indians. This news is graced with letters from the missionaries. He seems to say: «You are participants in whatever is done in these foreign lands!»
- in this Bulletin, the Founder also includes any Circular Letter which he addresses to the community of religious;
- news of the life at Holy Cross College at Le Mans. Basile Moreau publishes the advertising, the programs, statistics relative to students and to the personnel. He also gives an account of the celebrations, of visitations by people of importance, distribution of prizes, occasional invitations, etc...

All this was done for the sake of giving the Associates a sense of belonging and to make them feel a part of the family.

The Bulletin aims not only to inform the Associates or nourish their sense of belonging, but also to enrich their lives as Christians. Quite a few pages are presented with this in mind: e.g. short meditations on the Gospel, presentation of the great mysteries of the liturgical year and its principal holy feasts, etc... Basile Moreau was especially particular about the pedagogical range of his teaching.

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<sup>11</sup> The Bulletin was published at the beginning of the year, hence, its name. The Associates of the Good Shepherd also received the publication. See Catta I, very interesting chapter on the Bulletin (Tome I, p. 638 etc.). The author describes it as «an almanac of popular spirituality and piety.»

The publication of the Bulletin lasted for 11 years, from 1840-1851.<sup>12</sup> In his Circular Letter of December 8, 1851, Basile Moreau announced to its readers that this publication had come to an end.

Until his superiors deemed it necessary for him to retire from the direction of the Associates in 1864<sup>13</sup>, Basile Moreau found this organization which he had created to be quite important, the success of which he had progressively established through spiritual and social activities.

Because he considered the Associates as members of the family of Holy Cross, he was hoping for a certain relationship to exist between the Associates and the Religious. In this way, in one of his letters, he wrote:

«Establish and maintain with the Council of the Zealots in Le Mans, links that lead to mutual encouragement and success of this work.»<sup>14</sup>

In the eyes of Father Moreau, the work of the Associates was important also for the Church and the society of the time. Catta expresses it in this manner:

«The new Association had a very happy influence for the future of the Institute of the Brothers of Saint Joseph which was united permanently to the catholic public, fully aware of the needs of the time, devoted and interested in Christian teaching.))<sup>15</sup>

### The Associates and Basile Moreau's vision of the Church

It is evident that Basile Moreau was a man of the Church. Builder and creator of so many works, in his time, everything he himself started, or that was started by his own, he wants it to be rooted to what he called «the fertile soil of the Church.»<sup>16</sup> The foundation of the Associates of Saint Joseph, in 1837, is part of the same call. The official statute of the group will come from the same channel already existing in the Church. As we have mentioned previously, it is with the approbation of the Bishops, with the Blessing of the Holy Fathers that the Associates will evolve and that their presence in the family of Holy Cross will, little by little, find its proper place and importance.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, this rootedness of the Associates in the Church included spiritual privileges, many of which came from indults from Rome which Father Moreau had requested for them.<sup>18</sup> To be an Associate was then to be «Church», at a certain level of commitment and

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<sup>12</sup> It was published by the Gallien Library at Le Mans, as were so many other writings of Basile Moreau, at that time.

<sup>13</sup> There were then 2558 regular Associates and 100 zealots - men and women.

<sup>14</sup> Circular Letter no. 77. On occasion, it was important for Basile Moreau to meet personally with the Associates. He always asked the religious to gather the Associates so that he could meet them at the time of his community visitations. «It is a real pleasure for me to have all these people around me...» he wrote.

<sup>15</sup> Catta, I, p.318.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Graziella Lalande, Like a Mighty Tree, pp. 49-50.

<sup>17</sup> In his Circular Letter no. 86, Basile Moreau speaks of the «Canonic existence» of the Associates.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Basile Moreau, Circular Letter 47, December 8, 1851; Circular Letter 77, May 28, 1856.

of belonging, according to the customs concerning the place of the laity in the Church at the time.

However, Basile Moreau had a broader vision of this sense of belonging for the laity in the Church: a vision which was quite prophetic, which, decades later, would be confirmed by Vatican II and the subsequent orientations of the Magisterium concerning the place of the laity in the Church.<sup>19</sup>

As early as 1837, Father Moreau had introduced the lay Associates to Holy Cross as a form of sharing and of significant complementarity. The members of the family of Holy Cross, itself rooted in the Church, share the spirit, the spirituality, the vision and the apostolic calling. At a time when the Church established itself as a hierarchy of power, of mission and of charisms - the laity was situated at the very bottom of the pyramid. In his manner of perception and of orientation of the Associates of Holy Cross, Basile Moreau had already made them participants and partners of the work of the Church. This Church-Communion, made up entirely of the people of God, at the service of the Gospel was what Vatican II had so hoped for.

#### Today, the Associates as partners in Holy Cross<sup>20</sup>: their spiritual orientation

Basile Moreau wanted the Associates to participate in the spirit and in the spiritual adventure of Holy Cross. He wanted them to share with the other members of the family of Holy Cross, not only in festive celebrations and privileged devotions, but also in the way of reaching out to others and praying to God, a certain manner of «fashioning Church». That was the tendency of his action toward them.

How could this orientation become a reality today?

We are aware that there are certain ways of living our Baptism, whether we be lay or religious. Basile Moreau gave certain points of convergence. Those are the three Gospel imperatives which are found in the Constitutions of the Sisters: identification with Christ, union of hearts and zeal for the glory of God.

The first Gospel imperative given to us by Basile Moreau was identification with Christ, and this was meant for the Sisters, Religious and lay Associates as well. For the latter, it was to become a witness of Christ wherever they are, in the milieu where they live and at the work place — needless to search elsewhere for a place to live the Gospel. This rule of Christian life, Basile Moreau bases it expressly on Baptism. To all the religious, men and women (and to the laity as well), he writes:

«In Baptism, we have received the seed of spiritual life which needs to grow and to be strengthened... What we need is to become another Christ.»

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<sup>19</sup> Document Lumen Gentium, in particular (art. 40) insists on the complementarity of lay people in the constitutions of the people of God. Complementarity based on Baptism, as starting point of the Christian adventure, the same for all of us.

Recently, at the last Synod on Religious Life, the reflection will concern the expansion of this complementarity.

<sup>20</sup> Following, we will discuss the Associates and the Sisters and what is proper to them.

For all religious and for those who have made vows, to become like Christ is to live at the core of obedience, at the core of their proper personal call to holiness. For lay Associates, to become like Christ is to constantly be in search of the will of God, in their daily lives. All in all, belonging to a Congregation brings about precious means, and a spirituality which has been given to us by the Founder himself.

For each Associate, there is the logic of commitment; each must discover for herself/himself what it means to «become like Christ», to reveal Jesus Christ here and now. By a Christian way of behaving, for sure, but mostly by one's being, by one's quality of presence. In this sense, Mary really was the first Associate. «She neither preaches nor baptizes, but she is a presence, with her experience of life and death. She is there with her strength and her compassion: an example of life and of faith; she is there at the moment when our history unfolds.»<sup>21</sup>

To become like Christ leads to two other imperatives: a life of communion, and the zeal for bringing about the Kingdom of God! In this, there is a spiritual openness that sets in and lasts for a lifetime!

### The Associates and the impact of their belonging to Holy Cross

We are well aware of the image and the vision that Basile Moreau had for Holy Cross and how he described it so well:

«Holy Cross will grow like a mighty tree and constantly shoot forth new limbs and new branches which will be nourished by the same sap and endowed with the same life.»  
(Circular Letter no. 65)

This image will serve to make us reflect on the important reality of our lives: our belonging... Our belonging is first of all a fact, a given: we belong to a family, a country, a race, a religion, a history. The inherent links of this initial belonging are not the ones of our choice: we receive them. They constitute our personal, human and Christian roots.

When it comes to belonging to a religious family, other elements come into play: a call, a choice, a commitment. At the moment when someone takes the promises of the Associate, he/she assumes the responsibility of belonging - that is his/her choice. On the other hand, he/she brings to the group a sense of first commitment. This enriches the group. Thus, belonging to this group becomes a new dimension in our lives - a gift coming directly from God. It is important to be conscious of it, especially in a world where families are shattered, a world where countries are destroyed, devastated and oppressed. A world of exodus and exile where can be seen only the uprooted.

Therefore, to belong, to be rooted in a privileged place may constitute a path of sanctification and of mission. But, living this sense of belonging may also carry a counterbalance of faith and of love, amidst the difficulties that we may encounter in our modern world.

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<sup>21</sup> Graziella Lalonde, CSC, Like a Mighty Tree, p.211.

As Associate, to be able to situate oneself in «the mighty tree» which was planted by Basile Moreau, to drink of its sap and to receive the grace to grow, to contribute to its vitality and its productiveness, to be Church, while at the same time being of Holy Cross, is part of our being called.

### The Associates and the Holy Cross Heritage

Through Basile Moreau, we belong to a certain generation of Christians who have the vocation to be witnesses of who they are and how they live. The Religious and Associates possess the same spiritual patrimony. Each one is called to ask himself/herself, before Basile Moreau, in what point of view am I an heir/heirress to this patrimony? What gives me the sense of affinity to him, to the work he has created and to which I want to belong? There are many aspects of our being that allow us to blossom in feeling this sense of belonging. It is therefore important to discover these aspects. There are aspects of the heritage by which I recognize myself, and that I feel I am at the right place. It is always good to name these realities, and to question ourselves.

What do I bring to my milieu? As an Associate, what aspect of the heritage of Basile Moreau can I witness to? For many, it will be the zeal, for others, the simplicity of Basile Moreau, his compassion, his love of the Church, etc... There is the element of a certain call. There is also a confirmation. In the case where I belong, the support is based on the knowledge that exists between the Founder, the Congregation and the person who wishes to become an Associate. In this context, the Associate of Holy Cross is a conscious and responsible heir.

Other dimensions of the heritage: I remember two in particular - I will call them the dimension-communion of Saints.

In the family of Holy Cross, there were, and there still are saints. Some are in the process of being Beatified, others, very humble, are known by God alone. Anonymous Saints, we call them. We have Blessed Brother Andre and Blessed Mother Leonie... Presently, the cause of an American Priest, Father Peyton<sup>22</sup> has been introduced in Rome. There is also our dear Father Moreau who was recently (declared Venerable) Beatified. These are saints who belong to us; they are our family! In the name of the Communion of Saints, we may delve in the treasures of their lives!

Go and find in Brother Andre's life, the compassion, the sense of listening, the perseverance in a life of service, the gift of adoration... Go and find in Mother Leonie's life, her concern for priestly vocations, her humility in service, her love of the Church, her generosity-Go visit with Father Moreau, draw from his audacity, his perseverance, his concern for unity and communion, his courage in adversity, his sense of forgiveness.

The example of the saints in our religious family surely can nourish our prayer, our action, our testimony; and we should be proud of our «belonging».

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<sup>22</sup> Modern Apostle of the Rosary- he produced a series of films (3) on the mysteries of the Rosary. They have been shown nearly everywhere in the Christian world.



The other dimension touches a certain form of solidarity: the one that comes from the branches of the tree - solidarity among Associates, solidarity with the life and the mission of Holy Cross in the conditions of today. There is an interior attitude that needs to be developed in this area; there are things to be done, otherwise, solidarity is at risk of being dissolved with time and events.

It is imperative that we ask ourselves a few questions... On what can our solidarity depend, now? What «family resemblance\* can it have? What would the benefit be for us or for our Congregation?

The picture of the «Mighty Tree» here finds its place and its meaning... The Associates are grafted to this tree, since the day they made their promises. Truly, they can say: «I am part of this Tree! I assume its beauty, its grandeur, its life: I also assume its weaknesses and its failures... I belong because I promised!»

This belonging, this shared heritage with the religious community of the family of Holy Cross commits us to this spiritual adventure: only our journeys are different.

#### By way of conclusion

The Quebec novelist Germaine Guevremont, in one of her characters states: «You are as the lamp which gives life, wherever you are, light appears.» Following the example of Father Moreau, we are called to be people aflame with the love of God, through the love of our sisters and brothers, transfigured and transformed by this flame. Thus, to be a witness becomes very simple.

We must be light, we must be the «fire in the ashes». As we well know, a flame can be seen and it carries light. Father Moreau was a man of «fire». Religious, men and women and Associates, must represent the presence of God where God is absent, so that everyone can recognize us and say: «You are as a lamp that is lit, wherever you are, we can always see the light...»