



## LETTER TO THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

June 2020

The General Superior

## BUILDING ON THE ROCK!

**Dear Lay Mennaisians, Dear Brothers,**

The Coronavirus Pandemic seems to challenge the foundations of our society and our world. As Pope Francis reminded us, on March 27, 2020, we believed we could « *always remain healthy in a sick world* ». Should we not think of building differently if we want our common house to withstand the different waves that fall or will fall on it sooner or later?

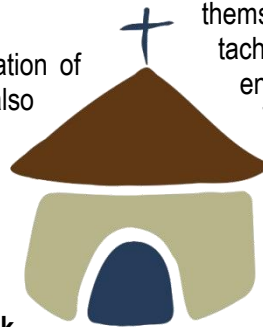
*Building on the rock!* It is the invitation of Christ to all disciples (Mt 7: 24-27). It is also the path of our charism: to continue to make a contribution to this new way of building thanks to a coherence of life which breathes dynamism and energy into our daily lives.

### 1- The Mennaisian who builds on rock builds on God alone.

Jean-Marie de la Mennais starts from a conviction of faith: God alone is stable and solid; it is the rock on which everything that will stand the test of time must be built.

*« Around us, nothing is stable, and we change ourselves like everything else, so do not rely on the wretched man toy of the most unforeseen events; let us rely on God Alone; only attach ourselves to God Alone »<sup>1</sup>.*

*Building on rock* consists of belonging completely to God, of offering him his freedom, his body, his life, his memory, his intelligence, his whole being. The one who lived this radical and total belonging is called Jesus. The Apostle Paul followed him on this path: « *It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me* » (Gal 2:20). Like Christ, the will of God becomes the soul of his action. Without this constant search for conformity to what God expected of him, he could have built his life on the sand of the search for glory and be this resounding cymbal (1Cor 13: 1) in search of praise and recognition.



Dieu Seul, the motto that Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes gave to some forty Brothers gathered in Auray from 9 to 15 September 1820 for their first great retreat, has only one objective: to belong completely to God. By welcoming him, the Mennaisian, Brothers and Lay people, undertake to detach themselves from everything in order to become attached to God Alone. They claim that God is enough for them and that he is their only treasure.

They confess that the Lord comes before their reputation, their health, their science. They want to accomplish the will of the Lord « *in all things: in humiliation, greatness, in poverty, in wealth, in health, in sickness, in life and in death* »<sup>2</sup>.

**To build on rock** is to learn to surrender to Providence, which dresses the lily of the field better than anyone else and which satisfies birds day and night. It is to strive first to seek the Kingdom of God and His justice (Mt 6: 24-34). It is to live with the certainty that God makes everything contribute to the good of those who love him (Rm 8:28) and that he always gives what he commands.

Was it not such a heritage that Jean-Marie de la Mennais wanted to transmit to us when he decided to give the nascent Congregation of the Sisters the name « *Daughters of Providence* »? He knew how to read in the difficulties of relations with Mgr de la Romagère, the new bishop of Saint-Brieuc, an appeal from the Lord. This is what he wrote to the Superior of the Daughters of Mary to inform her of her decision to transform the « Association of Young Ladies » into an autonomous religious Congregation: « *I believe I see in the foreign events which oppose their execution a particular view of Providence and I let myself be led by it* »<sup>3</sup>. Following the example of Jean-Marie who points out the way of abandonment to Providence, we are

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, *S VII*, 2165.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, *Letter to Mrs De Saisseval*, 21 January 1821.

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, *S VII*, 2164-65.

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invited to be flexible and available in the hands of God, to rest gently in his arms, to entrust to him our sorrows and our burdens and put our will back into hers.

- This is *building on rock*: God Alone. And we Mennaisians, Lay people and Brothers, how do we live our fundamental option for the Lord and abandonment to Providence? How can we help each other to build the Mennaisian Family on these solid foundations?

### 2- The Mennaisian who builds on the rock offers everyone the Mennaisian flavour.

Every Mennaisian, Lay person or Brother, who gradually succeeds, with the help of the Lord's grace, in building his life on God alone and in abandonment to Providence, becomes salt and light for those around him. So many Brothers during the very lifetime of Jean-Marie de la Mennais are showing us the way.

- **Availability of pioneers:** This value expresses total surrender to Providence and allows you to be on a mission where the Lord sends. We therefore understand better the attitude of the Brothers at the close of the retreat in 1837 when Jean-Marie de la Mennais asked for five volunteers to go on a *mission to Guadeloupe*. Of the sixty Brothers present, fifty-two responded favourably.
- **The audacity of Brother Zoël:** When the Mennaisian is inhabited by the conviction that God always precedes him in all his initiatives, provided that these only aim at the glory of the Lord, this makes him daring in the exercise of his mission. He is not afraid to move forward despite the difficulties. This is the example given to us by *Brother Zoël* who launched a bakery to provide bread to the town of Plouvorn during the famine of 1847. It was this same Brother who, in 1851, at the height of a typhoid epidemic, rose at four in the morning to comfort and care for the sick.
- **The hope of Brother Ambroise:** When the mission becomes more difficult, when failure is on the horizon and when misunderstandings and disappointments multiply, the Mennaisian hopes against all hope. This is the lamp that lights her and helps her to walk at the rhythm of God. This is reflected in the life of *Brother Ambroise Le Haiget*, the Director General of the Brothers in the Antilles. During and after the



storm, he let himself be guided by the only lighthouse: God alone.

- **The sweetness of Brother Hyacinthe:** To aggressiveness, the Mennaisian is called to respond with softness. With kindness and patience, he refrains from extinguishing the wick that is still smoking or breaking the already wrinkled reed. Is it not this fine heritage that Brother Hyacinthe Fichoux left us and who made him nicknamed "the Saint of Basse-Terre"?

- **The credibility of Brother Arthur:** As Pope Paul VI said, «contemporary man listens more readily to witnesses than masters or if he listens to masters, it is because they are witnesses»<sup>4</sup>. Our Congregation has not lacked these credible witnesses who first announced Christ by the example of their lives. Among these, we can mention Brother Arthur Greffier, whose mere presence on the plantations of Fort-de-France was enough to restore calm among the insurgents who gathered around him in order to listen to him with attention and affection.

1817-1820 / 2017-2020: our Congregation marks its 200th anniversary. We are called to « *live more and more in Mennaisian Family mode* » How can we not *give thanks* to the Lord for the pioneers who knew how to build their lives on the rock of God alone by surrendering themselves to Providence? How can we *not marvel* at this rich heritage made up of availability, hope, daring, gentleness and credibility? How are we going to *make this heritage fructify*?

While wishing you to be good and faithful servants of our ever-present charism (Mt 25,14-23), I ask the Lord to bless you by bringing down the dew from heaven which will fertilise the work of your hands. Peace and joy in the Lord who fills us far beyond our expectations.



**Brother Hervé Zamor, sg.**

<sup>4</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n° 41.