

A new page

The Bicentenary Year of the founding of our Congregation comes to an end during a particularly difficult time for us and the whole world. But the official slogan of this past year encourages us to look to the future: “Let us begin a new page”.

Throughout its long history, the Congregation has written so many new pages, starting with our Founding Father, Jean-Marie de la Mennais. His peaceful life in Saint-Malo was interrupted by the call to serve as a shepherd of Saint-Brieuc diocese. He put all his energy into reviving a sector of a wounded, divided and demobilised Church that needed rebuilding after all the material and moral destruction brought about by the Revolution.

Faced with the urgent need to offer a future to the younger generations, Father De La Mennais was called to found congregations, starting from nothing and without any resources. Trusting in Divine Providence, he established a family of consecrated men and women to fight against atheistic and falsely humanist ideologies, opening several educational establishments. Through his work with the Congregations of the Daughters of Providence and the Brothers of Christian Instruction, he set an example that was followed by many similar Institutes in other regions of France and across Europe.

He did not hesitate to embark on the ambitious project of founding the Congregation of Saint Peter, a religious family whose goal was to enlighten by faith the development of modern culture. With his brother Féli, he dared to engage in social action that was adapted to the demands of the time and inspired by faith.

Despite the dramatic end to the Congregation of Saint Peter and Feli's rebellion, he did not give up. He continued to consolidate the base he had laid down for the Brothers' mission: opening schools throughout the countryside and in the towns, primary schools and high (secondary) schools, vocational and technical schools.

Then, through the Minister of the Navy and the Overseas Colonies, came the call to go to missionary lands. A truly epic story thus ensued involving commitment and sacrifice, the development of an apostolate, a major contribution to the emancipation of slaves, and personal heroism, all lived out by our missionary Brothers. And he, Fr. De La Mennais, watched the development of this project with a smile mingled with tears of affection for his exiled, but still dearly beloved, sons.

The Founder maintained this attitude up until the end of his last letter to his missionary Brothers: “Sow, sow abundantly”. So many new pages were written, inspired by trust in God, in the life-giving presence of Jesus, in the strength and light of the Holy Spirit! And down the years, so many Brothers and Sisters have been called and have responded “Yes!” to this “charismatic” intuition, doing so with enthusiasm and humility.

This is what we too are called to, despite our poverty, our weaknesses, our ageing, our economic difficulties, always relying on Divine Providence. *“No sacrifice, even that of their own life, will be too painful for them.”* The life of the grain which falls to the ground and dies is one that bears much fruit.