

**BROTHER SCUBILION (2):  
«A Brother for those afar»:  
The Missionary**

The first document let us get acquainted with Brother Scubilion and to discover the great stages of his existence.

Now we must show what brought unity to this life: Brother Scubilion was a Missionary. He was a missionary in the sense given to this term and the end of the 19th century which saw great strides in this endeavour, turning from the countries of established Christianity towards the lands of Asia, Africa and Oceania. These were often old colonies or countries in the process of colonization. Without wishing to judge the ambiguities of these situations, it is an historical fact that they contributed in a positive way especially in the religious sphere.

Between 1822 and 1833 Jean-Bernard Rousseau had joined the Brothers of the Christian Schools and had lived his first ten years of the apostolate. At that time, after the turmoil of the French Revolution, the Brothers set as their priority the strengthening of their establishments in France itself. They really did not yet have foreign missions. Yet, a secret missionary fibre was beginning to vibrate in their Congregation. Requests began arriving from Louisiana, (a former French possession) and Guiana. Efforts toward both places were thwarted, the Institute turned towards a favourite direction, the Island of Bourbon. A fervent appeal by the Superior General, Brother Gerbaud, brought some volunteers. That was in 1817. The beginnings were very difficult: the sending of two groups of missionaries (1817 and 1826) hardly established a fragile "beachhead". The establishment of a solid mission had to wait until 1833.

Brother Scubilion was on his way (we already described this in the first instalment). So, from then on we had the "Brother for those afar". And the very farthest possible. A colony in the southern hemisphere, far from the city whose population had a definite Christian heritage but very neglected. It was almost a "spiritual desert". About 1820, for about 75,000 inhabitants there were some religious services on Sunday in the most important centres; yet there were no sermons, no catechism, let alone classes, and a lack of schools. The few schools there were existed for the white colonizers or the free Creoles. The slaves did not count at all, except for work. The majority of them were not even baptized. It was towards these that Brother Scubilion soon became inclined. (We will speak about this in the next instalment). Meanwhile, he will spend ten years in the apostolate of teaching primary classes and catechism in favour of the free population at St. Benedict's and St. Paul's.

So, here we have Brother Scubilion as a school teacher. He had to reckon with the character of whis pupils, rather given to laziness because of the hot climate. He is able to overcome their lackadaisical attitude and to win their affection. This he does less by his ingenuity (whose limits he recognized) than by his patience and self-mastery, and by his continual devotion to all. Being in charge of the domestic duties of St. Benedict's, he takes good care of the poor children for whom the Brothers provided lodging and food and sees to it that the black cook, a slave, prepares their rice well. This provides Brother Scubilion with an opportunity to discreetly give the children their first "homemade" and basic catechism lessons. The time was not yet right for "official" catechism classes for slaves after working hours.

For the moment, at St. Benedict's and St. Paul's, he taught catechism to the Creole children, who were not too attentive. Of course, he taught from the catechisms of his day: a summary of cut-and-dry questions and answers of the principal truths of our Catholic faith. Yet this catechist's convictions and enthusiastic presentation, and the strength of his example breathed into the exact and rigid pages the savour of the "Good News". Brother Scubilion never forgot the recommendations of his venerable Founder: "You should strive to make your questions and answers in Catechism easily understood, and explain them clearly by using words which are easily understood". (Meditation 33:3).

There is another aspect of Brother Scubilion's apostolate: although in charge of the lowest class, he extended his influence to all the pupils in the school. He had a spiritual intuition in detecting in the pupils the desire for a religious vocation, especially to the Brothers. The contagion of his own complete dedication was a kind of silent invitation: one wanted to become a Brother like him. Then, he sent at least ten young boys to the Novitiate. Later on, when he was finally able to catechize his beloved blacks (slaves) at St. Leu, one of them, thanks to him, became a Brother, the first slave to be vested in the habit of a Brother.

But beyond his work and days as a school teacher and a catechist, I would like to sketch a portrait of a missionary, to set aside the movement of this existence, to identify the spirit which animated him.

First of all, it was his passion to evangelise: a certain interior turmoil for his own 'salvation' without doubt either naturally ingrained or from the constant preaching of his times, but above all for the salvation of others. And the movement of his heart, of his life, could be sketched this way:

\* In the metropolis from 1823 to 1833 he gave himself completely to the children of Alençon, Poitiers, and Chinon. Yes, but... out there somewhere there are other children who need the Brothers even more to instruct and catechize them because they are the most abandoned. "Let us then go also to other places to proclaim the Gospel!" Out there beyond, one can give himself more completely, detached from his family and native land, without a desire of returning.

\* Once he arrived in Bourbon, he gave himself completely to the children confided to him: he instructed them, served them, catechized them, and led to the Novitiate. Yes, ...*But* these were the free children. What about the others? The most oppressed, the most abandoned? Are not the slaves also the children of God? Who will take care of them?

\* At last at the service of the slaves, God knows that he has given himself without reserve. Yes... *But...*, Bourbon is a Christian country, at least according to the Baptismal Register, the slaves themselves in ever greater number are being baptized and catechized. But way out there, some 800 kilometres away, is Madagascar, the Great Island, still pagan. He dreams of going there to bring the Gospel Message: "For the past twenty-two years I have been asking this grace of the Lord God (Brothers for Madagascar) and that I myself might be of the number of those who will have the good fortune of evangelizing these good Malagaseè"! (Letter of December 8, 1855). He will become a missionary to Madagascar without going there himself. He has carried this mission there in his heart and prayers. And in 1866, he will be happy to bless, he the veteran, his confreres who are departing for Tananarive. "You are leaving for this island which I have so much desired to evangelize! I cannot follow you but I shall always pray for the success of your work. Now that we have schools among the pagans, I shall die happy".

Yes, a passion was burning throughout the life of Brother Scubilion: the obstinate will to ever widen his field of endeavour, to extend it ever farther towards the most poor, in a total gift of himself. In Lasallian terms, it is Zeal; Brother Scubilion is a person eternally unsatisfied precisely because of his zeal! There is nothing unstable about him: wherever he is, he flourishes, he gives himself without reserve to his apostolate of the moment. But receptive to the Spirit, he aspires along the lines of his vows to "procure the glory of God as far as he is able". Brother Scubilion lives to the fullest his mission here and now, but his zeal makes him sensitive to the appeals of all and the unceasing invitation "to get even farther".

The second characteristic which I should like to underline with regard to Brother Scubilion, is the successful synthesis between his perfect *esprit de corps* (together and by association) and the daring of his initiatives. We could speak here of an obedience-initiative, an obedience operated from within by a love (therefore zeal) which is irrepressible. Those duties which are not expressly prescribed in his list of duties, he discovers, and improvises to the extent that he perceives a need.

Obedience-initiative, obedience and zeal: he succeeds in reconciling the two virtues and in accumulating their advantages. Along with obedience is the assurance of a solid mission within the framework of a community which supports him and without which he would not have his influence nor his outreach, assurance of a mission devoid of the pitfalls of personal fantasies or of the divergences of temperament. As regards zeal, as regards initiative, this timid one was always audacious. He permitted himself all and was permitted all. Speaking about the apostolate at the end of his career at Sainte-Marie, one of his former confreres gives the following testimony: "His superior told me one day that he did not watch over him, he always managed to go out to help the sick and the sinners, without thinking whether or not he had to ask permission, such was his great zeal". This was a trait worthy of the "little flowers" of St. Francis.

We conclude, with the words of Monseigneur Aubry, addressing a number of pilgrims who had come to pray at the tomb of the Servant of God, 17 April, 1983.

"Do not look foremost for the marvellous. Brother Scubilion was not a miracle-worker, but a missionary... go home and become missionaries".

There are many modes of being so. To discover them, Brother Scubilion has revealed his secret.

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