

**Saint John Marie Vianney,
Cure of Ars,
and the Brothers of the Christian Schools.**

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We are all familiar with the “holy cure of Ars”, Saint John Marie Vianney, canonized by Pius XI in 1925 and proclaimed patron of parish priests.

What perhaps is not known is that this holy priest had an appreciable relationship with our Institute from a very early age and he even almost became a Brother. Aside from that, some Brothers, in one way or another, maintained a relationship with him. Let’s look at some examples more closely.

**1. On the road to the Seminary...
or to the Brothers’ Novitiate?**

From early in his life John manifested great piety and a special inclination towards serving the Lord. Because of this, the parish priest in the town of Eculy, Father Balay, personally took charge of the boy in order to direct him to the Seminary. He himself taught him Latin as well as other subjects so as to prepare him for entrance into the Seminary.

That boy, for all his excellent spiritual and moral qualities, was not much given to studies. He would be classified as a student who was academically challenged. But Father Balay was not discouraged and decided to send him to entrance examination.

John showed up for that exam in 1814 at the bishop’s palace in Lyon. But he was not successful and he felt a certain sense of discouragement since this meant that he could not enter the Seminary. And he was very eager to consecrate himself to the Lord.

It seems that in Lyon, where the Brothers’ novitiate was located in the Petit-College, he had an interview with the Brother Director, to whom he recounted his failure in the exam for first orders. But perhaps during the dialogue, Brother Director encouraged him to take the exam again and continue along the journey to priesthood. Nevertheless, it seems that they parted with the understanding that if he should fail again, he would be received with open arms.

Brother Gerard, a childhood friend of the cure of Ars, and who made his own profession in 1818, wrote down this event: “Master Vianney, who was studying for the priesthood and for admission to holy orders in Father Balay’s house, the parish priest from Eculy, was not sufficiently prepared and he failed...He told me that he would then seek entrance in order to become a Brother. But the following day he wrote to me telling me not to say anything about it, because the parish priest wanted him to continue his studies” (*Rigault, Histoire de l’Institut*, IV, 267, note 4).

Having presented himself for the exam again, he passed it and was able to enter the Seminary. And that is the road that God made available to him and along which he would do immense good for souls within the Church.

But the memory of the Brothers never left him since among the hundreds of young people that he guided towards the priesthood or religious life it is estimated that more than 60 of these entered the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. And it also appears that on a certain occasion, while conversing with Father Lamennais, founder of the Brothers of Christian Instruction and with Father Perreyve, he said: “Had I not become a priest, I should have liked to don the habit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools”.

2. The case of Brother PÉrial-Étienne

Brother PÉrial-Étienne was elected Assistant to Brother Gabriel Marie on March 25, 1897. A special story is told about him and his relationship with the holy Cure of Ars.

The best way to tell the story would be to cite directly from volume VII of Rigault, p. 48:

“During the childhood years of Paul Bargel - Brother PÉrial-Étienne - there is a story told that has been perfectly authenticated, with no hint of being an ‘embellished legend’. On July 28, 1846, around noon, the holy Cure of Ars left the parish church where he had just finished celebrating Mass, praying and hearing confessions - twelve hours in all. When he arrived at his parish residence there was a woman on her knees who presented a child to him that she had brought from a great distance so that the holy priest would bless him. And John Vianney then said to the mother: ‘This child you have in your arms has been chosen by God for his glory. He will become a Brother of the Christian Schools and will do much good’”.

Rigault cites his source: **Francis Trochu**, *Vie du saint curé d’Ars*, ed. 1932, p. 213 and he notes that the author gives the date 1847. In the "notice nécrologique" of Brother PÉrial-Étienne the date of 28 July 1846 is given, but it is corrected in red ink and it says "July of 1847". Later on his date of birth is given: 29 December 1846, which is corroborated in the Archives’ Superior Registry and it says: "born 29 December 1846 in Pontcharra (Rhône)." Nevertheless, in the individual datafile the birthdate is given as 20 December 1846.

Rigault continues:

“Brother PÉrial told a close friend of his one day: ‘I was called to the most extensive beneficial ministry. I tremble at the thought of not having known how to fully respond to this divine vocation’. He said this out of humility; the reality is that the saint’s prediction was completely fulfilled”.

3. The future Brother Antel...

This is a similar case, yet unique in its own right.

This is the story of an adolescent who went to confess himself to the holy Cure of Ars. Immediately this man of God realized that before him was a pure and candid soul. His advice was: “You should receive communion more often than you do now. Beyond that, God is asking you to enter the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools”.

This boy entered the Institute and took the name of Brother Antel. He died in Paris in 1896.

4. The interview with Brother Exuperian.

At the beginning of January, 1899 a Brother requested an interview with the holy Cure of Ars. Permission was granted. After a few moments had gone by, the holy priest interrupted the conversation and said to him, looking him squarely in the eyes: “Go to Paris where you will do much good”.

That Brother was none other than Brother Exuperian, the Assistant to the Superior General, who held that office for 30 years.

He was born in Poujol on June 7, 1829 and he died in Paris on January 31, 1905.

His cause for beatification was introduced and his heroic virtues were promulgated on March 3, 1990. The zeal that he displayed, especially among young workers, was the flame that gave birth to the first Employee Union of Industry and Commerce that with the years evolved into the French Confederation of Christian Workers. If his meeting with the Cure of Ars took place on the date indicated, he would have already had many years of experience as Assistant and would have of course lived in Paris where the Cure of Ars told him to return.

As a bibliographic reference, apart from those sources already cited, we would point out the brochure of I. de Cicé, Rabats Blanc, the ninth in the series of the History of Vocations, 51 pages.