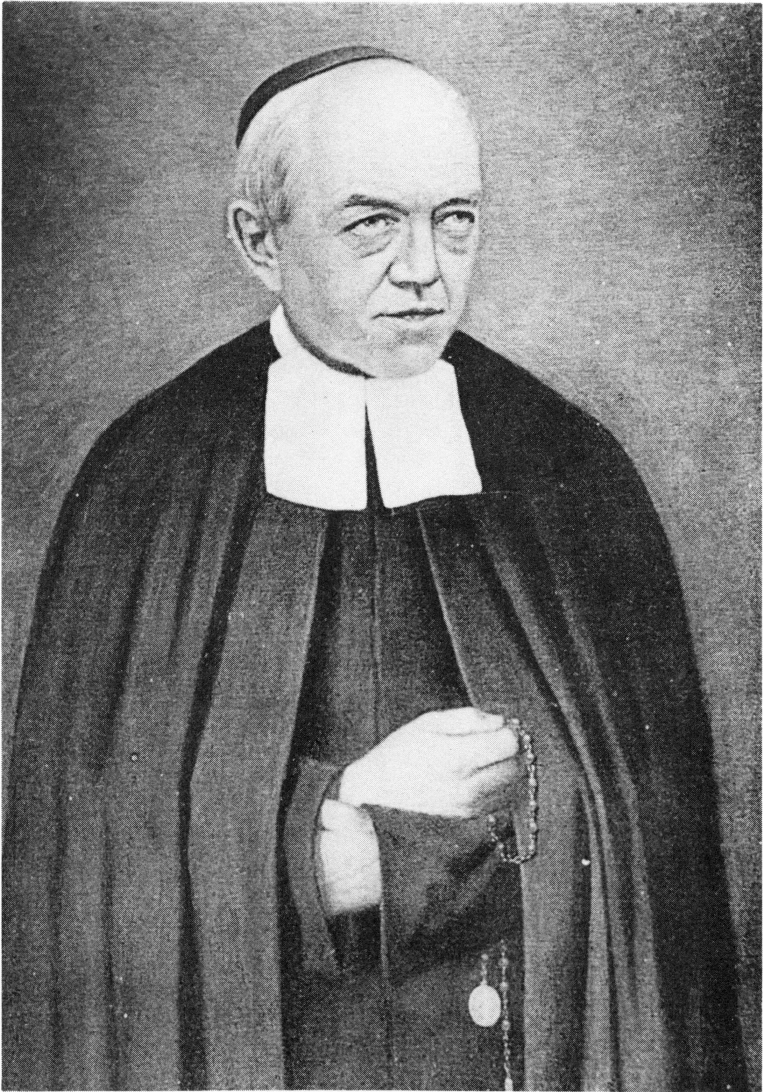


**Brother Mutien-Marie Wiaux, FSC**



**Portrait by Delmelle: “The Brother who is always praying”**

**Brother Mutien-Marie Wiaux, FSC**

**Sanctity in Simplicity**

by  
**Luke Salm, FSC**

**Christian Brothers Publications  
Romeoville, Illinois**

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# Abbreviations

- AMG Archives of the Institute's generalate in Rome.
- FM Frère Mélage, *Le bienheureux Mutien-Marie, FSC: Par la voie étroite*. The official biography of 1926 (*Par la voie étroite Frère Mutien-Marie*) in the 1977 Malonne edition, with "Postface" describing the 1938 exhumation and the 1976 decree on the heroicity of virtues.
- MF *Message du Frère Mutien* (Malonne, 1987). The message of Brother Mutien-Marie based on his letters.
- MH Alphonse M. Hermans, FSC [Brother Maurice-Auguste], *Le Frère Mutien-Marie 1841–1917* (Malonne, 1982). A modern biography based on archival documents and the testimony of witnesses in the canonical process.
- PA *Positio super virtutibus: Animadversiones*. Official publication of the Congregation of Rites giving the 1952 report of the Promoter of the Faith challenging the claim of heroic virtue.
- PR *Positio super virtutibus: Responsio. Ibid.*, giving the response of the advocate of the cause.
- PS *Positio super virtutibus: Summarium. Ibid.*, giving excerpts from the sworn testimony in the Ordinary (diocesan) process at Namur, 1923–1926, and in the Apostolic (Roman) process at Namur, 1937–1939.
- SB Jules Herment, *L'Institut Saint-Berthuin à Malonne* (Namur, 1947). A history of the school.
- SD *Super dubio . . . de miraculo* (Rome, 1988). Vatican dossier on the miracle proposed for canonization.
- YD A. Yperman, *Le Frère Mutien-Marie de Malonne aux origines d'une dévotion populaire 1917–1980*. A licentiate dissertation presented to the history department of the University of Louvain in 1983.



# Foreword

An English-language biography of Brother Mutien-Marie, now to be known as Saint Mutien-Marie, is long overdue. Apart from some rather brief leaflets, the only previous biography in English of this new saint appeared in 1934 under the title *A Hero of Malonne: The Story of Brother Mutien-Marie*. The author, Brother G. Paul, was stationed at the time at De La Salle College, Washington, D.C., but the small volume was for some reason published by the Brothers' Procure in Paris. Actually, this work, long out of print, is an adaptation for American youngsters of the "official" biography written in French by Brother Mélage and published by the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

It might even be said that a complete and well-documented biography of Brother Mutien-Marie in *any* language is long overdue, an enterprise that is beyond the scope of this present work. There will be an attempt here, however, to introduce some new material never before published, and to present it for a mature audience in a manner that avoids the uncritical style of the traditional hagiographers in favor of a more balanced and historically accurate portrayal of persons and events.

The history of the attempts to produce a biography of Brother Mutien-Marie is fascinating in itself. The first person to begin work on a biography was the saint's nephew, Gabriel Wiaux, who had joined the Institute of the Brothers in 1910 and was given the name Brother Mucien-Léon (note the variant spelling). Before long, however, he persuaded the superiors that it would be better if the biography were written by someone who was not a relative.

Accordingly, Brother Martial-André, a former colleague of Brother Mutien at Malonne and, since 1915, a professor of history in the scholasticate at Louvain, was entrusted with gathering material for the biography. Brother Mucien-Léon worked closely with Brother Martial-André, supplying him with extensive written and oral accounts of the family of his uncle and his experience with him as a confrere in the Institute.

The task of gathering and verifying the recollections of those who knew and lived with Brother Mutien was not as easy as it might have seemed. In addition to the physical restraints of wartime (Brother Mutien-Marie died in January 1917) there were psychological difficulties as well: hostility toward those Brothers whose countries of origin fought against the allies, questions about the judgment of certain superiors in dealing with Brother Mutien, and mixed feelings among some Brothers about the holy man himself.

Despite the general lack of cooperation and the very few responses from Malonne, Brother Martial was able to produce a tentative biography in the form of a necrological notice that appeared in 1920. Brother Imier, the Superior General, then asked Brother Martial to write a more complete biography that might serve as a circular for the Institute. It was not until 1925, under pressure from Brother Marcel and Brother Médard-Camille, the Assistant Superior General for Belgium, that Brother Martial finally agreed to attempt a *vie populaire*, a "popular" biography, of Brother Mutien-Marie.

Meanwhile, the canonical process at the diocesan level, known as the "Ordinary process," had opened at Namur in December 1923 to prepare the way for eventual canonization. This only served to complicate the task of Brother Martial. Some Brothers who had read the necrological notice complained that it was full of inaccuracies and exaggerations. Brother Martial, knowing that he would be called to testify and present the results of his research to the tribunal, tried with only modest success to enlist the help of the Brothers in verifying the facts and correcting what some Brothers considered errors or exaggerations.

Apparently the thought of testifying under oath caused a number of the witnesses to back away from their original testimony. The exact circumstances of Brother Mutien's death were a particular matter of concern. Although the infirmarian, Brother Fauste-Joseph, had given an account of the death to Brother Martial, when it came time to testify he said that he wouldn't dare claim even that he had witnessed the death of the servant of God.

When the Vice-Postulator, Brother Marcel-Léon, tried to enlist the help of the new Director at Malonne, Brother Max-

imien Camille, in getting at the facts, the Director replied, "I cannot accede to your request. I take no responsibility in the matter. I wasn't there when he died. Let Brother Martial-André come to Malonne and do whatever he wants. I'm glad I wasn't called to testify. I wouldn't have had a minute's peace" (AMG, EJ 47,71).

Father Petit, the chaplain at Malonne, was equally cautious. On March 21 1924, he testified that he could not say or deny that when Brother Mutien died people were calling him a saint and were looking for relics, that it was all quite vague in his mind. Yet in May 1920 he had written to Brother Martial, "When he died the word 'saint' was on everybody's lips, and more than one person would have been happy to have as a relic something that had belonged to him" (AMG, *ibid.*).

One of those who responded negatively to the draft prepared by Brother Martial was the 75-year-old Brother Michel, who had lived with Brother Mutien from 1867 until his death in 1917. He found the work of Brother Martial "tendentious" and "exaggerated, even with regard to events that did not seem to us at the time in any way extraordinary." In a letter dated June 13, 1924, Brother Martial replied that he had based his text on written notes from 15 Brothers and the chaplain, as well as oral depositions from several others who had known Brother Mutien, that he had read back to them their testimony, sometimes more than once and corrected any errors or anything that seemed exaggerated. To this Brother Michel replied, "Don't be upset. In reporting the words of your sources, you have acted responsibly. No one doubts or minimizes your diligence" (AMG, *ibid.*).

In December 1925 Brother Martial-André had a tentative text ready. Forty copies were printed and circulated privately for comment. Apparently many Brothers were shocked and unprepared for the thoroughness with which Brother Martial ferreted out the facts, named names, and quoted witnesses verbatim with little concern for the consequences, as he himself noted in a preface that he later wrote to the unpublished work (AMG, *ibid.*).

At this point, the canonical process at Namur still had ten months to go. On January 10, 1926, after reading the provisional text of Brother Martial, the Brother Assistant for

Belgium wrote to tell him that he had no obligation to reveal to the tribunal either the existence of his notebooks or anything they contained that might be detrimental to the cause of Brother Mutien or to the reputation of the Institute and its superiors. Brother Martial felt obliged in conscience to ignore this advice. As a result, the *Summarium* of the testimony, published by the Vatican, contains extensive and detailed excerpts from the testimony of Brother Martial-André and Brother Mucien-Léon, based on the written notes they had prepared with a view to a biography.

Meanwhile, the superiors decided to look for a new biographer, and entrusted the work to Brother Mélage-Antoine, who had lived with Brother Mutien at Malonne from 1895 until 1917. They insisted that the author eliminate all reference to Brother Mutien's deficiencies, the unreasonable orders given to Brother Mutien by his superiors, the conduct of the Director at Malonne at the time of Brother Mutien's death, or any details about Brothers of German origin. The names of any Brothers still alive were to be suppressed. The notebooks of Brother Martial-André were then relegated to the archives of the Institute.

The result, published at Namur in 1926, was the "official" biography, entitled *Par la voie étroite Frère Mutien-Marie*. In the following year it was published in a new edition by and for the Institute, without the pre-title and without identifying the author. The work of Brother Mélage thus served as the source for most of what came to be written or understood about the life of Brother Mutien until fairly recently. On the occasion of the beatification of Brother Mutien-Marie in 1977, a new and illustrated edition of Brother Mélage's biography was published at Malonne with a "postface" giving an account of the exhumation of the relics in 1938 and the texts of the decrees officially recognizing the heroicity of virtue and the miraculous character of the cure attributed to the intercession of the servant of God.

The biography by Brother Mélage, with its flowery and inspirational style, served its purpose for the time when it was written. In its main lines it is factually accurate, since Brother Mélage lived with Brother Mutien for more than 20 years. He had at his disposal, besides, the research of Brother Martial-

André. In fact Brother Martial complained somewhat bitterly in later years, "I wrote it, you decorated it." And decorate is perhaps the right word to describe the ornate style of Brother Mélage, "warm and poetic," as one commentator called it, more the product of a creative writer than of an historian.

Therein lie the drawbacks of the work. Brother Mélage does not hesitate to enter into the consciousness of his hero to describe his thought processes or emotional states. Neither does he hesitate to moralize about the religious significance of persons and events. The total effect is a picture of Brother Mutien that is other worldly and one dimensional, the idealized image of a saintly person that was characteristic of an older school of hagiography.

In 1982 Brother Maurice-Auguste Hermans, writing from the generalate in Rome, was the first to try a new approach. While expressing great praise for the work of Brother Mélage, which he calls a "veritable poem expressive of admiration and friendship," Brother Maurice felt that there was a need for a more factual account without "the literary allusions, the author's reflections, and the unexpected associations that give so much charm to the book of Brother Mélage." Accordingly, the work of Brother Maurice, entitled simply *Le Frère Mutien-Marie 1841-1917*, is based exclusively on the testimony given in the canonical process and on documents in the archives at Rome and Malonne. In a sense, it is the characterization of Brother Maurice that has served as the inspiration and the model for the present English-language version.

In the preparation of this present work, the author had access to all the biographies published thus far, to some of the more important publications circulated out of the center at Malonne, and to the *Positio super virtutibus* and the *Super dubio* containing the documents from the canonical process. In addition extensive use was made of the original manuscript notebooks of Brother Martial-André, some of his correspondence, and photographic copies of letters written by Brother Mutien, all preserved in the archives of the generalate at Rome. More complete publication data on these sources, which are cited extensively in the course of the work, are provided in the list of abbreviations used to identify them.

Special thanks are due to Brother Séraphin Lambo, Vice-Postulator of the cause of Brother Mutien-Marie, for supplying most of the illustrative material and for generous permissions to make use of the Malonne publications; to Brother Leone Morelli, the Institute's successful and indefatigable Postulator General with the Holy See, and to his secretary, Brother Michelangelo Ceppari, for their eagerness to supply the relevant Roman documents; and finally, to the ever-patient and always-encouraging Brother Edwin Bannon, Institute Archivist, first of all for suggesting to the author that he undertake an original biography, and then for the indispensable follow-through in making available the archival riches in the generalate at Rome. A word of gratitude must also be expressed to the editorial personnel of Christian Brothers Publications in Romeoville, under the supervision of Brother Paul Grass, Regional Coordinator, and the staff at Saint Mary's Press in Winona, under the direction of Brother Damian Steger, for the "heroic virtue" required to have the work available in time for the canonization of its hero.

Luke Salm, FSC  
Manhattan College  
May 15, 1989

# 1

## Louis-Joseph Wiaux

Belgium, more precisely the southern part of it known as French-speaking Wallonia, has the honor of being the birthplace of Brother Mutien-Marie, the third of the disciples of Saint John Baptist de La Salle to be canonized by the Catholic Church. Although Belgium is not a large country, this newest Lasallian saint was not only born there but lived and died within its borders. His boyhood was spent in his native village of Mellet, while most of his life as a Brother was limited to the environs of the boarding school at Malonne.

Mellet itself is a small village in the canton of Gosselies, part of the ancient county of Hainaut, just off the main road leading north to Waterloo and Brussels, and south to Charleroi about ten miles away. To the east along the Meuse River are Namur, Dinant, and the battlegrounds made famous in World War I. Malonne is a suburb of Namur. Neither Mellet nor Malonne is large enough to appear in either a standard atlas or an ordinary road map.

### The Wiaux Family

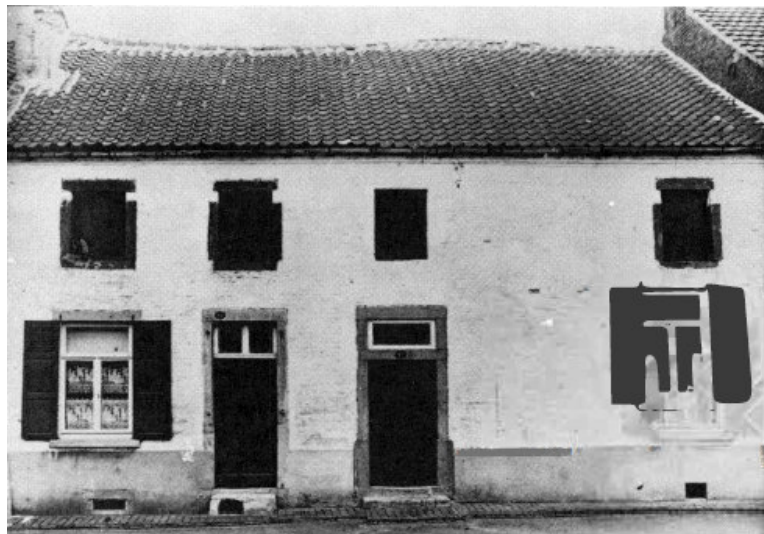
The child destined to become Saint Mutien-Marie was born at two o'clock in the morning of March 20, 1841. The third son of Jean-Joseph and Elizabeth Badot Wiaux, he was baptized the afternoon of the same day and given the name Louis-Joseph. His godfather was an uncle by marriage named Delhaye; his godmother was his aunt, Marie-Thérèse Wiaux.

Before Louis-Joseph, two boys had already been born into the Wiaux household: François-Joseph on October 27, 1837, and Jean-Joseph on September 2, 1839. After Louis-Joseph there would come two girls and another boy: Caroline-Joseph on November 11, 1842, Léon-Joseph on August 6, 1847, and Philomène-Joseph on June 28, 1851. Note that each of the Wiaux children, girls as well as boys, following a long-standing

family tradition, was given the name Joseph at baptism and put under the protection of the spouse of the Virgin Mary.

The parents were devout Catholics who worked hard to provide for themselves and their children. They were well thought of in the community, where the family had been for generations. The father was a blacksmith. He could be seen every day in his overalls at the forge adjacent to the house, where he shod horses, pounded out nails, or shaped tools for the villagers and for the farmers who came in from the fields nearby.

The large family living room had been turned into a café, over which the mother presided when she was not caring for the vegetable garden behind the house. The Wiaux café was a popular spot where the villagers could relax, play cards or lotto, and exchange stories over the good Belgian beer. This was especially the case during the long winter months when a warm fire provoked lively conversation about the old days under the oppressive rule of Holland, or the glories of the 1830 Belgian Revolution. The evenings at the café would always conclude with the recitation of the rosary and night prayer. Years later, the older generation could recall that, for all of the



**The Wiaux house at Mellet, where Louis-Joseph was born**

hilarity and good humor, violent or unseemly conduct was never tolerated in the Wiaux house.

At the time Louis-Joseph was born Mellet comprised a single parish of some 1500 inhabitants, all of them Catholics and all but a few faithful to their religious duties, especially to the Sunday observance that included Solemn Mass in the morning, Vespers and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the late afternoon, and abstinence during the day from all manual work.

The Wiaux family attended Mass every day. The children never omitted their morning or evening prayers, which they recited together, sometimes in the company of the patrons of the café. In later years, Brother Mutien would recall with emotion how each morning and evening the children would present themselves in turn to their parents and ask, "Please, Papa, please, Mama, your blessing." In those days it was customary for lay people to receive Communion only on the major feasts of the year. But no matter what anyone thought, the Wiaux family would not refrain from going to Communion on the feast of Saint Joseph.

From his earliest years, Louis-Joseph had an unusual attraction for things religious, a strong sense of duty, and an ability to influence others for good. This is not surprising in view of the pious atmosphere that pervaded the Wiaux home. Crucifixes and religious pictures were everywhere in the house. Madame Wiaux's brother, Joseph Badot, was a priest. The Wiaux children were often seen by the neighbors with François-Joseph, the oldest, organizing his little brothers and sisters into religious processions in the family backyard.

Grateful to God for their relative prosperity, the Wiaux did not neglect the poor. It was usually the youngest that would be entrusted with the alms to be offered to the beggars who came to the door. The young Louis-Joseph was given this responsibility often during his early years

## **Childhood Interests**

Quite a few of Louis-Joseph's childhood companions survived to testify to his youthful piety. They referred to him as a little

“Louis [i.e., Aloysius] Gonzaga.” Rosalie Flamand, born the same day as Louis, described him as a lad who was “gentle as a girl, happy only when he was in church, one who was forever fingering his rosary and whose favorite topic of conversation was God and the Blessed Virgin.” Emile Lacroix, with whom he sometimes played billiards or went hunting for birds’ nests, narrated that when he would invite Louis to go with him to look after the cows, Louis would agree on condition that they say the rosary together. “There was nothing in him that was the least bit tainted,” Emile testified.

Ferdinand Lacroix told the story of the time he went to the Wiaux café during the county fair to invite Louis to join him in a game of billiards. Louis had been assigned to fill the pots of beer in the cellar, where the barrels were lined up to keep the beer cool. Ferdinand found him there with a prayer book in one hand and an empty beer mug in the other, totally absorbed in prayer in the free moments between calls for a refill. On other occasions, when breaks in his duties allowed, Louis would go to find a quiet place to pray among the beanstalks in the garden, or, if there were time, go off to the church to be alone with the Lord and his holy Mother.

Louis-Joseph apparently exercised an ascendancy over his young companions and playmates. Instinctively he kept away from those who might have been able to lead him astray. Among the others he was an influential presence. Felicien Schildeck later declared, “You couldn’t have a better friend than Louis; he loved to pray, and he used to lead his little friends to the church for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament or to make the stations of the cross.” Ferdinand Lacroix said, “Louis had no equal,” and Jean-Baptiste Plaquet added, “Louis had character, and so everybody loved him.”

If any of his friends happened to do or say anything the least bit in bad taste, Louis would not hesitate to show his disapproval. Thus, on one occasion as he was on his way to school with some of his friends, Louis-Joseph heard one of them use some rather gross language. When the little group arrived at the wooden bridge where they had to cross a running brook, Louis stopped the offender and would not let him cross the stream until he had asked pardon of his friends. The guilty lad submitted with good grace.

Such stories probably have little appeal for young people growing up today in a late-twentieth-century, secularized environment. For some, the stories might seem either improbable or incomprehensible. Yet the childhood innocence they represent was still fairly common until recently, especially in a thoroughly Catholic culture such as prevailed in the remote Belgian village of Mellet, or even in a traditionally Catholic parish in Ireland, England, or the United States. What is distinctive about the childhood piety and innocence of Louis-Joseph Wiaux is that he kept them all his life.

## **Schooling**

Mellet boasted only a one-room elementary school, for boys. The schoolmaster was Monsieur Charles Dandois. Originally a barrelmaker by trade, he had studied during his free time and evenings until he obtained his teacher's certificate. As the reputation of his school grew, people began to send their children from relatively distant places to profit from his teaching. One of these children, from the Steinier family, who later became a canon and rector of the major seminary at Tournai, testified not only to the quality of the instruction, but also to the teacher's concern that his pupils be faithful to their religious duties.

On several occasions during the annual assembly of the canton at Gosselies the boys from Mellet walked away with a good percentage of the first-place prizes. When Louis-Joseph Wiaux took part in the competition in 1852, he won fifth place in the preliminaries and placed eighth among the 19 finalists, a respectable performance but considerably below the achievements of the more talented pupils of Monsieur Dandois. One of these was Léopold Dandois, the teacher's son, who later became a professor at the University of Louvain and an important source for the biographers of Brother Mutien-Marie.

Although Léopold Dandois described his fellow classmate as a model pupil, there was one occasion when Louis-Joseph failed to show up for class. That was during the retreat preparatory to his first Holy Communion. He preferred to spend as much of that time as possible in the church. There, before

the tabernacle and not far from Mary's altar, he prepared his heart so that it would soon be for Jesus, as he expressed it, "a beautiful dwelling place." Louis placed second in the preliminary catechism examination, better than his sister Caroline, who placed third, but he did not do as well as his brother Léon-Joseph and his sister Philomène, both of whom placed first. The day of his first Communion, which Brother Mutien-Marie would always describe as the happiest in his life, finally arrived. It was Passion Sunday, 1852.

After seven or eight years in the school of M. Dandois and the completion of his elementary studies, there was nothing for Louis-Joseph to do but go to work. Even if he had wanted to continue his studies, there were no schools near enough where he could advance his education. His father had been assisted for some years by a young apprentice named Jacques Desclez, who shared Louis' bedroom. But now Desclez had moved on, and the elder Wiaux found himself alone at the forge. Louis naturally agreed to lend a helping hand, but it was obvious that he was not made out to be a blacksmith. He was too young to hammer out iron, and he did not have the build or the physical stamina for that kind of manual labor. He did what he could by helping in auxiliary tasks, but he one day confided to a friend, "I don't expect to be polishing these tools much longer."

## **Religious Vocation**

The people of Mellet had always sensed that Louis was destined for a religious or a priestly vocation. His elder brother, François-Joseph, was already a student at the College of Notre Dame near Tournai, preparing to enter the major seminary. Jacques Desclez, the apprentice who had witnessed Louis' intensive and prolonged practices of piety, had said to him many times, "Louis, you are just not made for life in the secular world."

In 1855 the Brothers of the Christian Schools opened a community and a school in Gosselies, only a few miles from the Wiaux home. It seems that his confessor, Father Saille, the pastor at Mellet, suggested to Louis-Joseph that he might find

with the Brothers a way of life that would fulfill his ideals and aspirations in a vocation suited to his talents and capabilities.

The suggestion took root quickly. It could not have been much of a surprise to his parents, nor could it have given rise to any opposition, when Louis-Joseph expressed to them his desire to enter religious life. It would have been totally out of character for them to see in this development anything but another divine blessing on the family. Accordingly, on April 7, 1856, Louis-Joseph Wiaux took leave of his family and friends, and the church of his baptism and first Communion, to answer the call of the divine Master to another kind of forge. On that day the elder Wiaux personally brought his apprentice son of 15 years to the novitiate of the Brothers at Namur.

## 2

# The Novitiate and Brother Nonce

Founded in Reims in 1680 by Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools expanded rapidly during the eighteenth century until it numbered almost 1,000 Brothers teaching in 125 schools of various kinds throughout France. The French Revolution put an end to all of that: the schools were closed or taken over by the revolutionary government, the Brothers dispersed and deprived of their civil rights, and many of them imprisoned or put to death for refusal to obey the anti-Catholic policies of the new regime.

### **The Institute of the Brothers in Belgium**

During the French Revolution, some of the Brothers sought safety in flight to nearby Belgium, which was then part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands as established by the treaty of Vienna in 1815. At that time there were already Brothers in Dinant, Liege, and Tournai. The origins of the Brothers' school in Namur date from a letter sent in 1817 by the mayor of the city to the governor of the province:

During the times in which we live, the need to provide religious teaching becomes more important and more strictly obligatory than in times past. There has been a great relaxation in morality, a sad consequence of the calamitous period of the French Revolution. After having done enormous harm to the wealthier classes, the negative results have now been felt by the lower classes of people.

The difficulty in finding good teachers ought not to be such a serious obstacle today, since at Dinant, a city of this province, there has recently been established a community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools known generally



**Map of Belgium**

as being the best instructors, the most experienced teachers, and the ones in the best situation to provide an education to young people. (SB, 15)

On July 15, 1818, the Bishop of Namur addressed the people of his diocese asking for support for schools for the lower classes. He wrote in part:

The choice of instructors for the “lower classes” is just as important as the choice of professors for the colleges. The civil authorities, now that they have been empowered to do so, are anxious to select already proven teachers, noted both for their upright morals as well as for their effective teaching methods. With that in view, they have tried to obtain the services of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The religious devotion, the distance from the secular world, the community life of these teachers, as well as their consistent willingness to hold classes for their

pupils six hours every day, has merited for them the right to be supported by people of means and protected by public authority. (SB, 17)

Thus on September 4, 1818, Brother Marien came from Dinant to open the school in Namur. The school was an immediate success, and Namur soon became the provincial center of the Brothers' Institute in Belgium. By 1825 a novitiate of sorts was opened with 16 candidates, but the demands of military service made recruitment difficult. Then, in the following year, came the decree of the Protestant King William of Holland suppressing the Institute of the Brothers in Belgium. It was only after the revolution of 1830, in which Catholic Belgium won its independence from Protestant Holland, that the Brothers were able to return from exile and reopen the schools.

Even then, it seems that the habit worn by the Brothers was one reason why many people looked unfavorably on their return. Once again, a pastoral letter in support of the Brothers came from the bishop:

Is it the religious habit of the Brothers that makes people hesitate to bring them back? Should something essential then be sacrificed to something secondary? Since I myself was forced to hear it over and over again, I, too, finally became predisposed to object to a manner of dress that had been described to me as ridiculous in the extreme. For myself, however, I merely thought of it as something a bit unusual.

But then, someone spoke to me about it, a person who in fact was a better judge, since she was less well disposed to religious institutions than I. Nevertheless, she remarked that this costume, unusual though it be, is one of the reasons that the Brothers' institution enjoys such success. The habit, the rabat, the large hat worn by the Brothers, she said, represent to the children of the ordinary people what the moustache, the uniform, and the tall hat of the grenadiers represent to the soldiers and, above all, to the enemy.

Underneath this severe-looking habit, the children of the streets can discern a great reservoir of goodness and love for them, concern for their well-being, the desire to

help them, and a profound unselfishness in the services the Brothers provide for them. Soon the surprise that this habit at first inspired is turned into respect for and confidence in the person wearing it. Out of this respect and confidence are born the docility and the determination to enable the children to profit by their instruction. That explains all the success of these teachers and all the progress made by their pupils. While all this good is being accomplished, the habit continues to sustain the principles that it stands for, in much the same way that the constant sight of the flag encourages an entire army to continue doing battle. (SB, 18)

## **The Novitiate at Namur**

With that kind of official endorsement, the school at Namur prospered, the novitiate was reopened, and vocations became plentiful. By the time Louis-Joseph Wiaux came to the novitiate at Namur in 1856, the facilities had recently been expanded in order better to serve as the provincial center of the Brothers in Belgium. The property was extensive enough to house a building with rooms for five classes, a separate building for the novices, a chapel with an upstairs gallery, and an outdoor garden with a series of terraces that ended at the wall of the neighboring school of Saint Auban. The provincial Visitor, Brother Sancien, had his residence there; Brother Mainfroy was the Director of the Procure and the Brothers' community; Brother Nonce was the Director of Novices.

When Louis-Joseph arrived at the novitiate on April 7, 1856, he found that he was among the youngest of the 23 novices who had entered before him. Soon others, some younger and some older, came to join the group. It seems that no particular date was set for entry. In those days, the novitiate lasted two years, as had been the practice ever since the time of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. The novitiate program was divided into two periods, usually unequal in length: the first was spent in the novitiate house itself, the second in the exercise of some employment in an apostolic community. Members of the second group were known as novices employed.

At that time also, the novices had the choice of being admitted as either school Brothers or serving Brothers. The serving Brothers had been introduced by De La Salle himself to free the school Brothers from the temporal concerns of the community: shopping, kitchen work, laundry, gardening, and the like, all of which services usually had to be provided by the Brothers themselves. The serving Brothers wore a brown habit and did not take the vow of teaching the poor gratuitously, but otherwise they were to be treated, according to Rule, as the equal of the school Brothers in the life of the community. After consulting with the novitiate staff, Louis-Joseph Wiaux asked to be admitted to the Institute as a school Brother. He felt that he had the desire and the aptitude to devote himself to the Christian education of the young.

## **The Director of Novices**

Brother Nonce, the Director of Novices, had entered the novitiate at Namur in 1822. He was 27 years old at the time, and it was said that he had already rejected several attractive proposals of marriage. He was admitted as a serving Brother and worked in that capacity first at Namur and then at Tournai. Exiled from Belgium by the decree of William of Orange in March 1826, he went to France, where he served as economer, a function that involved some financial responsibility, and then began teaching in the schools at Orleans, Beauvais, and Saint Denis. In 1837 Brother Analet, the Superior General, sent him to take charge of the novitiate at Namur, a post he held for the next 27 years.

In his biography of Brother Mutien, Brother Maurice Hermans has given this description of Brother Nonce, based on the necrological notice sent to the Institute after his death:

As Director, he had a manner all his own. He preached by example, always presiding over his little troop of novices at the religious exercises and other activities of the day. He spoke little, making his wishes known quietly with a gesture, or sometimes a smile. He was ever available, tireless in his duties, and encouraging at the same time. This elicited a healthy desire on the part of the novices to imitate

his devotion to prayer, his poverty, moderation, and acts of penance. He loved punctuality and did not have much trouble in exacting it from his subordinates. He had no use for abstract theories, either in spiritual matters or otherwise. He spoke with conviction about the events in the life of the Savior, and often with a tenderness that moved his young audience. One Brother remarked, "He would have thought it a profanation of his ministry to speak of the Christian and the religious virtues in a way that was speculative, cold, and without feeling. The writings of the Fathers of the Church and the masters of the spiritual life were for his mind and heart a treasury from which he drew riches every day." (MH, 27)

## **Brother Mutien-Marie**

For three months after entering the novitiate at Namur, Louis-Joseph Wiaux was a postulant. Under the direction of Brother Nonce, he was working to discern more accurately the authenticity of his vocation as he became more and more familiar with the routine of the novitiate. He was given the Rule of the Brothers to study and to internalize into his own life. He was introduced to the formal method of meditation in use among the Brothers, an exercise that his own habit of personal prayer must have made relatively easy and attractive.

Finally, on July 1, 1856, the eve of the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, Louis-Joseph was invested with the black robe and the white rabat, the characteristic religious habit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. To symbolize the total break with his past life that this step implied, he was given the name by which he would be known from then on, Brother Mutien-Marie. Only the most specialized scholars would be aware of the existence of the original Saint Mutien, a martyr from Cappadocia during the Roman persecutions. In fact, Brother Maurice Hermans notes that the only Mutien listed in the recently published *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* is Brother Mutien-Marie himself.

There is, of course, nothing unusual about the second part of the name. For this long-time and childhood devotee of the

Mother of God to be called by her name must have given him much pleasure. Though almost everyone called him simply Brother Mutien, he always referred to himself and signed himself Brother Mutien-Marie, never omitting the second part of the name.

It is not accidental that the names assigned to the new novices at Namur all begin with the letter M. Only a few years before Brother Mutien and his companions were vested in the religious habit, the Institute had adopted the practice of giving two religious names to the Brothers, the first of which would identify the District of origin. The letter M was assigned to the Belgian province. This explains why most of the names of the Brothers in the narrative to follow begin with M, often with rather strange and obscure combinations such as Mégrin, Mimy, Mellon, or Memoire. When exceptions occur, it is either because the Brother entered the Institute before the practice was introduced (Brother Nonce, for example), or because the Brother was transferred from another District, as in the case of Brother Eugène-Abel.

## **Life in the Novitiate**

Although there is not a great deal of documentary evidence concerning the year that Brother Mutien spent in the novitiate, the details of the daily routine are easy enough to reconstruct. The program never changed much from the days of the Founder in the novitiate he established at Saint Yon in Rouen to what was followed for centuries in the Brothers' novitiates throughout the world, at least until Vatican Council II.

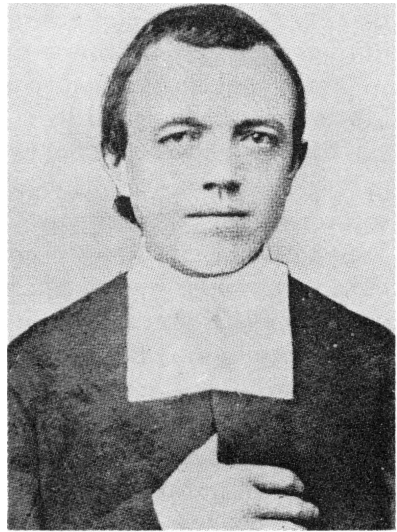
Rising was at 4:30 a.m. all year. Then there would be a full hour of vocal prayer and meditation before the beginning of morning Mass. A good part of the rest of the day would be devoted to conferences on the religious life by the Director, including a study of the spiritual and pedagogical writings of the Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle. These periods of study and reflection would be interrupted by the call to the chapel to recite the office of the Blessed Virgin or to engage again in vocal or meditative prayer. Part of the afternoon

would be devoted to manual work around the house and grounds. The only provision for recreation would be a brief period after the noon and evening meals, when the Brothers would be expected to limit the conversation to religious topics. On Thursday afternoon there would be a long walk to some distant shrine or other suitable place of interest.

After Brother Mutien's death, three Brothers who had been his fellow novices were able to supply more specific details about that year in the Namur novitiate. Brothers Mérovée-Joseph, Mérole

de Jésus, and Marien-Emile all remembered how poverty-stricken the house was at that time. Everything was lacking. The furniture was crude and uncomfortable, the food was scanty and unappetizing. Even in the dead of the dreary Belgian winter, the novices did their spiritual reading and study of religion in the bone-chilling cold of the novitiate garden. The only heat provided indoors came from a small stove in one or another of the community rooms. It was especially a challenge on winter mornings to rise before dawn and to hop from beneath the bed covers to the freezing cold water at the common outdoor lavabo to wash face and hands.

As if the lifestyle itself were not penance enough, additional mortifications were imposed on the novices for the slightest violation of the Rule or the novitiate regulations: making a mistake in the prayers, breaking silence, failing to obtain permission for specific needs, and so on. The traditional penances for such lapses were to kiss the floor, to take one's meals standing or kneeling, to beg bread from the other novices as an alms, or to kneel with the arms extended during the



**Brother Mutien-Marie as a young Brother**

recitation of the canonical office or the rosary. There are many Brothers still alive and active today who had such experiences in their pre-Vatican II novitiate.

According to the testimony of his fellow novices, Brother Mutien was recognized from the beginning as a "little saint," the "living embodiment of the Rule," who "looked like an angel" when he was at prayer in the chapel. He apparently accepted in good grace the teasing from the other novices. When they noticed that during recreation he would make little signs of the cross over his breast, they would ask, "Is that how you keep track of your temptations?" They liked to twit him also on the weakness he had for the rather sentimental hymns of Father Lambillote, probably because he had learned them from childhood at the church in Mellet. In 1918 Brother Marien-Emile would testify that from December 1856, when he first met Brother Mutien in the novitiate, through all the years that he lived in community with him, he never saw him in the least violation of the Brothers' Rule.

There is a story, repeated in the biographies, that on one occasion during the novitiate Brother Mutien was on the verge of giving up and going home. It seems that one day the young novice had looked out from the top floor of the novitiate in the direction of Mellet. For a fleeting moment he experienced a sense of regret that he had left his family, and he felt an urge to return. He quickly put the temptation aside, and never again waivered in his determination to give himself entirely to the Lord. This story was related by the chaplain in the course of his eulogy at the funeral of Brother Mutien. When pressed as to the source, the priest became evasive and said he had heard it from the Brothers. But none of the Brothers who knew Brother Mutien was ever able to identify the source of the story.

Brother Mutien had not long been a novice when, in September 1856, he was appointed to succeed Brother Mérole de Jésus as the novitiate bell ringer. Brother Nonce had quickly recognized that here was a young man with a meticulous sense of discipline and order with a predisposition to accept a life that was programmed in all its details. In addition, Brother Mutien was clearly a novice who already saw the Rule as an

expression of the will of God. Thus, a dozen or more times a day, Brother Mutien would ring the bell to call the Brothers to prayer, to study, to work, and finally to bed. For this purpose he had charge both of the tower bell for the exercises common to the novitiate and the adjoining community, and a hand bell for the novitiate exercises. The Rule prescribed the precise number of strokes, some to be swung, others tolled. Brother Mutien never missed a one. Later at Malonne he would be given the same function, a responsibility he exercised there from 1869 until 1892.

## **Training for the Apostolate**

For all the emphasis on prayer and meditation, spiritual reading, and religious study, the novitiate program of the Brothers was designed so that the spirit of faith, traditional in the Institute from the time of the Founder, could overflow into a spirit of zeal to evangelize young people through the work of Christian education. For this purpose, there would be regular practice sessions where the novices destined for the schools would give sample catechism lessons to their fellow novices. This was not easy. There were always one or two pranksters among the novices who could devise ways to test the mettle of the novice teacher. Brother Nonce could intervene when necessary to rescue the unfortunate victim, but not in such a way as to prevent the novice from learning from the experience.

A more true-to-life situation was provided for Brother Mutien toward the end of his novitiate, when he was assigned to teach the youngest children in the school of Saint Aubain on the adjoining property. There is no evidence that he experienced any particular difficulty in this assignment.

Although the prescribed year of residence in the novitiate house came to an end for Brother Mutien on July 2, 1857, and although classes in the Brothers' schools would continue normally until the end of August, he was kept in the novitiate house until the following September. That may have been due to his youthful age and appearance, or, perhaps, the experience at Saint Aubain was deemed a sufficient introduction to classroom teaching for the time being.

Since the novitiate hall was being remodeled that year, the novices were sent to Malonne for their annual retreat in September 1857. The preacher was Father Libersart of Saint Michael's church in Brussels, a priest described by his fellow Jesuits as "a man possessed of a high degree of perfection and a great apostolic zeal." As a souvenir of the retreat, he gave each of the retreatants a little folder containing some reflections and a prayer to the Blessed Virgin for the grace of perseverance. At the end of the retreat Brother Mutien-Marie learned that he had been assigned as a "novice employed" to the community and school at Chimay, several miles to the south, near the French border.

# 3

## The Trials of the Tyro Teacher

### Chimay

The retreat of the novices at Malonne in September 1857 coincided with the retreat of the community Brothers. Brother Mutien was thus able to join Brother Mimy, the Director, and the other Brothers of his new community as they made their way back to Saint Joseph's School in Chimay. In addition to the Director, the community consisted of two Brothers to cover the day classes, one Brother to direct evening classes for the adults, and one Brother in charge of the temporal affairs of the house. Inevitably, Brother Mutien was assigned the primary class.

Since he was still technically a novice, Brother Mutien was put under the guidance of one of the older Brothers, Brother Maixence, with whom he would later be associated at Malonne for many years. In a period when normal schools and academic degrees were not available to most Brothers, this system of training beginners through continual supervision and contact with men experienced in the classroom served to produce competent and sometimes exceptionally effective teachers.

Brother Mutien remained at Chimay for only one year. The school at the time was having difficulty with the civil government. The local commune had requested the Minister of the Interior to allow them to adopt the Brothers' school as their "state" school, rather than establishing a communal school of their own. The Ministry agreed on condition that the Brothers participate in the conference of teachers, which at that time was involved in a campaign against the simultaneous method. Another difficulty concerned the presence of this young Brother, only 16 years of age, with barely an elementary education. Accordingly, at the end of the annual retreat in September 1858, Brother Mutien-Marie was transferred to Saint George's School in Brussels.

## Brussels

If, in later years, Brother Mutien never referred to his memories of Chimay, he often said how happy he had been during the year he spent with the community of 23 Brothers at Saint George in Brussels under the direction of Brother Charles. It was, he said, a community where charity reigned and where the Rule was observed exactly. There was a good spirit in the house, even if, as it was said, Brother Charles never once gave a *Benedicamus*, that is, permission for the Brothers to speak during meals. Brother Mutien arrived at the community shortly after the whole neighborhood had celebrated the 25th anniversary both of the foundation of the community at Saint George and of Brother Charles as its Director.

Belgium itself is divided into two linguistic areas, French-speaking Wallonia and Dutch-speaking Flanders. The capital, Brussels, is thus bilingual, as was the school at Saint George. Brother Mutien was assigned to the French section, which consisted of three elementary classes. He was put in charge of the second class. That was unusual for a Brother who had only a year's experience in the classroom. It could be considered a promotion, or at least a sign that the young Brother had made a successful start.

In the spring of 1859, Brother Mutien was 18 years old, had completed two years as a novice, and was eligible to apply to make his first vows. This he did during Holy Week, addressing his petition, as was customary, to the Superior General, Brother Philippe. On July 21, 1859, a chapter of professed Brothers met at Namur to consider the merits of the request of Brother Mutien and some 30 other young Brothers to make vows. On the basis of the available information and the notes of the Brothers who knew the candidate, the chapter recommended that the Brother Superior admit Brother Mutien to pronounce his first vows as a school Brother for a period of three years.

There were still some written examinations to pass. In the test on the Founder's *Collection* of short treatises on religious life, Brother Mutien scored 4 out of 5. He earned a 3/5 in Catechism, a 3/5 on the Rule, a 2/5 in Church History, a 3/5 in

grammar, a 2/5 in arithmetic, and a 2/5 in geography, for a total of 19/35. Since this was more than 50%, he was considered qualified to be admitted to vows as a school Brother.

At the end of the annual retreat at Malonne, on September 14, 1859, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Brother Mutien-Marie consecrated himself to God to procure God's glory as far as he was able and as God would require of him, by vowing chastity, poverty, obedience, stability in the Institute, and teaching the poor gratuitously, thus binding himself for a period of three years. As a sign of his new dependence on the Institute, he formally ceded to the house of the novitiate his "trousseau," that is, all the wardrobe and personal articles that he had brought with him from his home in Mellet.

## **Malonne**

When Brother Sancien, the Visitor, announced the assignments for the following year, Brother Mutien found that he would be working for the glory of God at the Institute Saint-Berthuin in Malonne as an assistant teacher to Brother Majorinus in the elementary division.

Malonne was the location of an ancient abbey originating as far back as the seventh century, when Bishop Berthuin and his 12 companions, Canons of Saint Augustine, came from Ireland to evangelize the Franks. The original monastery was destroyed and rebuilt many times over the centuries, until the monks were finally expelled during the French Revolution and the property sold.

In the course of time, the Bishop of Namur was able to reclaim the property. In 1841 he gave it to the Brothers of the Christian Schools for the relocation of the normal school they had opened earlier in Namur. In that year there were five Brothers in charge of three classes; in 1847 there were 63 humanities students and 30 students in the normal school. By the time Brother Mutien arrived in 1859, there were 40 Brothers and more than 400 students.

Brother Mutien thus found himself thrust into a religious community twice the size of the one he had left. The commu-

nity, in turn, was at the service of a complex educational institution. The Institute Saint-Berthuin offered two distinct programs: one in the normal school and the other in the school for the humanities. Each had an elementary and a secondary division, and most of the students were paying boarders. In addition Saint-Berthuin staffed a gratuitous elementary school for the children of the village, which provided the advanced students in the normal school the opportunity for practice teaching. Brother Mutien was assigned as an assistant teacher of the seventh class, roughly the equivalent of the fourth or fifth grade, in the elementary section of the humanities program.

At Malonne it was a tradition to constitute each class as a distinct unity, not only during school hours, but also during



**The main courtyard of Institute Saint-Berthuin in Malonne**

study periods and times of relaxation. Thus the students of the same class were always together at meals, in the dormitory, on the playing fields, and during the Wednesday afternoon walks. All day every day, and all night long, they were supervised by one or another of the two Brothers in charge of them, one as principal and the other as assistant.

Brother Maurice Hermans has described the situation in which Brother Mutien found himself in 1859:

The position of assistant was not much sought after, since it required a great deal of self-effacement. It was up to the principal, or first teacher, to set the tone, to create a life-style, to enforce discipline. Most of the initiative was in his hands. He could be intransigent when he so wished, but he could just as easily close his eyes to what was going on.

The second teacher was in a much less comfortable position. Above all, if the principal was a strong authority figure—which was usually the case—the assistant had to be prepared to deal with the students who would try to get even with the system by taking advantage of his own weakness.

There was another aspect to the boarding situation that tended to aggravate the problems, especially in the lower grades. Often some older boys were placed among the youngest. These were teenage boys who were backward in their studies, and who had been sent to boarding school as hopeless cases. Earlier attempts to get them to take school seriously as day students had failed. The threat of a boarding school had been used so many times that it seemed to them a sentence of execution. Since the boarding situation rarely worked miracles, the lower classes were plagued with these bigger boys who kept fighting an uphill battle against the system. (MH, 39)

It is no wonder that in such a situation a young Brother of 19 years would have had trouble with discipline. It seems that there were occasions when Brother Mutien lost control in the classroom and had, in fact, to be rescued by the principal. It must have been a shock to the young teacher who, as far as we can gather, had never experienced such a challenge in his previous two years teaching elementary school.



### **Overview of the Institute Saint-Berthuin**

The Director at the time—and in those days the Director of the Brothers' community and the headmaster of the school were always one and the same—was Brother Maufroy, a man not inclined to be patient with any weakness in the members of his staff. He was determined at all costs to enhance the reputation of the school. The chronicle of Saint-Berthuin states that during his tenure, from 1860 to 1873, “you could feel a new and powerful breath of life” in the institution (SB, 36). No expense was spared to update the facilities and provide the latest equipment. Brother Maufroy extended the boundaries of the property; he transformed the courtyard that had been the ancient cloister into a huge dining hall; he erected a whole series of buildings in the second courtyard to house laboratories, a museum, and a gymnasium. He wanted above all to have a teaching staff that was impressive both in scholarship and in school discipline.

### **Brother Mutien on Trial**

Although Brother Mutien had made vows for a three-year period, in the Spring of 1860 he requested, as had been customary since the time of the Founder, to renew them at the end of the first year. This time the petition had to be passed by the

chapter composed of the professed Brothers of the Saint-Berthuin community, with Brother Maufroy at its head. In view of the difficulties he was having in school, and with little thought of giving the young man a chance to develop as a teacher, the chapter voted not to allow him to renew his vows as a school Brother.

In retrospect this seems a bit unfair, especially since the reputation of Brother Mutien-Marie as a teacher never recovered from this setback, even now as he is presented for the veneration of the whole Church as a saint. The fault, if any, certainly lay with the superiors who moved him forward too fast, without adequate training or experience. And his difficulties were not that unusual for a beginning teacher, especially in the challenging circumstances of a large boarding school. As subsequent events would show, the judgment that he would forever be useless as a teacher proved to be false and premature.

In later years, whenever he had the occasion to encourage other young Brothers who were having similar difficulties, as Brother Mégrin-Joseph, for example, would testify, Brother Mutien admitted that the experience was for him a great humiliation. When, in 1911, another Brother, named Madulf-Jacques, learned that his request to make perpetual vows had been deferred by the chapter, he went to Brother Mutien, then 70 years old, to seek consolation and advice. Brother Madulf described the encounter:

I was sorely tried in 1911 when I learned that my perpetual profession had been put off, and so I went to Brother Mutien in the hope that he could provide some measure of comfort and consolation. I was not disappointed. The servant of God knew the right words to say to reassure me: he encouraged me to support the trial with a spirit of faith, because, he said, the good Lord permitted all this for my own good. "I, too," he said, "was once refused permission to make vows; it was a question of triennial vows. But then I thought that the Lord had permitted this for my own good, and that I should put myself entirely into his hands. Now you should do the same." Brother Mutien put so much fervor and love into his words that I felt once again at peace. (PS, 79)

## The Rescue

Although refused permission to renew his triennial vows in 1860, Brother Mutien still had two more years of temporary profession as a school Brother. In the normal course of things, once these vows expired he might have been allowed to renew them as a serving Brother. That may well have been the plan of Brother Maufroy and the community chapter, and it might have worked out that way had not Brother Maixentis come to the rescue.

Brother Maixentis himself had made his perpetual vows just three years previously. Age 32 in 1860, he had already become a distinguished professor of architecture, music, and drawing, all specialties that greatly enhanced the reputation of Saint-Berthuin. He was also generous in the help and encouragement he gave to the young Brothers just starting out. Thus, it was he who offered to take on Brother Mutien as his assistant, thereby making it possible for him to continue as a school Brother.

The rescue effort was evidently considered a success. The records show that Brother Mutien was allowed to renew his vows as a school Brother the following year, and annually after that, until he made his perpetual profession in September 1869. A friendship developed between Brother Mutien and Brother Maixentis that lasted during the almost 60 years they shared in the community at Malonne.



**Brother Maixentis**

During the years that followed, Brother Maixentis was much in the spotlight. His reputation spread all over Belgium as he engaged in extensive extracurricular activities, including the construction of new churches and schools, while continuing to supervise the building programs at Saint-Berthuin as well as the courses in music, art, and architecture. Brother Mutien, too, was

kept continually occupied during all those years, but always in a subordinate capacity, hidden and all but unknown. The one thing that the two had in common was a profoundly prayerful and almost mystical spirit. During a period of several years, for example, the two of them would spend an hour together after night prayer in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Brother Maixentis was to die at Malonne in 1917, only two days after his companion and subordinate.

The assignment of Brother Mutien-Marie to Malonne proved to be permanent, that is, from 1859 until his death. Whatever his initial difficulties, he proved to be a useful and appreciated member of the staff during all that time. The school expanded its facilities and offerings, the student body continued to grow, and the administration became more complex. Directors and professors would come and go, but the life of the community went on according to the Rule of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, and so did the daily routine of Brother Mutien-Marie.

## 4

# Teacher of Music and Art

For 57 years Brother Mutien labored, not only with energy, devotion, and love, but also effectively to bring the Gospel to the educational community at Malonne. He taught a variety of musical instruments, he taught drawing and design, he was assigned a number of the less-prestigious prefecting duties, and he taught catechism in the neighboring parish during his free time on weekends. To all of this he brought a prayerful attitude and a concern for the eternal welfare of his students that no one could miss. In him the Lasallian spirit of faith and zeal became indistinguishable, as the Founder meant them to be.

### **“Brother Harmonium”**

The first assignment given to Brother Mutien by his mentor, Brother Maixentis, was to learn and to teach the harmonium. That instrument has all but disappeared from the scene in the electronic age, but at one time it was commonly found in convent chapels, rural churches, and even in many homes. The harmonium is a reed organ with one keyboard. Air is supplied by a bellows pumped with both feet, while the volume can be altered by wooden slats controlled by the knees. Courses in the harmonium were popular at Malonne, especially among the normal school students, who knew they might be expected to have mastered the instrument when they applied for teaching positions in the rural parishes.

A special room at Malonne contained the five or six harmoniums, each in a glass-enclosed cubicle. In addition, there was an office and a harmonium for the use of the instructor. At the direction of Brother Maixentis, Brother Mutien began to master the instrument, practicing scales and fingering exercises one hour every day between nine and ten in the morning. He

kept to this schedule all his life, right up until a few days before he died. Brother Mutien became so identified with his daily trips to the practice sessions and his classes in the instrument that the students gave him the nickname of "Brother Harmonium." The harmonium that Brother Mutien used for many years is now preserved in the sanctuary at Malonne, where his mortal remains are enshrined.

Many Brothers in a position to know testified in the formal canonical process to the success Brother Mutien had with his music pupils. Brother Maurice Hermans has summarized their judgment as follows:

His first pupils were assigned to him probably at the opening of school in 1861. They were beginners in every sense of the word. They had to be taught everything. For the young teacher it was an exercise in patience, but that was one quality in which Brother Mutien excelled. He never scolded, but was tireless in offering encouragement. He was demanding on himself, persevering in the precision required by the finger exercises and the detailed preparation of his lessons. He had the gift of accepting on their own terms the students who were the least endowed and bringing them to the maximum effort of which they were capable. They were helped more by the human qualities and the religious devotion of their teacher than by his mastery of the instrument. (MH, 54)

Brother Mutien's nephew, Gabriel Wiaux, who was one of his pupils at Malonne and who later joined the Brothers and inherited his uncle's name, gave a more precise description of the daily routine:

He put a great deal of care and effort into his course on the harmonium. He greeted us on our arrival with that amiable smile of his. Once we entered the music room, each of us took his place at his assigned instrument. Each week we were assigned to a different one. For some minutes, Brother Mutien would pace back and forth in the room saying his prayers. Then, once we had begun our finger exercises and rehearsed our simple melodies, he



**The harmonium used by Brother Mutien-Marie**

would come to stand over each of us in turn, listening, and then stopping us if we were not playing in the right tempo. If we were having trouble mastering a particular exercise, he would show us how it ought to be done. He was always encouraging, and never impatient with us. If we played our lesson well, he would then sit down and play for us the following melody, pointing out the difficult parts that we might encounter in learning it. Once the bell rang for the end of the lesson, he would clap his hands as a signal to stop. When we were ready, he would then lead us back to our regular classes. (PS, 128)

One of his students, Maurice Ducarme, who later became a professor at Malonne, remembered the ascendancy that Brother Mutien had over his music students:

In 1913 I was lucky enough to get to know Brother Mutien rather well. I was studying the harmonium, and two or three times a week he would come to supervise us. It

usually happened that at the beginning of the school year we would enter the music room with our minds set on all sorts of frivolity. I never remember him making the least movement or showing the least sign of impatience. He spoke with a voice full of understanding and mildness but with a firmness that none of us could resist. He would say quietly, "Now get down to business." And each of us would set about at once doing our assigned work. (PS, 615)

Another former student, M. Lembet, who later became a teacher at Temploux, said much the same thing, "As a teacher, he never had to tolerate the least lack of discipline, even though his gracious manner might well have given rise to it" (*Ibid.*).

Over the years Brother Mutien's personal mastery of the harmonium became more and more appreciated, not only by his pupils, but also by his colleagues, some of whom were expert musicians themselves. Nevertheless, Brother Mutien was always aware of his limitations. As soon as he recognized that one of his pupils had genuine musical talent, he would go to Brother Bruno, who taught the advanced courses, to recommend that the lad be given a greater challenge than he could provide. "The boy is wasting his time with me," he would say.

## **The Pipe Organ**

In view of this success at the harmonium, Brother Maixentis decided that it was time Brother Mutien learned to play the pipe organ. It was easy enough for him to learn to play simple melodies on the manuals, as the organ keyboards are called. But the complexities of the pedal board proved to be too much for him. For a time he was sent to Namur to take weekly lessons from M. Delchambre, an organist of some renown. When, after several weeks, the results were not commensurate with the effort that the diligent Brother put forth, the organist suggested that the lessons be discontinued.

This did not exempt Brother Mutien, however, from being called upon from time to time to play the chapel pipe organ for services. Because of the large number of boarders, as well as

the domestic help, for whom regular chapel services had to be provided, the schedule always included numerous Masses, Vespers, and Benedictions that required organ accompaniment. At one time, Brother Mutien was the regular chapel organist for the services intended for the humanities students.

Brother Mutien would become particularly apprehensive when called upon to substitute for Brother Bruno, the principal organist. Before Brother Bruno's time, the organ in the main chapel had been a relatively simple one. But he arranged to have a new organ installed that was of modern make and so complicated that only an accomplished organist could play it. Among the Brothers it was considered a great honor to be asked to play this organ whenever the entire school was assembled for the solemn ceremonies associated with the great feasts of the Church. For Brother Mutien, however, the invitation to play was a source of anxiety and humiliation. As Brother Martial-André remarked, "He had to die to himself to do so."

Brother Mégrin-Joseph, one of Brother Mutien's former students, related what happened at Vespers scheduled on the feast of the Assumption of Mary, August 15, 1894:

On that day Brother Bruno, the chapel organist, had to be absent. Ordinarily, his place would be taken by Brother Mutien-Marie, in view of his position as professor of the harmonium. Since I was part of the choir, I came to the organ loft intending to take my place. But then Brother Mutien came up to me, and he spoke to me so meekly and so simply that I can still see the expression on his face. "My dear Brother Mégrin," he said, "could you please accompany the Vespers?" "But, my dear Brother Mutien," I said, "this function belongs by right to you. You are the harmonium professor, and it is your right to replace Brother Bruno whenever he is absent. Now go, sit down at the console." "No," he replied, "please let me insist. I know that you love to play the organ. This will give you great pleasure. And, besides, you see, today I have a bit of a headache." And so he brought me over to the console, and then went to kneel at one of the benches, while I had no choice but to give in to his wish. (PS, 464)

## **Other Musical Instruments**

Over the years Brother Mutien became an integral part of the musical life of the Institute Saint-Berthuin. In the days before radio, television, and stereos, instrumental music played an important role in the life of a boarding school, as well as in everyday family life. Thus, every school was expected to have an orchestra and a marching band. It wasn't always easy at the beginning of the school year to assemble or to reassemble two such groups. Often there would be too many players of one instrument and not enough of another. For this reason it was important to have people who could play several instruments, especially among the teachers.

In this situation Brother Maixentis did not hesitate to suggest to Brother Mutien that he learn to play the flute. He brought to his playing such breath control and finger dexterity that even Brother Bruno, the principal professor of music, was impressed. It was only a matter of time until Brother Mutien was called upon to give lessons on the flute. Eventually some of his more talented students were good enough to replace him in the orchestra.

The next challenge came when someone was needed to play the double bass. The generosity of Brother Mutien was called upon once again, and once again he succeeded. In fact, he felt especially at ease with the double bass, because he could readily hide behind it during public performances. Also, he felt that he filled a special need, since not many students were attracted to that unwieldy instrument.

With a solid bass line guaranteed for the orchestra, there yet remained the problem of the brass band. Who else but Brother Mutien to take up the bass tuba? In this role he would be seen marching in the last row of the school band in all the civic parades and religious processions, such as those for Corpus Christi and King Leopold's birthday. He wasn't the only Brother in the band. It was common enough for the people of Malonne to see the Brother musicians in their black robes marching side by side with the students in their flashy uniforms.

Meanwhile, someone was needed to teach the piano to the youngest boarders at the school. Brother Mutien took them in

hand, literally, as he met them in each of their classes to lead them to the great hall, where the pianos were located. His characteristic patience and persistence produced good results as his little charges learned to read the notes and work their pudgy fingers over the black and white keys.

During the scholastic year 1871–1872 Brother Maixentis had to be away for an extended period, with no one left to conduct the band and the orchestra. Brother Maufroy, the Director, determined that both ensembles should continue to function, asked Brother Mutien to take charge and assume the role of conductor. Brother Mutien knew that the assignment was beyond his capabilities, but he could not bring himself to refuse.

The results were not good, and it often happened in public performances that he would give the wrong cues to the musicians. On one occasion, when the school band took part in a festival at Aix-la-Chapelle, their performance was so mediocre compared to the local groups that they received only polite applause. This was considered a blow to the reputation of Saint-Berthuin. Fortunately, Brother Maixentis returned soon thereafter, and with a sigh of relief Brother Mutien handed back the baton.

It was the simple harmonium, then, that always remained the instrument with which Brother Mutien felt most comfortable. He was even called upon on occasion to play the harmonium at other schools in the vicinity. Brother Marcel recalled the time he had to impose upon Brother Mutien:

When I was in charge of the community at Tamines, I had occasion to call upon the charity of Brother Memoire, the Director at Malonne, asking him to send one of his Brother musicians to accompany the singing at graduation. He agreed to send Brother Mutien, who asked to have the music beforehand so that he could practice. He said he was not a professional musician, and that it would be foolish on his part to try to play the accompaniment at sight.

When the day arrived, he came to Tamines, went first to the chapel to adore Our Lord, then, after the usual greetings, put himself entirely at the disposal of the

community. . . . Once his part in the ceremony was over, he proceeded once more to the chapel and then returned to his own community without wasting any time. The period he spent with us was for the Brothers and the students a living example of religious witness. (PS, 41)

Sister Adelina, the principal of Saint Joseph's School in Malonne, also recalled the time that Brother Mutien came to the school as the substitute for another Brother to rehearse the songs for their graduation. He was even more shy in the company of the females than he had been with the Brothers and boys at Tamines. Sister Adelina wrote:

He never looked at me directly, and I had the impression that he did not even see the young girls who were there with me. . . . Once the rehearsal was over, I wanted to go to thank him, but he was already on his way out of the hall. Without saying a word, he merely made a slight bow to me and left. (MH, 64)

For all his meekness and apparent shyness, Brother Mutien was not afraid to stand up for the rights of his students. On one occasion he felt that they were being charged too much for instruction books and sheet music. He went straight to the Brother Director and persuaded him to have the materials sold at a discount. On another occasion, the Brother in charge of the student services had set aside a part of the harmonium room to be used as a barber shop while the regular shop was being renovated. Brother Mutien considered this a sign of disrespect for his students. Again he went to the Director and was successful in having the barber shop located elsewhere.

Thus it was not so much his contribution itself to the musical life and instruction at Saint-Berthuin, but rather the genuine interest that Brother Mutien had in his students that made the most lasting impression. He was always there to say goodbye to his young charges when they left for their holidays. On their return he would grasp their hands in a friendly manner and, with that shy smile of his, address some words of welcome and encouragement to them. And, as instanced above, he protected their interests. Long after they left school, many of his former students would come back to Malonne to visit him.

## **Classes in Drawing**

When, in 1860, Brother Maixentis had asked to have Brother Mutien as his helper, he had already foreseen that he would one day put him in charge of some of the classes in drawing. It wasn't long before he told his young apprentice to take up classical drawing, one of the optional courses open to students from different departments in the boarding school.

There were never many who wanted to enroll in this course. It was at the request of the parents that the school had responded by filling this gap in its cultural offerings. The course was given twice a week: on Wednesday morning, when there was a free afternoon that day, and at the end of each Sunday's morning session. At those hours the art room would be opened to receive a dozen or so aspiring artists, a few from each of the classes of the boarding school. Four teachers and one prefect shared the instruction and supervision of the course. The holiday mood that prevailed on Wednesdays and Sundays was good reason for having a Brother prefect keep order.

Accordingly, on Wednesday and Sunday mornings Brother Mutien would wait at the bottom of the stairway leading to the art room for the students assigned to him. The room was located not far from the harmonium room in the second wing of the building that every day became more and more familiar to him. It was a rather spacious room divided into four parts. To the right was the section for architectural drawing; and in the center, for industrial drawing, while the section on the left, assigned to classical drawing, was divided into two subsections. Brother Mutien was put in charge of the subsection for older students.

After the opening prayer, model drawings carefully selected beforehand by the teacher were distributed for the students to copy. They were allowed to choose for themselves from the models available, but always subject to the advice of the teacher, who might recommend a more judicious choice in line with the natural ability and level of training of the student. The student's task was, for the most part, to copy as faithfully as possible the design, the floral motif, the landscape, or the personage in the model presented. The student might also be

asked to produce an adaptation of one or another of the frescoes that adorned the walls of the room. Neither creative drawing nor drawing from live models was a feature of the program.

If the Brother prefect happened to be delayed in arriving, Brother Mutien took his place, but always with a certain visible anxiety as he awaited his arrival. Once that Brother had come to take responsibility for the discipline of all four groups of students, Brother Mutien was free to devote himself entirely to his pupils. He would move from one to the other, giving advice, retouching this or that, and even drawing a few lines himself.

According to one of the Brothers:

He had a beautiful way with the pen. He created shadows by crossed lines in a diamond-shaped pattern, in the manner of the Saint Luke school. The students loved to see the care and determination with which he would bend over their work, with a prolonged sigh pointing out the flaws or giving the final touch to a piece of work. In this way his students produced some beautiful drawings, which I was able to observe many years later at close range when I saw them framed in the homes of his former pupils.

He hardly ever interrupted these individual lessons, but I do remember that sometimes he would walk back and forth behind the last row of desks saying his rosary. He was most pleasant and encouraging. Whenever a student seemed discouraged over his work, he would smile, find something good to say about it, and then take his pencil and guide the wayward hand of the pupil. He was adored by his pupils. I never saw him snarl or get angry; neither did I see him bubble over with enthusiasm. He was pleasant, reserved, and obliging. Since he did not have to be concerned about the discipline, he managed his responsibility in great calm and tranquility. (MH, 69)

One student who had been in his class from 1907 until 1910 described Brother Mutien:

He gave the course in classical drawing: landscapes, ornamentation, busts, or portraits. He also taught drawing

based on frescoes to the more advanced pupils in the fifth and sixth form. One day I heard him reprimand a very distracted student. But he never spoke an idle word to a student; if he said a few words, it was always either to indicate corrections to be made or what needed to be done to make the drawing more beautiful, or else to offer a word of encouragement, something that he did all the time.

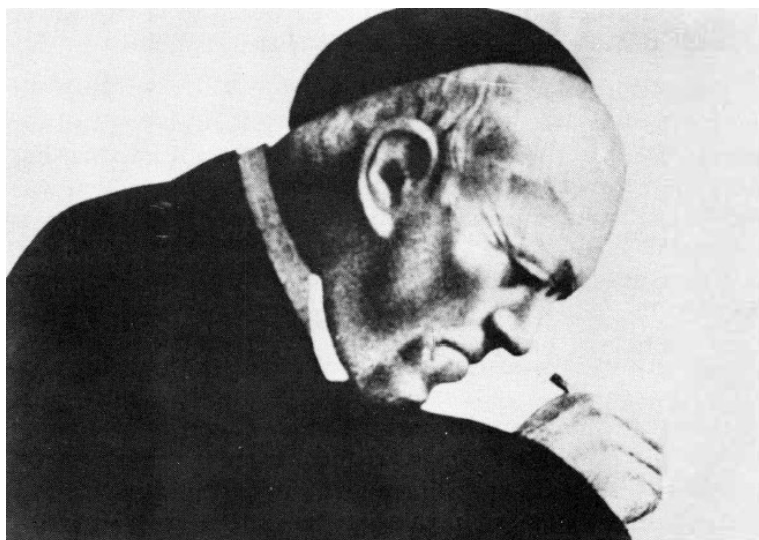
When he spoke it was always in a low voice, in few words, and in a kindly tone. The student he reprimanded that day went back at once to his work, because the reprimand was given with vigor, but in a low voice and without emotion. As he went from one bench to the other, offering corrections, you had the feeling that here was a soul united to God and always perfectly composed. His method for offering correction was simple: he never tried to appear learned, he took one step at a time, and this his students much appreciated, and they loved him for it. I didn't waste my time, and I learned a great deal from him. (*Ibid.*)

One of the Brothers added the following:

He had an ability to encourage his students by a simple word spoken with unction, such as, "Well done, keep up the good work!" Sometimes he would accord them an even greater reason for satisfaction when he would tell them that their drawing ought to be framed. (MH, 70)

In the first wing at Malonne a long corridor served as an exhibition hall. The work of the students and a few drawings of the professors were displayed there. Some of the other teachers, impressed by what they saw of the students' work, would sometimes compliment Brother Mutien. He would invariably reply, "Oh yes, that one has good taste," or "Yes, he does his work very well." He would never admit, said one of the Brothers, to what an extent the little masterpiece was due to his own retouches and corrections. He never displayed any of his own drawings. However, mention was made of a *Mater Dolorosa* of his that at one time hung in an alcove of the main corridor.

In 1880 a required course in drawing was introduced into the program of the two elementary classes in the normal



### **Brother Mutien-Marie at his drawing lesson**

school: linear drawing and geometric figures in the first year, and projections and perspective in the second year. Brother Mutien was called upon to teach these classes. One of his students, who later joined the Brothers, described his experience:

When I arrived at Malonne in 1888, he taught drawing in the normal school and gave a special course in elementary music, devoted to the harmonium and the flute. He was a conscientious teacher, and there never was the least disorder. He had great control and good order, even though our class was rather large and restless. The other teachers of specialized subjects did not have much order, but from the minute that Brother Mutien arrived on the scene, calm was restored. We liked him very much for his kindness, his devotedness, and for his evident holiness which radiated from his entire person.

Brother Mutien never had to show anger in any way at all to any of his students. There was absolute silence during his lessons. The teachers were aware from experience that drawing lessons were usually rather undisciplined. But we all had such a feeling of respectful fear for that

good Brother, that it never entered the head of any one of us to disturb the good order of his class. (MH, 71)

Another former student described him as “very watchful and kindly but without weakness, firm without being rude or severe. There reigned in his class an exemplary discipline that came from the genuine influence of his character, which was always the same. He was exacting but never lacking in graciousness” (MH, 72).

There was one incident, and one only, that created a minor scandal. The story was told by the guilty party himself, who many years later had become a younger confrere of his former teacher:

I was a student in the normal school at the time. During one of the classes in drawing, I created a good bit of disorder by meowing like a cat. Brother Mutien calmly invited the delinquent to come forward at the end of the class and confess his guilt. This I did. He didn't give any sign of impatience, but he put a negative mark against my name in the notebook he kept for this purpose. (*Ibid.*)

In 1894 Brother Mutien was relieved of the drawing class in the normal school. The students so appreciated their teacher that they went to the administration, pleading that the decision be revoked. But they were unsuccessful. From then on and for another 20 years, Brother Mutien taught drawing only in the elective courses in the humanities program.

The weight of the testimony concerning the effectiveness of Brother Mutien-Marie in his teaching assignments in music and art seems to be quite positive. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that he was an accomplished musician or artist. The fact is that most of those who knew him admitted that he had little natural talent in either area. Brother Martial-André, in his unpublished biography, even cites the names of some Brothers and laymen who complained that he was not a good teacher, in view of the high fees that were charged for the lessons (PA, 44). By dint of hard work, and motivated by religious obedience, he mastered the skills he needed to do justice to his pupils at the elementary level. As the years went on, it

became more and more clear that his work was not easy for him, and that he derived little, if any, personal or professional satisfaction from whatever he was able to accomplish in music or art. It was, as he often said, all for the glory of God.

## **The Catechist**

From the origins of the Institute, it was always presumed that every school Brother would teach a religion class. In an institution as large and complex as Saint-Berthuin, however, this was not always possible. It was a special trial for Brother Mutien that his regular teaching assignments in music and drawing did not provide him with the opportunity to give formal religious instruction, although the witnesses are unanimous on the religious influence that his words and example had on all his students.

But for him, that was not enough. Accordingly, he volunteered to teach catechism during his free time to the youngest pupils in the day school that was staffed by the apprentice teachers. He felt at home there, much as if he were back among the first pupils he taught in Chimay and Brussels. One of the lay teachers remembered:

Brother Mutien had asked permission to teach catechism once or twice a week to the children of the village. I myself was a teacher in the day school, which served as the elementary school for the village. The children who attended his catechism lessons were well behaved and attentive under the kindly influence of his saintly manner. I know that he also taught catechism in the other two classes in the day school. (MH, 45)

Brother Maxime-Alexandre added these details:

Every Saturday without fail, from 3:30 to 4:00 p.m., Brother Mutien taught catechism in the class of a colleague of mine in the day school in Malonne. I noticed that Brother was always lively in class, showing by the glint in his eye and by his gestures, always controlled, that he was totally absorbed in what he was teaching. His

pupils seemed to be under the spell of his words, so charming were they, so convincing, and so kindly. I had to admire this weekly activity in favor of the children of the poor, when he might just as well have been doing the same thing in an elementary class in the boarding school. (MH, 46)

Unfortunately, precise details are lacking as to just how long Brother Mutien was able to continue this specific apostolate, or what difficulties, if any, he encountered. Brother Maurice Hermans speaks of "fifteen years, more or less," and suggests that it may not have always been easy to adapt the abstract formulas of the catechism to the understanding of these village youngsters. The testimony does show, however, that in the right circumstances Brother Mutien could succeed as a classroom teacher.

Enough has been said to give some idea of one part of the personal routine of Brother Mutien in the Institute Saint-Berthuin at Malonne, where for 57 years he taught music and art. In addition, for many years he served as a volunteer teacher of catechism to the poor children in the village day school. But his assignments in the apostolic ministry were not limited to the classroom, as the narrative to follow will show.

## 5

# Prayer and Prefecting

### Always Praying

In an educational institution as large and complex as Saint-Berthuin, it would not be easy for all the students in the various departments to know the 60 or 70 Brothers by name. To many, the Brothers all looked more or less alike. But there was something special about Brother Mutien that set him apart. His unflinching routine at the harmonium already occasioned one nickname. As the years went on, he came to be identified by another and more significant description: "The Brother who is always praying."

Even so, only part of Brother Mutien's prayer was visible to the students at Malonne. Each day his prayer began and ended with the Brothers as they assembled for their community prayers. What distinguished Brother Mutien was that he continued to be visibly absorbed in prayer as he went about his school duties; it was obvious to all that his prayer continued all day long.

Brother Mutien's daily prayer began at 4:00 a.m. Although the Rule set the rising hour at 4:30 a.m., during the school year at Malonne the Brothers rose at 4:15 so that they could finish their prayer early enough to get the resident students and themselves to class on time. Since he was the bell ringer, Brother had to rise and dress 15 minutes ahead of the others. Brother Maufroy had appointed him to this function in 1869, the year Brother Mutien made his final vows. This unpopular assignment, a rather strange way of celebrating a Brother's perpetual profession, lasted for 33 years, until 1892, when the Director at the time, Brother Marien-Emile, his companion from the novitiate days, finally had the good sense to relieve him of it.

Thus, every morning at 4:15, Brother Mutien would leave his small room under the bell tower and pull the bell rope that would summon the community from every corner of the vast

property to assemble in the chapel for prayer. While the others were getting dressed, Brother Mutien would invariably go to his favorite spot at the communion rail, not far from the altar of Our Lady, and remain there absorbed in his devotions until it was time to take his place and begin the morning prayer with the others. In those days, Brothers all over the world would follow the same routine: 15 minutes of vocal prayer, followed by the reading of the subject for meditation, and then a prolonged period of meditative prayer until it was time for Mass.

During the period of meditation, Brother Mutien would kneel without support, "his body erect, his head slightly inclined, his arms crossed on his chest," as one confrere described him. He would sometimes lose himself in God so completely that the students arriving for Mass would stop to stare at him. In 1906 the Director, Brother Marcel, decided to change Brother Mutien's place from the end of the bench, so



**Brother Mutien-Marie before the Blessed Sacrament**

that he could have more freedom to express his devotion. Afterwards, the Director said that he regretted the move, because it deprived the students of such a striking example of a Brother at prayer.

Before the 1905 decree of Pope Pius X encouraging Catholics to receive Communion as often as possible and at an early age, it was the custom for the Brothers to receive the sacrament only twice a week. From 1873 onward, his confessor had encouraged Brother Mutien, despite his sense of personal unworthiness, to receive Communion every day. Brothers and students alike never forgot his seraphic expression as he returned to his place from the altar, his face almost transparent with joy in the presence of the Lord.

The community would assemble again briefly at noon for the examination of conscience, the *Angelus*, and a series of litanies. In the evening there was another full hour devoted to religious reading and meditation. The day would close with night prayer in common. To these community prayers, whenever he could spare the time, Brother Mutien would add visits to the Blessed Sacrament or to the Lourdes grotto on the hill behind the school.

## **Developments at Saint-Berthuin**

Over the years, Brother Mutien would see many Directors come and go. Some of them, like Brother Maufroy, his first Director, who later left the Institute, seem not to have appreciated the fundamental goodness and competence in all that Brother Mutien did for the smooth functioning of the school. Brother Mélancy-Pierre, the Director during Brother Mutien's last years, appears to have been similarly insensitive to the special quality of his contribution to the well-being of the community and the school.

There were others of his Directors, however—such as Brother Marien-Emile, who had been a fellow novice and was Director from 1886 to 1889; Brother Marcel-Compère, Director from 1895 to 1907; or Brother Mémoire-Achille, his former student, who was Director from 1907 to 1913—who were his great admirers and later on became ardent advocates of his cause for

canonization. But for all of them, those who understood him and those who did not, he was a devoted and reliable worker, humbly submissive to them as religious superiors.

The Institute Saint-Berthuin went through a particularly difficult period from 1878 until 1884, when the so-called "disastrous law," the result of anti-clerical politics, was in force. The teaching of religion during regular class periods was forbidden in the state-controlled normal schools, while a campaign was launched to discredit the private and independent schools such as Saint-Berthuin. For a time, it seemed that the very survival of the private schools was at stake.

The Director at the time was the 60-year-old Brother Mémoire. Remarkably energetic for his age, he insisted on the highest academic standards. His opening talk to the Brothers was emphatic:

If we want Malonne to prosper, we must make sure that the academic courses are solid. The parents expect that we will prepare their children for honorable careers. If we deceive them in this regard, we shall see our classes deserted. We are Brothers dedicated to the school, and every school Brother ought to know how to teach. We are, as it were, retailers of the sciences; let us not dilute the quality of the merchandise. (SB, 47)

By that time, the Institute Saint-Berthuin could point to the success of its former students in university studies, as well as the quantity and quality of the materials it displayed in the national and international expositions that were so popular at the time. Brother Mutien made his contribution in this regard, since as teacher of academic drawing he was responsible for both a judicious selection of the material to be exhibited and an effective manner of presenting it.

Over the years it was a joy for Brother Mutien to see the school prosper and expand under the successive Directors. New buildings and courtyards were added on both sides, with the ancient abbey church and the main courtyard at the center. The hill behind the school was leveled to create new playing fields. To the primary normal school and humanities programs were added a secondary program in the normal school and a commercial department, thus doubling the course offer-

ings. The 340 pupils that Brother Mutien had found in 1859 had become 450 by 1873, 930 in 1898, and exceeded the 1,000 mark—of whom 900 were boarders—on the eve of World War I in 1914.

Brother Mutien wrote to his niece, Léontine Wiaux (Sister Maria-Thérèse), on January 2, 1905:

Our school is filled with students: more than 800 boarders. To this you have to add 70 Brothers, some lay teachers, and about 70 persons employed as domestics. That brings the total to about 1,000 persons living here under the patronage of Saint Berthuin. Every Sunday there are something close to 600 Communions. There are two chaplains assigned to take care of the spiritual needs of the school. As you can see, the Lord has blessed this establishment. (MF, 37)

On January 3, 1913, he wrote to the same niece, "The place now holds 900 students, including boarders and apprentice teachers. You can see that there is plenty of work to do" (MH, 47).

The expansion of the facilities and course offerings of Saint-Berthuin, with its large population of resident students, turned the institution into a self-contained community. One obvious consequence was the need for continuous surveillance. Brother Maurice Hermans has described the complexity of the situation:

Some of the buildings were 200 feet long; there were six open courtyards and 25 dormitories, with people coming and going all the time. That is why all the staff had to work together to maintain good discipline and to prevent tomfoolery or accidents. When you add to this the ever-present danger of at least 100 coal stoves and, up until the end of the last century, 600 gas lamps, it is easy to see what a responsibility the administration had to assume.

At Malonne, supervision was the concern of everyone: professors, principal teachers and their assistants, those in charge of special courses—each one had to do his share, and none had the right to settle for one prefecting assignment alone. At the beginning of the school year, before the return of the boarders, the prefecting assignments would

be judiciously divided among the 60 or 70 Brothers of the community. Each one knew exactly what he was expected to do: whether to greet the parents of the new boarders, or to keep order in the second courtyard, in such and such a dormitory, or somewhere else. (MH, 112)

## **Brother Mutien, Prefect**

Perhaps because he was so submissive and obliging, perhaps because his teaching schedule in music and art was considered a sinecure by his superiors, or perhaps because he was dependable and effective in controlling the students, the various Directors in turn seem to have singled out Brother Mutien for some of the more unpopular prefecting assignments.

During the canonical process for beatification, Brother Martial-André testified:

The vigilance [Brother Mutien] exercised over the pupils, whether in the courtyards or in the classroom, was such that he was never found to be negligent in any way. More than that, he was motivated by a spirit of obedience and his desire to prevent the students from doing wrong. Whenever the name of Brother Mutien appeared on a list of assignments, whether permanent or temporary, you could always be sure to find him in the assigned place at the assigned time, and for as long as the assignment indicated. (PS, 553)

Since Brother Mutien was not assigned to any particular class or group of students, he was not called upon to prefect in the dormitories. His prefecting assignments were designed to provide for those times when the students would be temporarily away from the first and second teachers who had charge of them.

One such duty was to supervise a special group of students who were allowed to take a cup of coffee immediately after rising to tide them over until breakfast, which came an hour and a half later. Brother Mutien would leave the community chapel, watch over the little group in perfect silence, see that everything was done in order and without delay, and then

send his charges back to their prefects, while he himself would return to the chapel to continue his meditation.

Since the younger students were never allowed to roam the corridors unsupervised, he would go to collect them for their lessons in music or art, lead them in order and in silence to the appropriate room, and once the lesson was over, bring them back again. For more than 40 years he was assigned to supervise the courtyards and lavatories during the evening study period from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. In 1875 Brother Milliany, the Director, assigned him to supervise the lavatories in the courtyard during the intermissions whenever there was an evening performance or ceremony in the main hall. It was only 30 years later, when Brother Marcel, the Director, noticed him there in the freezing cold, that he was relieved of this duty. Brother Mutien always presumed that any assignment, no matter how unpleasant, was permanent until formally revoked.

Whatever the motives of his superiors in making these assignments, Brother Mutien accepted them because, as he often said, this was an effective way of preventing the students from committing sin. This was especially true, of course, in the delicate and distasteful task of supervising the courtyards where the outdoor lavatories were located.

There were special assignments indoors as well. For a time Brother Mutien was scheduled for an hour each day to prefect in the student infirmary. Twice a week in the school there was a detention period for students who were either misbehaving or behind in their studies. Brother Mutien was in charge of notifying the teachers when it was their turn to take the detention. Many of them would offer excuses, and Brother Mutien would have to take the turn himself.

Supervision extended even beyond the confines of the school property. Two Brothers were regularly assigned to accompany the various groups of students as they made their way home by train for vacation, and then to go again to bring them back. The Brothers were sometimes given permission to visit relatives for a few hours en route, provided they returned to the community the same day. In this way, Brother Mutien was able to stop occasionally at Jodoigne to visit his sister Philomène and her family.

One of the principal reasons these supervisory functions were so attractive to Brother Mutien was that he could pray at the same time. He found it easy to concentrate on the presence of God, to say the rosary or some other prayers, while he was watching over the students. Many of them recalled that he almost always had his rosary in his hand, and that his lips would be constantly moving in prayer as he kept an eye on the boys.

This continuous prayer of his in no way hampered his effectiveness in supervising the students. His nephew, a student at the time, related the following story:

It was in 1909 when Brother Mutien came to prefect the fifth class, where I was at the time. Monsieur Dardenne was at the teacher's desk, while Brother Mutien was standing in the back of the room, a prayer book in one hand and the rosary in the other. At a certain moment, he went to speak to M. Dardenne, who then left his place to catch a student in the act of cheating. The boy said to me afterwards, "It was your uncle who saw me cheating. And here I thought all the time that he was blind." (PS, 503)

## **Special Religious Devotions**

The prayer life of Brother Mutien was conditioned by the devotions that were then popular: devotion to Mary and to the rosary, in particular; devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Eucharist; frequent reception of the sacraments, especially the sacrament of penance as it was then called; observance of Friday as a penitential day, climaxed by the Way of the Cross, and special devotion to particular saints, such as Saint Joseph, patron of the Brothers' Institute, and Saint Berthuin, patron of the school. To the list would be added John Baptist de La Salle, the Founder of the Brothers, who was declared "Blessed" in 1888 and canonized in 1900.

The nineteenth century could be called the century of Mary in Catholic life. In 1854 Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, that is, Mary's exemption from original and actual sin from the first moment of her existence. In 1858 Mary is believed to have appeared to Ber-



**Brother Mutien-Marie before the Lourdes Grotto (composite)**

nadette at Lourdes. Pope Leo XIII, who reigned from 1878 until 1903, wrote ten encyclical letters on the Virgin Mary, most of them giving special attention to devotion to the rosary.

The devotion of Brother Mutien to the Blessed Virgin was nourished and deepened by his reading in the classic Marian works: *The Glories of Mary*, by Saint Alphonsus Ligouri, who died in 1737, and *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, by Blessed Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, who died at the age of 43 in 1716. In one of his letters, Brother Mutien offered this analysis:

This book of Blessed Grignon de Montfort is full of doctrine. It is a bit dry to read, but it contains hidden treasures. If I understand it correctly, the devotion to Mary

that this great servant of the Most Blessed Virgin explains in his book consists in a total abandonment of the entire self into the hands of this good Mother. We abandon to her our body, our soul, all of our interior and exterior talents, in order that Mary may dispose of them as she sees fit. That constitutes, as it were, the external part of the devotion. But the greatest practice that the Blessed Grignon teaches is an intense union with the Mother of God, in such a way as to be able to say, "It is no longer I who live, but Mary who lives in me." The interior practice of this devotion, according to Blessed Montfort, is always to perform one's actions in Mary, through Mary, and for Mary. He then explains the various ways of doing this. (YD, 109)

Every chance he had, Brother Mutien would urge his students, and especially the members of his family when he wrote to them, to say the rosary, or at least to repeat often the *Ave Maria*, and to celebrate Mary's feasts. He would frequently promise to pray to Mary for them. And he never omitted the second half when he signed his name: it was always Brother Mutien-Marie.

These somewhat exaggerated expressions of devotion to Our Lady were balanced in the piety of Brother Mutien by an equally intense devotion to Our Lord, especially to his Sacred Heart and to the Eucharist. In 1878 the Archconfraternity of the Sacred Heart, which had been founded earlier by the Visitation nuns, was officially approved for Belgium and France. On June 21, 1889, Brother Mutien was formally inducted as *zélateur* of the Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart. In this capacity he would go from class to class to urge the students to enroll. The members were asked to pick a specific hour each week to go either in body or in spirit before the Blessed Sacrament and to express their love, honor, and consolation to the heart of Christ.

Mention has already been made of Brother Mutien's practice of daily Communion and the fervor that he brought to it. During vacation periods and on holidays he would spend most of his free time in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament. Every Friday without fail he made the Way of the Cross either outdoors or in the chapel, stopping for long periods before each

of the stations and praying with his arms extended before passing on to the next.

## **In the Presence of God**

One way to summarize the prayer life of Brother Mutien is to return to the observation of the students: he was the Brother who was always praying. Or to put it another way, he lived continually in the presence of God. On one occasion, he even admitted to a confrere, naively perhaps, that he did not think he ever went for five minutes without thinking of God or his holy Mother. In this regard, he was true to the tradition of the Institute of the Brothers and the practices recommended by Saint John Baptist de La Salle as the principal means of preserving the characteristic spirit of the Institute, the spirit of faith.

If Brother Mutien's prayer was continual and extensive, it also had its moments of deep intensity. This is best illustrated by an account given by a former student named Oswald Snappe before the ecclesiastical tribunal during the beatification process:

I was the witness of an extraordinary phenomenon. On that particular day, I went to the music room at the time appointed for my hourly lesson. I was very surprised not to find my teacher there, the more so because punctuality was one of his special characteristics. When the chapel clock struck the hour, I realized that it was past the time. Since I was already aware of his holy ways, I said to myself that surely the worthy Brother would be found praying in the chapel.

I went down to the chapel, and my expectation turned out to be correct. I entered by the side door. The church was otherwise deserted, but I must say that the Lord, the Prisoner of the tabernacle, never had such a visitor as his servant, Brother Mutien-Marie. I saw him kneeling, some little distance from the altar, on a student's prie-dieu.

I waited for a moment near the door, thinking that the noise I made while entering would cause him to turn his

head. But he didn't budge. I went respectfully over to him and asked in a rather loud voice to be excused for disturbing him. All in vain. There was not a word from his lips, and he still did not move. I repeated my request, even louder this time, but still the unexplained silence. I got no other response.

Filled with emotion, I came closer to look at the face of the Brother, and oh what a wonder it was! I was struck to the core of my being. His hands were joined at his breast, his eyes were half closed, his wide and noble forehead, indeed his whole expression, radiant with beauty. His eyes were fixed on the tabernacle.

This was no longer the humble old man walking across the courtyards of the boarding school; this was an angel come down to earth. He was truly in ecstasy. His heart, all on fire with love, was in direct contact with the Divine Master, who was reaching out to him from the depths of the tabernacle. At least, that is the way it seemed to me. Brother Mutien no longer belonged to this world; his whole thought was with God. His body was in front of me, as stiff as marble; his soul, if I may put it that way, was speaking with God. . . .

Then I was penetrated with a strange kind of fear. Looking up at the clock and realizing that the hour was late, I went out and then reentered the chapel to find Brother Mutien still in the same state of contemplation. I went forward, shaking all over, and touched him on the shoulder and spoke to him. He didn't see or hear me at all. More disturbed than ever, I tried again respectfully, and then a sigh escaped from deep in his chest. He looked at me for a moment, understood what I wanted, got up, and followed me out. . . . He then apologized for causing me to lose the time assigned for my music lesson. . . .

How many times, during my nights of insomnia and physical pain, this sweet vision from Malonne came back to me in memory and helped me support the trials of life here below. I have spoken of it often to my beloved parents, to my wonderful wife, and to my dear children, trying to make them understand that this devout and holy soul had a vision of God, even in this life. (PS, 76)

Thus there was at least this one occasion when Brother Mutien's preoccupation with God in prayer got the better of his sense of duty to the students in his apostolic ministry. But most of the time it was hard for him or for anyone else to tell when prayer left off and school or prefecting duties began.

# 6

## Serenity in Community

### Community and Life in Common

In the earliest version of the Rule that John Baptist de La Salle wrote for the Brothers, we find these words: "There shall always be evident in the Institute a true spirit of community." In one of his meditations for the last days of the calendar year, De La Salle wrote, "Union in a community is truly a precious gem. . . . When this is lost, all is lost." Other authors, perhaps a bit more realistic, have pointed out that life in community is not only a source of the greatest joys, but also of the greatest trials in a religious institute. Such was the case with Brother Mutien-Marie during the 57 years he spent in the Brothers' community at Malonne.

Up until the changes that followed Vatican II, the community life of the Brothers was understood as life in common. In addition to the common prayer life described in the previous chapter, the Brothers shared common meals and common recreation. All the Brothers in a given community exercised the same apostolic ministry of teaching, usually in the same kind of educational institution. They prepared their classes and advanced their own education by study in the community room. It was considered a major innovation when, in large communities such as Malonne, the common dormitories of the Brothers were replaced by single rooms opening on a common corridor. The community routine was such that there was little opportunity during the day for a Brother to go off to be by himself.

Situated thus in the midst of a large and busy community of Brothers of all ages, various competencies, and diverse personality traits, the shy and self-effacing Brother Mutien might well have found community life a burden. If he did, the evidence is that he didn't show it. Brother Médard-Camille, who later became a major superior in the Institute, remarked that he had the impression that Brother Mutien was the happiest

Brother in the community. Another confrere noted that, no matter in what circumstance you met Brother Mutien, he always had the same welcoming smile, the same expression of joy and simplicity. It was, as one Brother remarked, as if life had passed him by without ever touching his pure heart and his childlike soul.

## **The Rule**

Brother Mutien's approach to community life was entirely expressed and defined by the requirements of the Rule of the Brothers. He was often referred to as the living Rule. Brother Mélage-Antoine, who would one day become his biographer, declared:

Brother Mutien gave you the impression of being a carbon copy of the Rule. He was the Rule. That struck me the first time I met him, and that identification with the Rule continued for more than 50 years. That is genuine heroism. I often saw him at his prie-dieu during the religious exercises. He was a man who found himself facing God, in the presence of God, and in true union with God. And this went on and on, day after day, year after year. There was never any letting up, something that would have been unimaginable. Divine grace had complete dominion over him. (PS, 102)

At that time, in a well-regulated community such as Malonne, it might be presumed that all the Brothers kept the primitive Rule quite faithfully. The structures of religious discipline and control were such that there was little opportunity for deviation in matters of the common life, the observance of poverty and obedience, or the restrictions on social contacts with the outside world. But for Brother Mutien, his observance extended even to the least details. The Brothers used to vie with one another to try to catch him in any kind of a violation, but they were not often successful.

His nephew, Brother Mucien-Léon, provided some examples:

The Rule of the Brothers is detailed, and it does not leave them much room for choice. Brother Mutien never failed in his observance, at least not voluntarily. That is the unanimous opinion of the Brothers, especially of Brother Emile, the Visitor, who knew him through his entire life as a Brother. For my part, I never saw Brother Mutien violate the rule of silence, raise his eyes without necessity, walk with his arms hanging at his side, close a door noisily, laugh boisterously, or come the least bit late when duty called. (PS, 149)

It was the rule of modesty, which De La Salle had borrowed in large part from the Jesuits, that Brother Mutien found especially helpful in maintaining his continual awareness of the presence of God. His nephew recalled that when Brother Mutien came to Mellet to accompany him on the long trip by train to the novitiate at Bokrijk, he never once looked up to view the passing scene. It was his custom on such occasions to alternate the recitation of the rosary with conversation on religious subjects.

It was the same in the community. Again, the nephew:

One day in 1915 there was an unusual and loud noise from outside the house. All of a sudden, one of the Brothers cried out, "It's a zeppelin!" Surprised by the outcry, Brother Mutien raised his eyes for an instant and then lowered them. The other Brothers all rushed to the window to have a look, but Brother Mutien remained at his place.

During that same year, Malonne was visited by the King of Bavaria. The Brothers all came to the windows to watch the reception in the courtyard below. Brother Mutien didn't see a thing and didn't even ask about it later in the recreation period. (*Ibid.*, 384)

If Brother Mutien was strict in his observance of the Rule, he was not the one to want to add to its burdens. Although he lived a disciplined life, he was not noted for extraordinary acts of penance and mortification beyond what the Rule required. Some thought that he used the scourge occasionally, but there is no hard evidence to prove it. Then there was the time when

one of the more fervent Brothers suggested at a community meeting that extra time for meditation be added to the daily schedule. Much to everyone's surprise, Brother Mutien argued against it, insisting that what the Rule required was enough.

So rare were the deviations of Brother Mutien from the letter of the Rule that whenever they occurred they would be commented on and remembered long afterward. On one occasion, by mistake he rang the rising bell an hour early. It is easy to imagine that the Brothers would never let him forget that one. And none recalled that he ever rang it late. When one Brother claimed that he once spotted Brother Mutien walking across the courtyard with his arms dangling at his sides, none of the Brothers would believe him.

More shocking still, in the light of the tremendous issue that was made over the years in the matter of smoking, was the famous incident of the cigar. In his unpublished biography, Brother Martial-André told the story:

One day Brother Mutien-Marie and Brother Michel went to visit the castle of Monsieur de Dorlodot. As they were leaving, that gentleman gave each of them a cigar. Once they came to a wooded area, each smoked part of his cigar. When Brother Michel reminded Brother Mutien of this event 30 or 40 years later, Brother Mutien swore that this was the only time he had ever smoked. (PR, 69)

In testifying before the church tribunal, Brother Martial-André declared:

During his whole life he smoked only half a cigar. It had been given him by the Baron de Dorlodot. He was in the company of Brother Michel at the time. After a couple of puffs, Brother Mutien threw the cigar away. (PS, 590)

In his testimony, Brother Michel added this explanation:

The rule on the subject of smoking was not as precise at that time as it is now. Certainly Brother Mutien would not have done it had he known that it was against the Rule. (*Ibid.*)

It is also known from the testimony that Brother Mutien occasionally took snuff. During the last years of his life he

suffered terribly from headaches. When they became unbearable he would take snuff to clear his head, but he never carried his own supply. When he felt the need he would borrow the snuffbox of a regular user.

Not surprisingly, the Promoter of the Faith, known popularly as the “Devil’s Advocate,” tried in the canonical process to make as much capital as possible out of these little violations.

## **Community Recreation**

One practice prescribed by the Rule that allowed no escape from interaction with the other Brothers was the community recreation, “recreation of Rule” as it was called. Recreation for the Brothers in those days consisted solely in walking and talking: in small groups around the property after the noon and evening meal, and in pairs, or sometimes larger groups, in extended walks on Wednesday afternoons. The Rule was explicit about what was considered suitable subject matter for conversation during recreation. Again, Brother Mutien not only participated in these conversations; he took an active part, but always within the limits prescribed by Rule. Brother Eugène-Abel described it this way:

In recreation, whenever anyone had something to say, he would smile and show by his expression that he was listening with the greatest attention to what was being said. He showed such an interest that each speaker in turn might think that he was the object of special esteem and particular affection. With great prudence, and a wisdom that was truly supernatural, he would then provide a suitable response. (PS, 429)

In any human situation, however, such conversations could take a nasty turn. Again, Brother Eugène:

If, in recreation, a thoughtless word should escape the lips of one of the Brothers, Brother Mutien would find immediately something positive to remark about the subject being discussed. If the conversation took a turn that was the least uncharitable, he would keep silent for a few

minutes, if that were the best he could do in view of the character of the person speaking, but soon he would divert the attention of the others by changing the subject to something religious or to some recent event. (*Ibid.*)

There were other topics that Brother Mutien avoided so as not to violate charity, obedience, or the Brothers' Rule. Thus, according to Brother Mansuy-Albert, he would never speak of politics, secular affairs, or the administration of the school. Brother Martial-André remarked how difficult Brother Mutien would find it to have to listen to Brothers who were always complaining. It became legendary, not only in Malonne but around all the Belgian communities, that it was not easy for any Brother to engage in criticism if Brother Mutien were present.

Brother Mucien-Léon, his nephew, was more specific:

He never spoke of himself, of what he had done, or of what he had heard or seen, saying, for example, I saw or I heard such and such. He never spoke of eating or drinking. If he were to speak about a person, or a community, or a religious institute, it would always be to speak well of them. He never asked questions that were useless or intended to satisfy his curiosity. Neither did he engage in foolish or trivial talk: no jokes or puns, and no little barbs intended to tease. (PS, 382)

What then did he talk about? Recreation always began with a discussion of the saint of the day, and then of the books that had been read in the dining room during the meal. Brother Mutien was well acquainted with the lives of the saints, even from his youth, and could always be counted on to provide some new and interesting facts or insights to amuse his companions. For some saints, the Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph, or Saint Stephen, for example, he could get carried away with enthusiasm. He followed avidly the religious events of his time: the first Vatican Council, the beatification and the canonization of the Founder of the Brothers, and the published encyclicals of the successive popes. All of this provided fresh material to inject into the conversation. And although he himself refrained from telling jokes, it was remarked that he could

enjoy or even relate a humorous incident and, when appropriate, get a chuckle out of it.

On the weekly promenades on Wednesdays, Brother Mutien seems to have been an agreeable companion, at least as related in the testimony of Brother Martial-André:

When out walking with his confreres, Brother Mutien would invite them to say some prayers, but he knew how to temper his suggestion, and even to withhold it altogether, according to how he judged the physical or spiritual capacities of his regular or occasional companion. With Brother Michel-Robert, for example, a nervous and scrupulous person, who was his assigned companion for almost three months, he didn't suggest any prayers at all, except that they make a brief stop at some shrine. With the young Brothers, he would be content to say one decade of the rosary; with older Brothers with a reputation for piety, he would recite six decades or more, followed by the *Pater*, *Ave*, and *Gloria* six times. In short, he adjusted to his companions. The advice he would give to his young companions on these walks was always appreciated: he was well aware of the physical and spiritual dangers to which they might be exposed on these excursions. (PS, 461)

## Community Relationships

Apart from recreation times, Brother Mutien kept the rule of silence strictly without giving offense. If someone accosted him in the corridor, he would smile, answer in as few words as possible, and then excuse himself. He was always, however, at the disposal of Brothers who came to him to ask for his advice or for his prayers. Insofar as his duties allowed, he would ask the permission of the Director to visit Brothers who were sick. There were even accounts of cures attributed to his prayers. Whenever a Brother was cited for some particular accomplishment or given some honor, Brother Mutien went out of his way to say a word of congratulation.

He was a favorite of the domestic servants engaged to take care of the laundry and the kitchen and to maintain the vast

property at Malonne. He would encourage them to be faithful to their religious duties and to their work as well. He often mediated in conflicts between the servants and the other Brothers, sympathizing with the servant and excusing the Brother. The servants vied with one another to offer him some service, which he always received with humble thanks. From time to time he would give them some little token of esteem, such as a medal or a holy picture, which they would then show to the others and treasure ever after.

Brother Maluèle-Emile hinted that not everything at Malonne was sweetness and light. Thus, he noted in his remarks to the tribunal, "When confronted with the petty difficulties of community life, Brother Mutien always remained calm and in total possession of himself." It is easy to imagine what some of these difficulties were. As experienced members of religious institutes well know, it is sometimes difficult to live side by side with a saintly person such as Brother Mutien, whose innocence, naiveté, and literal observance of all the rules can be seen as a reproach to the realists, the sophisticated, and those who prefer a more relaxed approach to religious life.

Some of these reactions came to the surface after the death of Brother Mutien, when his admirers among the Brothers began to gather testimonies about his life and virtue. There were those among the Brothers, including some of the superiors, who wondered what the fuss was about, who thought that these stories about him were exaggerated, who found many of his habits idiosyncratic and annoying. For example, towards the end of his life some Brothers expressed annoyance at his habit of sniffing or sometimes forgetting himself and praying aloud during the community meditation time.

Even during his lifetime, he confided to Brother Mémoire-Achille, the Director, that there was a certain Brother with whom he found it difficult to work. The Brother in question was Brother Madolf-Jacques. He had been assigned to assist Brother Mutien with the music lessons. Although Brother Madolf was lavish in his praise of Brother Mutien before the tribunal, it is easy to read between the lines of his testimony and realize how many demands he made on Brother Mutien, not only in the music room, but in seeking his advice and in

complaining about difficulties he was having with other Brothers.

Somewhat more surprising is the story recounted by Brother Martial-André:

The only instance with which he could be reproached concerned Brother Ambroise-Paul, who one day asked Brother Mutien to take his place in class for a few moments. Brother Mutien replied that too many people were taking advantage of his good nature, and that this time he could not be of any help. Brother Ambroise was rather taken aback by this response, but he reflected that Brother Mutien had his own duties and his own lessons, that people had indeed taken advantage of his kindness by asking him to replace them in class when he had his own work to do. (PS, 450)

There was, after all, then, a human side to Brother Mutien. If this showed itself in occasional disagreements or misunderstandings, his willingness to share in simple human joy became equally apparent on the occasion of great feasts. These Brother Mutien entered into wholeheartedly, whether in the school celebrations by participating in the musical program, or in community celebrations in the chapel and the dining room.

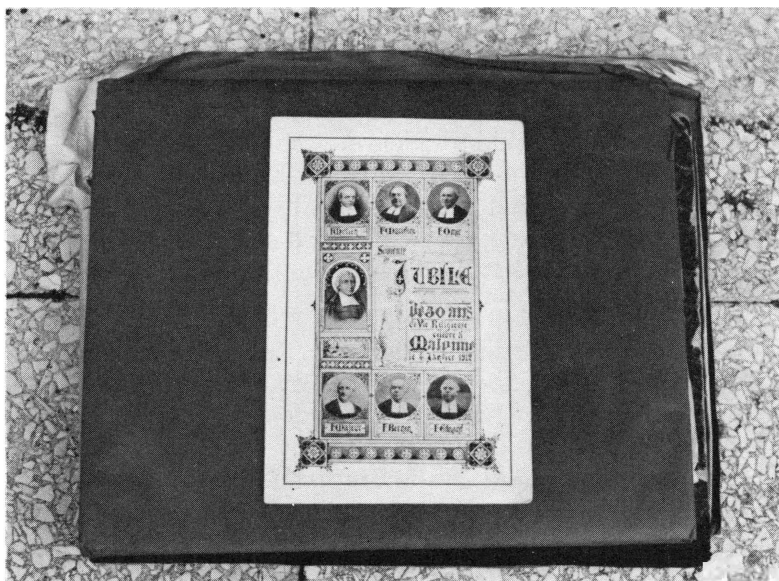
Ordinarily, he was sparing in the use of food, but he ate what was set before him and did not engage in extended fasts beyond what was required by church law and the Rule. He was known to take a glass or two of wine on feast days, and he usually drank the good Belgian beer that was regularly served at meals. Perhaps because it was a bit unusual, the Brothers liked to retell the following story. Here is the version of Brother Mégrin-Joseph:

On August 15, 1894, the feast of the Assumption of Mary, a somewhat more lavish dinner than usual was served to the Brothers. When it came time for the dessert, an excellent pastry was served. Brother Mutien took a piece of it and then passed it to me to do the same. After everyone at the table had been served, there still remained four or five portions that no one had touched.

After some minutes, while we were waiting for the coffee, I asked Brother Mutien if he wouldn't like another

piece of dessert. Then the humble Brother, always so disciplined in his own regard, replied simply, “Why not, good Brother Mégrin? It is one of God’s excellent creatures, this pastry, so let us make a little use of it once again. Besides, today is the feast of our good Mother Mary, and in that way you, too, can take advantage of it.” And so we each took a portion, and while I myself enjoyed it, I admired his simple willingness to go along with my suggestion. (PS, 597)

One of his Directors who always had a special appreciation of the presence of Brother Mutien in the community was Brother Mémoire-Achille. During his last year as Director he decided it would be a good idea to celebrate the Brothers in the community who had been in the Institute for 50 years or more, among them, of course, Brother Mutien-Marie, who by then had been a Brother for 57 years. The celebration took place on January 4, 1912. On the following day Brother Mutien wrote about it to his nephew, Brother Mucien-Léon:



**The program for the jubilee celebration of 1912. Underneath are the notebooks of Brother Martial-André containing the manuscript of his unpublished biography.**

I want to thank you for the prayers that you addressed to Our Lord and his holy Mother for the intention of us jubilarians. I am going to give you some details as to how we spent the day on the fourth. There were six of us: only Brother Edmund was too ill to attend and had to stay in his room. The other jubilarians were Brothers Macédone, the former Director at Carlsburg, Majeur-Martin, Macar-Omer, Bernon-Marie, and your servant, Mutien-Marie.

At 9:00 a.m. the entire community gathered in the parlor. The chaplain arrived, accompanied by his two assistants, Father Felton and Father Baufays. After addressing us with a few pious words, the chaplain gave us the papal blessing, which Brother Assistant Macaire had obtained from Rome. Then we went in procession to the chapel, where special prie-dieus were set in place for the jubilarians. The High Mass was sung in Gregorian chant, followed by the *Te Deum* and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

We then went back to the parlor, where we exchanged pleasantries for a little while. At noon we were led into the dining room that had been elaborately decorated for the occasion. It would take a long time to recount for you the speeches that were made and the thousand thoughtful things that were said to celebrate the jubilarians.

I do hope that this family celebration will prove to have been beneficial to all the members of our community, and I hope that you, too, can derive some benefit from it. What a happiness it is to have spent 50 years in the service of the good Lord. (MF, 19)

When Brother Mutien-Marie wrote those lines he had just about another five years to live. This letter serves, then, as a fitting summary of the life, with all of its joys and sorrows, satisfactions and disappointments, lived by a dedicated Brother in community. Through it all, Brother Mutien remained always the same, ever serene in the face of whatever challenges life in a large and complex apostolic community had to offer.

# 7

## Family Relationships

Although Brother Mutien lived a quiet and retired life during all the years he was at Malonne, he never lost contact with the members of his immediate and even his extended family. His visits home were few and far between, sometimes occasioned by a death in the family, sometimes because business of one kind or another brought him either to Mellet or to Jodoigne, where his sister lived. From time to time, some of the family would come to visit him at Malonne, and he always received them cordially. For the most part he kept in contact with the family by letters, of which 72 have survived. The majority are addressed to his sister-in-law, Lucie Meunier, or to her sons and daughters who entered religious life. There are some interesting letters, however, that he addressed on the occasion of a marriage in the family or the birth of a child, as well as, of course, letters of condolence when someone had died.

### His Parents and His Brothers

The first death in the immediate family occurred in 1860, the year that Brother Mutien was denied permission to renew his temporary vows. His older brother, François-Joseph, had entered the Jesuit seminary and was in the course of his studies for the priesthood when he contracted tuberculosis and died. There is no indication that Brother Mutien was able to attend the funeral. Then his mother died in 1868, and his father in 1871. It is more than likely that he would have been present at their funerals. It was the custom at the time to allow Brothers to attend the funerals of their parents if they lived within a reasonable distance. Mellet was not that far from Malonne.

Brother Mutien's younger brother, Léon-Joseph, died in 1869 while he was still a student at Malonne. His nephew, Brother Mucien-Léon, related the circumstances:

Léon-Joseph was very dear to Brother Mutien, who spoke to me about him on many occasions. Léon was a student in the normal school at Malonne, but he died prematurely of tuberculosis at the age of 22. Alexis Lorette, the burgomaster of Mellet and a cousin of ours who knew him well, affirms, as do several other members of the family, that an extraordinary event occurred when Léon died. A picture of the Sacred Heart, to whom Léon always had a special devotion, broke loose from the wall where it was hanging and fell down onto his chest as he was breathing his last. (PS, 90)

From time to time, Brother Mutien would return to Mellet to fulfill his obligation to vote. It so happened that, in 1884, one of the candidates of the notoriously anti-Catholic liberal party was Paul Wiaux, a cousin. When he arrived in the village, Brother Mutien was reproached by his cousin: "You won't come home when somebody dies, but here you are now just because you want me to lose votes." Brother Mutien didn't reply, but let his old classmate, Professor Léopold Dandois, speak in his defense. After that, Brother Mutien never returned to Mellet to vote, but voted instead in Malonne as his adopted commune.

Another disagreeable incident occurred when he was cited in a dispute over a will. According to Brother Martial-André, it seems that an uncle of Brother Mutien by marriage, Bonnejonne by name, had made two wills. The first disposed of part of his goods in favor of his nephews, cousins, and second cousins, Brother Mutien among them. This language left no basis for contestation. The second will, disposing of his goods and stating simply, "I leave them to my heirs," was ambiguous. The Bonnejonne family argued that this applied only to them; the Wiaux and others argued for the more inclusive specification in the first will. They decided to bring common suit against the Bonnejonne family's narrow interpretation of who were the heirs.

Brother Mutien, upon being asked to join with his own relatives who were contesting the second will, agreed to be party to the suit. The judge, however, decided against them, and Brother Mutien and his party were condemned to pay the

costs. Brother Martial-André added that from his study of the case he was convinced that Brother Mutien got involved, not to challenge the rights of the others, but to protect what he considered the just claims of his own family.

Brother Mutien's only surviving brother, Jean-Joseph, lived long enough to raise a large family, to whom Brother Mutien was attached in a special way. After the death of his first wife, who bore him three children, Jean married Lucie Meunier, by whom he had twelve more children, five of whom eventually entered religious life. One of them, who became Brother Mucien-Léon, characterized his father in this way:

Jean-Joseph had a great love for the poor, and he often served as godfather for the children of poor families. In 1879 [the year of the repressive education law] he took up the defense of the religious Sisters, and I heard it said that it was due to his efforts that the Sisters were allowed to continue in the village. He was happy-go-lucky and loved to play practical jokes. (PS, 90)

The Wiaux family lived in the large house at Mellet that Jean had inherited from his parents. Brother Mutien made



**The Wiaux Family shortly after the death of Brother Mutien in 1917. In the front row, Léontine (Sister Maria-Thérèse), Marius (Father Odilon, OFM), Lucie Meunier Wiaux, Gabriel (Brother Mucien-Léon, FSC), Mercédès (Sister Lucia-Joseph). In the rear: left, Fernand and Alice Wiaux; center, Hector (one-time Brother Octavius, OFM).**

over to his brother and sister-in-law the interest from his part of the inheritance. Jean-Joseph and Lucie were the earliest and most frequent visitors to Malonne, especially after two of their sons came to Saint-Berthuin as boarders. That justified a visit from the mother, who came with them at the beginning of the school year and again at each trimester.

Brother Maurice Hermans has well summarized the testimony relative to such visits when the members of the family would come to Malonne:

Brother Mutien did not go to meet his visitors at the Flawinne railroad station, but he always sent the community carriage to get them. He himself waited for them in the main courtyard. He greeted the members of his family with such effusive joy that he astonished some of the Brothers, who were used to seeing him so silent and reserved.

During the few hours that the visit would last, he kept his eye out for every detail. He made sure beforehand that everything was in order in the parlor and in the dining room. When necessary, he would give a sign if something had been forgotten. Thus, on one occasion, he went to remind the cellarmaster, who had failed to set out the bottle of wine that was traditionally offered to the relatives of the Brothers.

Once his guests arrived, Brother Mutien would say over and over, "How happy I am to see you again!" He would ask all kinds of questions about their health, about those who couldn't make the trip, and numerous other details about family matters. He would then conduct his guests on a tour of the house, never forgetting to bring them to the chapel for a short prayer. (MH, 21)

After the death of Jean-Joseph in 1898 at the age of 59, Brother Mutien kept in regular contact by letter with his sister-in-law, Lucie. Brother Martial-André says that "he treated his widowed sister-in-law as if she were his own sister, even addressing her in that way, writing to her often in the beginning to console her in her sorrow, to encourage her, to show his concern for her in other ways, and to promise his prayers."

## **His Nephews and Nieces**

Brother Mutien helped his sister-in-law's family in practical ways also. As soon as Marius, who was six years old when his father died, and Gabriel, who was three, were old enough to come to Saint-Berthuin, Brother Mutien was able to have the tuition and boarding costs reduced. Without showing undue favoritism, he kept an eye on them and informed their mother of their progress. He wrote to her, for example, during the Christmas vacation of 1907:

I presume that Gabriel arrived home safely last Saturday about noontime. People here are happy with him, and he works hard. You can see by his report card that he has received high marks—in fact, he is first in his class. Let's hope that he will persevere in these good dispositions and attain a high rank at the end of the school year. See to it that he goes out only with good companions, something that I have already warned him about. (MF, 33)

It wasn't long before Marius, and then Gabriel, began to show signs of religious vocation. An older brother, Hector, had entered the Franciscans as Brother Octavius, but had to return home because of poor health. When Marius expressed a desire to join the Franciscans as a missionary priest, Brother Mutien did nothing either to encourage or to dissuade him, urging him simply to pray to know God's will and promising to do the same. This was his usual response to those who sought his advice in vocational matters. It contrasts notably with the approach of most other Brothers at the time who were successful in developing religious vocations among their students. Eventually Marius was ordained, as we shall see further on, and after a fruitful career as a missionary he died in Japan in 1975.

Gabriel received the same kind of treatment, as he himself related:

Brother Mutien showed the greatest prudence with regard to my vocation. He never spoke to me about it until I myself let him know that I was thinking of it. He never said a word to me about what was done in the Institute or

what were its practices. Thus I didn't know any of the specific points of Rule before I entered the congregation. (PS, 503)

Gabriel entered the Brothers' novitiate in 1910. Brother Mutien was given permission to go to Mellet and accompany him to the novitiate at Bokrijk in eastern Belgium, near the German border. He was also present on September 16 when Gabriel was given the religious habit and the name Brother Mucien-Léon. Brother Mutien followed Gabriel closely during the years he was in training and in his first experiences in the classroom, writing to him often, or writing to his mother or to Marius about his progress. Their paths sometimes crossed, especially when the nephew had occasion to come to Malonne for the annual retreat for the Brothers of the Belgian District.

After his uncle died, Gabriel applied to the superiors to have his name changed to Mutien-Marie, a favor that was granted. Known thereafter as Brother Mutien-Marie of Ciney, he developed his own reputation for holiness. He was killed in a tragic train crash on the feast of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, May 15, 1940. He was only 45 years old when he died.

Two of the daughters of Jean-Joseph Wiaux and Lucie Meunier entered the congregation of the Daughters of Mary of Pesche. Léontine became Sister Maria-Thérèse, and Mercédès became Sister Lucia-Joseph. Brother Mutien wrote to them regularly, encouraging them in their vocation and urging them to fidelity to the Rule and to devotion to the Blessed Virgin as a guarantee of perseverance. He would also include any news of the family, especially if he had recent visits from any of them. In his letters to his sister-in-law he would often remark how blessed she was to have given so many of her children to God in religious congregations.

Thus he wrote to her in December 1910 after Gabriel had entered the novitiate:

Gabriel has written to me. He is very happy. I met his Director, Brother Fulbert, who had many good things to say about him. And his health is very good. I hope that he is being called to make the good Lord known and loved by many souls.

I have also received letters from Marius and from Sisters Maria-Thérèse and Lucia-Joseph. All are happy in the service of Our Lord who has called them.

How happy you are, dear sister, to have given several of your children to the good Lord. You have good reason to expect to be well received by the Sovereign Judge, since you have made the sacrifice of what you might consider the most precious thing in the world. I hope these thoughts will give you courage and fill you with joy and consolation. (MF, 30)

The other nephews and nieces in the Wiaux family were Arthur, Jules, Louis, Auguste, and Alice. Of those who married, Brother Mutien had occasion to write mostly to Alice. Thus he wrote to her on November 16, 1905, on the occasion of her marriage to Fernand Wiaux, a distant cousin:

I pray to Our Lord and his holy Mother to bestow their most abundant blessings on the new state that you are about to embrace. Marriage is a great sacrament, since it is Jesus Christ who instituted it. In this kind of life not only can you attain salvation, but you can even attain a high degree of sanctity. Think of how many saints the Church honors who have sanctified themselves in their marriage.

But you should not be deceived, for each state in life has its difficulties. You must, therefore, be armed with strength, courage, and patience. That is why, if you wish to be happy, you must get heaven involved in your interests. Place yourself, dear niece, under the special protection of the most holy Virgin and Saint Joseph. . . . (MF, 16)

As time went on, Brother Mutien shared the joy of Alice and Fernand in their children as, for example, in the following letter to Alice, where he refers to two of them with the traditional Wiaux names of Jean-Joseph and Gabriel:

I have been very happy to learn that all of your family are well, and that little Jean-Joseph and Gabriel are enjoying good health. I have written to your mother to thank her for the beautiful rosary she sent me as a souvenir of her trip

to Lourdes. I added that she must have been happy to have witnessed some important miracles. Thanks be to God, my own health is good. Give the two little ones, Jean-Joseph and Gabriel, a big hug from me. (*Ibid.*, 8)

On October 16, 1912, he had the occasion to congratulate his nephew, Louis Wiaux:

I have learned from Alice that you are going to embrace a new state in life, and I extend my very sincere wishes that you will be happy in it. I note with pleasure that you have chosen a Saturday for the nuptial Mass. Since that day is consecrated to the most holy Virgin Mary, you cannot do better than to place yourselves under the protection of our heavenly Mother. . . . (*Ibid.*, 17)

We know also from some brief postcards that his other nephews, Arthur and Jules Wiaux, made occasional visits to Brother Mutien at Malonne, especially in the last years of his life, when Arthur had a job with the railroad.

## **His Married Sisters**

Brother Mutien was equally devoted to his two married sisters, Caroline and Philomène. Brother Mucien-Léon testified that Caroline was a good woman, active in many pious confraternities, and devoted to the poor. When her husband died shortly after her marriage, she went to serve as housekeeper for her mother's brother, Father Joseph Badot. She took care of him in his successive assignments as pastor at Vaulx, Lompret, Mesvin, and finally during his last years as chaplain in the hospital of the Good Shepherd at Mons. This probably explains why there is little evidence of regular communication between her and Brother Mutien. However, when Caroline died in 1907, Brother Mutien was able to attend her funeral.

Two of the earliest letters of Brother Mutien that have survived, dating from 1875 and 1878, are addressed to his sister, Philomène, and her husband, Gustave Colin, congratulating them on the birth of their children. It has already been noted that Brother Mutien was able to visit them for a few hours at their home in Jodoigne whenever he was assigned to

accompany the students returning to their homes from Malonne for vacation.

Philomène died suddenly in 1902. On New Year's Day of the following year, Brother Mutien wrote to his niece Léontine (Sister Maria-Thérèse):

I was able to assist at the funeral of my dear departed sister, Philomène. I arrived at Jodoigne at the same time as Berthe and Caroline. It is impossible to describe to you the heart-rending scenes that I witnessed there. I suppose that they have informed you about the details of her unexpected death. It is in these circumstances that we ought to adore the designs of God and say with holy Job, "It is the Lord's will, may his holy name be blessed!"

I also had permission to go to the six-week anniversary Mass, but the relatives from Mellet arrived here much too late; the trains could not provide regular service because of the fog. At least I was able at that time to see your good mother with Marie-Claire Meurant, as well as your brothers, Arthur and Jules, who came along simply to show their sympathy and affection for the dear departed woman. (MF, 14)

## **Letters of Encouragement and Advice**

The excerpts from the letters of Brother Mutien that have been provided thus far have been chosen to illustrate how concerned he was about his family, each of them personally and in turn, with great interest in the routine as well as the extraordinary events in their lives. What does not appear so forcibly in these excerpts is the extensive spiritual advice that Brother Mutien offered in his letters as a sort of apostolic ministry to his family. Although he tailored his advice to the situation of each, there were the same recurrent themes: resignation to the will of God, peace and unity in the family, and devotion to the Blessed Virgin, especially to the *Ave Maria* and the rosary, and to Saint Joseph. Thus he wrote in 1902 to Léontine (Sister Maria-Thérèse):

What a great grace God has given you, dear niece, by calling you to serve him in such a special way. The longer I

live the more I appreciate what an inestimable blessing it is to have a vocation to the religious life. Continue, then, day by day to make more firm and more stable the gift you have made of yourself in taking the Lord as your portion. May the honorable title of "Daughter of Mary" lead you to have recourse to that good Mother in all your needs. (MF, 28)

In 1912 he wrote to Gabriel (Brother Mucien-Léon):

Your letter has filled me with consolation since you tell me that you are still happy in the service of the good God. Continue to have a great love for Jesus and Mary, and be faithful in the observance of our holy rules. That is the source of your strength as a religious, and that is what will guarantee your perseverance. (*Ibid.*, 30)

In 1913 he wrote to Marius, then Frater Odilon, OFM:

Reading your letter has given me great joy as I learn that you have received minor orders and that you intend to make your solemn vows on September 21.

It seems to me that the first thought that ought to spring from your heart is to thank Our Lord for having called you to such a sublime vocation. I will continue to pray for you often, that you may become a worthy minister of the holy Church by devoting yourself body and soul to the salvation of so many lost souls who hardly know at all what is their eternal destiny. (*Ibid.*, 29)

Finally, and in a different vein, he wrote in late December 1913 to his sister-in-law, Lucie Meunier, the widow Wiaux:

My wish for you is that you will have peace, for that is the greatest good one can have in this world. Without peace, riches and honors cannot make us happy, but when we are at peace, the bitter things in life will always have a consoling side to them. Therefore, peace first of all with the good God through great fidelity in observing all of his commandments and those of his Church. Secondly, peace with all those with whom you have to deal. It is this unity which I often ask of the most holy Virgin for all the mem-

bers of your family. I trust that this good Mother will answer my prayers, and that the family will continue to live entirely in conformity with the Christian ideal of charity and peace. (*Ibid.*, 12)

## Last Visit to Mellet

The ordination of Marius Wiaux (Father Odilon) as a Franciscan missionary in 1916 provided Brother Mutien with the opportunity to return to Mellet and to participate in the family celebration for the first solemn Mass of the newly ordained priest. The detailed account of that trip, written by Brother Mucien-Léon and recorded in an unpublished manuscript of Brother Martial-André, gives a glimpse of Brother Mutien at home and at ease with the rest of the family. It was to be his last home visit.

The story begins at Malonne on Friday, September 1, 1916, at the close of the annual retreat of the Brothers in the evening of that day. Brother Mucien-Léon had participated in the retreat, and so was able to join his uncle for the community recreation after supper. Brother Mutien spoke mostly on his favorite subject—devotion to the Blessed Virgin—and made no mention of the fact that they were planning to set out together the next day for the celebration at Mellet. Since it was wartime, Brother Mélancy-Pierre, the Director, was a bit apprehensive about how the 75-year-old man would manage the trip with only a young Brother to accompany him. He delegated his Sub-Director, Brother Macaire, to find someone to go with them.

*Mon cher Père*

*Pour la dévotion envers la très sainte Vierge, je vous renouvelle ce que je vous ai écrit il y a quelques jours, je me permets d'attirer votre attention sur le chapelet que nous avons la douce obligation de réciter tous les jours, cette pratique et particulièrement agréable à notre bonne mère, surtout quand on médite les mystères en le récitant. Je considère le chapelet comme une chaîne qui nous lie à la reine du ciel, de proportion de la femme avec laquelle nous le récitons, je le considère aussi comme un bouquet de fleurs que nous offrons à Marie. Chaque nous serons toujours dans nos derniers moments, si nous pouvons nous rendre le témoignage d'avoir offert à Marie tous les jours de notre vie tous ces bouquets formés de roses cueillies sur les montagnes du Rosaire.*

*Votre tout dévoué Confiant en Jésus et en Marie*  
*J. Mutien, Paris.*

### A letter to his nephew Gabriel (Brother Mucien-Léon)

Brother Macaire, in turn, asked Brother Michel-Auguste, the Director of Gosselies, who was returning to his community not far from Mellet, to take the old man and his nephew along with him. Brother Michel asked to be excused since he had to take an earlier train. He suggested in turn that a Brother of his community, Brother Marinus, be delegated to accompany the pair. Brother Marinus was delighted. He had been an admirer of Brother Mutien ever since he first was introduced to him at Malonne as a postulant on his way to the novitiate.

When Saturday morning arrived, it was learned that Brother Mutien had been suffering an attack of diarrhea. He wouldn't say anything himself—it was far too delicate a matter—but one of the Brothers noticed it and told the nephew. By noontime Brother Mutien seemed to be well enough. After dinner, he bade farewell to the Director, made a visit to the chapel, and set off with his two companions. The Sub-Director, Brother Macaire, went with them in the trolley as far as Namur. Brother Marinus would then accompany them in the train from Namur to Fleurus, where he would have to leave them to get to his community at Gosselies. When asked how long it had been since his last trip home, Brother Mutien replied simply, "Six years."

While the three were waiting for the train in the Namur station, they spotted a group of German soldiers. Brother Mutien noticed that one of them could speak French. He reminded the other two Brothers how careful one had to be in conversation during wartime. Then they met another group of Brothers taking the same train. Brother Mutien suggested that Brother Marinus go sit with them and join their conversation, so that he and his nephew might pray the rosary together.

Shortly after the train left the station, two German soldiers came through the train demanding to see the identity cards of the passengers. At that moment Brother Mutien realized that he had forgotten to bring his card with him. The soldier was most considerate. He said not to worry, but that he would have to take him to the military post at Fleurus to get the proper papers for the return trip. He indicated that the guard on the return trip might not be so obliging.

When they got off the train at Fleurus, the soldier was waiting for them. He told the uncle and the nephew to follow

him to the post. Brother Mutien remarked, almost jokingly, "What do you know! We are under arrest." Brother Marinus decided to go along with them. The German registration officer at the post agreed to telephone Malonne and ask the Brothers to send Brother Mutien's papers to Mellet. However, all the phones in the school at Malonne had been taken over by the Germans, who were using it as a hospital. None of them was willing to bring the message to the Director of the Brothers.

The officer in charge at Fleurus then instructed Brother Mutien to go to the telegraph office at the other end of the town and send an urgent message to Malonne. Once assured that the message had been sent, the officer let the Brothers go. Meanwhile Monsieur Staufs, a cousin of the Wiaux, and his brother, Octave, had arrived with a carriage to take the two Brothers to Mellet. They said goodbye to Brother Marinus, who set off for his community at Gosselies, where he had a good story to tell about Brother Mutien-Marie under arrest.

The little group arrived at the family home in Mellet at about 3:30 in the afternoon. The newly ordained Father Odilon was waiting for them there with his mother, Madame Lucie Wiaux, and her entire family, all but the two nuns, who were unable to get permission to attend the celebration. The priest and the two Brothers decided to pay a courtesy visit to the pastor of the parish, Father Marlet. He received them very graciously. He had met Brother Mutien on his previous visit in 1910 and had been impressed by him at once. He said he was another Alphonsus Ligouri.

Back at the Wiaux house, Brother Mutien seemed a bit ill at ease with all the female relatives, finding it easier to direct his conversation to the men in the family. But he was perfectly relaxed with the young children. The two-year-old son of Alice and Fernand Wiaux became suddenly fascinated by the big toe protruding from the sandals under the Franciscan habit of Father Odilon. The little tot then decided to poke under the robe of Brother Mutien to find out if he, too, had bare feet. Brother Mutien thereupon picked the child up onto his lap and placed his calotte on his head. The child squealed with delight, and everybody laughed.

When it got to be eight o'clock, Brother Mutien asked Father Odilon to give his blessing, much in the way that the

Wiaux children used to ask for the blessing of their parents before going to bed. The two Brothers then said good night. Brother Mucien-Léon accompanied his uncle to the rectory, where he was to spend the night, then went himself to stay with his married sister, Alice. Father Odilon remained with his mother.

The next morning, Sunday, the whole family assembled at the parish church at 6:30 to receive Communion from the hands of Father Odilon. Then they had breakfast. At 9:30 they reassembled at the rectory, where a procession was formed to escort the newly ordained to his first solemn Mass. First came the cross bearer and the choir boys, followed by the boys of the parish school with the local schoolmaster. Next were the girls carrying flowers under the watchful eyes of the nuns of the parish. They were followed by the members of the Wiaux family. Then came the two Christian Brothers; Father Marlet, the pastor; Father Jamar, the vicar; Father Ulric, a Franciscan; and Father Odilon.

After the Mass the procession was reorganized to accompany the priests back to the rectory. Father Odilon stopped at the door and turned to face the crowd. Little Marie Stassart, a relative, stepped forward and gave a pretty speech offering congratulations in the name of the entire village. Then the girls came up one by one to offer their flowers to Father Odilon, who passed them on to the members of the family. Father Odilon thereupon gave his blessing to the entire assembly.

The family and invited guests then proceeded to the large hall in the Wiaux house for the banquet. It was evident that, despite the rationing in wartime, the family had made many sacrifices to provide a meal worthy of the occasion. As the dinner progressed, Arthur Wiaux stood up and announced that he was going to give a sermon. He began solemnly with the sign of the cross, which Brother Mutien repeated with great devotion. But then Arthur began reciting the letters of the alphabet, repeating them over and over with elaborate gestures and a rising and falling inflection in the manner of the pompous pulpit orators of the day. Brother Mutien was a bit startled at first, but then good naturedly joined in the general hilarity.

Then Octave asked Father Odilon to recite the poem about the famous cheese of Drumont. It seems that two men had bought a nice piece of cheese that they decided to keep overnight. The next morning one of them said that he had dreamt that the cheese was so good that it ascended into heaven. The other said he had the same dream, but he was afraid that he would never see the cheese again, so he got up and ate it. Brother Mutien laughed as the recitation came to the climax, but his face was drawn, and it was clear that he was suffering, even though he didn't eat much and at most had only a glass or two of wine.

But the speeches were yet to come. The pastor started his speech, but choked with emotion before he could finish. Father Ulric, the Franciscan, said it was a great occasion for the family and a day he would never forget. As the speeches continued, it was clear that Brother Mutien was becoming more and more uncomfortable. He asked to be excused until Vespers. Alice followed him up to Lucie's room to look after him. He said not to worry, that he just wanted to rest a bit and pray the rosary. When he reappeared for the 5:00 p.m. Vespers, people noticed that his face had a yellow look.

Odilon presided at Vespers, which were followed by the rosary and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Brother Mutien remained kneeling devoutly through it all. Back at the Wiaux house, he again had to leave the gathering to go out to the garden. This time Arthur followed him to make sure he was all right. Brother Mutien complained that he thought they had skipped some of the *Aves* during the rosary. Arthur said no, that because he was getting deaf, he didn't keep pace with the rest of the family.

The next morning Brother Mutien was feeling much better and was able to accompany Father Odilon and Brother Mucien-Léon on a series of courtesy visits. He was supposed to return to Saint-Berthuin that afternoon, but the missing identity card had not yet come from Malonne. It finally arrived late Tuesday afternoon. On Wednesday, after saying their good-byes, the two Brothers left with M. Stauf's in his carriage for Fleurus. There they reported to the registration officer and produced the identity card. He let them go, but told Brother

Mutien that he would have to report to the German headquarters at Wépion within 30 days. The uncle and nephew then took the train back to Namur, where they parted, Brother Mucien-Léon going on to his community at Saint Trond, and Brother Mutien-Marie, after a brief stopover with the Brothers at Namur, back to Malonne.

When he arrived at the community, Brother Mutien found that the whole house knew about his adventure with the Germans. They looked upon the incident as a great joke. Even the barber thought it was hilarious that Brother Mutien, who had never before left the property during the entire war, should be caught by the Germans the first time he went out. On the following September 25, accompanied by Brother Mansuy-Albert, the bursar, Brother Mutien reported as ordered to the German authorities at Wépion. Brother Albert pleaded a masterful defense of the old man, and succeeded in having the fine reduced to five marks. The whole story became a legend in the life of Brother Mutien.

Brother Mutien would never see the members of his family again. But in the days that followed, he basked in the memory of the happy time he had spent with them. He expressed many times his satisfaction that they had maintained their religious faith, and that there was such a strong bond of unity among them all. He never sensed any conflict between his own religious faith or his vocation and his devotion to the members of his family.

# 8

## The Last Years

### Photographs for Posterity

In 1906 Brother Mutien had been a Brother for 50 years, although the anniversary would not be celebrated until 1912. Meanwhile Brother Marcel, in his last year as Director at Malonne, felt that it was not too soon to try to capture the physical features of Brother Mutien in a photograph that could be preserved for posterity. Knowing that the humble Brother would never consent to pose by himself, the Director rounded up a number of the older men, the “uglies” as he called them, for a group photograph. Just as the picture was about to be taken, they asked Brother Mutien to look up. Forever after, composite photos of Brother Mutien show him with that same upward-looking expression, frozen for all time in the master negative.

The only other photo of Brother Mutien taken in his later years is also the result of a plot, this time between Brother Martial-André and Brother Augustine. As Brother André tells the story, it was sometime around the year 1913, shortly before Brother Augustine left the Institute, that they planned together to catch Brother Mutien at the communion rail during his customary period of adoration before the beginning of the 4:30 morning prayer. The night before, Brother André knelt in that same spot while Brother Augustine adjusted the focus and the light meter of the camera from a hiding place in the confessional. The next morning he shot the picture.

Later that same day, Brother Augustine took pictures of Brother André in the places that Brother Mutien frequented: at his desk in the art room, the harmonium room, the community room, and kneeling at the Lourdes grotto. As with the group picture, it was then relatively easy to superimpose the face of Brother Mutien onto the pictures taken in these various locations. Thus, in reality, there are only two pictures of Brother Mutien from this period in his life. The only other

known picture is one taken when he was in his early twenties. For this reason the two typical pictures do not show the gradual physical deterioration that was taking place during the last years of Brother Mutien's life.

## **World War and the Germans**

Although he never enjoyed good health, Brother Mutien was rarely sick and never felt poorly enough to excuse himself from his regular duties in the community or the school. But then in 1914 the war broke out. Within a few short months the routine of the Institute Saint-Berthuin was turned upside down by the advance of the German armies. Although the school was in a dangerous area, not far from the fortifications of Namur, Brother Mutien remained calm, trusting Providence that no harm would come to them. In terms of the school buildings as such, that proved to be true, but there is no doubt that the strain and the deprivations of the war took their toll on his aging physical frame.

At first the facilities of the school were given over to civilian refugees fleeing from the advance of the invading armies. Among them were groups of Brothers, notably those from Dinant, who arrived at Malonne after a dangerous and difficult flight from the city they left in flames. Then the school was taken over for brief periods by various units of the army of occupation. Finally it was turned into a hospital for the Germans wounded in battle.

On August 17, 1915, Brother Mutien wrote to his niece, Mercédès (Sister Lucia-Joseph):

I have received your letter with pleasure, especially since it makes me realize how well the good God has protected the family during these unhappy times we are experiencing.

As for myself, I am well enough. Our boarding school for the humanities has been turned into a hospital for the wounded Germans. However, the pupils in the elementary normal school have been able to return to class, but not the older boarders. (MF, 42)

A month later he wrote to his nephew, Hector:

All four years of the normal school should be able to resume classes next October, but our boarding school for the humanities has been turned into a field hospital. We are waiting for authorization from the German government to have the use of several classrooms to house the boarders.

I myself am well. We are carefully watched, but we are not under the command of the military. Many of the soldiers are Catholic and impressively devout. Their military chaplain comes to hear their confessions, to celebrate solemn Mass, and to give the soldiers religious instruction followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. (MH, 137; MF, 42)

On December 20, 1915, he wrote that the resident humanities students had still not been able to return. During September and October of 1916, Brother Mutien had a group of student Brothers to whom he taught the harmonium. Then, towards the end of October 1916, about 100 or so of the humanities boarders were allowed to return. Part of the problem was providing enough food. Strict rationing was in effect, the portion allotted by the government for each student determined by the occupation of his parents.

Meanwhile, the presence of the Germans was a matter of constant concern to the Brothers' community. Brother Mutien remained calm himself and helped to calm the fears of the others. Brother Mansuy-Albert testified:

During the great war, Brother Mutien preserved perfect calm based on his confidence in God. He was never heard to speak against the Germans. During our conversation in the dining room, he would say, "Let us have confidence in God. The Sacred Heart will save Belgium." I often heard the Germans say that they would put the school to the torch before they left. I told this to Brother Mutien in order to motivate him to pray for the school. He replied, "God will never allow that to happen!" I am convinced that he was a lightning rod that served as protection for the institution throughout the entire war. (PS, 319)

Brother Majorinus quoted Brother Mutien as saying, "When we have sufficiently expiated our offenses against God, the Germans will leave" (*Ibid.*, 367).

Try as they might, however, the Brothers could not get him to say anything uncharitable against the Germans. He would always find something good about them, especially when he noticed that many of them frequented the chapel and were otherwise faithful to their religious duties.

One of the workmen in the school, Louis Denis, tried to get Brother Mutien to share his hatred of the Germans, for which he felt he had good cause. He himself told the story:

As far as the Germans were concerned, I related to Brother Mutien that I had been taken prisoner along with eleven of my fellow townsmen, and that the Germans were preparing to shoot me. I called them every evil name in the book, but Brother Mutien only kept silence. I then said to him that the action of the soldiers confirmed what I was saying, because they arrested me even though I had given them bread without charge when they arrived in the town. In fact, that is why the officer finally agreed to let us go. "You see," Brother Mutien said, "there is some good in them after all." He said the same thing when he would see the soldiers come from the infirmary to the chapel to pray or to make the Way of the Cross. (*Ibid.*, 437)

## **Declining Health**

During all this time, it was becoming more and more noticeable that Brother Mutien's health was declining steadily. Brother Martial-André identified the first specific ailment as rheumatism of the legs. But Brother Mutien did not complain and would not use this as an excuse to neglect any of his regular duties, not even the Wednesday afternoon promenade. The only concession he made was to stay within the limits of the property and to stop to rest now and then on a bench in the garden. When his nephew came on a visit and joined him in the walk, he noticed that Brother Mutien was on the verge of

falling several times. "It is nothing," he said. "It's just that I have rheumatism in my legs, but that is coming along better now."

Brother Mélage-Antoine, who would later become the official biographer, described his condition:

During his last years I saw him in the harmonium room, still faithful to the schedule that Brother Maixentis had set for him in 1861, keeping up the finger exercises in spite of the pain from his arthritis and severe headaches. It was a rather pitiful spectacle.

Other Brothers have mentioned to me the difficulty he experienced as he was assigned to preside over the rehearsal period, where beginners on the violin, all in the same room, would each be engaged in practicing the elementary exercises.

These difficulties caused him much nervous and mental fatigue. It sometimes happened that, in order to clear his head, he would ask for a pinch of snuff from those who used it regularly.

During the last months of his life, when he was an old man in every sense of the term, it was particularly painful for him to make his way across a wide courtyard and then down a long corridor in order to report to his classes. He literally had to drag himself, but in spite of the pain he continued to fulfill his assigned duties right to the very end. (PS, 100)

Other Brothers confirmed how obvious it was that his music classes only aggravated his persistent headaches. He finally had to admit to one student for whom he was providing piano accompaniment that the vibrations of the violoncello caused him intense pain. Yet Brother Maixentis continued to send him students beginning on all sorts of instruments, including the bass tuba, even though by that time Brother Mutien had lost most of his teeth.

The Director of the community during this period was Brother Mélancy-Pierre, who, it seems, was not concerned enough to take the initiative in relieving Brother Mutien of at least some of the duties that had become too much for him.

Brother Martial-André testified that Brother Mutien “kept his Director informed about the condition of his health, but left it up to him to determine what ought to be done. This explains why his last days were such a martyrdom” (PS, 554). Apparently many Brothers tried to alert the Director to the difficulties Brother Mutien was having, but Brother Pierre was occupied with too many other concerns, perhaps including the war and the German occupation, to do anything specific to relieve the ailing old man.

In November 1916 Brother Mutien had a severe asthma attack and had to be sent to the infirmary, the first time in memory that he was forced to take to his bed. According to Brother Martial-André:

On November 22, 1916, Doctor Kaisin determined that the condition of his heart was such that the patient could die any minute. When Father Petit, the chaplain, was notified, he suggested to Brother Mutien that he receive the sacrament of extreme unction, to which he agreed. Brother Mutien was aware of his condition. When Adolphe Lebon visited him in the infirmary and asked what was wrong, he received this reply: “It’s my heart that is bad.” (*Ibid.*, 624)

In spite of the seriousness of his condition, once the crisis was over Brother Mutien returned as much as possible to his usual routine, although finding it increasingly difficult to do so. He started to experience an excessive flow of saliva and loss of control of his lower lip so that he had to hold a handkerchief to his mouth almost continually. Then the diarrhea that he often suffered became much worse. When the Brothers complained to the Director about the odor, he suggested to Brother Mutien that from then on he spend his free periods in the infirmary instead of in the community room.

Brother Pierre, the Director, himself admitted in his testimony that he stopped short of telling the Brother to alter his routine. In his own words:

Nevertheless, Brother Mutien continued to come to the community exercises, and he even continued to give some lessons on the harmonium. He wanted in this way to

practice perfect obedience even to the end, because I had not said to him explicitly that he ought to dispense himself from these obligations. (*Ibid.*, 754)

On January 13, 1917, Brother Mutien wrote to Brother Madulf-Jacques at Louvain, his former companion in the harmonium room. Addressed just 17 days before his death, it is probably the last letter he ever wrote.

Thank you for your prayers and your good wishes. To tell the truth, I have not been well. For a long time I have been suffering from asthma, but towards the middle of November my condition grew worse, and walking became painful for me. Doctor Kaisin found that my condition was very serious and that I ought to give up all work. At the moment I am well enough. I am walking and can mount the stairs. For the last two weeks I have been able to follow the routine of the community. Continue to pray for my intention, and I shall beg Our Lord and his holy Mother to bless my very best wishes that I offer you for the coming new year. (MF, 65)

## **Friday, January 26**

On Friday, January 26, Brother Mutien came to the morning chapel exercises as usual, although he was noticeably weak. Afterwards he was barely able to drag himself to the refectory for the meager breakfast served on Fridays, which the Rule prescribed as a fast day. The small portion of bread and coffee was customarily taken standing. Brother Mutien tried his best, but it was too much for him. He couldn't lift the cup to his lips, and he began to totter precariously. The Brothers nearest him alerted the Director, who told him to sit down, and that from then on he should take his meals in the infirmary.

Two of the Brothers practically had to carry him upstairs. He remained in the infirmary for most of the day, saying the rosary with one of the Brothers, until it was time for the weekly sacrament of penance, as it was then called, followed by the Way of the Cross.

## **Saturday, January 27**

Saturday, January 27, was a bitterly cold day, as the several days before it had been. Nonetheless, Brother Mutien was determined to follow the chapel exercises with the community and to give his regular lessons on the harmonium. He had no clear directive to the contrary. Despite the fact that the courtyards and external stairways were covered with snow, he managed somehow to make his way to the harmonium room.

It was at that moment that Brother Menas-Joseph was about to begin his English lesson. He looked out the window and saw Brother Mutien all bundled up and bent over, barely able to stay steady on his feet, making his way nonetheless to the harmonium room. He turned to Brother Frumence-Charles, who was nearby, and said, "What is he trying to do there, a man who already has one foot in the grave?" Brother Frumence remembered the incident, because Brother Menas, who was strong and well built, died two weeks later (PS, 768).

On that Saturday, between 4:00 and 4:30 p.m., Brother Mutien appeared in the harmonium room for the last time. Maurice Ducarme, who was then a student, remembered the scene vividly.

On the last two days that Brother Mutien came to the harmonium room, he seemed to us to be visibly weaker. He greeted us as usual, but then he had to sit down at once at his desk. We saw him there, struggling to fight off sleep that seemed invincible. He would rouse himself, and then raise his eyes to the small crucifix that he had placed just above his desk. A few minutes later, as if in spite of himself and as if he could resist no longer, his head would fall to his chest. Then he would look up again for a few seconds with his eyes on the crucifix. This scene lasted, on both of those days, during the entire time of our practice session, about half an hour. It was even more painful to see him the second of the two days, for his powers had so visibly declined.

I was profoundly impressed by this spectacle, and it has remained deeply engraved in my memory ever since. This Brother, his body so hunched over that he could no longer respond, concentrated totally on the crucified

Christ. He seemed to reflect the intensity of his faith, love, supplication, confidence, and determination to the end to have his soul retain mastery over his weakened body. Never have I seen a person whose whole appearance was so expressive as that of Brother Mutien during those moments, which seemed all too short. (PS, 769)

On the evening of that same Saturday, Brother Mutien joined the community to hear the weekly conference of the Brother Director. This was followed immediately by night prayer. Accustomed over the long years to recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin at the end of night prayer with his arms extended in the form of a cross, the old man wanted once more to perform this act of penance. But he could not. His arms kept drooping to his side.

## Sunday, January 28

On Sunday, January 28, the weather continued to be bitter cold, the temperature falling to 18 degrees below zero Centigrade. Once he arrived at his place in the chapel, Brother Mutien had to turn to the Brother next to him and ask him to hook up his collar: his fingers simply couldn't manage it. Afraid of imposing any further suffering on the old man, the Brother simply drew the ends of the collar together and then fastened the hooks on his robe up to the neck. When Brother Mutien tried to make the prescribed reading in the *Imitation of Christ*, his fingers were so weak that the little book fell from his hands.

Contrary to the habit of a lifetime, Brother Mutien remained seated throughout the entire morning prayer, meditation period, and most of the Mass. When it came time for Communion, he pulled himself together to go to the communion rail. The Brother next to him, absorbed in his own prayer, was suddenly startled to realize that Brother Mutien was no longer at his place. Then he saw the old man return, visibly exhausted, but radiant with joy. He helped him to his seat, while from the enfeebled lips the ailing Brother kept repeating without cease, "*O mon Jésus, mon bon Jésus!*"

After the Brothers left the chapel, the Brother Director came up to Brother Mutien and suggested that he remain in the infirmary until he had completely recovered his strength. The Brothers offered to make a fire in his room, but he declined, saying that he considered it an unnecessary luxury. To one of the Brothers who tried to reason with him, he replied, "After all, my dear Brother, it is the will of God." Meanwhile, the rosary never left his worn fingers.

When evening arrived, Brother Fauste-Joseph, the infirmarian, and his lay assistant, a man named Jules, brought Brother Mutien from the kitchen of the infirmary to his room to put him to bed. Once arrived there, he sat on the edge of his bed. It was at this point, it seems, that he confided to the two of them, "What a great consolation it is at the moment of death to have had a great devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin." These words were much discussed and reinterpreted afterwards, lest they seem to have been overly presumptuous. The chaplain, Father Petit, for example, said it was unthinkable that the humble Brother would have bragged about "having had" a great devotion to Mary. There is no doubt that Brother Mutien had such a devotion, but the priest, who knew him well and who had heard his confession for six years, found it difficult to believe that he would have given himself credit for it.

One thing is certain beyond any doubt. When he was at the point of death, Brother Mutien displayed no sense of anxiety. What freed him from any apprehension about what lay ahead was the assurance that he had never ceased to have confidence in the intercession of the Lady whom he invoked continually in his prayer.

In any case, that evening Brother Mutien, admitting that he felt extremely weak, had to ask the help of the infirmarian to get into bed. Once settled in bed, he expressed his thanks over and over again for the help that was given him.

## **Monday, January 29**

When the rising bell sounded on Monday, January 29, Brother Mutien found that he was too weak to answer its call. Com-

munion had to be brought to him in his sick room. Afterwards he was obliged to stay in bed during the rest of the day. Many Brothers, including the aging Brother Maixentis, came to visit him. The sick man was so weak that the infirmarian thought it best to forbid him to pray aloud. Instead he offered to recite the community prayers so that Brother Mutien could follow them mentally.

When Brother Michel came to visit that Monday afternoon, Brother Mutien was just waking up. Still a bit disoriented, he asked Brother Michel to recite the community night prayer, saying, "The infirmarian has forbidden me to pray aloud, so I will unite myself mentally as you say the prayers." When Brother Michel noted that it was only two o'clock in the afternoon and much too early for night prayer, Brother Mutien fell back to sleep. But he soon woke up again and renewed the request. So as not to disappoint him, Brother Michel began to recite the prayers that the community would recite before supper: the *De profundis* and the *Angelus*. At that point the chaplain arrived, and Brother Michel took his leave.

Then Brother Pierre, the Director, came. He found Brother Mutien very calm. He testified later that the dying man gave not the slightest indication that his conscience was in any way troubled or that he had any fear of his approaching death.

Later on Monday evening, the infirmarian rescinded the prohibition against praying aloud. He remembered afterwards having heard Brother Mutien formulate a long and fervent prayer of thanksgiving for all the benefits he had received from the divine liberality: the grace of his baptism, his childhood in a Catholic family, his vocation and his life with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the graces that came from his days spent in prayer, works of charity and the apostolate, the grace to be able to call himself a child of Mary and to be sure of her maternal protection. At the end, Brother Mutien prayed for Belgium, that had suffered so much during the war. He kept repeating with some insistence and with all his forces, "Sacred Heart of Jesus, protect Belgium! Sacred Heart of Jesus, save Belgium!"

As night fell, Jules, the assistant to the infirmarian, came to look in on the patient. Brother Mutien asked whether he intended to come to see him before retiring. Not quite

comprehending what might have been behind the question, Jules replied, "Brother Mutien, we won't leave you alone again until you are feeling better." Since there did not seem to be any immediate cause for alarm, a cot was laid out in the sick room, and Brother Mellon-Sancien was left to keep watch. Brother Fauste-Joseph, the infirmarian, and his assistant, Jules, went off to bed. For a while Brother Mutien and Brother Mellon recited some prayers together, but soon, it seems, they both dozed off.

## **Tuesday, January 30**

There are conflicting stories about what happened next. In one version, when the infirmarian came to take over the watch at 3:00 a.m., finding Brother Mellon asleep and Brother Mutien already dead, he reprimanded Brother Mellon for letting the Brother die while he himself slept. In another version, Brother Mellon shook the arm of Brother Mutien to show that he was still alive, whereupon Brother Mutien awoke. His lips seemed still to be moving, as if he were trying to repeat the invocations and prayers suggested by the infirmarian. But there was no audible sound. In either case, imperceptibly, without a sigh and without a word Brother Mutien took leave of this world. It was the early morning of January 30, 1917, less than two months short of his 76th birthday.

The first Brother to come to the infirmary after the 4:30 a.m. rising bell was Brother Mondolf. There he found the infirmarian and his assistant already cleaning the body to prepare it for burial. The Brothers had meanwhile assembled in the chapel for their morning prayer. Informed by the infirmarian that Brother Mutien had died, the Brother Director recommended their confrere to the prayers of the community. There was some criticism afterwards that neither the Director nor the infirmarian had taken sufficient precautions during the night, that Brother Mutien had been left to die practically alone, and that the Brothers had not been summoned earlier, as was customary, to recite the prayers for the dying. Even some of the students, professors, and externs who had known Brother Mutien were astonished to learn that "he died alone

and without ceremony, as if he were just any ordinary Brother.”

The conflicting versions of the time and the manner of the death did not help matters. Brother Fauste-Joseph defended himself by remarking, “Brother Mutien died just like any of the other Brothers.” But Brother Martial-André, both in his written account and in his oral testimony, insisted that he was never able to get anything but evasive answers from either Jules or Brother Fauste-Joseph about the exact circumstances of the death of Brother Mutien.

The official response to these criticisms cited the war: the fact that the house was occupied by the armed forces considerably reduced the religious and lay staff at Saint-Berthuin. It was also pointed out that many Brothers in the community were old, and that four of them, including Brother Mellon, would die within a week or two. Finally, Brother Mutien himself had shown such will power during his last weeks that no one around him thought the end was so near.

## **The Funeral**

The German officers in charge of the occupation had forbidden all access to the house by outsiders, and so on January 30 and 31 few were able to come to the wake. Although the corpse was greatly emaciated, the lines in Brother Mutien’s face were in repose, and they revealed the peaceful character of his last moments. He was laid out in the infirmary, clothed in his religious habit, his hands joined on his chest as they had always been, with a rosary entwined around his fingers.

On the evening of January 31, the body was placed in a double coffin of zinc and oak. This measure, contrary to the custom of the house, had been decided upon at the urging of Brother Marcel, the former Director and Visitor, who more than anyone at the time was convinced that a case could be made eventually for canonization. The coffin was sealed and displayed in the large parlor on the ground floor, between the main staircase and the office of the Brother Director.

The funeral Mass was celebrated in the school chapel during the morning of February 1. In addition to the Brothers of

the community, those attending included some of the professors, the students of the normal school, and several members of the Wiaux family, among them the sister-in-law of Brother Mutien and three of his nephews. After the Mass, Father Petit, the chaplain, preached the eulogy of the deceased, but without the customary eloquence for which he was noted. When Brother Médard-Camille, the Visitor, complained that Brother Mutien was deserving of a better effort, the priest explained that he was fearful that the enthusiasm of those present might give rise—on their part then and there, and on the part of others later—to indiscreet manifestations that some future ecclesiastical tribunal might interpret as premature acts of public cult.

This caution was evident even in the eulogy itself:

God keep us from prejudging his eternal designs, or from being so rash as to assume a role that does not belong to us, by pretending to dictate how Infinite Wisdom should proceed in this matter. Neither shall we anticipate in an untimely fashion the decisions of the holy Church, to whom it alone belongs to pronounce on the virtues of one of her children. To that Church we humbly submit our words and actions, realizing that all that we say or do with regard to our Brother has nothing more than a merely human authority. (PS, 777)

The preacher concluded his eulogy by an address to Brother Mutien:

For you, O humble son of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the time of testing has passed: a time of difficult labor, suffering, and tears. . . . Now you can chant for endless ages the infinite effectiveness of the blood of the Redeemer. Proclaim that a "Servant of Mary cannot possibly perish," and that the word of God is always vindicated for those who seek to know it. (MH, 150)

After the services, the funeral cortege wended its way to the village cemetery, situated high on a hill behind the school. At this point the cortege was joined by a number of people from the village who had waited in vain for the authorization to enter the precincts of the German hospital in order to at-

tend the services in the chapel. Following behind the heavy casket, the relatives, friends, and confreres of Brother Mutien climbed up the steep hill to the rhythmic repetitions of the *Ave Maria*. The choir of the normal school, many of whom had been students of "Brother Harmonium," sang the liturgical chants.

The coffin was buried in the Brothers' community plot located at the highest part of the cemetery, dominated by an impressive calvary group in bronze. Brother Mutien was buried in position number 16, next in order after many of his confreres, whose labors, joys, and sorrows he had shared.

Other Brothers were soon to join him, among them Brother Maixentis, 13 years older than Brother Mutien. All during the wake, Brother Maixentis, inconsolable at the death of his saintly friend, wandered aimlessly through the house, only to return again and again to the side of the lifeless corpse. At one point, thinking he was alone, he was heard to cry, "Brother Mutien, come to bring me with you." His prayer was apparently answered. He died on February 2, 1917, the day after the funeral of the Brother who, since 1860, had been his devoted assistant and, when the occasion warranted, his courageous replacement.

## 9

# The Humble Exalted

In view of the reputation that Brother Mutien-Marie had for holiness during his life and the subsequent developments after his death, it seems surprising at first glance that his death and burial went almost unnoticed. Brother Michel, who had lived with him for 50 years and who prayed with him the day before he died, stated matter-of-factly, "The funeral service was held at Malonne in the Brothers' chapel. There was nothing special about it. I do believe that he wanted to die hidden and unknown. There were no letters sent out inviting people to attend" (PS, 748).

There may have been good reason. It was wartime, and Belgium was in the grip of a particularly severe cold spell. The Germans, who occupied a good part of the buildings at Malonne, severely limited the number of those who were allowed to attend the wake and the funeral. Brother Mutien was only one of several Brothers at Malonne who died and were buried during that time. Even so, it must be said that the Brothers in charge seem to have had little interest in the possibility that Brother Mutien might some day be honored as a saint. Apparently that question was not a priority at the time.

## The Initiative of Brother Marcel

The one exception was Brother Marcel, who had been Director at Malonne from 1895 until 1907, and then Visitor of the South Belgian Province until 1914. As Yperman remarks in his dissertation, it was Brother Marcel who early appreciated the special qualities of Brother Mutien and arranged to have authentic photographs taken. And it was he who insisted on the double casket in view of an eventual exhumation. Later, he would be one of the first to gather accounts of favors received through the intercession of the Brother he admired and loved.

Although it is true that many Brothers were perfectly convinced that Brother Mutien was a saint, there was no one else to serve as a leader to organize pilgrimages and other forms of devotion among the faithful (YD, 156).

At the time Brother Mutien died, Brother Marcel was in Bokrijk, at the other end of Belgium. He did not learn of the death of Brother Mutien, or any of the other Brothers who died at Malonne, until several days after their decease. When, towards



**Brother Marcel**

the end of the war, the Germans expelled the majority of the Brothers from Malonne, Brother Marcel was appointed by the Visitor to go to reorganize what was left of the community.

One of his first tasks was to gather together the effects of Brother Mutien. In this he had the help of Brother Mondolf, the Brother in charge of the laundry. As Brother Marcel described it:

As soon as possible, I set to work collecting all the things that Brother Mutien had had for his use. Luckily, the Brother in the laundry had been able to remain at Malonne, and he knew exactly what items had belonged to Brother Mutien. I had a chest built into which we put all these objects, making sure that they had indeed been used by Brother Mutien. These items are presently preserved at Malonne. Since I had known Brother Mutien for a long time, I was convinced that eventually these things would be considered relics. (PS, 749)

## **The Origins of Popular Devotion**

In his testimony Brother Michel dated the beginning of popular devotion to the first recorded cure:

When one of the pupils fell into a coma and showed no signs of life, a Brother applied a relic of Brother Mutien, and the sick boy regained consciousness. It was from that moment, I believe, that people began to invoke the intercession of Brother Mutien. We did nothing to provoke large gatherings of people at his grave. It was these astonishing events that made them popular. (PS, 748)

Very early, then, devotion to Brother Mutien-Marie became popular, first, among the townspeople of Malonne, many of whom had known him and his reputation for sanctity, and afterwards, among a wider public throughout Belgium. It became customary that those who visited the cemetery to bury or to remember their own relatives stopped afterwards to pray at the grave of Brother Mutien. Urged on by this popular movement, the Brothers began to use the network of their schools throughout Belgium to disseminate holy pictures or accounts of favors received, and even to organize pilgrimages.

## **The Canonical Process Begins**

The Bishop of Namur, in whose diocese Malonne was located, was the Most Reverend Thomas-Louis Heylen. He had been bishop since 1899 and would remain in that post until 1941. More than likely, he was aware of the reputation of Brother Mutien during his lifetime, and he almost surely met him on his frequent unofficial visits to Saint-Berthuin, especially during the years when Brother Marcel was the Director.

Although the bishop kept an official distance from the developments at Malonne, he seems to have been privately convinced that there was a case to be made for the eventual canonization of Brother Mutien-Marie. Like Brother Mutien, he had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin and no doubt would have considered it an honor to promote the cause of one of his diocesans who was known as an "apostle of the *Ave Maria*."

When the time was ripe, Bishop Heylen moved quickly. On December 19, 1923, he formally opened at Namur what church law calls the "Ordinary process," that is, an investigation un-

der the local bishop (the "ordinary" authority in a diocese) into the life and virtues (or vices, if any) of the "servant of God," as the candidate would be called from then on. The process lasted until October 5, 1926, during which time 46 witnesses were called to testify.

As the process was under way, the time seemed opportune to carry out the original plan to have the body of Brother Mutien buried within the walls of Saint-Berthuin. A suitable location was found near the base of the bell tower, where a small chapel was constructed, opening on the main street and easily accessible to the increasing number of pilgrims who were coming to venerate the Brother they considered to be a saint.

The solemn exhumation and transfer took place on May 11, 1926. The procession from the cemetery to the new chapel included Bishop Heylen and six of the cathedral canons. They were preceded by 35 members of the Wiaux family, the superiors of the Brothers in Belgium, and the professors and the 850 students of Saint-Berthuin with their choir and band, and followed by a large gathering of pilgrims, who, despite efforts to keep the occasion relatively low-key, had learned of it in time. The original oak casket was then reburied under the pavement of the little chapel.

## **The Roman Process**

It is proverbial that Rome moves slowly; there are some who think that is why it is called the eternal city. In any case, it was not until July 8, 1936, that all the documents were gathered and analyzed so that Pope Pius XI could sign the decree officially introducing the cause to the court of the Congregation of Rites in Rome.

This decree was the signal to open the "Apostolic process," so called because, even though it took place at Namur, it was directed from Rome and conducted by Roman officials. In effect, it gave the Roman authorities the opportunity to cross-examine as many of the witnesses as were still alive, and to pursue lines of inquiry that the earlier testimony had left ambiguous. The process lasted from July 6, 1937, until March 22, 1939, during which time 35 witnesses were heard.

Meanwhile, as part of the canonical process, it was necessary to exhume the body of Brother Mutien again and formally identify the remains. This measure had been introduced into church law centuries earlier to guarantee the authenticity of any relics that might afterwards be circulated. On July 27, 1938, the casket containing the body of Brother Mutien was brought to the parlor at Saint-Berthuin, where the canonical recognition took place in the presence of Bishop Heylen, two medical doctors, and the members of the tribunal.



**The identification of the relics in 1938**

Brother Mélage-Antoine, who had authored the official biography commissioned by the superiors of the Institute, was admitted briefly to view the remains. He later wrote a description:

The body appeared mummified, the yellowed skin clinging to the bones. . . . The nose and the forehead were easily recognizable. The robe, calotte, and rabat were intact as on the day of burial. The emaciated and elongated hands had the familiar aspect of Brother Mutien, “who was always praying.” The profession cross, eaten by rust, had slipped toward the cross of the rosary.

Once the formal ceremony of recognition was over, the body was placed in a new metal casket, and the official seals were set in place. The casket was then displayed for a time in the main courtyard, to give the public an opportunity to pay homage to the holy Brother. After a solemn ceremony of absolution in the school chapel, the remains were placed in a new marble tomb, above ground this time, in the small chapel originally designed in 1926.

After the conclusion of the Apostolic process in 1939, all the documents and records were sent to Rome for further study. It was not until February 20, 1943, that the two processes were officially declared to be canonically valid.

## **Heroicity of Virtue**

The next step toward beatification required a specific examination into the question of whether or not the "servant of God" had practiced virtue to a heroic degree. According to the church law at the time, this discussion before the court of the Congregation could not begin until 50 years after the death of the candidate, which in the case of Brother Mutien would have required a delay until 1967. Under pressure from the Belgian Ambassador to the Holy See, however, Pope Pius XII granted a dispensation from this requirement so that the investigation could begin at once.

For this purpose a *Summarium* of all the relevant testimony from the Ordinary and the Apostolic processes was prepared for the commission of theologians and cardinals. Extensive verbatim excerpts from the testimony were gathered and presented under specific headings: heroic virtue in general, charity towards God and neighbor, prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, poverty, chastity, obedience, and humility, in that order. To this was added detailed testimony about the circumstances of the Brother's death. Some of this testimony has served as source material for the present biography.

The *Summarium* was also given to the Promoter of the Faith, the "Devil's Advocate" in popular parlance, whose task it was to comb the testimony for discrepancies and to challenge the contention that the virtue of the Brother was heroic. His

report in the form of *Animadversiones* was submitted on July 16, 1951. A year later, on July 20, 1952, the canon lawyers who served as advocates for the cause submitted their *Responsio*, answering the objections one by one. Then all three reports, the *Summarium*, the *Animadversiones*, and the *Responsio*, were printed and bound to form a complete dossier for the use of the commission in a volume entitled *Positio super virtutibus*.

The *Animadversiones* make interesting reading. There were 28 specific objections developed in 74 printed pages in the *Positio*. Some of them concerned the lack of written documentation for specific facts, such as the reception of the sacrament of confirmation, minutes of the vow chapters, records of assignments, and so on. The many contradictions in the testimony on the sequence of certain events and their significance were pointed out. The witnesses seemed more concerned to glorify the Brother rather than to get at the truth and the facts. Although there were hints that not all the Brothers were favorably disposed to Brother Mutien, none of those were summoned to testify. "Did they all die prematurely?" asked the Promoter of the Faith. He also had some harsh words to say about the poor judgment of the superiors in assigning Brother Mutien to tasks for which he was not suited.

The principal objections concerning Brother Mutien himself were that, although he was obviously virtuous, this did not make him heroic. He did not seem to have endured many trials, nor did he engage in extraordinary fasting and penances, such as were customarily practiced by the great saints. Much was made of his little foibles: the occasional glass of wine or beer, the extra piece of dessert on one occasion, the use of snuff to relieve his headaches, his excessive concern with the members of his own family. The report also suggested that his literal observance of the Rule was merely mechanical, and that he did not show much prudence or common sense in making adjustments to external conditions or his failing health.

The *Responsio* was equally forceful. The principal contention was that the heroicity of Brother Mutien consisted in the unswerving fidelity to a daily grind that was demanding and painful. Much use was made of the principle, established in

the canonization of Thérèse of Lisieux and the beatification of Brother Benilde, that the endurance of the *terribile quotidianum* in fidelity to a religious Rule was itself heroic virtue. Furthermore, the advocates pointed out that whatever supposed deviations might have occurred, Brother Mutien did all that he did under obedience and never voluntarily did anything without explicit permission of the superiors. A case was made that the totality of his humble, difficult, and prayerful life was a greater testimony to his sanctity than any isolated analysis of specific virtues or events.

According to the law at the time, the question of heroicity in the practice of virtue had to be discussed in three successive sessions of the Congregation of Rites. The first was held in July 1956. For some reason, perhaps the strongly negative report of the Promoter of the Faith, or perhaps the death of Pius XII and the events surrounding Vatican Council II, there was a delay of 13 years before the second session was called in February 1969. By that time, the Congregation had been transformed by Pope Paul VI into the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, and the requirement of a third session was dropped. In view of the favorable judgment of the Congregation, Pope Paul VI promulgated on May 4, 1970, the decree affirming the heroic virtue of Brother Mutien-Marie.

All that remained to be documented before the beatification could proceed was evidence of two cures judged to be miraculous that were effected through the intercession of the holy Brother.

## **The Cure of Dominic Scaccia**

The first of the miracles to be submitted for the judgment of the Congregation was the cure of Dominic Scaccia, an Italian immigrant worker living in the village of Lamberstart, near Lille in France. Robust and in good health at the age of 44 in August 1932, he suffered a mosquito bite on his leg that he scratched until it broke open. As the wound became infected, he developed a high fever and had to be taken to the hospital. The doctor made several incisions in the leg and administered



**Mr. Dominic Scaccia**

a series of injections, but the fever persisted. When the infection began to spread and gangrene set in, the doctor decided to amputate the leg. That procedure had to be abandoned when it was seen that the infection had spread to the lower bowel. The case was considered hopeless, and the relatives were summoned and told that death was imminent.

One of the Sisters in the hospital produced a picture with a relic of Brother Mutien that she had obtained from another patient, who claimed to have been cured through his intercession. She told Dominic to have confidence, that Brother Mutien could obtain a cure from God if he would have faith. She then placed the picture with the relic inside the bandages on the leg. As Dominic said later, "All the relatives around me were saying that the end had come; once they start using remedies like that, it means the end."

That night the fever fell for the first time, but in the succeeding days it continued to rise and fall. Then the man who had provided the picture-relic stopped by to say that he and his brother were on their way to Malonne to make a pilgrimage of thanksgiving to Brother Mutien. On the day of their arrival at Malonne, August 31, 1932, all signs of the fever left Dominic for good. The doctors were amazed at the disappearance of all the symptoms as they saw their patient recovering and "full of life." After a short convalescence, Dominic was able to go back to work. Not long afterwards, a friend of his found him working at the top of a scaffold on the cathedral of Notre Dame in Lille. Dominic died 30 years later, with never any recurrence of the gangrene or the infection.

## **The Cure of Georges Thibault**

Although many similar cures were attributed to Brother Mutien, the one chosen to be submitted to Rome concerned Georges Thibault, a man of 62 years who had known Brother Mutien before moving from Malonne in 1914 to his residence in Salzinnes, near Namur. For some time he had been suffering from skin ulcers that were slow to heal. By April 1952 the varicose ulcer on his right foot began to cause intense pain, so much so that he could not put on his shoe or even lie comfortably in bed.

On January 19, 1953, he decided to put aside the ineffective medication he had been given and to use instead a picture-relic of Brother Mutien-Marie. In addition he promised to make a novena of pilgrimages to Malonne on each of the succeeding nine days. In his own words:

The next day at 9:00 a.m. I went from my house on Wiertz Place to get the 9:15 bus for Malonne. I took a cane along. I also cut the back part of my boot in order to get my foot into the sole. I walked on tiptoe, not being able, because of the pain, to let my heel touch the ground. When I arrived at Malonne, I sat down on the left side of the tomb of Brother Mutien, I stretched out my ailing foot, and I invoked Brother Mutien, saying, "I'm from Malonne (I lived there for many years), you know me well, you cure others, well now, I want to be cured, too."

I put my heel on the ground and let out a cry of joy when I realized that the pain in the heel had disappeared. After praying for an hour and a half, I took the road back to my home in Salzinnes, a distance of about three miles, on foot and without the use of the cane, placing my heel normally on the ground. (MH, 161)

The cure wasn't total that first day. The ulcer continued to cause some pain, but this also disappeared during the night between the third and fourth day of the novena. The doctor later testified that he had treated the man over several months for a worsening, infected wound with no result. He said there was no way he could explain so radical a cure in three days.

## **Beatification**

On November 13, 1976, the papal decree was promulgated declaring the cures of Dominic Scaccia and Georges Thibault to be indeed miraculous. All that remained for the beatification was to set the date. Meanwhile, the cause of Brother Miguel Febres Cordero of Ecuador was moving rapidly through the same canonical process toward a successful conclusion. It was decided to celebrate together the beatification of the two Brothers on Sunday, October 30, 1977.

The ceremony, which coincided with the closing of the papal synod on catechetics, was held in Saint Peter's Square in Rome, with Pope Paul VI presiding. Despite the early morning rain, there was a huge crowd in attendance, estimated by the Vatican radio at 50,000. Brothers, their students, and members of the Lasallian family were present from all over the globe, with especially large numbers from Belgium and Ecuador. Seated prominently behind the prelates and diplomats were Brother José Pablo, Superior General of the Brothers, his council, and his two immediate predecessors, Brother Charles Henry and Brother Nicet Joseph.

After the Liturgy of the Word, the bishops of Namur and Quito came to the microphone in turn to request formally that the Holy Father proclaim the two Brothers "Blessed" and worthy of veneration by the Church at large. The Most Reverend Robert Mathen, the Bishop of Namur, summarized his petition in these words:

The servant of God, Brother Mutien-Marie Wiaux, was born on March 20, 1841, in the village of Mellet in the diocese of Tournai in Belgium. He was scarcely 15 years old when he entered the novitiate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He spent almost his entire life in a single community, that at Malonne in the diocese of Namur. He ended his days on January 30, 1917. During almost 60 years he taught class, especially in instrumental music and imitative drawing. In addition, whenever he could, he taught catechism to the youngest and the poorest children. In the eyes of all who were able to know him in his lifetime, he was always a model of piety, of tenderness,

and of self-effacement. To the extent that his life and his death went unnoticed, to that extent has the power of his intercession been proclaimed ever since by the multitudes of people who have never ceased to have recourse to him. (MH, 164)

Then Pope Paul VI personally read the decree of beatification. He gave the homily, prepared for the most part by the Brothers themselves, and presided over the Eucharist with 20 chosen prelates concelebrating. Present were 24 cardinals, 60 bishops and archbishops, and 200 vested priests to distribute Holy Communion. In addition to the Sistine Choir, there was a special choir composed of 100 Brothers and 100 religious Sisters of various congregations. Dominating the scene was an enormous tapestry depicting the two *beati* that was hung over the central balcony in the facade of Saint Peter's Basilica. All in all, it was one of the greatest public affirmations ever of the Brothers and of the significance of their vocation for the Church and the world.

It often happens that the solemn ceremonies of beatification are followed by a long period of waiting for another cure that would meet the stringent standards of the Vatican tribunal for a miracle. Brother Miguel did not have long to wait. On the occasion of the beatification, an Ecuadorian woman was cured of a *myasthenia gravis* in the airplane en route to Rome for the ceremony. The cure was accepted as miraculous by the Roman tribunal, and Brother Miguel was canonized in Saint Peter's Basilica on October 21, 1984.

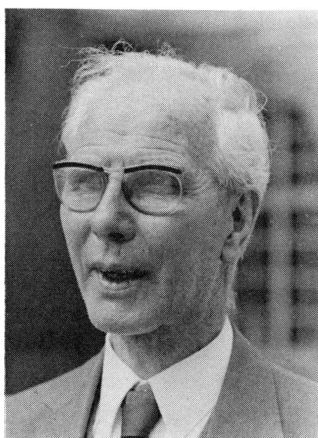
## **The Cure of Brother Madir**

The cure that would be eventually accepted for the canonization of Brother Mutien also took place in connection with his beatification, a few months earlier in fact. The reluctance of some of the doctors to testify, however, and the less than radical nature of the cure delayed a formal and favorable judgment for several years.

The cure concerned a Brother Madir, otherwise known as Brother Franz Verstaelen, of the Brothers' community at

Malonne. He had been suffering since 1969 from a serious case of *osteoporosis*. This made it increasingly difficult for him to walk, to climb stairs, or to get in and out of cars, trains, and buses. By the time he celebrated his 60th anniversary as a Brother in November 1976, he was 77 years old and could only shuffle along a few short steps at a time with a cane and arm crutches to support himself.

On February 22, 1977, in preparation for the beatification of Brother Mutien, there was another exhumation and "recognition" of the relics in the parlor at Malonne. The principal purpose this time was to obtain some first-class relics to present to the Pope and other dignitaries. Brother Madir, having had experience as an infirmarian, asked if he could assist the



**Brother Madir**

medical doctors in the procedure. He had a great devotion to Brother Mutien, and so he asked the Brothers and other friends to pray that "Brother Mutien might do something for me."

Pictures taken on that occasion show Brother Madir entering the room, supported by his cane and his crutch. But as the doctors began to work on the exposed corpse, now in an advanced state of decay, Brother Madir put aside his cane and crutch, almost without noticing it, and assisted in the procedures without support and with both hands free. He never had to use artificial support again. Much to everyone's surprise, he walked normally out of the room, again as the pictures show (SD, Appendix).

Although the X-rays indicated no radical alteration in the fundamental condition of Brother Madir, he was able thereafter to travel by bus and car without evident effort. The following October, he attended the beatification of Brother Mutien in Saint Peter's Square. Pictures taken on that occasion show him walking and supporting himself without visible help (*Ibid.*). Eventually, the doctors conceded that the sudden and

permanent reversal of the debilitating effect of the disease was beyond all natural explanation. Brother Madir died nine years later, in 1986 at the age of 89, of a heart attack, but without any recurrence of the effects of the *osteoporosis*.

## **Canonization**

The cure of Brother Madir, after review by the commission of cardinals and theologians, was finally accepted as miraculous early in 1989. This decision was subsequently ratified by Pope John Paul II, who decreed that the canonization would take place at Rome in St. Peter's Basilica on December 10, 1989. From then on the lowly Brother would be known as Saint Mutien-Marie. His feast day, now to be celebrated throughout the universal Church, occurs on January 30.

# 10

## Sanctity in Simplicity

In the long list of canonized saints who, over the course of the Church's history, have exemplified the Christian ideal to an extraordinary degree, some attained the heights of sanctity only after many years of pain and struggle; others, as a result of a dramatic conversion at some critical moment in their lives. Then there have been those who seem to have been born saints, who manifested from their earliest years an unusual attraction for things religious, a strong sense of duty, and an ability to influence others in the practice of virtue. Such it seems were most of the saintly Brothers in the Lasallian tradition: De La Salle himself, followed by Brothers Benilde, Miguel, Arnold, Scubilion, and certainly Brother Mutien-Marie.

It is not easy, in an Institute dedicated to the work of education, for the Brothers to take literally the injunction of the Lord to change and become like little children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3). Success as a teacher demands a measure of maturity and ascendancy over the "little ones" and not-so-little ones whom the Brothers are expected to educate. It is even more difficult to make literal sense out of the prayer of Jesus: "Father, Lord of heaven and earth, to you I offer praise; for what you have hidden from the learned and the clever you have revealed to the merest children" (Matt 11:25, Luke 10:21). Why then the time, energy, and expense devoted precisely to making the Brothers "learned and clever" in the areas they are expected to teach?

At least one conclusion that seems warranted from the life of Brother Mutien-Marie is the realization that these "difficult" sayings of the Lord in the Gospel sometimes do make literal sense in particular cases. It might well be said that Brother Mutien never grew up. All his life he remained the *enfant de Mellet*, as Brother Maurice Hermans likes to emphasize in his biography.

## Simplicity

The more one reads the stories and reminiscences of the Brothers who lived with him, the more it becomes obvious that Brother Mutien lived in a sort of world all his own. The events that took place around him, the development of the Institute Saint-Berthuin, for example, the succession of religious superiors, and even the tragedy of the first World War, seem hardly to have touched him. Whatever interest he showed in such happenings was limited to interpreting them as manifestations of divine Providence or as suitable concerns for his prayer.

It was especially in regard to authority figures that the childlike character of Brother Mutien shone forth. There is little evidence that he ever entertained an independent thought. The directives of his immediate supervisor, Brother Maixentis, the assignments of his religious superiors, and, above all, the prescriptions of the Rule seem to have relieved him of the necessity of ever thinking for himself. In conversation during recreation, the only opinions he ever expressed on controverted subjects took the form of citations from spiritual authors, papal encyclicals, which he read avidly, or the circulars of the superiors. He never engaged in criticism, either constructive or destructive, and he was not inclined to tolerate it in others.

It seems that over the years the superiors at Saint-Berthuin took unfair advantage of his submissive spirit. They knew that he would accept without complaint the assignments that no one else wanted or, in some cases, those for which he was barely qualified. Some of these positions, such as bell ringing and supervising toilets, he kept for dozens of years because he never complained, and it never occurred to anyone to relieve him. In his last years his daily routine was so taken for granted that no one seemed to notice how sick he was or to suspect that he might welcome a "command" to take it easy on himself.

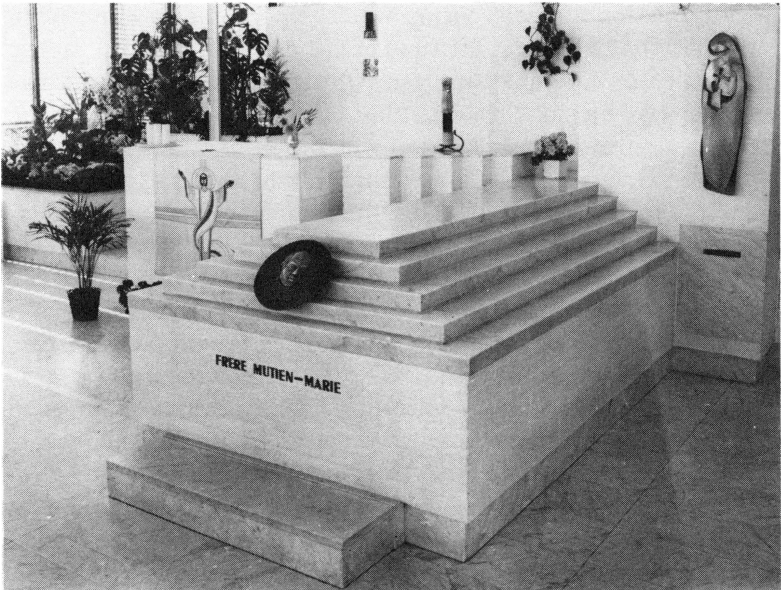
His devotional life was every bit as simple and childlike. His favorite forms of prayer were those he had developed as a child: the rosary especially, frequent repetitions of the *Ave Maria*, or short invocations to his heavenly patrons, the Sacred

Heart, Saint Joseph, Saint Aloysius, Saint Berthuin, and above all, the Blessed Virgin Mary. He carried on a continual and almost naive kind of conversation with these celestial beings, as if they were as physically available and as interested in his concerns as were any of the Brothers around him.

It is not an exaggeration, then, to say that Brother Muetien-Marie, on the surface at least, never lost his childhood simplicity. He remained shy and innocent, naive and uncomplicated, all his life long. He was unsophisticated and uncritical, not intellectually brilliant, and not unusually talented, at least not in the areas in which he was asked to work. It was mainly by dint of sheer will power and determination that he became sufficiently qualified to carry out his teaching assignments in music and art, and to be reasonably effective both in classroom discipline and in his prefecting responsibilities.

Such was the human personality, as far as it can be reconstructed, of a man that the Church now proposes for the veneration of the faithful as a saint. By this formal act, the Church intends to do more than honor the memory of an obscure Christian Brother, more than express the conviction that he has entered into heavenly glory in the eternal possession of his Lord. By this medium the Church wishes to convey a message to a new generation of the faithful about the meaning of holiness and the Christian life. In this case, at least, the Church seems to be telling the contemporary world, with all of its sophistication, specialization, and science, that Jesus was serious when he proposed a little child as the way to the kingdom of heaven.

The people who first caught the message of Brother Muetien were not at all "the learned and clever," not even, if we can read between the lines of the history, the greater part of the Brothers with whom he lived. The people who first invoked his intercessory power, who came spontaneously in ever greater numbers to venerate his tomb, were simple people. Most people in Belgium in the years after the first World War led simple and unexciting lives, working at dull jobs in the towns or enduring the drudgery and the uncertainty of work on the farms. Most of them were staunch and practicing Catholics, whose devotional life was expressed in the traditional practices of piety popular in the nineteenth century.



**The shrine and tomb of Brother Mutien-Marie at Malonne**

No wonder, then, that they saw in this simple and humble Brother a model for their lives on earth and an advocate to intercede for them in heaven. They could identify with his life spent in unpleasant and ungrateful tasks, his lack of worldly wisdom, his submission to authority, together with his simple faith and childlike trust in the efficacy of devotional prayer. Long before his death, Brother Mutien had become known all over Belgium as the "saintly Brother of Malonne." For his fellow countrymen he was the very image of sanctity, of what they thought a saint should be.

## **Sanctity**

But sanctity, if genuine, is more than a matter of image. Sanctity, or holiness, in the strict sense is attributable only to God. Whatever sanctity human creatures attain is always a sharing in the holiness of God, an unmerited gift brought about by the divine action within the depth of a person's being. In the case of Brother Mutien, the raw material that the divine energy

used to fashion a new creation was the personality of a grown man with the heart and attitude of mind of a little child. In the formal act of canonization, the Church recognizes that the man was truly a saint, that is, that the holiness effected by the divine action in Brother Mutien was profound and genuine.

When God intervenes in human history, and especially in the personal history of an individual such as Brother Mutien, the divine action is always accomplished in a human context and through human mediation. In the case of Brother Mutien, his sanctity was attained in and through his vocation as a Brother of the Christian Schools. If it is true, in one sense, that he was born a saint and was predestined to sanctity, it is quite probable that Louis-Joseph Wiaux might have emerged as "canonizable" no matter what vocation in life he had chosen. But the fact is that he chose this one, guided no doubt by divine Providence in a particular set of historical circumstances. For that reason his sanctity inevitably took on a decidedly Lasallian character.

## **Lasallian Spirituality**

Lasallian spirituality is characterized by the spirit of faith and zeal, a legacy from Saint John Baptist de La Salle proclaimed as a guiding principle in every version of the Brothers' Rule from the earliest extant text of 1705 to the most recent revision of 1987. The spirit of faith in the mind of De La Salle was no vague abstraction. In his Rule he wrote, "It is this spirit that should animate all the actions of the Brothers, and be the motive of their whole conduct. . . ." In order to enter into this spirit and live up to it, the Founder in his day, and the Rule ever since, emphasize respect for the Scriptures, self-control, supernatural motivation, and attention to the presence of God.

Brother Mutien exemplified all of these elements to perfection. But if one of them had to be singled out, it would surely be his attention to the presence of God. In fact, it might be said that the one characteristic that all of the recently canonized and beatified Christian Brothers have had in common was an extraordinary ability to remain in constant and conscious contact with the divine presence in themselves, in their surround-

ings, in the events they experienced, and in the persons with whom and for whom they exercised their ministry.

The point has been made that, in his external demeanor and attitude of mind, Brother Mutien never lost his childlike trust, and in that sense never grew up. But there is enough evidence to show that the realization of the presence of God grew and matured within the depths of his soul. While so many around him were becoming more learned, more competent, more independent and "adult," the divine energy was overflowing within the heart and soul of this simple man to lead him to a degree of mature holiness that not even the Church itself could ignore.

It is in the light of this inner maturity, rooted in a sense of the continuing presence of God, that we must understand the devotional life of Brother Mutien. The daily prayer schedule of the community brought Brother Mutien, as it did all the Brothers, to the chapel for longer or shorter periods in the morning, at noon, before the evening meal, and before retiring. The presence of God was recalled at the beginning and end of the school day, as well as before each lesson.

Into this routine Brother Mutien introduced his own internal and external devotions to keep the divine presence at a high level of consciousness. God became ever more vividly present to him precisely through the images of the wounded and loving Sacred Heart of Jesus, the physical presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the lonely prisoner of the tabernacle, the familiar accessibility of his holy Mother Mary, the repetitive petitions of the rosary and ejaculatory prayer.

Since Vatican II, many of these typical nineteenth-century devotional forms have been either abandoned or deemphasized, and rightly so, on historical, psychological, and theological grounds. At the worst, it has been argued, this kind of religiosity might easily degenerate into something close to superstition, a substitute for or even an obstacle to a genuine openness to the heart of the Gospel message. Even at best, this type of piety tends to produce a kind of sentimental and often superficially religious person.

The objective question as to which devotional forms are best suited to the full expression of the Christian life becomes irrelevant when dealing with a specific instance of a person

who, in particular historical circumstances, lived one form of the Christian life to the full. For Brother Mutien-Marie, as for many others of his generation, the popular and typically Catholic devotions of the day served to nourish an authentic Lasallian spirit of faith lived in the presence of God. In short, it was by this means that he became a saint.

A second aspect of Lasallian spirituality that is exemplified in Brother Mutien is its apostolic character. For De La Salle, and his Brothers ever since, the spirit of faith is expected to overflow into an ardent zeal to bring the Gospel message to the educational world. Lasallian spirituality is not a monastic spirituality; it does not reach its perfection until it is expressed in action to evangelize through education.

From everything we know about his temperament and personality, it might seem at first thought that Brother Mutien would have been better suited to life in a monastery. Indeed, it might even be said that he led a sort of monastic existence in the bosom of an active religious community, spending all his free time in the chapel, scrupulously observing religious silence, identified as the "Brother who was always praying." But that was not the vocation to which Providence called him, or the spirituality and lifestyle that the nature and the purpose of his Institute could tolerate.

The classroom and the courtyard were as much a context for the spirituality of Brother Mutien as the chapel or the community life. For him, his elementary lessons in music and art, his prefecting duties, and those occasions when he could teach catechism were all expressions of his zeal for the eternal welfare of the young boys entrusted to his care. They provided him with opportunities to lead them in prayer, to provide example and inspiration that they could draw from his own religious demeanor, to speak to them of the things of God, to urge them to virtue, and to be vigilant in minimizing the occasions of sin that the boarding-school situation provided. That attitude transformed the boredom and routine of his many thankless and difficult assignments into a source of grace for himself and his young charges. The sanctity of his simplicity bore fruit in an apostolate that was effective also in the simplicity of its appeal.

Some commentators on the sanctity of Brother Mutien-Marie are prone to stress his devotion to duty and his scrupulous observance of the Brothers' Rule. Ever since the canonization of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and, more recently, of Brother Benilde Romançon, much has been made of the spirituality of dull and daily tasks faithfully performed, the *terribile quotidianum*, as it has been called. This approach to spirituality presumably takes on special significance when it is tied to the faithful observance of a religious Rule. This idea, first enunciated by Pope Pius XI, has been used extensively, especially in causes of canonization. It serves to refute the objections of the Promoter of the Faith who finds little that could be called "heroic" in the virtue of a candidate. That argument was, in fact, adduced with vigor in the case of Brother Mutien. There is a tendency, therefore, to interpret the spirituality or the sanctity of Brother Mutien, or of any of the others for that matter, in terms of drudgery patiently endured.

Although this approach serves a certain purpose, two objections might be made. First of all, it puts too much emphasis, as indeed does the whole examination of the heroicity of virtues, on what the saintly person does, rather than on the saint that this person is. Of course, everything that Brother Mutien did, including his exact observance of the Lasallian Rule, flowed from and gave expression to the holy person that he was. But the holiness of his person is the more fundamental reality that transcends any patterns of action, even those based on a "holy" Rule, that are often conditioned by historical and cultural factors.

A second difficulty with the "canonization" of the *terribile quotidianum* is that truly saintly persons seem not to have experienced it that way. All the evidence indicates that, despite the demands of a rigorous Rule and the difficulties and setbacks he experienced in the community and in the school, Brother Mutien was a happy person. This was due in part to his happy and childlike disposition; on a deeper level his happiness was rooted in his mature conviction in faith that he was doing the will of God. Thus it is doubtful that he thought of his daily routine and his involvement with his young students as in any way *terribile*. Perhaps some of the Brothers at the time

thought it was all pretty terrible, but they have not been proposed for canonization. Rather than exchanging a “terrible” existence here on earth for a “blessed” one in heaven, it seems more likely that Brother Mutien went from one form of beatitude to another.

## **Admiration or Imitation?**

There is a saying that some saints are more to be admired than imitated. The question remains as to how true this is of Brother Mutien-Marie. The admiration for his evident sanctity can be accorded willingly. So, too, can he be accepted as a model for imitation in what concerns the integrity of his person, the liveliness of his faith, the intensity of his prayer, and his willingness to accept the most thankless tasks to be of service to others in the name of the Gospel.

Not for everyone, however, are his abject humility, his naive and uncritical acceptance of the views of authority figures, his unquestioning obedience to superiors and Rule beyond the bounds of common sense, his external religiosity and devotional practices, and his childlike mannerisms. It would be unfortunate if these mostly exterior qualities, no longer in fashion among even the most earnest Christians, were to obscure the basic message that sanctity can be found in simplicity, that there is meaning to the Lord's own words that it is necessary to change and become like little children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Recent years have seen a proliferation of members of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools raised to the honors of the altar. Like Brother Mutien, they are all worthy of admiration. There is danger, in fact, that the admiration may turn back on the Institute itself in the form of a kind of triumphalism or, in some quarters, in a certain cynicism as to how all this comes about. The real significance, however, lies in the distinctive something in each of these Brothers that can serve as a model for different personalities to imitate, whether among the Brothers who are members of the Institute, their associates who constitute what is now called the Lasallian family, or the Christian faithful generally.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle is the universal model from whom all Lasallian spirituality and apostolic zeal derive their inspiration: the spirit of faith, zeal, and community; love for the Church and fidelity to the Pope as the symbol of its universality; creativity and competence in the educational apostolate; total self-renunciation in favor of the poor and those who are "far from salvation."

The others who have been thus far raised to the altar all share these qualities, but each has a different, specialized appeal. Blessed Brother Solomon was an administrative type, loyal to his chief and to his duties, consciously willing to give up his life for what he knew to be the truth. Saint Benilde was a model Director of a school and a community that proved to be especially fruitful in religious and sacerdotal vocations. Saint Miguel was an effective catechist and a linguistic scholar recognized as such by his colleagues at the highest academic level. Blessed Brother Arnold was also an exemplary and self-taught scholar, but one who preferred instead to devote his energies to the pursuit of perfection through austerity and bodily penance in his assigned ministry as Director of Novices. Blessed Brother Scubilion was the model missionary, an effective man of action, bringing the message of hope and reconciliation to the enslaved population of a remote and foreign land.

Finally, in Saint Mutien-Marie, the Institute has a model for the many Brothers and lay colleagues who have never been and will never be administrators, religious superiors, scholars, missionaries, or great penitents. For many of them the *quotidianum* may indeed sometimes seem to be *terribile*. In Brother Mutien they can find a challenge to realize in faith and hope that what seems terrible can be the source of happiness and joy. If the message of Brother Mutien means anything, it says that the way to authentic sanctity is open to those whose lives are otherwise without distinction, sophistication, and glamor. There are indeed secrets that the divine Wisdom hides from the learned and clever and reveals to the merest children. And we have it on the highest authority that of such is the kingdom of heaven.