

**Father Moreau and the Question of a Holy Cross Education**  
**by Rev. Thomas O. Barrosse, CSC, STL, SSL**

Whenever several independent groups within the Church, for example, religious communities, are organized to do the same work, we tend quite naturally to wonder what justifies their individual existence. Does each of them do its portion of the work somewhat differently? Or should we rather look for an explanation to mere historical accident (in that other, similar groups were not available at the time and in the place in which the several groups arose)? Historical accident, or, more accurately, providential historical circumstances, must certainly be recognized as an important and often even a determining factor. Many communities would not have come into existence had others been available to answer the needs of a particular time and place. But even so, we may still pose our first question: does each of the communities engaged, say, in teaching do the work in exactly the same way? And if not, granted that the particular group's peculiarities are good, are they intended by the group's founder? Can they be looked upon in some sense as the characteristic contribution of the particular group to the exercise of the apostolate in question?

Let us apply all this to the educational apostolate of our own Congregation. Is there anything proper to or distinctive of a Holy Cross education — that is, is there anything characteristic or "different" about the Christian education Father Moreau wanted religious of Holy Cross to give? The Jesuits, for example, have their well known *ratio studiorum* regulating the classical education they give on the secondary level. They are so known for this training that it is implied in the adjective "Jesuit-trained," at least when the latter refers to education received at the secondary level. Of course, if we consider this program of classical studies *characteristic* of Jesuit schools, we might still ask whether it is in any real sense distinctively Jesuit. After all, it is little more than what was once the practically universal secondary school curriculum in Europe. One wonders, too, how much longer it will survive in the changing world of education, and — should it change — would the high school education given by the religious of the Society of Jesus be really any less "Jesuit?" Finally, nothing comparable to it, that is, nothing so noticeably "different," is to be found in the education of the Jesuits given on levels other than the secondary, although they have their *ratio studiorum* for these levels too.

If we turn now to Father Moreau, we find in his writings quite advanced thinking on aims to be envisioned and methods to be employed in the apostolate of Christian education. But can we call any of the aims and methods our Founder proposed really characteristic or distinctive of Holy Cross? Did not Father Moreau recommend them simply because they appeared to him effective means or worthy goals of any and all authentic Christian education? It is true that we find him alluding occasionally in his writings, especially the Circulars, to attempts to make the education which our religious gave homogeneous — at least in the sense that in most of our schools in France, but not, as far as I can tell, abroad, the

same textbooks were to be used and a unified program of studies was to be offered.<sup>1</sup> However, the absence of any official *ratio studiorum* from the Congregation's early decades and the sporadic nature of the allusions in our Founder's Circulars to a unified program make one wonder whether there was ever any really serious desire on Father Moreau's part to draw up an official pattern for a characteristically Holy Cross education.

But now let us pass beyond Holy Cross education *as education*. Let us consider another possibility and pose another question. Is it possible that our Founder should have wanted us to give our students something over and above a good Christian education and that this something is characteristic and distinctive of Holy Cross? It must be admitted quite candidly: Father Moreau does not seem to have written explicitly on this point, at least in those documents in which he details what he expects us to give our students: Constitutions, Rules, his *Pedagogy*, pertinent Circular letters, and the like. Hence, the method we shall have to adopt for our investigation is the following. We shall first examine whether he wanted us as religious of Holy Cross marked by any particular characteristic or characteristics. Then we shall try to ascertain whether he implied that this mark or these marks should color our apostolic activity, in particular our teaching, and perhaps even that they should be passed on to our students.

There are certainly many ways in which we differ (and Father Moreau wished that we should differ) from other religious communities. Our habit, the particular prayers we use, certain practices such as the weekly Hour of Adoration and the weekly Way of the Cross, — the way we observe poverty — all these set us off from most other religious groups. But just as certainly none of these things are really characteristic. At some time or other in our short history as a religious Congregation every one of them has been different from what it now is. In all likelihood too most of them will change, at least to some degree, in the future. Finally, neither our Founder nor any longstanding tradition (not to say any specific legislation or official directive) has ever presented any of them as so characteristic of the Congregation that we would hardly be the same community without them.

There is, however, a difference — a distinguishing mark — of Holy Cross about which Father Moreau was quite explicit and even emphatic. To explain the mark and to amass evidence that he was quite insistent about it, I draw upon a lengthier treatment of the matter prepared for another occasion.<sup>2</sup>

In his Circular Letter No.14, dated September 1, 1841, a document which we might well call the Congregation's Magna Charta, Father Moreau at the community's very beginnings outlined in great detail his original plan for Holy

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<sup>1</sup> See especially the pertinent paragraphs in Circulars No. 104, II, pp. 93 ff, and No. 159, II, p. 254 ff; see also No. 54 and No 65, I, pp. 278 and 315; contrast No. 25 and No 50, I, pp. 109 and 263.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Thomas O. Barrosse, C.S.C., *Liturgical Piety and Holy Cross Spirituality*, pp. 6-11; also *Analecta*, XI, 1-2, pp. 16-22.

Cross. In it he explains that he intended from the very start a Congregation of three societies dedicated to the hearts of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph — their *hearts* because he wanted the religious to imitate and be marked not so much by the lowliness, the simplicity, or the fervor of their life at Nazareth as by their *union*. Drawing upon this letter (which is echoed in several of our Founder's later Circulars), a passage in our present Constitution on the "Special Spirit of the Congregation" (article 70) expresses Father Moreau's ideal for Holy Cross exactly: all the religious are encouraged "to reproduce in their mutual relationships the charity which united the members of the Holy Family, in order to emulate the union of the three Divine Persons of the Adorable Trinity."<sup>3</sup> Union founded on love (Constitutions, article 68) — here we have the key idea that can explain in its various details the life which our Founder proposed to his religious community and which the Congregation accepted from the beginning.

Let us make a cursory examination of those details.

The seal of the Congregation until well after Rome had separated the Sisters, consisted of an anchor which was entwined by a banner bearing the letters **J.M.J.** and was surmounted by three hearts — the traditional representation of the Sacred Heart in the center, a sword-pierced heart mounted by flames on the left, and a heart mounted by lilies on the right — with the words *Congregation of Holy Cross* semicircular around the upper part. The seal of each Society consisted of a representation of the heart of its patron (as found in the Congregation's seal) surrounded by rays and encircled by the name of the Society — for example, "Societas Salvatoristarum." The afternoon ejaculations for one, two, and three o'clock were for many years, *Cor Jesu sacratissimum, Sanctissimum et immaculatum Cor Mariae refugium peccatorum, and Cor Joseph purissimum et fidelissimum*. The early Directory lists the solemn feasts of the Congregation as the Feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Feast of the Sorrowing Heart or the Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin Mary (the third Sunday of September), the Feast of the Most Pure Heart of Joseph or of St. Joseph, and the Anniversary of the Dedication of the Conventual Church of Our Lady of Holy Cross and of the foundation of the motherhouse (Sunday after the octave of All Saints).

The facts just listed show how important a place Father Moreau gave to the hearts of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in the ideal he conceived for the Congregation. Since, however, he did not insist on any special devotion to these hearts, giving hardly a single prayer in the Directory in their honor (besides the afternoon ejaculations), what purpose could he have intended them to serve other than that of symbols — symbols of the union of love with which he wished to mark the community? His own explanation of his plan for Holy Cross (Circular No.14 noted above) bears out this conclusion: a congregation of three societies dedicated to the *hearts* of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and *bound together* as were the members of the Holy Family.<sup>4</sup> And his choice of the anniversary of the founding of the motherhouse

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<sup>3</sup> *Father Moreau Circular Letters*, I, p. 43.

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and dedication of the mother church — the great symbols of the Congregation's unity — as the chief feast of the Congregation confirms it.

Father Moreau often implied that he considered the motherhouse the *home* of a *family* made up of all the religious of Holy Cross. In his letters he frequently speaks of Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix, the motherhouse, as though it were simply synonymous with the Congregation. There he intended to bring back all the elderly religious of the entire Congregation to pass their last days. There he planned to bury the remains of all the members, even those who would die outside France. He even explicitly called the motherhouse the "home of a fortunate family." And when he called the community a family, he meant a group whose members would be intimately bound together, a group characterized by the union of its members. This family spirit is the object of his letters' repeated pleas for "one heart and one soul — *cor unum et anima una.*"

An examination of the early rules composed by our Founder shows the stress he laid on union. Father Mollevaut, his director, had encouraged Father Moreau in the Congregation's early years to look to St. Vincent de Paul as model. Our founder certainly followed M. Mollevaut's advice. Article after article of our 1858 Rules echoes the ideas and even the expressions of the Rules or Constitutions given to the Congregation of the Mission by St. Vincent. Father Moreau did not copy; he omitted much and developed the rest usually in great detail. One rule, however, he developed out of all proportion to the others, and into it he put more originality and more eloquent pleas than, probably, into any of the others — the rule on the spirit of union or community spirit.

Father Moreau's efforts at realizing this union further illustrate the importance he attributed to it. What distinguishes Holy Cross from most, if not all, other religious communities is the union of two societies in one congregation. The original plan called for three. Our Founder explicitly stated that his plan had nothing in common with that of other communities to which it has been compared. He fought long and hard to preserve the original plan, bowing at last only to the Holy Father's desire that the Sisters be separated. He thundered terrible anathemas against any religious who might oppose what he was sure was God's own plan. But he was concerned over more than merely the union of several societies with one another. He repeatedly insisted on the union of all the members among themselves — of house with house, of subjects with authority, of religious with religious. He inserted into the vow-formula a promise to labor for the maintenance of union. He imposed a special oath of union on superiors. He saw many elements of the religious life, even obedience itself, as a manifestation of this union. Would we err in interpreting all the opposition he met with on this point of union as an indication that this was a most important aspect of the providential work he was realizing? Bearing fierce opposition to the essential point of a plan conceived under God's inspiration is often in God's wisdom the indispensable condition for the realization of the plan. No other obstacle did Father Moreau consider a graver threat to Holy Cross than lack of union.

It is true that many of the specific ways in which the union with which our Founder was so preoccupied expressed itself have disappeared, for example, the Congregation's seal no longer bears three hearts and we no longer promise to labor for union when we pronounce our vows. But there has not been merely this natural process of attrition. There has also been development in the other direction. To mention a single point — Father Moreau wrote no rule or constitution on the special mark of the Congregation (though he did write in his rule on community spirit that he wanted the spirit of union to characterize us). Our revised Constitutions of 1950 make his aims and ideals an explicit part of our official legislation by including a Constitution on the "Special Spirit of the Congregation."

If we admit that this is *the* distinctive mark Father Moreau wished to see characterize us, we must next examine whether he implied that it should color our apostolates, in particular our teaching, and whether he may have wanted it to include or extend to our students or even to be imparted to them.

One point which is quite evident is that at Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix under Father Moreau's inspiration a family spirit — an overflow of the mutual union of the religious — bound the students with one another and with the priests, Brothers, and Sisters who cared for them. On December 27, 1837 Father Moreau himself wrote: "Here [at Sainte-Croix] charity reigns and unites the one hundred and more souls whom Providence has brought together"<sup>5</sup> — a number that certainly includes the students since in March of that same year all the priests and Brothers in the entire Congregation numbered hardly sixty-one.<sup>6</sup>

The Catta brothers write of Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix in the 1840s and 1850s:

*On the testimony of former students, a great family spirit reigned in the house. Good news and bad news was shared in common. This spirit of solidarity extended also to the families of the students. Very early in his career, Father Moreau was convinced that the families of the students should be in contact with the administration of the college. At the beginning of 1858, he organized a "family council," composed of the parents of twelve students in the college, to offer suggestions on all measures calculated to improve the school at Sainte-Croix. The council met [a minimum of four times each year].... In these gatherings the parents were requested to make their observations on the discipline and curricula of the school, to present and to solve all questions relating to the physical and moral well-being of the student body, to make known the reaction of public opinion to the administration and progress of the school and, lastly, to indicate to the director of the house anything which, in his relationships with the students, their parents, or different outside persons, might seem useful for the improvement and expansion of the school. It is*

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<sup>5</sup> *Father Moreau Circular Letters*, I No. 5, p.11

<sup>6</sup> Catta, *Basil Anthony Moreau*, I, p. 369.

*certain that, at that time, very few educational establishments maintained any similar contact with the families of their students. The results of these meetings are not known; nevertheless, we must conclude that they contributed in no small degree to the good will with which Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix was constantly favored by the families of Le Mans and the vicinity.*<sup>7</sup>

On his journey to Rome in 1850 Father Moreau wrote to his "beloved family at Sainte-Croix" — an expression that included not simply the religious but the students as well. The long letter, dated November 11, less than two weeks after his departure from Le Mans, is not at all like the abundant business correspondence of our Founder with which most of us are familiar. Rather it is written in a very familiar tone and is full of little travel incidents. It concludes:

*My lamp is burning out; I am short on paper; it is almost midnight; our Brothers are sound asleep, and I have only the time to recommend myself to your prayers, while assuring you of my tender affection for, all those at Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix -- priests, Brothers, and Sisters -and you (students) whom I love and esteem with all my heart.*<sup>8</sup>

On January 1, 1851, still in Rome, he addressed a Circular to his "dear sons and daughters in Jesus Christ" — the entire Congregation.<sup>9</sup> It gives details similar to those of the letter just quoted. Well into the letter, as though he took it for granted that the students too would read it or at least be informed of its contents, he included a lengthy paragraph which begins:

*I count also on your good will, my dearly loved children, worthy students of Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix, who are always in my thoughts. The reading of your weekly reports lightens my sufferings at not being able to be with you as soon as I had expected.*<sup>10</sup>

In the mid-1850s an alumnus of Sainte-Croix published a brochure entitled *A Visit to Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix at Le Mans*. The author, a student at Sainte-Croix about ten years earlier, describes his meeting with Father Moreau during the visit in these terms:

*The first person that I met as I left the chapel was the venerable and well-loved M. Moreau, the Founder and Superior-General. But how he had changed! His hair had turned white and his features were creased by work and austerities. My heart was all a-flutter, like one who sees his aged father once more after a long absence, and I ran toward him ... He recognized me ... and the sparkle in his eyes and his kindly smile did a*

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 816 ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 806.

<sup>9</sup> *Father Moreau Circular Letters*, I, No. 45, pp. 210 ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

*world of good for my soul. I let myself be caught up in his arms... For me Father Moreau was not an officer of the University who had been in command of the little regiment to which I had belonged, but he was a father who had admitted me within the little circles of his beloved family and who loved me as a child over a long period of years. This father and his colleagues had given us all their time and attention ...*<sup>11</sup>

The Catta's comment:

*Such praise may strike us today as commonplace. But at the time [this brochure] was written it bore witness to something entirely new in the educational field. Institutions like Sainte Croix offered to the younger generation an atmosphere entirely different from that created by the imperial lycées and collèges and permeating all the secondary schools depending on the university. Public education retained that "military character" which had been stressed by Madame de Stael and Alfred de Vigny. Between them and the schools opened by religious congregations there was a striking contrast, and this was one of the reasons for the success of the Catholic schools. Hence, it is not entirely without interest to find the pen of an alumnus of Sainte-Croix describing the pleasant impression left on him by the family discipline of the school and the fatherly kindness of his teachers.*<sup>12</sup>

The sources on which we have been drawing regularly refer only to the school at Le Mans. This is quite natural since it was here that Father Moreau spent most of his time. However, they also contain occasional references to other schools, and it takes little imagination to conclude that he expected to find the same spirit in all the Congregation's schools. In particular he wanted to see the Association of Saint Joseph established in all our schools (as well as among all the other people with whom we were working).<sup>13</sup> He certainly desired to obtain for the Congregation whatever material and spiritual help the associates could give, but he desired just as certainly to bring them (in particular, those who were our students) into the work of Holy Cross. In certain Circular Letters he warmly recommends establishment of the Association among the students of all our schools.<sup>14</sup> This had already been begun and in some instances on the initiative of the students themselves. In other Circulars he speaks of the close association of the members with the prayer and work of Holy Cross, even providing that

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<sup>11</sup> Catta, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 641 ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 641 ff.

<sup>13</sup> The Association here mentioned was the forerunner of the present-day Association of St. Joseph and, like it, and the modern Associate Family, was a group of lay auxiliaries who worked and prayed for and with the Congregation. Father Moreau planned to found it soon after took over the direction of the Brothers of St. Joseph. He had already founded the Association of the Good Shepherd in connection with the establishment of the Le Mans Good Shepherd Monastery, of which he was the chaplain. See his Circular Letter No. 5 of December 27, 1837, I, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Father Moreau Circular Letters*, II, No. 86, p. 21; and No. 90, p. 42

promoters receive a copy of the chronicles of the Congregation.<sup>15</sup>

Texts like those given above could be multiplied. But the citations made seem numerous enough to permit us to draw conclusions. If, however, we are to do so validly, we must consider the texts against the broader background of Father Moreau's life and activity in general!<sup>16</sup> Recall that our Founder had come from a closely knit family circle. Remember that he was a man of extraordinarily great affection. The testimonies and descriptions left by those who knew him personally almost unanimously underscore his kindness and affectionateness. Note too that again and again he founded or projected "associations." He concerned himself in a special way with the mutual union of the members of the various organizations that came under his direction. (To cite but one example: he saw to it that the monastery of the Good Shepherd at Le Mans should send a gilded heart to the monastery at Angers [from which the Le Mans house had been founded] as a permanent reminder of the union of hearts binding the two houses together.) With these considerations in mind we find it altogether natural that he should want the members of his religious Congregation bound together in a distinctive way by a family spirit- a spirit of union based on love. Against this background can we draw any other conclusion from the texts we have examined than that Father Moreau wanted that same family spirit to pervade not only our mutual relationships but our activity as well, that he wanted it to extend not only to fellow religious but also to those for and with whom we work, and that he even wanted to see it imparted to them as a result of their contacts in God's providence with the work of Holy Cross?

By way of postscript we may note that the point this paper makes has its validity *mutatis mutandis* for other religious groups too. To illustrate by a single example, the Franciscans are marked by a spirit of holy freedom, a joyful freedom from care that certainly characterized the Poverello of Assisi, wedded as he was to Lady Poverty and consequently totally dependent on the providence of his heavenly Father. Just as certainly as it marked him, he wanted it to characterize his sons. It is inevitable that those with and for whom the Franciscans work should become aware of this spirit and even (if the contact is prolonged) catch something of it. So too with the spirit Father Moreau wanted to characterize us. But did St. Francis say anything about communicating this Franciscan spirit? Father Moreau, however, quite explicitly approves of the students at Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix forming part of the family of Holy Cross and thereby, it would seem, implies that this is the situation that should prevail in our schools in general. We might close by asking whether the family spirit, including lay professors and students, that characterized the smaller Notre Dame of a few decades back did not take its origin ultimately, through the formation he gave to those who established Holy Cross in this country, from Father Moreau himself?

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 92, p. 48; No. 122, p. 131,

<sup>16</sup> Barrosse, *op. cit.*, pp. 10ff.