

CHAPTER ONE

MSFS HISTORY AND ITS MISSIONARY MOVEMENTS

The Congregation of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales (MSFS) was neither a miracle of a moment that took place on 24 October 1838 nor was our charism a gift of God given to Fr Mermier in one single moment of inspiration. Its history, in fact, begins in seminal form in the childhood of Fr Mermier. It was shaped gradually through the ministry of Fr Mermier as a young priest, with the assistance of wise priest friends and very supporting and encouraging Bishops.

Based on the chronology of events in the life of Fr Mermier, the first part of this Chapter highlights twelve experiences of Fr Mermier - the milestones that shaped his vision for the Congregation. These twelve experiences constitute the core of the chapter because, the life of Fr Mermier and the initial growth of the Congregation are inseparable. The two most invaluable books, that give us these twelve experiences, are *Monsieur Mermier* by Adrien Duval¹ and *Missionaries of St Francis de Sales* by Jean Rey.² The second part of this Chapter mentions MSFS Missionary Movements from Annecy and from the Provinces in India to the rest of the world. It is important to note these missionary movements to understand the later history of the Congregation after Fr Mermier until the present times. This ensures a comprehensive panoramic view of the Congregation as it is today without getting into the intricate details of a vibrant mission history that each of these movements contains. At this juncture, it suffices to mention a few useful books that can give access to these missionary movements: *Missionaries of St Francis de Sales* by Fr Francis Moget, *Vagabonds for God* by Fr Francis Moget, *Shepherds for Christ* by Fr Francis Moget, *Fransalians in India* (Licentiate Thesis) of Fr Thomas Cherukat, *Makers of a Mission History* edited by Fr Henry Jose, Fr George Panthanmackel and Fr Joseph Pulloppillil,³ and recorded history of each of the Provinces of the Congregation.

The Twelve Core Experiences of Fr Mermier

1. **The First Experience:** The Childhood Experience of his Mother Madamme Antoinette Bastian (1790-1813)
2. **The Second Experience:** The Magland Experience of the New Priest (1813-1816)
3. **The Third Experience:** The Melan Experience of a Teacher and Disciplinarian (1816-1819)
4. **The Fourth Experience:** Le Chatelard, the First Parish Mission Preaching (1819-1822)

¹ Jean Rey, *Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod*, trans., (Visakhapatnam: SFS Publications, 1980).

² Adrien Duval, *Monsieur Mermier, Founder of Two Religious Congregations*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1985).

³ Francis Moget. *The Missionaries of St Francis de Sales of Annecy*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1985), Francis Moget, *Vagabonds for God: Story of the Catholic Church in Central India 1846-1907*, (Visakhapatnam: SFS Publications, 1990) and Francis Moget, *Shepherds for Christ: Story of the Catholic Church in Central India, 1907-1956*, (Visakhapatnam: IIS Publications, 1994). There has been a thesis written which is unpublished, i.e., Thomas Cherukat. *Fransalians in India – A historico-theological study on the Apostolate of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales in India from 1845 to 1990* (Licentiate thesis), West (Germany: University of Wurzburg, 1982). H. J. Kodikuthiyil, G. Panthanmackel, J. Pulloppillil (eds), *Makers of Mission History*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2018).

5. **The Fifth Experience:** Initial Discernment of a Community for Mission Preaching while in Major Seminary, Annecy (1822-1823)
6. **The Sixth Experience:** La Roche-sur-la Furon Experience in Community Living (1834-1837)
7. **The Seventh Experience:** The La Feuillette Experience and the Canonical Approval (1837-1838)
8. **The Eighth Experience:** Call to found the Daughters of the Cross (1837-1841)
9. **The Ninth Experience:** The Visit to Rome, the Eternal City (1842-1843)
10. **The Tenth Experience:** Sending Missionaries to India (1845)
11. **The Eleventh Experience:** The Education of the Young as Mission to the Youth (1848-1856)
12. **The Twelfth Experience:** Fr Mermier's "Noon of life," Sunset, and Dawn into Eternity (1848-1862)

Let us launch into the first part of this chapter: the twelve experiences of Fr Mermier.

1.1 The First Experience: The Childhood Experience of his Mother Madame Antoinette Bastian (1790-1813)

A woman of faith...An apostle...

Fr Mermier was born on 28 August 1790 in Savoy. It was a troubled time after the French Revolution and the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte. It was a time when anti-clericalism was on the rise; the priests and religious had to go underground; they had to flee to other countries. The people, left uncared for several years by their pastors, were ignorant of their Christian faith and were indifferent to it. The mother of Fr Mermier, brought up in the school of the Visitation suffused with the spirit and spirituality of St Francis de Sales, reached out to the underground priests by providing to them clandestinely the house barn to celebrate the Eucharist. Besides, on her own initiative, she would gather the children and teach them catechism, as a way of carrying on the mission of the pastors to the uncared flock. Fr Mermier as a child watched carefully the social and religious situations in Savoy. Besides, he admired his mother's courage, confidence and service to the people in that situation. The seed of vocation was already sown. As a priest, when he looked for ways to revive the faith of the people in his parishes, we can safely conclude that the inspiration of his mother must have surely influenced him to commit himself to the preaching of parish missions. Fr Mermier regretted that he did not speak sufficiently of his mother. He says: "I regret for not having written anything of my mother. My God, how much I owe her. No, no, she was not an ordinary woman."⁴ She had shown him extraordinary and creative ways to do something for the renewal of faith.

1.2 The Second Experience: The Magland Experience of the New Priest (1813-1816)

Discovery of a valuable spiritual guide...Temperance of zeal...Adherence to Personal rule of life and discipline...

In 1813, Fr Mermier was ordained a priest and his first appointment was as the Assistant Pastor at Magland. Here he obtained a valuable spiritual guide in Fr Desjacques, the Parish Priest of Magland. Even after Fr Desjacques retired, Fr Mermier could seek his valuable

⁴ Jean Rey, *Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod*, 6.

advice. Fr Mermier confided to him his fears as well as his plans. In his first appointment, Fr Mermier learnt the value of a spiritual guide, how to temper zeal and to have a personal rule of life and discipline. Prone to excessive zeal, Fr Mermier would spend a lot of time at night to prepare for the ministry of the day as well as to update his theological studies. Fr Desjacques in a friendly and pleasant way told Fr Mermier that he would not allow his assistant pastor to burn all his candles.⁵

1.3 The Third Experience: The Melan Experience of a Teacher and Disciplinarian (1816-1819)

The first practice of Salesian spirituality in transforming people...Being a father and mother to the young children...Being gentle and firm...The first stirrings of being a religious...Yearning for a pastoral situation

From 1816-1819, Fr Mermier was Professor and in charge of discipline at the school of Melan. Here he gets opportunity to put into practice the Salesian Spirituality and see its effectiveness in dealing with people. As the biographers indicate, he was gentle and firm. The pupils loved him and feared him. He was a mother as well as a father to the young ones. He realized that the heart of education is the education of the heart. The firmness of his character permitted Fr Mermier to substitute a good healthy familiarity which opens hearts and creates trust in children.⁶ But deep within him there was an urge to be a religious and a missionary to attend to the indifference of the people to faith. He consults his elderly guide Fr Desjacques about his possibility to be a Jesuit. Fr Desjacques cautions him and asks him to test the inspiration and get clarity before he makes his decision.⁷

1.4 The Fourth Experience: Le Chatelard, the First Parish Mission Preaching (1819-1822)

Finding a friend priest in Fr Joseph Marie Favre for mission preaching...Conviction of parish mission preaching as a powerful way of renewal of faith...The force behind parish mission was the power of prayer...

Appointed as parish priest of Le Chatelard parish, Fr Mermier finds the people in a most pathetic state of indifference and ignorance of faith, although sufficiently wealthy. Fr Mermier had heard about the missionary priests who conducted missions to revive the parishes. The most famous one in that area of Savoy was Fr Joseph Marie Favre. Favre was a zealous priest-highly intelligent and creative. But he was impulsive and strongheaded.⁸ Fr Mermier invites him to preach missions to Le Chatelard. The response of the people in the first eight to nine days was very tepid with a few people attending it. Fr Mermier suggests to Favre to give up the mission. Fr Favre does not agree. He suggests that the two of them go and pray at La Grande-Chartreuse monastery, not very far from Chaterlard. The people who came to the church found their priests missing. They were told that they had gone to pray for

⁵ Adrien Duval MSFS, *Monsieur Mermier : 1790-1862*, trans., Vincent Kerns, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1982), 9.

⁶ Jean Rey, *Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod*, 16-17.

⁷ *Ibid*, 19-20.

⁸ Adrien Duval, *Monsieur Mermier, Founder of our Religious Congregation*, 10-11.

them. They went in search of them and brought them back to the church. Struck by this rare gesture, the people began to come in large numbers and the mission was very successful.⁹

The Le Chatelard experience will always remain a turning point in the life of Fr Mermier for three reasons: first, he obtained a very good friend and guide in Fr Favre; second, he had the conviction that parish mission preaching was the way of fighting the indifference and tepidity of the faith of the people; and third, the power of prayer is the key to the success of the mission.

1.5 The Fifth Experience: Initial Discernment of a Community for Mission Preaching while in Major Seminary, Annecy (1822-1823)

Gestation Period for Clarity of Vision...Trial by Practice and Living...Daring witness to "I want mission through a religious community..."

In 1822, the Diocese of Annecy was erected from the Diocese of Chambéry and Bishop Thiolloz was appointed as the Bishop of Annecy. Fr Mermier belonged to the new diocese of Annecy. The Bishop asked him to be the Spiritual Director of the major seminarians. Knowing the desire and conviction of Fr Mermier about mission preaching, Bishop Thiolloz grants Fr Mermier permission to go on preaching parish missions and form a group of missionaries and have their base in the major seminary at Annecy.

The idea to amalgamate the various groups of missionaries and to found a religious congregation was very appealing to Fr Mermier but he felt that he was not the man to found it. He expected Fr Favre to do so. Besides, in the course of his preaching missions, he became apprehensive and wondered if he would be effective enough to touch people's hearts. He felt that way after a few missions that were preached and were not successful. He even felt it would be better that he joined the Jesuits or the Capuchins. But Fr Favre instills in Fr Mermier confidence and courage. He asks him not to be distracted by his fears and new proposals but to go ahead firmly and resolutely in trying to found a congregation for missions in the spirit of St Francis de Sales. His doubts and fears vanish and Fr Mermier with his band of missionaries continues the life of preaching missions, returning to the seminary for rest, for evaluation of their work, for planning for the next missions and for strengthening their common life through prayer, common meals, and recreation.

Meanwhile Bishop Thiolloz dies in 1832, and the new Bishop, Bishop Joseph Rey is transferred to Annecy as its Bishop from the diocese of Pignerol, a place where there were already groups of missionaries and whom Bishop Rey encouraged. When he discovers that in his Diocese there is a group of missionaries, he is very happy and wants to encourage them. When Fr Mermier asks Bishop Rey to grant approval to their group of missionaries as a religious congregation, Bishop Rey urges them to continue to live as a community for some more time so that he could watch and study the group before giving approval. This message is not happily taken by the first group of missionaries who were with Fr Mermier, namely, Abbe Allard, Rochet, Jean Baptiste Revillod, Jacques Martin, Phillippe Gaiddon and Ducroz. Most leave except Jacques Martin, Ducroz and Phillippe Gaiddon. Jacques Martin and Ducroz waiver. Fr Mermier turns to the one who was firmer, Phillippe Gaiddon, and says: "My friend, you are free, make up your mind which side you have to take. If you leave me, after 10 years of trial, I shall be alone. My resolve is unshakeable, my longings the same: I

⁹ Adrien Duval, *Monsieur Mermier, Founder of our Religious Congregation*, 6-7.

want mission work.”¹⁰ We are told that these words drove away the fears of Martin and Ducroz and they strengthened their resolve to pursue the project of forming themselves into a religious congregation committed to missions. This crisis is indeed very revealing, not only because of the clear and unambiguous mind and heart of Fr Mermier as to what he wanted. He wanted a religious congregation committed to parish mission preaching. The two were inseparable components of his vision, a vision that he wished to soak into the spirit and spirituality of St Francis de Sales.

After this crisis of 1832, while they were still staying at the Seminary, Fr Mermier welcomes new priests and the total number of missionaries is again six: Mermier, Jacques Martin, Ducroz, Cheminal, Petit Jean, and Gaidon. Later when they shift their residence to La Roche-sur-la Furon, Fr Joseph Lavorel joins them, and when the mother House La Feuillette is built, Bro Pierre Carton also joins them. They were then eight (7 priests, including Fr Mermier and 1 Brother). As we reflect on the Foundation of our Congregation today, it is important for us to know this community more closely along with their names and the type of life they lived. Indeed, it is a source of tremendous joy and motivation to focus on the life of this first group as they moved from the Seminary to La Roche-sur-la Furon and then to the Congregation’s own mother house, La Feuillette.

1.6 The Sixth Experience: La Roche-sur-la Furon Experience in Community Living (1834-1837)

Community Life. Intense preaching of missions...The preparation of the draft of the first constitutions of the MSFS...

As the number of missionaries increased, Fr Mermier and the Bishop were forced to look out for another house. After initial search, they settled for a rented house not very far from the presbytery of the parish of La Roche-sur-la Furon. The house, although a rented place, was a home of the community where peace, fraternity, cordiality and spiritual ambiance reigned. Here the missionaries returned to rest between preaching missions; there were times of prayer which all attended with great devotion; they studied personally and collectively and prepared and planned the next mission preaching; they evaluated their performance and fraternally corrected each other to be more effective; they spent time in recreation and innocent laughter in playing some indoor games. To be focused on these objectives they did not undertake pastoral work after their return to the community and till they set out to a new mission preaching. They were focused on the plan that God was unfolding to them and resisted any other distraction, however good, that would take them away from community life or from the type of work God wished to entrust to them. Fr Petit Jean writes, “there reigned between the members a sincere cordiality, simplicity and modesty cementing their unity...their spirit of zeal animated their activities and they shared all their experiences in the art of preaching and in being all to all. They made their meditation together as well as their examen and spiritual reading. Every Friday they attended a conference given by Fr Mermier. They were some of the happy moments of their first fervour.”¹¹

There is much for us to learn from the life of the first community of our confreres. It is more pleasing to God that we do the good which is entrusted to us in obedience rather than doing good which we would like to do and contrary to obedience. Would Fr Mermier be happy to

¹⁰ Adrien Duval, *Monsieur Mermier, Founder of our Religious Congregation*, 44

¹¹ Jean Rey, *Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod*, 1960, (French Edition) 36

see us the way we are? A constant return to Fr Mermier especially in living common life like that at La Roche sur-la Furon will definitely demand a big change in our community life style. The superior of this first community, Fr Mermier, is described as strict with himself, but accommodating towards others. He put everyone at ease although he appeared stern. He was cheerful. Fr Mermier presents himself as a good model for superiors to imitate.

What does it mean to live as MSFS today? May our short reflection on the community at La Roche instill in us freshness, joy and zeal for what it means to be an MSFS.

1.7 The Seventh Experience: The La Feuillette Experience and the Canonical Approval (1837-1838)

The mother house of the Congregation will always be at Annecy...Salesian way...

Let us have an insight into the first house of our first community in Annecy. Adrien Duval gives the details of the purchase of the plot and construction of the house in his book *Monsieur Mermier*.¹² Bishop Rey inaugurated the new house of the community on 27 August 1837. The first community of MSFS moved to La Feuillette from La Roche. It was a big house with three stories of 11 rooms on each floor, built under the supervision of Fr Jacques Martin. It was meant to be initially the house for the missionaries for rest, for study, for planning and for prayer. It was also to be a novitiate and a scholasticate. In 1903, during the term of the 5th Superior General (1894-1905) La Feuillette was taken over by the Anti-Clerical and Anti-Religious Government of the time.¹³ Although La Feuillette is no more at Annecy, it continues to be the historical source of inspiration for every community of MSFS. We are told that joy, peace, serenity and mutual brotherly affection reigned in this House. As soon as the chapel of the house was ready, Fr Mermier dedicated an altar to St Alphonsus Ligouri who was his mentor in morals and pastoral outlook for his times to confront the rigidity of Calvinism which had infiltrated into the Catholic Community. Another altar was dedicated to Mother of Sorrows, where Fr Mermier would spend time in prayer every day.

La Feuillette would be the harbinger of the good news. The missionaries will no longer be a mere band of missionaries but a Congregation of the missionaries of St Francis de Sales. The royal warrant was signed by the *Sardinian Government* (Duke of Savoy) to give the Congregation the legal existence on 29 September 1838. On 21 October 1838, Bishop Rey comes to La Feuillette and gives this good news. On 24 October 1838, Bishop Rey signs the Decree and gives the Congregation the Canonical Approval. St Francis de Sales and his spirituality is the fountain and spring from where every missionary drink the source of their spiritual life i.e., Jesus. To be transformed into him and LIVE JESUS was the Founder's passion. Fr Mermier strove to be like Jesus in his mind and heart. He wanted his missionaries to present themselves like another Jesus, the way St Francis de Sales did. He was filled with the little virtues, daily expressions of living in love and for love. "The love of God turns everything into gold," said Fr Mermier. The Bible and the Treatise on the Love of God were his two companions on any journey that he undertook.

¹² Adrien Duval, *Monsieur Mermier*, 58-59

¹³ Officially, the government of France at that time could not derecognize the MSFS Congregation as it was approved by the Duke of Savoy in Sardinia. When Savoy was annexed by France, the Treaty stated that all the approvals given by the Duke of Savoy would be respected by France. This understanding was not honoured by the French Government. La Feuillette was confiscated and the MSFS were expelled from Savoy. Many legal attempts to recover the House failed. In 1970 the house was destroyed by the municipality and replaced by modern residential flats. (cf Francis Moget, *The Missionaries of St Francis de Sales*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1985), 192-193.

If Fr Mermier is the Charismatic Founder of the Congregation, Bishop Joseph Rey is indeed the Ecclesiastical Patron, Guide and Founder. He held the Congregation close to his heart, believed in its present and its future as God's means of salvation and renewal of people. He ensured that his diocesan priests contributed to the building of La Feuillette. He visited La Feuillette often and guided Fr Mermier and encouraged the confreres to be zealous missionaries after the example of St Francis de Sales - the Apostle of Chablais. The Congregation owes to him profound esteem, regard and gratitude for being the visible support and solidarity of the Church. No doubt he decided that he would like to be buried at La Feuillette and so it was done according to his wish. These significant words of Bishop will always echo in the heart of the MSFS: "**Study** St. Francis de Sales, **Imitate** his virtues, and **Form** your method of direction on his, filled with kindness towards poor sinners...you will find his method in his letters. You will discover the treasures of this heart in his Treatise on the love of God...read these pages on fire with fervent charity. As a rule, people speak of St Francis de Sales as the Gentle Saint. That's true, of course, but to me, it does not distinguish him sufficiently. I feel his gentleness was merely one of the ways of practicing zeal. Zeal - that is the distinguishing feature...together with gentleness, have a strong zeal against vice."¹⁴ This powerful message of Bishop Rey captures the essence of Salesian Spirituality, namely love expressed in gentleness and zeal.

1.8 The Eighth Experience: Call to found the Daughters of the Cross (1837-1841)

Response to a social situation...Meeting with Claudine Echernier...The Salesian guidance of the Daughters of the Cross...

The experience of preaching missions in parishes from 1821 made Fr Mermier realize a peculiar social situation in the parishes. There were a number of poor young girls who felt that they were not called for married state of life and yet could not join the established religious societies and congregations on account of demand for dowry. Such girls were left to fend for themselves and were exploited by the domestic employers. They were made to feel unwanted in their own homes. The other evil was ignorance as they did not know to read and write. They lost respect for religion and experienced despair. Fr Mermier dreamt of organizing them and giving them education and self-esteem as well as jobs. He would eventually explore the possibility of gathering them into a religious congregation. In 1837, he met Claudine Echernier, who was working as a housekeeper of the parish of Chavanod. In guiding her, he discovered that she was working to support her family and at the same time engaged herself in self-learning. In the course of time, she would gather the young poor working girls and teach them. Fr Mermier was impressed by her genuineness of life and her passion for the education of the poor. He was amazed by the divine presence in her life and her docility to God. And with the encouragement of Bishop Rey, he directed Claudine Echernier in her spiritual life. He directed her through the tenets of Salesian Spirituality. Along with her, he founded the Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross for the education of poor girls and their growth in faith. The Bishop of Annecy granted his approval to the new Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross on 4 Nov 1841.¹⁵

1.9 The Ninth Experience: The Visit to Rome - the Eternal City (1842-1843)

¹⁴ Jean Rey, Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod, (French Edition), 46-47

¹⁵ Jean Rey, Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod, (French Edition), 87-94

The groundwork for approval of the Congregation by the Holy See in Rome...Witness to the indefatigable courage and perseverance of the Founder...

The dearly loved friend and supporter of the MSFS, Bishop Joseph Rey breathed his last on 31 January 1842. In the same year, Rome requested the diocese of Annecy to take charge of a mission in Africa in Guinea. This invitation looked like God-sent opportunity to Fr Mermier to offer his tiny Congregation for missions abroad. He himself would have preferred to go to Liberia. But it would not be possible unless the Congregation was approved by the Holy See. Fr Mermier, encouraged by the newly appointed bishop of Annecy, Msgr Rendu, set out to Rome on 22 September 1842 and reached Rome on 30 September 1842. His first visit was to the Prefect of *Propaganda* (now known as the Congregation for Evangelization), Cardinal Franzoni. The Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda was happy that the Founder was ready to accept the invitation to take up missions in Africa, but he stated that the canonical approval was needed from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. The interview with Cardinal Ostini, the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, was not very encouraging. To the normal pointed queries of the Prefect, Fr Mermier had to reply that he had only one house, that the total number of members was eleven, and that the missionaries were working in only one diocese. He got a blunt reply that no approval would be given.

Fr Mermier, although disappointed by the reply and refusal, continued to explain about the work that is being done by the confreres. Touched by the simplicity and sincerity of heart, the Cardinal “was quick to recognise a true apostle, inspired by unflinching faith and a glowing zeal.”¹⁶ He was also impressed that the proposed Congregation was placed under the patronage of St Francis de Sales. He instructed Fr Mermier to get letters from the four Bishops of Savoy Region that they would agree to bring all the missionaries in the dioceses under this Congregation. In the course of the following days, the recommendation of all the Bishops of Savoy was obtained, while Fr Mermier stayed on in Rome. He made use of his stay to make friends who would be helpful for him in the mission work. He consulted some theologians. He visited holy places and Basilicas and made 30 days of retreat. The new dossiers were examined by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and they were satisfied. Cardinal Franzoni of the Propaganda then informed Fr Mermier that the missionary destination would not be Africa but Asia. The Congregation of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales was temporarily approved by the Holy See on 2 June 1843. Fr Mermier then set out to Annecy on 24 June 1843. He visited the Loretto Shrine on the way and reached Annecy on 27 June 1843. On 2 May 1845, the Propaganda entrusted the vast mission of Vizagapatnam, India to the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales. The letter of commission arrived at Annecy on 10 May 1845, the eve of the Feast of the Pentecost.

1.10 The Tenth Experience: Sending Missionaries to India (1845)

Go missionaries go...together as a family...Obey and meditate on your holy rules

When the letter of Commissioning arrived, Fr Mermier, with joy and excitement, chose a team of six confreres to go to India. They were Fr Jacques Martin, Fr Lavorel, Fr Jean-Marie Tissot, Fr Jean Thevenet, Br Pierre Carton, and Br Sulpice Fontanel. Their superior would be Fr Jacques Martin. At La Feuillette, on the night of 12 May 1845, the farewell ceremony, with the kissing of the feet of Fr Martin and Fr Lavorel by Fr Mermier was moving and

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 98

solemn. It was repeated for the other four on 22 May 1845.¹⁷ The preparation had to be done in a hurry and the team had to proceed to the seminary of Missions Etrangères in Paris (MEP) for intensive mission formation and directions. This Institute would also advance a modest financial grant to the group on behalf of the Holy See. Having completed these formalities, they boarded at Bordeaux the ship *Courrier de l'Inde* on 5 June 1845. It was sad and painful that Fr Mermier had no opportunity to meet this first mission group together before they left for their missionary journey and so he forwarded a touching and inspiring letter through Fr Cheminal. His letter is a witness to a heart set on fire speaking to missionary hearts ready to set sail from Bordeaux: "What joy, what consolation to set out together as a family! Go missionaries of St Francis de Sales in the peace of the Lord, in the hands of Mary, under the protection of the Guardian Angels! Go, be happy on your journey. Fulfil your spiritual exercises well each day. Obey and meditate on your holy Rules. Do not forget us. The ties that unite us have no distances. Once more, blessed are you. Your vocation is really great; you cannot imagine the repercussions it had on the whole diocese."¹⁸

In every appointment and commissioning of a confrere by a legitimate superior, these words emerging from the heart of the Founder, Fr Mermier, should ring in confidence, courage, joy and hope to dare to go forward to break the frontiers of the Lord's Mission: "*Go missionary go, go prophet go.*" After about three months of travel via the Cape of Good Hope, the ship with 23 passengers, of whom sixteen were priests, including our six MSFS, landed at Pondicherry on 8 September 1845. They waited till they got the green signal to proceed to the Vizag Mission.

1.11 The Eleventh Experience: The Education of the Young as Mission to the Youth (1848-1856)

*The heart of education is the education of the heart...Be a father and mother to the children...
Be gentle and firm...*

In 1848, Bishop Rendu of Annecy offered to the missionaries of St Francis de Sales the management of the College of Evian.¹⁹ The Bishop felt that only missionaries would be able to revive this college which was facing an existential collapse on so many fronts, such as teaching, faith formation and finances for running the school. Fr Mermier, at first, found it a strange proposal from the Bishop to his tiny Congregation when the members were focused on parish mission preaching. He took time to respond to the request. He consulted with his confreres. He reflected and prayed. After prayerful consideration, Fr Mermier found that the proposal was a good way to integrate education with parish mission preaching and missions abroad. The college would be a training ground for the future aspirants of the Congregation and equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills that would be needed for a missionary. Again in 1856, at the request of Bishop Rendu of Annecy, Fr Mermier accepted the management of the College of Melan. From his personal convictions and experience of teaching at this school when he was appointed as a young priest, Fr Mermier guided the confreres to be educators of heart and not merely educators of mind. It was to ensure that the

¹⁷ Francis Moget, *Early Days of the Visakhapatnam Mission 1846-1920* (Bangalore: IIS Publications, 1997), 21.

¹⁸ Jean Rey, *Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod*, 76.

¹⁹ Adrien Duval, *Monsieur Mermier*, 177-181.

knowledge acquired was used to make the right decisions in favour of the good of others and the needy and strengthen their faith to live godly lives according to God's will. The history of the Congregation as it took up missions abroad revealed the value of the ministry of education in the context of missionary work. It was found very useful and a means of reaching out to children and youth and promote vocations to religious life and priesthood. Chapter 3 on our Charism and Apostolates gives detailed insights into the origin of the various foundational apostolates of the Congregation, including the apostolate of education.

1.12 The Twelfth Experience: Fr Mermier's "Noon of life," Sunset, and Dawn into Eternity (1848-1862)

*Parish of Pougny...The initial stroke...Death of Fr Martin in India...Blindness...
Resignation to God's will...New dawn into eternity...*

After the revolution of 1848, the situation of religious institutions in Savoy was in danger of being confiscated by the state. Fr Mermier moved to the French territory of Gex and was given the charge of the Parish of Pougny. The Parish was in a very bad shape. There was paucity of funds to run the parish schools and to maintain the priests. But the most difficult problem was that the people were greatly indifferent to faith and the sacraments. A number of initiatives to revive the faith of the people met with very poor results. He who had great success in the revival of faith through parish mission preaching appeared to be a failure. Fr Mermier appointed Fr Blifford, one of his best confreres in faith animation as the parish priest of Pougny. Unfortunately, the priest died suddenly. Other confreres were reluctant to take up the responsibility of the parish of Pougny. Fr Mermier himself took up the work of the parish priest. The parish of Pougny proved a big challenge to his ministry of parish mission preaching. He wrote to his niece Sr Louise Mermier, "the consciences are frozen, everywhere there is the sleep of indifference. Oh, how great is the need to pray for my intentions."²⁰ Fr Mermier visited the parish of Ars and had very brief moments of interaction with John Marie Vianney, the Cure, as there were so many people waiting for him. Seeking his prayer for his intentions, Fr Mermier returned from Ars.

Besides taking care of the two Congregations and fulfilling the obligations for preaching retreats already agreed upon, the burden of the parish of Pougny, was too heavy. Fr Mermier suffered a minor stroke. This forced him to request the Bishop to take back the parish of Pougny. Fr Mermier returned to La Feuillette at Annecy. He felt he had to resign as the Superior General. But the confreres would not accept such a proposal. He accepted what God wanted of him. From Pougny, he began his ascent to Calvary, victim of his zeal. His dark night of the soul, about which great spiritual masters speak, had begun. He wrote to Fr Thevenet, a missionary in India, in March 1852, "sickness has the benefit of detaching us from created things. Illnesses are blessings from God to all those who endure them in a spirit of sacrifice and love. As long as we do God's will, that's it. We do a lot in doing little, if we do it for God, when and as he wishes. Nothing is more likely to bring the soul to this attitude of mind than the ordeal of sickness."²¹ His health improved slightly. He visited Loretto in thanksgiving to Mary for her favours and for the recovery in health that he had made.

Meanwhile, Fr Mermier received the sad news of the death of Fr Jacques Martin, the superior of the Indian Mission. That was a huge blow to Fr Mermier. There was also the good news of

²⁰ Jean Rey, *Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod*, 89.

²¹ Adrien Duval, *Monsieur Mermier*, 267.

the new opening of the Congregation in England in 1861 with the assistance of Captain Dewell of Kamptee. This gave him some consolation. Bishop Rendu of Annecy died on 28 August 1859 and Savoy was annexed by France on 22 April 1860. Although gentle reminders were sent to the Holy See for the final approval of the Congregation, Fr Mermier was informed that the dossier couldn't be traced in the Roman office. Therefore, he reworked on the dossier and at last on 19 May 1860, the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars established the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales as a Congregation with simple vows. Again, Fr Mermier gives expression to what is going on within himself when he writes: "I needed this lesson. How good God is! I was a proud man and he humbles me. I was always on the go, ever outside myself, always active, and he forces me to take it easy, he binds me to inactivity, he turns me in on himself." ²²

Fr Mermier was at peace but his health declined with increasing blindness. That was a trial in faith and patience. It was his dark night of the soul, the harsh noon of his life. Unable to celebrate Mass, he went for Communion each day. Fr Gaiddon writes: "Always the first at the spiritual exercises made in common he continued to get up at four o'clock in the morning, he heard two Masses every day. Generally, with a smile on his face, he presented a serene and radiant front to everyone. For all that, he felt keenly everything that was humiliating in his situation."²³ Mother Louise Blanc, the Superior General of Sisters of St Joseph of Annecy, after a visit to Fr Mermier at La Feuillette, writes to Fr Larrive, a missionary in India: "Oh father, if you could see this blessed face, the blissful face! If you could listen to his words! There remains only love of God in his heart, only the vision of faith in his mind, there remains no human contrivances. He repeats to us to do good, that religious must be like water, having neither colour nor taste, that nothing is more harmful in the work of the souls than an attachment to a way of seeing and doing. Then when we told him not to try to work, he replied, 'and what will you do if we only talk, today conversations are just empty.' A quarter of an hour of conversation with this man of God does more to lead a soul to recollection than would hours of sermons."²⁴

On 10 August 1862, Fr Mermier had a fall. He had a fracture on his right leg, and his condition gradually deteriorated. On 30 September 1862, our holy Founder breathed his last and entered into eternity. The words of Bishop Magnin of Annecy, the Bishop of the time, in his eulogy at the funeral of Fr Mermier, sums up the holy, missionary, Salesian and daring life of our Founder: "Allow me to tell you how happy I am to see here your very worthy leader, your venerable and holy superior, this man of faith who had founded, directed and sustained your dear Congregation in such a flourishing state from its very start. He allowed the Spirit and Breath of God to have dominion over everything and everywhere; who by him has done such great things. How happy am I to see that Divine Providence has left him as it were to outlive himself in order to be for each one of you a living model of all priestly virtues; to survive like a brilliant torch to guide you in the exalted paths of evangelical perfection; to survive finally by miracle, in order to make him enjoy at the end of a full saintly life, the progress of his children in Jesus Christ and to find in his charitable works an anticipated recompense of his indefatigable endeavours which have prepared for him such a rich crown in heaven! Thank the good God, my dear Fathers, for such a grace, just as I

²² *Ibid.*, 270

²³ *Ibid.*, 276

²⁴ Jean Rey, *Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod*, 97.

myself thank him for such a consolation.”²⁵ Thus God brought to completion a life that was consecrated entirely to God and to His Mission.

2. MSFS Missionary Movements

The life of Fr Mermier and that of the early history of our Congregation explained in the form of the Twelve Experiences of the Founder give way to the growth of the Congregation through Missionary Movements that carry on its chequered history to this date. These movements reveal the missionary dynamism which was in the heart of Fr Mermier bequeathed to his sons and give witness to its charism.

These movements are the following:

1. MSFS Missionary Movements from Europe to other parts of the world
 - To Vizag Mission,
 - To Nagpur Mission,
 - To England via India,
 - To Brazil,
 - To USA via England,
 - To German-speaking part of Europe.
2. Missionary Movements from Provinces in India to other parts of India and neighbouring countries
3. Missionary Movements from Provinces in India to Africa
4. Missionary Movements from Provinces in India to places other than Africa

2.1 MSFS Missionary Movements from Europe to other parts of the world

The second part of this Chapter gives a panoramic view of the missionary movements of the MSFS that started from Europe to the Vizag Mission and Nagpur Mission. This chapter also records missionary movements of MSFS from India when the Provinces of MSFS were constituted. Each of these movements have contributed to the evangelisation in the Universal Church by way of pastoral assistance and renewal of faith. Where needed the Fransalians have offered education, social and humanitarian uplift of the poor. Though this part of the chapter is very limited in providing details of these movements, it is hoped that it will give a taste of the onward missionary journey of the MSFS after the death of Fr Mermier. One can have detailed insights into these movements in some of the books written and /or edited by our confreres, namely, *Monsieur Mermier* by Fr Adrien Duval, *Vagabonds for God* by Fr Francis Moget, *Shepherds for Christ* by Fr Francis Moget, *Fransalians in India*, the Licentiate Thesis of Fr Thomas Cherukat, *Makers of Mission History* compiled and edited by Fr Henry Jose, Fr George Panthanmackel and Fr Joseph Pullopillil.

2.1.1 Movement from Europe to India (Vizag Mission)

Fr Mermier desired to take up missions in Africa, but he was asked to take up the vast mission of Visakhapatnam. The area was very vast, 435,000 square kilometres; limited by the

²⁵ Jean Rey, *Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod*, 101. (Found in the Eulogy of Fr. Mermier, pronounced by Bishop Magnin of Annecy at La Feuillette after the religious profession of 4 msfs, 08 September, 1862)

rivers of Mahanadi and Narmada in the North; River Godavari in the West and the South, thus including parts of Modern states of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Jabalpur, Cuttack and Aurangabad were later attached to the Visakh Mission. Amazingly, only 4 priests were catering to all the Catholics in this vast area.²⁶ The evangelical situation in 1846 was complex and difficult and indeed challenging from the time the missionaries landed on the shores of Pondicherry where they were to halt for a while before going to Yanam and then to Vizag. They felt unwanted by local church leadership due to lack of cordial and hearty welcome. They noticed local ecclesiastical weaknesses at display.²⁷ They did not get discouraged; they patiently waited till clarification came and the mandate was ensured. They used their time usefully; learning English, Tamil and Telugu. They preached parish missions in Pondicherry and they made their annual retreat as well. Thus, they remained faithful to one of the instructions given to them by the Founder while they set sail to the mission land to be faithful to their spiritual life. There were other difficulties, like travel and journey by bullock cart; robbery on the way; health hazards; food and climate; the pain of not having the joy of living in a community after they arrived in Vizagapatam and being scattered in the vast mission territory of the Vizag Mission. But they moved on faithful to the Lord and to His Mission.

After landing in Yanam on the coastal village of Vizag Mission, the confreres were sent to different destinations: Fr Jean Thevenet to Jalna-Aurangabad, Fr Joseph Lavorel to Kamptee -Nagpur and Fr Jean Marie Tissot to Vishakapatnam. The Mission Superior, Fr Jacques and the two Brothers remained in Yanam. They too would be moved to missions where their services were required. Meanwhile Fr Jacques Martin remained alone in Yanam. The letters from the Superior General did not arrive as they were held up on the way. Fr Martin remained isolated without the support of the community and contact with the Superior. Due to this mental worry and the heat of the place, he succumbed to death in May 1846. While in Vishakhapatnam, the MSFS dared to go to the untouched un-evangelised lands.²⁸ In 1850 Fr Tissot and Fr Sermet made attempts in Orissa among the Khonds. They went through villages and mountains trying to contact the Khonds. They went to Berhampur, then Ganjam on their way to Cuttack. Fr Tissot fell seriously ill. Fr Sermet fell ill and died in the afternoon. When Tissot returned he gave a favourable report on the mission.

The second wave of European missionaries came at different times as per the need of the mission. In 1851 Fr Richard, in 1853 Fr Guillaume and Fr Seigneur; Fr Dupont arrived and took up the mission of Surada. The experiment of Fr Seigneur to live like De Nobili to approach caste people is worth noting. He employed a Brahmin cook and followed a vegetarian diet. He also found a Brahmin who had a talent to write poetry. He made him compose a kind of "Christ Bhagvad Gita" that explained the catholic faith in harmonious Oriya verses. Several years of perseverance brought only 6 Christians. The reasons for such poor response were the opposition from the local kings (rajahs), the power of the local customs, difficulties in communications, mountain fever and famine.

Another wave of missionaries arrived in 1911. The Mission of Surada had five residential stations with 24 villages. There were 3500 Catholics and 3600 catechumens. Therefore, we

²⁶ Francis Moget, *Vagabonds for God: Story of the Catholic Church in Central India 1846-1907*, (Vishakhapatnam: SFS Publications, 1990), 18.

²⁷ Thomas Cherukat, *Fransalians in India – A historico-theological study on the Apostolate of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales in India from 1845 to 1990*, Licentiate thesis (West Germany: University of Wurzburg, 1982), 4-6.

²⁸ Francis Moget, *Vagabonds for God: Story of the Catholic Church in Central India 1846-1907*, 42-43.

can confidently say that the Gospel was sown in Surada by a band of young zealous missionaries in their youthfulness. Most of them sacrificed their lives without counting the cost. Fr Jean Prunier (died at 24 years), Fr Muffat Meridol (died at 32 years), Fr Petit Jean (died at 28 years); Fr Suffet (died at 41 years), Fr Julien Vulliez (died at 45 years), Fr Fleury (died at 39 years), and Seigneur (died at 38 years). As illness and other hazards took the toll of the missionaries, more were added: Fr Petrus Descombes, Fr Jules Rey, Fr Bouchet and Fr Alphonse Barril. As a result, in 1921 there were 10,000 Christians. Unable to attend to the vast mission of Surada and the rest of the Mission of Vizag, through the recommendation of Bishop Pierre Rossillon (1919-1947) the Mission of Surada was handed over to the Lazarist or Vincentian Congregation.²⁹

A few words on Bishop Rossillon would not be out of place here. He was first appointed as assistant pastor at Gnanapuram. He was a pastor, educator and renovator of faith and morals and a forward looking missionary. He insisted on dignity and self-reliance even in matters of vocations. He decided to recruit vocations from Kerala and expanded the mission of Vizag to Srikakulam. His vision of evangelization and missionary work in India as given in his address to the Eucharistic Congress in 1937 is worth reading and being inspired.³⁰ The Vizag Mission besides developing Surada in Orissa developed the core centres in the area of Vizag: Yanam in 1846; Behrampore in 1850; Cuttack in 1850; Kakinada in 1854, Vizianagaram in 1857; Srikakulam and Palkonda in 1858; Salur in 1883, Makkuva in 1925 and Gnanapuram, in 1872. The Vizag district itself focused on Kottavalsa, Mangalapalem, Vepada, Madugula, Skota, Pedda Boddepali, Aruku, Raja, Parlakameddi, Bathili, Kothuru, Levidi.

A historical note like this needs to affirm the valuable and significant contribution made by women congregations in partnership with the MSFS. They are; St Joseph of Annecy (arrived in 1849); St Joseph of Chambery (arrived in 1854); The Sisters of Immaculate Conception (Provisional Congregation under Fr Balmand arrived in 1857. But it did not survive and was closed down in 1885); Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate (SMMI); Sisters of the Cross (arrived in 1886) and St Anne's Sisters of Lucerne (arrived in 1921).

The Diocese of Visakhapatnam (which later becomes an archdiocese) was erected in 1864. Through these years of missionary history, the MSFS Congregation also provided leadership to the local church through its Bishops:

- Msgr Theophilus Neyret, Apostolic Vicar of the Vicariate of Vizag, in 1850 (died in 1862)
- Bishop J.M Tissot, first Bishop of Vishakhapatnam in 1864 (died in 1888)
- Bishop John Mary Clerc, in 1891
- Bishop Rossillon in 1920, (died in 1947)
- Bishop Baud in 1947 -1966 (Coadjutor Bishop in 1942 of Bishop Rossillon)
- Bishop Gopu in 1966, died in 1980 (Coadjutor Bishop in 1964 of Bishop Baud)
- Bishop K. Mariadas, Bishop of Vishakhapatnam in 1983 (died in 2018)

The following dioceses were carved out from the area where the MSFS had worked, namely;

²⁹ Francis Moget, *The Early Days of the Visakhapatnam Mission 1846 -1920*, (Bangalore: IIS Publications,1997) 18 & 24

³⁰ General Administration, eds., *Missionaries of St Francis de Sales*, Appendix 1, Some MSFS Stalwarts, 2014, 14-15.

Archdiocese of Visakhapatnam
Archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar
Diocese of Berhampur
Diocese of Balasore
Diocese of Srikakulam

2.1.2 Movement from Europe to India (Nagpur Mission)

The Nagpur Mission was part of the Vizag Mission till its separation. From the earliest stages of its history in 1846, Fr Joseph Lavorel was sent to Nagpur-Kamptee and Fr John Thevenet was sent to Jalna-Aurangabad. John Thevenet had to face stiff opposition from the Goan priests who were assigned to look after this area by the *Padroado*, with a change in the Ecclesiastical Administrative setup, they refused to hand over the charge and instigated the locals against the missionaries. Fr Thevenet sent a very sad letter to Fr Mermier on the treatment he received at the hands of the *Padroado* priests.

The earliest expansions of the Nagpur Mission are the following;

Mandla Mission 1859
Nagpur 1867
Chindwara 1866
Raipur 1875
Khandwa 1880
Akola 1881
Amravati 1884
Badnera 1886
Jabalpur 1885
Ghogargaon 1892

Fr Jacquier spent all his energy on the Mahar Mission and extended it to 50 villages. He opened a catechist school, many village schools and many joined the Christian faith. The Archdiocese of Nagpur came into existence from 1887. The Nagpur SFS Cathedral was built from 1880 to 1887. The first Bishop was Alexi Riccaz. For a certain period of time, the Bishops of Nagpur were from the Congregation, namely;

Alex Riccaz 1889-1892;
Charles Pelvat 1893-1900
John Mary Crochet 1900-1903
Stephen Mary Bonaventure 1904-1907
Stephen Coppel 1907-1933
Louis Francis Gayet 1934-1950

- Eugene Dsouza 1951-1963 - He was transferred to Bhopal Archdiocese in 1963 as its first Archbishop. After retirement as Bishop he died in 2003.
- Bishop Joseph Rosario, was the Bishop of Amravati (1955-1995) when the new diocese was carved from Nagpur archdiocese in 1955. He retired as the Bishop in 1995 and died in 2011.

The following are the 9 dioceses carved out from the Nagpur Mission or part of the Mission;
Diocese of Nagpur 1886 (later became an archdiocese);

Diocese of Amravati, 1955

Archdiocese of Bhopal 1962
Diocese of Jagdalpur 1972
Diocese of Jabalpur 1932
Diocese of Chanda 1962
Diocese of Raipur 1964
Diocese of Khandwa. 1977
Diocese of Aurangabad 1978

When the two Missions of Vizag and Nagpur grew extensively, the Holy See entrusted the work of evangelization to other Congregations.

In 1928, the Mission in Orissa was entrusted to the Vincentians.

In 1932, the Mission of Jabalpur was entrusted to the Norbertines.

In 1935, the Nimar Mission was detached and established as a Diocese of Indore and entrusted to the SVDs.

In 1955, the Mission of Amravati was made into a diocese.

In 1962, the Mission of Chanda was entrusted to the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, of Kerala

In 1962, the district of Hoshangabad was attached to the Archdiocese of Bhopal

In 1964, the Mission of Raipur was entrusted to the Pallotines and made into a Diocese.

In 1972, the district of Bastar was attached and was made into the diocese of Jagdalpur and entrusted to the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, Kerala

In 1977, the Mission of Khandwa was established into a diocese

In 1978, the Mission of Aurangabad was established into a Diocese

2.1.3 Missionary Movement from India and Europe to England

The opening of our Mission in England was due to Captain Dwell, an Irish Englishman stationed in Kamptee. While being instructed in faith and spiritual life, he asked Fr Larrive to open a mission in England to bring the Catholic faith back to the people. That was also the desire of St Francis de Sales, i.e., to go on mission to England. When there was a call to go to England, Fr Mermier was very happy to know that in the response to the invitation the desire of St Francis de Sales was being fulfilled. In 1867 Fr Larrive took charge of Devizes and also the house of Captain Dwell at Malmsbery. Catholics were few. Prejudices were very strong. Papist, as Catholics were called, were hated. Fr Larive went on foot. With patience, courtesy, gentleness and affability he slowly won the people.

The missionary wave that began from India to England was enhanced by a wave of missionaries from France. Many missionaries who would set sail to India came to England for ministry and to learn English. One of them was Fr Coppel, the future Bishop of Nagpur. Fr Loius Valluet from Savoy was an outstanding missionary in England. Filled with missionary zeal he preached missions, retreats for priests and nuns. Our first missionaries promoted local vocations both from England and Ireland and imbued them with the spirit of St Francis de Sales.³¹

2.1.4 Missionary Movement from Europe to Brazil

³¹ Antony Kolencherry and Antony Mookenthottam, eds., *150 Years: Missionaries of St Francis de Sales*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1988), 149-157.

In 1926, the Archbishop of Sao Paulo invited the MSFS to work in his diocese. The missionaries in India had serious concerns in accepting the offer because there were not enough personnel for the Indian Mission. In the course of time, the pastoral care of the French speaking people in Sao Paulo was entrusted to the MSFS. Besides, the parish of Santa Teresinha, Sao Paulo was entrusted to the MSFS. It is no more with us. In December 1926 three missionaries, Fr Augert, Fr Gaydon and Fr Birraux arrived in Sao Paulo. Over the years, the European Fathers established Missions and parishes in Cacador, Curitiba and Rio de Janeiro. Diocese of Cacador inherited the church built by our Fathers as the Cathedral of the new Diocese. Fr Augert founded a Congregation of Sisters, which is still there today. In the early part of this century, the Brazil Province opened a new mission in the Amazon area. Recruitment for the seminary and formation were given importance by our missionaries. A number of Brazilians became priests. The post-Vatican period saw an exit of a number of confreres, European and Brazilian from the Congregation, creating a big vacuum in our Brazil mission. The Brazil Mission at present (2019) is strengthened by a few local vocations and missionaries from India ³²

2.1.5 The Movement from England to USA and supported by the members of other Provinces

Before 1968, unsuccessful attempts were made to open centres in USA. There was already the presence of Fr Basil Luyet, MSFS (1897-1974). He went to USA in 1929 for research in Biological Sciences. Today he is called the Father of Cryobiology.³³ In 1968, the Superior General, Fr Adrian Duval, took the decision of taking up missions in USA and entrusted the same to the English Province. The MSFS first settled in Atlanta, and with sheer determination and united effort, they built the two big parishes of the diocese, namely, St Patrick's Norcross and St Lawrence Parish at Lawrenceville. Both the parishes are no more administered by us. There were a few local American vocations. Some became priests and made significant contribution to the growth of the American Mission. The English Province had also to rely on confreres coming from India to sustain the two parishes. The USA Mission also relied on the generosity of confreres who went from England and France.

Our confreres got attuned to the American culture. People's participation and good relationship won them goodwill and solid support in building the two parishes.³⁴ In course of time, the American Mission was erected into a Region under the General Administration, with the pioneering efforts of Fr Augustine Tharappel, with the regional office at Wellspring Center, Tyler. In 2013 the Region of USA became a Vice-Province; the first vice provincial was Fr. Augustine Tharappel. At present the vice-provincial house is at Atlanta. The Vice-Province is at present supported with personnel by confreres from other Provinces especially from the Provinces in India.

2.1.6 Attempt to establish the presence of the Congregation in German-speaking Europe.

³² Antony Kolenchery and Antony Mookenthottam, eds., *150 Years: Missionaries of St Francis de Sales*, 158-164

³³ Cryobiology is the preservation of cells and tissues for purposes of long-term storage, under specific temperatures. It has led to cryotherapy which uses extreme cold to freeze and remove abnormal tissues. Cf. <http://sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S08877963060000162>, (Accessed on 12 August 2023)

³⁴ Antony Kolenchery and Antony Mookenthottam, eds., *150 Years: Missionaries of St Francis de Sales*, 176-178.

Many confreres ask the question, “why the Congregation in early years of its history did not establish its presence in German-speaking parts of Europe?” This question is legitimate as most other Congregations founded in Europe had their extensive presence in these German-speaking countries. It is important for the MSFS to know that a serious effort was made to have MSFS presence and formation in Dreiborn in the Duchy of Luxemburg. The presence and mission were fast growing when it came to an abrupt ending due to the historical situation there after the second world war. Besides the needs for personnel and resources in the Indian Mission were so great that further attempts were not made for extension in Europe. This excerpt from the book *Makers of Mission History* explains what happened.

“Fr. Albert Dangelmaier was born in Germany, in Württemberg, on 12 November 1885. In 1908, he joined the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. On 13 July 1913, he was ordained a priest and was sent to India to serve the mission of Nagpur. The 1914-1918 war forced him to return to Europe. Therefore, Bishop François-Etienne Coppel, Bishop of Nagpur, asked him to work for vocations among young German-speaking youth to strengthen the Nagpur mission. Fr. Albert had a few candidates in the Villa Edelweiss, Fribourg. This initiative did not find favour with Bonlieu, Germany and France were out of a cruel war that had left its mark. In 1926, the Superior General and his Council decided to open a Juvenate at Dreiborn in Wormeldange, in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, on neutral ground. Fr. Alphonse Favrat purchased a property, a castle on the left bank of the Moselle, a wine region that borders Germany. It was easy to send young people from this country and German speaking part of Switzerland to Dreiborn. A novitiate was opened in 1927 to accommodate lay brothers. Candidates who were preparing for priesthood were given intensive courses in French, because it was decided that they would join Bonlieu in Fribourg for the novitiate and study philosophy and theology. At the beginning of the war, Dreiborn had already given to the Congregation 12 priests and 25 scholastics. Having joined the Indian Mission, Fr Otto Reitmayer, Fr Jacques Gebert and Fr Xavier Schmaderer had gone to Brazil in 1932 (the only one who has travelled by airplane).

The register of religious professions at Dreiborn has more than 50 names, all lay brothers for the period from 1927 to 1939. Some did not continue, but there were several departures for India and Brazil, with quality reinforcements: Brothers Eugene Oppold, Aloys Schneider, Joseph Iten, Corbinian Neumaier, Jacob Truniger and Anton Betz. The adventure of this Juvenate ended abruptly when German troops occupied the house in February 1941, giving one hour’s notice to pack up and leave. The war shattered all hopes of a future German province. Those who returned were taken to be put at the disposal of the dioceses of the country. The friendship between France and Germany will be born much later. The Director at Dreiborn, Fr Currat Joseph was well appreciated, as he was a remarkable religious, community superior and master of novices.

Till his death on 11 February 1935, the seminary there was booming, but the political developments in Germany were soon to jeopardize its existence. The committed confreres remained there till their expulsion. They were then able to go to Switzerland and provide a powerful reinforcement to Florimont Institute: Fathers Paul Lorenz, Adrien Duval, Alphonse Baeriswyl, Henri Wider, Jean Déclinand, Camille Savoy. At the end of the war, the Government of the Grand Duchy bought the property, and forced the demand for the opening of a juniorate in French speaking part of Switzerland, Juvénat La Corbiere Estavayer-le-Lac

(Canton of Fribourg).”³⁵ Besides, after the World War II, when some of those German Confreres who survived the war wished to return to the Congregation, they were advised to integrate into the church in Germany as the climate of peace and reconciliation between Germany and France and allies was not stable enough to rehabilitate the confreres when they returned. The above-detailed quote from one of the latest books on the History of MSFS Missions is worth noting lest we miss the real reasons for not having an MSFS foundation in Germany and other German-Speaking countries in the early part of its history.

2.1.7 The Spirit of our Missionaries from Europe

2.1.7.1 The spirit of the pioneers of the early European missionaries was of courage and daring, trust in the providence of God amidst adversity and zeal for souls. It was total divesting of themselves and their collective and individual resources to build the local church. The missionaries promoted local vocations and also due attention was given to the formation of msfs candidates as well as of the diocesan.

2.1.7.2 Another characteristic of our early missionaries was their love for the poor. They bought acres of land to rehabilitate people and to give them a sense of rootedness and belongingness. It was an experiment bold enough to meet with success in Gnanapuram of the Vizag Mission. But the project in Padri Thane of Nagpur Mission did not achieve what was intended in a big way.

2.1.7.3 The life of our early missionaries was also marked with simplicity and hospitality. They welcomed all especially the diocesan priests who were their co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord.

2.1.7.4 What stands out among the early European missionaries is the generous self-gift of themselves to the missions. This observation is so well-expressed by Fr Anselm Francis Biswal and Fr Augustine Kartakuttiyl of the Diocese of Berhampore in an article, *The Little Mustard Seed: Genesis and Growth of undivided Cuttack Mission*: “The French Missionaries without counting the cost, went forth meeting the people, being with them, loving them, identifying with them and sowing the seeds of faith in and out of season. Their indomitable missionary zeal, commitment and dedication was unforeseen, like the dreaded famines that occasionally struck human lives in thousands. They went all their way to reach out the tribals, Dalits and even caste Hindus, the helpless orphans and victims of famines and epidemics.

By the time of their departure from Ganjam Mission in 1922 they had brought the light of the Gospel to about 8000 people, had opened seven parishes, three orphanages, eight schools, two catechist-training centres, published two prayer books and hymn books and the Catholic Bhagabat of about 5000 verses in Odia composed by a Brahmin convert. Thus, the Missionaries laid a firm and sure foundation of the Church.³⁶ These words reverberate the well-deserving sentiments of the present generations of Christians and non-Christians alike for the sacrifice of their lives. When the mission of Vizag and Nagpur grew and came of age, they became Provinces of the MSFS Congregation in 1965: the Province of Nagpur and the Province of Vishakhapatnam. The provinces spread across the length and breadth of India,

³⁵ Henry Jose Kodikuthiyil, George Panthamackel and Joseph Pulloppillil, eds., *Makers of Mission History*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2018), 8

³⁶ Anselm Francis Biswal & Augustine Kartakuttiyl, eds., *The Little Mustard Seed, Genesis and Growth of undivided Cuttack Mission*, (Berhampore, diocesan publication)

and established new Provinces not forgetting their responsibility to go to missionary territories outside India. Here we mention only the missionary movements of these Provinces and later ones and urge the readers to read fascinating and challenging accounts of the new movements from the recorded history of the different Provinces in India.

3. Missionary Movements of MSFS Provinces of India within India and neighbouring countries

The Provinces of India having experienced the generosity and dynamism of missionary zeal of the European confreres and the first Indian confreres felt that then was their time to continue the legacy of launching into pioneering missions. This missionary outreach is seen within the vast subcontinent of India and the neighbouring countries.

3.1 Vizag Province to the North East India. This movement started in 1975 with 6 confreres moving to the North-East from Vizag: Fr Kurian Pattimakal, Fr Jose Mundoly, Fr Joseph Kizhakkevedu, Fr George Parampukkattil, Fr Abraham Kutiankal and Fr Joseph Kutiany. Of the six, two left the Congregation. The rest worked mightily with dedication and devotion and with the assistance of new missionaries coming from Vizag built up the mission. In course of time the confreres started serving in many dioceses of the North-East India and among its varied tribes. The North East India became the MSFS Province of North-East India. It is proud to have local vocations and priests from almost all the tribes of the North East India. The Province was further divided into two in the General Chapter, 2019: Provinces of Guwahati and Province of Dibrugarh.

3.2 Vizag Province to Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu in India. This movement with intensive and extensive apostolates by the Vizag Province in different dioceses of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu, established the Provinces of South-West India Province and South East India Province.

3.4 Maharashtra Goa Province (later became Nagpur Province and Pune Provinces) moved to Goa, Delhi in north India, western Orissa, Kolhapur district of Maharashtra, in Vasai area of Mumbai, in Kinwat- Mandvi tribal areas of Nanded District of Maharashtra.

3.5 Nagpur Province initiated the missionary movement in several dioceses of Jharkand and some parts of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.

3.6 Pune Province launched its services in Gujarat and Rajasthan in west and north-west of India. It stretched its pastoral services into the District of Sindhudurg of Maharashtra and in Daman, the Union Territory and Vasai District of Vasai Diocese.

3.7 North-East India Province extended its missionary presence and services into the states of Assam, Megalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, and parts of West Bengal. Bold initiatives to have MSFS presence and ministry in Nepal and Sikkim were tried for a few years. But due to various factors had to be closed down.

3.8 The missionary movement of South West India Province within India was more towards the northern parts of Karnataka in Koppal, Bellary, and Belgaum districts, and diversification of its apostolates within Kerala and Karnataka.

3.9 The South-East India Province while strengthening its pastoral activities and educational apostolate in the various districts of Tamil Nadu, tried to establish MSFS presence in the

eastern part of West Bengal but it did not continue to be there after a few years. The Province diversified its apostolates and took up mission centres in different districts of Tamil Nadu.

4. Missionary Movements of MSFS from Provinces in India outside India to Africa

The new movement to Africa for the first time after the Congregation closed its community in Algiers in the early 1950s was to Tanzania. The missionary movement was due to the bold decision of Fr Emile Mayoraz, our former Superior General who felt that the time was ripe for the MSFS in India to fulfil the desire of Fr Mermier to go to Africa. He guided, encouraged and supported the various movements of the missionaries in all ways possible. His visits to these fledgling missions encouraged the confreres and revived their vision to implant the Congregation in Africa. The fruits of such a vision are there for all to see.

4.1 Movement from Vizag Province to East Africa. It began with the arrival of Fr Sebastian Kuzhupil, Fr Devasia Kuzhupil, Fr Augustine Mangat and Fr Thomas Kochuparambil who landed in Africa on 31 December 1987 and reached the Archdiocese of Tabora Diocese on 2 January 1988 to begin their missionary journey, from that time onwards there has been no looking back. The missionaries opened centres in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda with the help of more MSFS who came from India. The Province initiated vocation promotion and formation for the candidates from Africa wanting to join the Congregation. Eventually, it became a Province in 1995. It continues to give guidance to all others who come to establish missions in Africa.

4.2 North East India Province opened its missions in Namibia in 1998 and in South Africa, in 1999. An attempt was made to establish MSFS pastoral presence in Swaziland in 2016, but it was discontinued. Till 2023, it serves in six parishes in South Africa and four parishes in Namibia. It has its regional house in Cape Town.

4.3 South-West India Province went to Chad in 1999 and to Cameroon in 2000 and established the Congregation with the promotion of local vocations, formation houses, pastoral ministry and ministry to youth. Till 2023, it serves in 3 parishes in Cameroon, two parishes in Chad; it has a minor seminary, a scholasticate for theology students; a centre for retreats; two children's homes and two chaplaincies for university students.

3.4 Nagpur Province went to Mozambique in 2000 and took up pastoral, social ministries and initiated promotion of local vocations, and their formation. Till 2023, it serves in six mission centres; it has a scholasticate for theology students and 2 minor seminaries.

3.5 Pune Province opened its mission in Zambia in 2012 and is serving the people there for several years in pastoral and renewal ministry. Till 2023, it has established three MSFS communities and pastoral presence in two dioceses of Zambia.

3.6 South East India Province sent missionaries to Malawi in 2018 and their pastoral presence is in two dioceses. They are in the process of promoting local vocations and their formation.

3.7 The General Administration with the assistance of the Provinces in India, of East Africa and Mission Superiors of Africa started an Institute of the Congregation, called Lumen Christi Institute in Arusha, Tanzania on a 100-acre plot of land, in 2010. The purpose of the Institute is to be at the service of the Church in Africa by providing pastoral, health catechetical,

philosophical, educational and spiritual services and formation to the people, seminarians, religious, priests and catechists. The programmes were started at different times beginning with the department of Philosophy in 2011.

4. Missionary Movements of Confreres of various Provinces from India outside India, other than in Africa

4.1 The Province of South West sent confreres to Philippines in 1993 to have a foundation of the Congregation there. They have built sufficient infrastructure for vocation promotion and formation. The Philippines is now a Delegation of the Congregation under the Province of South-West India. Till 2023, it has its own novitiate, scholasticate for philosophy and theology students and a minor seminary. It serves in two parishes in different dioceses.

4.2 The Province of South-East India established its community in Caltagirone, Sicily, Italy in the year to assist the local church in its pastoral needs.

4.3 The Province of Pune undertook missions in Ecuador in 20019, in Peru in 2022 and in Spain in 2023 to cater to the spiritual needs of the people. Till 2023, it serves in two parishes in Ecuador; one parish in Peru and one in Spain.

4.4 The Province of Vizag has undertaken a mission in the interior parts of Canada in 2012 and *in Indonesia* in 2020. The plan is to establish MSFS communities and to take care of pastoral and faith renewal work of the people. Till 2023, it has two communities in Indonesia and one in Canada for pastoral ministry.

4.5 Assistance to needy dioceses in the world in pastoral ministry. A number of confreres from the Provinces of India and East Africa are assisting with pastoral ministry in the dioceses in Germany, Austria, USA, Papua New Guinea, Italy, West Indies and Australia.

4.6 Assistance to the MSFS western provinces. The Provinces in India are also supplying personnel to the Provinces where presently there are no or very few local vocations, as in the Province of Franco-Swiss, USA Vice Province, Brazil Province and English Province.

5. Critical remarks and observations of the Missionary Movements after the death of Mermier

5.1 What is to be noted after Provinces were erected in India, is that the Congregation in spite of changed political, social situation in the world, has tried to be faithful to its foundational apostolate of pioneering missions abroad. The urge to go to mission territories other than one's own as in the heart of Fr Mermier continues to live in the generations that follow him. The Congregation very much desires that the fervour, joy and vigour of this missionary aspect of its life is promoted in spite of all odds that plague our times. The danger to be settlers in our own land needs to be faced courageously. With missionary openness we are meant to go to other lands and cultures. Such identity and integrity of our vocation echoes the heart-beat of Fr Mermier, our Founder.

5.2 The investment of personnel and resources to build up new missions has been formidable but due to the generous contribution of benefactors and the frugal living of the confreres, the congregational units have moved forward in serving the people. Hard work, trust in the

Providence of God and genuine and transparent love for God's people will always bless us with the generosity of people of goodwill.

5.3 Growth of a congregation depends a lot on discernment of right type of vocations for our Congregation and forming them. The Provinces have consciously worked on this aspect of their life by opening minor seminaries, scholasticates, common philosophical institutes like Suvidya College at Bangalore and Lumen Christi Institute (Philosophy department) in Arusha, Tejas Vidyapeeth (for integral and experiential formation) in Bangalore. The charismatic yard stick of discernment for the MSFS way of life as explained to us in our Constitutions is pivotal for the right type of growth of our Congregation.

5.4 In view of future growth and expansion of ministry, the pioneering missionaries in different places bought land and worked to provide infra-structural facilities. for the all-around development of the people. According to their means and capacities they initiated social and educational services. This integral developmental module of carrying on the mission of Christ is essential for the growth of the kingdom of God through our apostolates.

5.6 Sensing the times and the needs of the people, confreres and General Chapters discerned the need for diversification of apostolates, which are expressions of the original three foundational apostolates. However, for administrative purposes the MSFS Constitutions in 2007 put into operation four apostolate forums: Forum for Mission, Forum for Education, Forum for Formation and Forum for Social and Innovative Ministries. Our three Foundational Apostolates and the 4 Apostolate Forums have to be understood in the light of this understanding. Ministries which are specifically of pastoral care, spiritual care and guidance come under Mission Forum. Ministry for formation of seminarians although it belongs to educational apostolate, is constituted into Formation Forum separate from Education Forum to attend to its specific demands, and challenges. Most of the social and innovative ministries come under Educational Apostolate. Because of their varied forms of educational thrusts, other than institutional, they are constituted as one Forum of Social and Innovative Ministries.

5.7 Social apostolates to the poor and the disadvantaged in many Provinces are well organised and in some Provinces these services are given through institutions. As we are deeply appreciative of these social and educational apostolates, we should not forget one outstanding confrere of the Mother Province of Franco-Swiss, who blazed the trail of social work and justice. He is Fr Joseph Favre. He saved hundreds of Jews from the Nazis during the second world war. He used our community - house at Ville-la Grand, situated in France on the border with Switzerland, to help the Jews to escape from France to Switzerland. He was betrayed by informants of Nazis, incarcerated in prison and later killed. The Israeli Government through its embassies have expressed their appreciation and gratitude to his service by conferring on him posthumous award. The life of Fr Joseph Favre reminds us that we should be proud of our confreres who risk their lives for faith, justice and human dignity

5.8 Our Congregation, wishing to be faithful to our original apostolate of renewal of faith through parish mission preaching, has revived interest and initiatives in parish mission preaching apostolate. A similar situation of indifference to faith and poor knowledge of Christian doctrine in our times as in the times of Fr Mermier exists today. The efforts made by all the Provinces to renew enthusiasm in the ministry of parish mission preaching (PMP) is praise worthy and are bearing fruits.

6. Record of attempts of missionary movements that did not grow. This chapter dedicated to the history of our Congregation also takes note of a number of efforts made by the Congregation to launch out into new countries/places and had to be given up.

6.1 *The Mission in Chile* was started in the year 1994 and closed down in 2014-2015. But as we are informed in 2023, the mission will be re-started by the Franco-Swiss Province, very soon.

6.2 *The Mission to Romania* was started in 2000 and was closed down in 2002.

6.3 *The Mission to Poland* was started by Franco-Swiss Province with the help of confreres of North-East India Province in 2004 and was closed down in 2009.

6.4 *The Mission in Nepal* was started by North East Province in the year 1998 and was closed down in the year 2004.

7. Major Contributions to the understanding of MSFS History and Movements, and research works in Salesian Spirituality

7.1. As we close this chapter, we acknowledge with gratitude the work done by some of our confreres in writing and /or translating the French works pertaining to our history, and spirituality into English or other languages and making the Congregation and its spirit known. They are the following: Fr Philippe Gaiddon, Fr Joseph Tissot, Fr Jean Rey, Fr Adrien Duval, Fr Vincent Kerns, Fr Francis Moget, Fr Claude Morel, Fr Antony Mookenthottam, Fr Armind Nazareth, Fr Antony Kolencherry, Fr M.Mariadas, Fr Augustine Tharappel, Fr Ivo Carneiro, Fr Henry Jose Kodathiyil, Fr Noel Rebello, Fr Suresh Babu, Fr Kurian Kollapallil.³⁷ We also can get valuable details in the research done by the Sisters of

³⁷ Phillippe Gaiddon, *Notice Biographique sur M. Pierre Mermier et Mgr. Neyret, Burdet*, (Annecy : MSFS Private Publication, 1863), Joseph Tissot, *The Art of Utilising our faults*, trans., Ivo Carneiro, (Place: Publication and Year), Jean Rey, *Founder of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales and of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod*, (Vishakhapatnam: SFS Publications, 1960), Adrien Duval, *Monsieur Mermier: Founder of two Religious Congregations*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1985), Francis de Sales, *The Love of God: A Treatise*, trans., Vincent Kerns (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1967), Francis Moget, *The Missionaries of St Francis de Sales*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1985), Francis Moget, *Vagabonds for God: Story of the Catholic Church in Central India 1846-1907*, (Vishakhapatnam: SFS Publications, 1990), Francis Moget, *Early Days of Visakhapatnam Mission 1846-1920*, (Bangalore: IIS Publications, 1997), Francis Moget, *Shepherds for Christ: Story of the Catholic Church in Central India, 1907 -1956*, (Bangalore: IIS Publications, 1994), Francis de Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life*, trans., Antony Mookenthottam, Armind Nazareth and Antony Kolencherry, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2005), Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, New Edition, trans., Antony Mookenthottam, Armind Nazareth and Henry J. Kodikuthiyil, (Bangalore: ATC Publications, 2012), Antony Mookenthottam and Antony Kolencherry, eds., *150 years of Missionaries of St Francis de Sales*, Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1988), Antony Mookenthottam, *The Crisis in Paris Amidst Trials and Problems- Vol I and II*, (Visakhapatnam: SFS Publications, 1979, Vol III in 1980), Antony Kolencherry (ed.), *Love Be-All & End-All, a Compendium*, (Mumbai, St Pauls., 2023), Midathada Mariadas, *Pastoral Spirit of St Francis de Sales*, Book I-III, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1996), Augustine Tharappel, *Spiritual Moments Newsletter* (Tyler: Wellspring (Publications, Annual), Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Conferences*, trans., Ivo Carneiro, Vol. I and II (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1995), Henry Jose Kodathiyil, George Panthanmackel, & Joseph Pulloppillil, eds., *Makers of Mission History Vol I-III*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2018), Noel Rebello, *Salesian Spirituality: A Source Book of Meditation*, (Navi Mumbai: Mermier Bal Ashram Press, 2002), Suresh Babu, *A Spoonful of honey*, Vol I-II, (Vishakhapatnam: SFS Printing, 2013, Vol III, 2014) Suresh Babu, ed., *Pearls of our Patron*, Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2021), Suresh Babu, *A journey with St Francis de Sales*, Visakhapatnam: (SFS Publications, 2014), Claude Morrel, *15 days of Prayer with Saint Francis de Sales* (New York, New City Press, 2008). Kurian Kollapallil, *Through the Year with St Francis de Sales* (Leonie Publications, USA 2011)

the Cross of Chavanod on Fr Mermier and Madame Echernier.³⁸ Besides, there are numerous articles written by our confreres in various magazines and bulletins aiming at the dissemination of our MSFS History and spirituality and which are not recorded here on account of the limited scope of this chapter.

7.2 It is edifying and refreshing to read the notes of the missionary experiences of some of our veteran confreres as recorded in the form of booklets and books after their long missionary life. A few are listed here: *Memoirs (in Malayalam)* by Fr George Vayalil; *History of Vizag Mission* by Fr Devasia Kuzhupil; *Beyond the Barriers* by Fr Mani Tharappel; *Gleanings from the Mission Field* by George Nellikkunnel; and *My Missionary Journey* by Fr Joseph Pauvath. In reading the simple and straightforward narration of mission experiences one can sense the missionary pulse of our confreres full of zeal.

7.3 This chapter also records the *research work done by our confreres in the mission history of our Congregation, on Fr Mermier and on Salesian spirituality up to 2023* and which can serve as ready reference for the confreres: Fr Thomas Perumalil, Fr Devasia Manalel, Fr Antony Kolencherry, Fr Antony Mookenthottam, Fr Benni Gregorius Koottanal, Fr George Mathew Panthanmackel, Fr Thomas Cherukat, Fr Johnson Mathew Pathiyil, Fr Mathew Edattu, Fr Francis Poovelil, Fr Sen Velakadda, and Fr Jose Cheriyanthara.³⁹

Conclusion

This first Chapter unfolds to us the early history of our Congregation very well intertwined with the life of our Founder, Fr Mermier. The history recorded as the Twelve experiences of Fr Mermier encapsulate his spirit, vision and charism as stated in Constitutions of MSFS, Art.7, EGC 2022: *to continue the mission of Christ and the Church by living the spirit and spirituality of St Francis de Sales in a religious community of missionaries as lived and envisioned by our Founder*. This was the buzz of the day in Annecy. It attracted priests and seminarians to be part of this vision and mission of our Founder. The generosity of their lives

³⁸ *Family Annals of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod, Vol I-V*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications 2017)

³⁹ Thomas Perumalil, *Perfection: A Salesian perspective*, (Bangalore: Indian Institute of Spirituality, 1998), Devasia Manalel, *Spiritual Direction and Methodology*, (Bangalore: IIS Publication, 2005, 2008) Antony Mookenthottam, *Saint Francis de Sales: a Formative Biography of St Francis de Sales*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2003), Benni Gregorius Koottanal, *A Dogmatic and Hermeneutic Understanding of the Salesian Eucharistic Theology in the Calvinistic Era*, (Muenster: LIT Verlag, 2000), George Panthanmackel, *God of Love: An Investigation into Transcendent Love in the Spirituality of St Francis de Sales*. Bangalore: ATC Publishers, 2011), Thomas Cherukat, *Fransalians in India – A historico-theological study on the Apostolate of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales in India from 1845 to 1890*, Licentiate thesis (West Germany: University of Wurzburg, 1982), Johnson Mathew Pathiyil, *St Francis de Sales and New Evangelization*, 2021 (unpublished work), Mathew Edattu, *The Holistic Spirituality of St Francis de Sales*, (Bengaluru: SFS Publications, 2022), Francis Poovelil, *Fransalian Charism and Missionary Apostolate*, An Exploratory Study on The Charism of The Missionaries of St Francis de Sales, unpublished work, (Bangalore: St Peter's Pontifical Institute, 2022), Sen Velakkada, *Person-Oriented & Person-Oriented Salesian Spirituality – Rogerian Approach*, (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2017), Jose Cheriyanthara, *Spiritual Growth in the Life of the Laity*, 2005 (unpublished work).

spans the rest of the years of the history of the Congregation as missionary movements to India and from India to Africa, the Far-East, West Indies, England, Brazil, USA, Canada, and Australia and other parts of the world. This chapter encourages the reader to explore the details of these missionary movements recorded in various provinces and thank God for the diversity and communion through which the charism of the Congregation finds concrete expression. The natural corollary of this First Chapter is Chapter 2 which deals with the Legacy (Heritage) of our Founder and its hallowed Traditional Devotions and Practices.

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