

October 23, 2014

Death Notice No. 25 (To all Unit Administrations):



The Province of France recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **HENRI MOUGEL**, priest of the community of Issenheim, France, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on October 8, 2014 in Guebwiller, France, at the age of 88 with 71 years of religious profession.

Our brother Henri was born September 15, 1926, in La Bresse in the Department of Vosges. His father was a lumberjack. From among his several siblings, his brother Jean also became a Marianist.

Henri attended the free school taught by the Marianists in the village. Fr. René Mougel, as well as his teacher, Bro. Guth, posed the question to him about entering the Society of Mary, but Henri hesitated. He did have a classmate, Jean Brissinger, who was already a postulant, but he could not yet make up his mind. Finally, freely and with the consent of his parents, he decided to enter the Postulate of La Tour-de-Scay in 1939 to do his high school years. He was thinking at the time, and continued to do so

until his novitiate, to become a Marianist missionary priest. The young outdoorsman found it quite difficult to be closed up in a classroom for study, but little by little he adapted to that new kind of life and actually found it to his liking. In October 1941 he lost his mother, but felt strengthened in his vocation.

In spite of the war, the occupation and the privations involved, Henri entered the novitiate in 1942 in Antony. After his first profession, he continued his secondary education at the Institution Ste Marie in Belfort, passed his *baccalaureat* in philosophy in 1946 and, in the process of things, was assigned as a literature teacher to the Collège de St. Hippolyte, where he was evidently not expected: "I will never forget the solitary arrival at the St Hippolyte Railroad Station of the scholastic coming to his first community, at night, 3 kilometers on foot, suitcase in hand, with a moustachioed old gentleman of the town who told me stories about Gy and left me at the entrance. No concierge, of course.... Someone had forgotten that the young whippersnapper in the *Personnel* who had to live somewhere...." But it was a mission on all fronts that awaited him: "27 hours of courses a week, study hall and dormitory supervision, fires to light in the morning, upkeep work on the house during vacations...." It has to be added, however, that Henri was prepared for many different material jobs, since in July 1945 he worked at several manual trades while helping his father reconstruct the family home that had been razed by the Germans, as indeed had been the whole of La Bresse. That first mission to St. Hippolyte was interrupted by military service in 1948-49.

Upon admission to study for the priesthood, Henri left in 1951 for the international Marianist seminary in Fribourg, Switzerland. Besides his studies, he began to operate the mimeograph machine and worked at the editing of the provincial publications, *Antenne* and *Chevalier de Notre Dame*. He was ordained on July 17, 1955, by Bishop Charrière and assigned to Ste Marie of St Dié. There his principal activity was recruitment of young men who showed a desire to become, like himself, Marianist religious. He plowed along the roads of eastern France in a 2CV ["deux chevaux" = 2 HP Citroën] which he baptized "Marie-Ange." A man for whom contacts and relationships came easy, both with adults and with young people, gifted with a spirit of adaptation that put him at ease in the various milieu he frequented, whether primary school children or senior high school students, an amateur photographer as skilled as some professionals, capable of producing audiovisuals of a quality that certain authors of "worldly knowledge" would not hesitate to claim; in short, Henri knew how to capture the attention of his young public, make his hearers reflect, give them guidelines for their future, guide and counsel them in their human, intellectual and spiritual life. In 1958 he was assigned to give a new boost to the province magazine, *L'Apôtre de Marie*, which then became *Marianistes*, while continuing the publication of *Antenne*, which had been a supplement of *L'Apôtre de Marie* for the Marianist religious.

That task was exhausting and after four years of exciting but grueling work, Henri settled down in Colmar, at the Collège St André, where he served as chaplain for two years, from 1960 to 1962.

The school at St Hippolyte recalled its young priest, now experienced, multi-talented, but it was not with a light heart that Henri accepted that mission, knowing as he did what awaited him. Over the past twenty years he had accumulated many different functions: teaching literature, Latin and religion, physical education, "Weekly Mass with clever

techniques to substitute for the lack of a choir director, the responsibility of preparing, if possible, the readers, the responsibility for the school collective prayer twice daily,...” besides all the many manual jobs and different services....

During that time he felt lonely: the community was aged, many criticized him, he had little contact with the parents. He would have liked to deepen his formation, but his days could not allow it: “There was a time when I would have like to “philosophize”: about man, his destiny, the impact of environs upon his formation, his capacity for expression and for relationships, all that would have excited me.... But I always had to ‘fill in a hole!’ Finally, it was a bit through life and not through books that I found a balance and truthful answers, like poor people who lack “culture”; thus my love went out those poor children at Saint-Hippolyte whose parents confided them to us when they were desperate for their children who were too weak in the face of the great school machines secreted by our system. For those poor children, I re-opened my grammar book a third time, I used cartridges of red ink, I ran in the fresh air and in the sun, irritated with a cold anger (which never scared anyone!) because I was so tired, but above all I watched over them, encouraged them, prayed together with them... as only God knows.”

While his arrival at St Hippolyte had been difficult, his departure was even more so: “I had given too much to that work to leave it without being physically upset. I have always played secondary roles, a kind of housemaid who submerges herself in her household and who through the years forges a soul for herself in a consummate fidelity.” He had taken root in that house which he loved, but he felt, along with a confrere, that the school would soon close its doors.... Nonetheless, he accepted his new assignment and left in 1980 for Ste Marie in Belfort. He remained there for four years and was regretted when he had to leave that school for the Collège St André in Colmar.

Besides the Mass for the little ones, he was concerned about being close to the students. At the beginning of the school year Fr. Mougel was in the midst of them, at first in front of the school’s main door, then in the courtyard and finally in the chapel. “It was a real ceremony that would impress these youngsters and teach them that they were entering into a Christian home, a house whose hallmark was its family spirit. Within a few minutes all were won over and the parents left us their little angels with the confidence that they were putting them into good hands.” Very conscious about awakening faith among so many youngsters, he was very attached to the liturgy, where he understood how to bring out its true dimensions.” “Always in the spirit of the Servant of Mary, Henri was a man of dedication and service, discreet, modest, but extremely effective.” In the last years at Colmar, he ministered to the sick in the St. Joseph Clinic.

In 2003 it came time for Fr. Mougel to retire, having reached his 77th year. St Hippolyte was the ideal house for him who had spent more than twenty years in the venerable Collège St André, now under the co-sponsorship of the diocese and the Marianists. He returned to the house that he knew so well, to a community of elderly brothers with whom he had maintained friendly relationships and to quite a quantity of friends in the city who had often been his students. Who could not know Henri here, in the surroundings of the school and the neighboring villages where he would gladly give a hand to the local clergy? And having been an athlete throughout his life, he went on hikes with the Vosges Mountains Club of St Hippolyte. In summer he would be seen going swimming in a gravel pit owned by a friend. He frequently roamed the paths of the Haut Koenigsbourg or the Taennchel, giving his lungs a workout by running through the vineyards towards Orschwiller or Rodern...until an unfortunate fall caused him to break a leg, forcing the retired priest to reduce his active outings. Alzheimer’s illness struck him and he declined little by little. He would often sit on the bench near the Calvary at the school entrance, next to Chemin du Wall, where he enjoyed chatting with strolling passers-by, whether acquaintances or strangers. He still tried to get some exercise with the help of a cane, then with two walking sticks, until the state of his health required care that could be given him only on site. So he moved to the St Antoine House in Issenheim to spend the last part of his long stay on this earth and depart to the Father from the hospital of Guebwiller.

Although many people mention his good humor and pleasing smile: “a man with a big heart, mischievous and funny, who made a mark on the life of the institution,” prayer was the secret of his life. He was so deeply anchored in it that when illness struck him, he spent long hours in the chapel, even lying down stretched out on the pews....

The photographer, the man with the tapes and the movie camera (don Helder Caméra, as some called him) was a person of great sensitivity, a man always concerned about others whether in Scouting, in the Marianist *Fraternités*, in the Eucharistic Movement for youth, etc.: “For me God is always someone new. My joy is in discovering him at work in people whom I know are mixed up in their worries; their little lives are never banal: my comfort is to share prayer with them.”

May the Virgin Mary receive her servant among all his brothers in Heaven.