



A RARE MAN  
SELECTED BY PROVIDENCE

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Afterword

by

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**G**ary MacEoin opens his biography of the founder of the Holy Cross family with a marvelous insight, “Basil Anthony Mary Moreau was one of the rare men who alter the course of history.” This simple statement has been confirmed over the years that have passed since Father Moreau’s life and death in the nineteenth century. That confirmation is evident especially in the several decades since the appearance of MacEoin’s work in the mid-twentieth century. Today we have an enhanced awareness of the rich and living legacy that Basil Moreau passed on, not only to the religious of Holy Cross and those who minister with them, but to all who are committed to continuing the mission and message of Jesus.

That awareness did not come quickly. After the life of a founder or foundress of a religious community, the usual course



of events involves an exploration and elaboration of the example and teaching of that founding person so future generations can adopt and adapt the basic principles for life and ministry that reflect the gifts with which God blessed the person. Such a course did not unfold after Father Moreau's death. There was, in fact, a silence that shrouded his memory among the members of Holy Cross, except for the Marianite Sisters whose fidelity never wavered. That silence spanned more than five decades. As MacEoin notes, there were internal difficulties, disputes, and divisions among the members of Holy Cross before Father Moreau's resignation and after his death. This turbulent atmosphere, in addition to the, at times, careless disposal of Moreau's personal effects, hindered the collection, preservation, and translation of primary materials by and about him. And many who knew and worked personally with Father Moreau lived the remainder of their days in that silence, thus taking with them the possibility of developing an authentic oral tradition about the personality and perspectives of the founder that no documentary sources could capture completely. The consequences of those silent years are still encountered today by those who undertake scholarly work with the sources available on Basil Moreau.

Gradually, through the study, research, and writing of several brothers, sisters, and priests after the first decades of the twentieth century, the members of Holy Cross were reintroduced to Moreau's life, work, and teaching. In recent years this expanded to include reflections on the significance of Basil Moreau's accomplishments for today's world, society, and church. Through the efforts of those who continue to study and research Moreau sources, and with the increase of materials available for distribution, the Family of Holy Cross, as well as those associated with it by ministry and friendship, are embracing anew the words and wisdom that the founder brings into their lives.

Like Father Moreau's life, the heritage that flows from his example and teaching is complex. In his presentation of this holy man, which was gleaned from the much more



comprehensive 1955 biography by Etienne and Tony Catta, Gary MacEoin touches on that complexity from a historical and biographical perspective. Because Holy Cross does not have a reliable oral tradition that can trace its roots to Moreau's contemporaries, that perspective is particularly important. The research and reflection that continues today can benefit from that perspective, enlarge it, and so amplify the information we have about Father Moreau and sharpen our appreciation of his contribution to the times in which we live. These present reflections will highlight some of the principal areas being focused on in that research and reflection.

### “Promoting the Kingdom of God”

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MacEoin's biography presents Basil Moreau as a man of God, a man committed to doing God's will, a man in love with God. The founder of Holy Cross, the author notes, “not only became a priest and a religious but dedicated all his energies throughout his life to the single purpose of promoting the Kingdom of God.” This dedication marks Moreau's life, for all of his life, and he wanted it to mark the lives of Holy Cross religious. In recent years there has been an increased attention given to Moreau's perspective on the key elements for building and maintaining a relationship with God. This has been and continues to be challenging because the founder did not articulate a systematic approach to the spiritual life. Though he began to move in that direction during the 1840s, he abandoned the project to focus on the persons of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in lieu of distinctive devotions for his religious family. In guiding the men and women of Holy Cross, Father Moreau drew upon the wealth and wisdom of several mystical traditions with which he was familiar: Sulpician, Ignatian, Benedictine, Salesian, Carmelite, and the French School.

Primary among the elements of his spirituality is the indispensability of imitating Jesus and continuing his mission. The supporting components that he proposed for this imitation and



continuation are simple and straightforward. Moreau lived with, and insisted on the need for, a keen sense of trust in divine providence—that is, the conviction that God is present and active regardless of the situation and our experience of it. That conviction is nurtured by fidelity to personal and communal prayer and is supported by a community life that is loving, reconciling, genuinely concerned for one another, and hospitable to everyone. All this is expressed through commitment to the religious vows and to the transformation they facilitate. Father Moreau knew, by faith and experience, that such a life, inevitably, would encounter the cross. That encounter and our response to it will define the caliber of our spiritual lives. For this reason, Basil Moreau situates the Family of Holy Cross, within the Paschal Mystery, at the foot of the cross next to Mary of Sorrows, Our Lady of Holy Cross. From there, as pure gift, comes the grace of new life.

Father Moreau tells us, “Christianity—and with still great reason the religious life—is nothing else than the life of Jesus Christ reproduced in our conduct” (*Circular Letter* 137). The quality of our life for the future will be gauged by our willingness to explore as fully as possible what this means, concretely, for the world in which we live. Basil Moreau was a man of God. His life and legacy are pathways for us to become people of God.

### “Less Interested in Theory Than in Action”

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As Gary MacEoin portrays him, Moreau was a man of vision. He could see what needed to be done, then he would organize and mobilize the resources necessary to do it. Part of this characterizes his personality, and part marks the age in which he lived. As the biographer observes, “Father Moreau and his contemporaries were less interested in theory than in action. They belonged to a generation which thought it had all the answers.” This trait served the founder well as the Family of Holy Cross began to develop and move beyond the borders of France. He had the ability to see the potential that could be tapped by uniting the few

Auxiliary Priests and a small community known as the Brothers of Saint Joseph. And, as the author points out, “with the establishment of the sisters, the Congregation had assumed its definitive form.”

Studies in recent years uncovered some historical insights to which MacEoin did not have complete access. First, with a deeper understanding of the plan envisioned by Father Jacques Dujarié in founding the Sisters of Divine Providence and the Brothers of Saint Joseph, we can recognize now Moreau’s respect for and attentiveness to all that Dujarié had accomplished. At the same time, he was creative and insightful in building from and expanding upon those accomplishments. Second, the life of the first brothers has come more sharply into focus. And, as MacEoin says, “the spirituality and dedication of Brother André were to serve the group well.” It is clear that the brothers were concerned about the quality of their service, their efforts to remain in contact with Father Dujarié and one another, and their involvement in the lives of the people. Third, we know more about the first ministries in which the sisters were involved. Though domestic services occupied a large part of their workday, they had the apostolic energy, creativity, and sensitivity to provide day care as well as basic lessons in catechetics and home economics to girls and women who needed assistance. Finally, and unfortunately, not much additional information has come to light regarding the Auxiliary Priests. It is known that Father Moreau composed a rule of life for them, which they adopted; however, there is no text extant. Because the priests, as an independent group, were in existence for such a brief time before becoming a part of Holy Cross, there may not be much more that can be known about them.

In articulating his vision, Father Moreau wrote that his plan “was to found three establishments consecrated to the Most Holy Hearts of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph; although living in separate dwellings and under different rules would, nevertheless, remain united among themselves after the model of the Holy Family”



(*Circular Letter 8*). That vision enabled Holy Cross religious to live and minister around the world while striving to remain close to one another and to the people they serve. The challenge is to assure that those efforts remain fresh so they can be a witness to all people that unity in the midst of diversity is truly a possibility. Basil Moreau was a man of vision. Our daily life is the means through which the vision will become action for the good of society and the church. Our work and our witness will demonstrate that we, too, are people of vision.

#### “Modern and Practical Approach”

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This biography also introduces us to a man of mission. Father Moreau was passionate in his desire to respond to people’s needs to the best of his ability; he was known for his zeal. This was true for all his ministerial interests, especially those in which he envisioned Holy Cross religious involved: education, parish ministry, and the foreign missions. This was the case especially for his commitment to education. MacEoin tells us, “He had a modern and practical approach to the content of education, always insisting that education was intended to prepare for living, and that the vast majority of the students were going to live in the world.” Father Moreau believed that students should experience continuity between what they learned and experienced in school and what they would do and experience once they had families and entered the business world. They were to be prepared for everyday life. This modern and practical approach was to become the hallmark of Holy Cross education.

Considerable research and reflection has been done in recent years regarding Moreau’s philosophy of education. Though MacEoin does recognize some ways in which the founder was a pioneer in this field, the extent to which Father Moreau was a genuine innovator has become even clearer since this volume’s original publication. He understood that the entire person needed to be engaged in the educational process if the experiences and

learning in school were to have any lasting influence and significance in shaping the person's life. "We shall always place education side by side with instruction; the mind will not be cultivated at the expense of the heart. While we prepare useful citizens for society, we shall likewise do our utmost to prepare citizens for eternal life" (*Circular Letter* 36). This seminal statement from the founder has stimulated both personal and institutional discussion and reflection on the Holy Cross character of the school and of the education provided. Basil Moreau's philosophy of education constitutes a process that is designed to serve students long after their years in school. The information communicated to them must be more than mere data; it should be presented in such a way that it becomes an integral part of their academic, personal, social, and spiritual formation. This formation will transmit the values by which students make decisions and take directions; it will influence their quality of life for the future. As it deepens, such a formation, and their service to others, will engage them in the transformation of the society in which they live and work. The interaction and integration of these three—information, formation, transformation—compel Father Moreau to describe education as "this work of resurrection" (*Christian Education*).

The founder's apostolic mandate to the Family of Holy Cross is clear: "We are committed by our vocation to extend the reign of Jesus Christ in the hearts of all people" (*Exercises*). The challenge is to fulfill that mandate in whichever circumstances our vocation places us and through whichever ministry we serve others, for the mission and message of Jesus have value for every circumstance and in every age. Basil Moreau was a man of mission. Our service to others will have a transformative effect insofar as we are committed to being people of mission.

### "Get People to Come Together"

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Gary MacEoin recognizes that Basil Moreau was a man involved in many relationships, familial and personal, ecclesiastical



and political, social and formal. This spectrum of relationships is a testimony to the truth that Father Moreau was a man of love. His ability to relate to others and to express care and compassion for them stood as an invitation for them to share in and even promote his projects. As the biographer indicates, "Basil Moreau's genius was that he could get people to come together and pool their efforts to accomplish the purposes he proposed." It is not surprising that one of his favorite images for Holy Cross is the family. The founder knew that he could not realize his dreams alone. He needed others and appreciated that truth of his humanity throughout his almost seventy-four years of life.

When there is no extensive oral tradition surrounding the founder of a religious community, whatever visuals are available become quite important. In Father Moreau's case, there is but one photograph, taken in 1856 at a time when he was not well, affected by a cataract, and not pleased with the plot used to make the photograph possible. His unhappy visage, combined with the stories of his austerities and penitential practices, gave rise to an image of the man as stern, aloof, austere, unsmiling, unaffected, and unaffectionate. That image prevailed for several decades after his death. As his writings and especially his personal letters were studied, a different image began to take shape. Though he is clearly a man of uncompromising integrity with a keen sense of justice, his correspondence reveals a person who knew and enjoyed many people. In his exchanges, he would challenge and cajole, explain and excuse, invite and invoke, forewarn and forgive. His words are those of a warm man who made friends and acquaintances from all sectors of church and society. He knew well the men and women of Holy Cross, personally at first, and then through letters as the community expanded numerically and geographically. Moreau insisted that the members of Holy Cross "have great respect, sincere esteem, and cordial affection for each other, living together as friends strictly united" (*Rules*). These are words from a man of love; he strived to be that in all his relationships.



Father Moreau had the ability to bring together very diverse people for a common project primarily because he would appeal to the heart. He would speak of the need for and wisdom of interdependence, teaching that “the activity of the individual will help the community, and the activity of the community will, in turn, help each individual. (*Circular Letter 65*). The challenge for today is to demonstrate that such interdependence is possible in our world and work and neighborhood. Basil Moreau was a man of love. We know this is the way, for we know that love sums up the example of Jesus. It remains for us to follow that way and live that example and so become people of love.

#### “Selected by Providence”

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The world has changed. The times in which we live may have more parallels to Moreau’s own times than when Gary MacEoin’s biography first appeared. Nineteenth-century France was familiar with social turmoil, economic inequities, mistrust of government officials, doubts about the church, international wars, concerns and fears for the future. Similar themes are echoed for us today in the morning newspaper and in the evening news reports. In such a context Basil Moreau was called by God to revitalize faith and to rebuild society. This revitalization and rebuilding are principal elements of the charisma that has become his lasting legacy to the Family of Holy Cross and to the whole church.

Father Moreau knew that there would be a personal price to pay; after all, in response to the call he received, he chose to live the message and example of Jesus. He knew there would be more than one death to self to be experienced if he was to become and be a man of God, vision, mission, and love. He learned what it meant to encounter and embrace the cross. There were many; crosses came both from within and without the Holy Cross family. But such is God’s work. As MacEoin wisely observes, “The founders of religious institutes seem to be selected by providence to



illustrate this law in a special way.” Truly, Basil Moreau was a man selected by providence.

Gary MacEoin opens his biography by describing the founder of Holy Cross as a man who altered history. He concludes his work by referring to Jesus’ teaching in John 12:24: “the seed must fall in the earth and die before it can produce its fruit.” Father Moreau’s experience has produced much fruit that will shape the future. The seed sown by his life and example continues to be creative and productive. There is much yet to be explored and expressed from the rich heritage given to us by Basil Moreau. Within his words and wisdom and way of life there is a spirituality for all people. There are more implications to be gleaned from his life’s work and teaching that will be of benefit to those serving others through education, social justice, and parish ministry—indeed, through all forms of service anywhere in the world. The evolution of the Holy Cross charism can be further elaborated regarding interdependence in ministry as laity and ordained, women and men. There are finer points to be articulated from Basil Moreau’s teaching regarding the responsibilities to which God calls us and the transformation that God promises to each of us.

That promise and the transformation accompanying it are, essentially, apostolic; their effects will extend far beyond the individual. Father Moreau tells educators that, through their ministry, “you will contribute to preparing the world for better times than ours” (*Christian Education*). Whatever our vocation, whatever our work, this is a contribution to which all of us must be fully committed. Such a commitment will be a means for us to bring a resounding message of hope to our world. This was a matter of urgency for Basil Moreau, and so it must be for us.



## Bibliography

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