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# **The Congregation of St. Basil** (Basilian Fathers)

## **The Ten Founders**

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**The Church of Saint-Basile in the Ardèche**



**THE TEN FOUNDERS  
of the  
CONGREGATION OF PRIESTS OF ST. BASIL  
(BASILIAN FATHERS)**

**INTRODUCTION**

Most religious orders have one founder, for example, the Benedictines have St. Benedict (420-547); the Dominicans have St. Dominic (1170-1221), the Franciscans have St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), the Jesuits have St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). The Basilian Fathers have not one, but ten founders, and on this very point one of our confrères stated boldly in a retreat conference, “We Basilians were blessed with our ten founders, because it meant that each of the ten brought to the Community his particular talents and charism, which gave us a great variety of gifts” <sup>(1)</sup>. We shall see how true this is when we look at the life and work of each of the ten founders.

Here is a list of the ten in alphabetical order:

1. **JACQUES DURET**
2. **ANDRÉ FAYOLLE**
3. **JOSEPH LAPIERRE**
4. **HENRI MARTINESCHE**
5. **JEAN-FRANÇOIS PAGÈS**
6. **AUGUSTIN PAYAN**
7. **JEAN-BAPTISTE POLLY**
8. **PIERRE TOURVIEILLE**
9. **JULIEN TRACOL**
10. **ANTOINE VALLON**

Let us look now at the life and work of each of these ten founders.

**DURET, Jacques Vincent (1762-1841)**

Jacques Vincent Duret was an aristocrat, that is to say, of a well-to-do family, a royalist, the very sort of person the activists during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution wanted to send to the guillotine, and the sooner the better. He was born in Annonay, 9 July 1762, the son of Dr. Matthew Duret, a medical doctor and Marianne Jaquier. He was tutored in his early studies by his uncle, a priest and canon of the diocese of Viviers. He was a good example of home schooling, and he learned so well that he was sent to Paris to the

Collège d'Autun, a school that merged with a bigger and equally famous school in Paris, the Lycée Louis le Grand. It was here that the young Jacques Vincent Duret met among his fellow students, Maximilien Robespierre, and the younger brother, Augustin Robespierre. It would be an exaggeration to say that they were close friends, but the young Duret could not help noticing and admiring how well dressed these two Robespierre brothers were, and how carefully they avoided any smudge or damage to their fine clothes.

Jacques Vincent Duret earned a Master of Arts degree at the University of Paris. He studied theology at the Sorbonne and was ordained a priest in 1786, three years prior to the storming of the Bastille and the outbreak of the French Revolution. He came back to Annonay and began exercising the priesthood wherever there was need. Unlike many clerics, he did not emigrate to another country during the worst days of the French Revolution <sup>(2)</sup>. He went into hiding, first in a farm house near Annonay; later he went to the city of Lyons; unfortunately for him, at the time the city was laid siege to by the army of the Convention. Disguised as a guardsman of the National Guard, Father Duret managed to escape and return to Annonay where he helped the faithful to practise their religion in secret. Father Félix Pouzol, one of our 20<sup>th</sup> century French confrères, whom some of us knew, was proud to show us in his tour of Annonay the underground storage space beneath the store and dwelling of the Pouzol family, where the faithful gathered in secret for Mass during the bad days of the Revolution.

After Thermidor (1794), Father Duret fulfilled his priestly ministry quite openly. Thermidor in the revolutionary calendar was the month of heat (July really). The 9<sup>th</sup> of Thermidor, Year 11, Maximilien Robespierre was voted out of office; it marked the end of the Reign of Terror, 27 July 1794. But by Fructidor 1797 (Fructidor was the month of fruit, September really), Father Duret had to flee again from Annonay, and this time he made his way up to Saint-Symphorien-de-Mahun. Here he found Citizen Lapierre, the pastor of the local parish, and some young men who helped him conduct a school in the parish rectory. The coup d'état of Fructidor was 4 September 1797. This was Father Duret's first contact with the group who would eventually become the Priests of St. Basil.

When the school moved to Annonay in 1802, Father Duret helped the teachers and students to get settled in the Franciscan

convent known as, “Les Cordeliers,” and he felt himself to be part of the project, hence to be one of the founding Fathers of the Basilian Community. His ministry was not that of teaching, but his name, Jacques Vincent Duret, is intimately associated with two important projects in Annonay that had long lasting results.

The first project undertaken by Father Duret was a small school called Sainte Barbe; it was a minor seminary for boys and young men who felt they had a vocation to the priesthood, but whose parents were too poor to pay any sizeable tuition for their education. It was located within easy walking distance of the Collège des Cordeliers in Annonay. The origin of this minor seminary, Sainte Barbe, is worth noting. Father Duret rented a house for 150 francs a year. The price was modest enough, but so was the house. The ground floor was a cellar divided into two rooms; on the next floor was the kitchen and one small room. On the upper two floors, there were four small rooms. The whole house was in a sad state of neglect and disrepair. But after successive alterations and additions, in conformity with the strictest poverty, no fewer than 80 pupils were able to register in the Fall of 1819. Not all were boarders; some families in Annonay known to Father Duret were willing to offer accommodation to needy students.

To give an idea of the age of the minor seminarians at Ste Barbe in 1812, out of 58, only 22 were under 19 years old. Fifteen were 21 years old, and 10 ranged in age from 22 to 29. This modest minor seminary, Ste Barbe, furnished one third of the students for the seminary in the diocese of Viviers over the years 1826 to 1848.

Another significant contribution of Father Duret to the Church in the diocese of Viviers was to bring to Annonay the Sisters of Providence whose apostolate was the education of girls of poor families, many of whom were orphans. Father Duret served as spiritual director to the Sisters and the pupils of the Providence foundation. After Father Duret’s death in 1843, the Sisters asked and were granted permission to encase the heart of their spiritual director in a metal container placed in their chapel, and there it remains to this day.

In his book on the origins of our Community, Father Charles Roume records a couple of vignettes concerning Father Duret: i) “Whenever he encountered a beggar, Duret always took off his hat before giving the person an alms. More than once he supplied money to employers to give to men out of work since he could not offer them jobs himself.” ii) “One day a young seminarian made fun of the cut of

Father Duret's soutane. Father Duret replied, 'Well, my tailor is getting on in years.' Couldn't he change tailors? the young man asked, to which Father Duret replied, 'That's just what I can't bring myself to do. He needs the work and that is reason enough for me to give him the order. Anyway, whether the soutane turns out well or not so well, I am satisfied.'"

Such is our so-called "aristocrat" founder, Father Jacques Vincent Duret, a humble man who helped the poor wherever he found them, a priest who made provision for many young men to study for the priesthood in the diocese of Viviers, a diligent and wise spiritual director to the Sisters of Providence in Annonay, who provided an education for girls of poor families from all over the Ardèche, and beyond. He was not a teacher in the classroom or lecture hall, but he helped countless young people to better their situation in life with the academic qualifications they needed.

### **FAYOLLE, André (1791-1867)**

Our next founder, André Fayolle, was born in a small village called, Montréal, in the southern Ardèche. It is perhaps not surprising that he joined the group who came to be known as the Basilian Fathers because his uncle, Father Pierre Tourvieille, was a Basilian. André Fayolle studied at the Collège des Cordeliers in Annonay from 1807 to 1811. He taught grammar in that school while studying theology, and was ordained a priest in 1816. After ordination, he taught humanities (philosophy, languages, history) in the Collège des Cordeliers in Annonay. Here, along with three other teachers (Jean-François Pagès, Julien Tracol, Henri Martinesche), he formed a small group seeking mutual advancement in perfection. These four teachers placed themselves under the wise direction of Father Augustin Payan. When the priest teachers of the Annonay school began speaking of forming a religious community, the small group of four did not sign the petition which was to be submitted to the bishop of Viviers because no mention was made of religious vows. However, when the Association was formed in 1822, André Fayolle and the three other members of the small group of four agreed to be part of it because it seemed to them that the other six members were serious in their pursuit of religious perfection.

André Fayolle is remembered for his contribution to two schools staffed mainly by Basilians. The first, called, Maisonseule, was

really a minor seminary offering classes from “sixième,” 6<sup>th</sup> form, which is about 1<sup>st</sup> year high school, to what is known as, “classe terminale,” the year that prepares students for the “baccalauréat.” Any Basilian who goes on a pilgrimage to our Basilian roots in the Ardèche should take the time to visit Maisonseule. It was originally a fortress of thick stone walls, and although most of the turrets were removed to make it look less forbidding, it remained a fortress, totally devoid of comfort on every level. It is situated high in the hills of the Southern Ardèche, exposed to howling winds from every direction and a target for thunderbolts not uncommon in that part of the country. Little wonder it was known, and still is to this day, as Maisonseule, Solitary House. But it also enjoyed some advantages: fresh air day and night, and healthy vegetation such as one finds in mountain ranges, and edible mushrooms. An excellent environment for young boys considering a vocation to the priesthood.

Maisonseule is worth a visit, but so is the nearby church, Saint Basile, a 13<sup>th</sup> century stone structure built by the Benedictines from an abbey on the Island of Lérins near the north shore of the Mediterranean Sea. This church, Saint Basile, gave its name to the parish of that region where the monks labored over the years to fight heresy among the people of that part of France, the Albigensians in particular. Naturally, Saint Basile came to mind when our founders in 1822 looked for a patron saint. Father André Fayolle taught at Maisonseule in the parish of Saint Basile from 1822 to 1828. He then moved to the city of Privas, where he became superior of a small group of confrères who staffed the College of Privas. He remained in Privas for 39 years, from 1828 to 1867. Let us now look at the College of Privas.

The College of Privas was not a minor seminary, it was a state secondary school (high school) which the city of Privas was willing to confide to the early Basilians because they had proven themselves to be capable teachers in the Collège des Cordeliers in Annonay, operated skillfully by Monsieur Pierre Tourvieille and his companions. Father Charles Roume, in his book on the origins of our Basilian Community, informs us that the College in Privas was opened in November 1828 “under Basilian administration” with André Fayolle as Principal and Superior. Fayolle had good helpers in the task of running a state school: Henri Coupat, André Charmant, Louis Monot, Jean-Pierre Ranc, Jean-Claude Chavanon, all of whom were Basilians, although in the eyes of the state each was Monsieur so and so. For close to 40 years, André

Fayolle, thanks to his remarkable ability, prudence and tact, maintained the best relations with all the successive representatives of authority in Privas.

In April 1849, Father Julien Actorie came down from Annonay to do a visitation of the school in Privas, including that part of the cloister that the Basilians on staff called their residence. He wrote in his report of the Principal, i.e., André Fayolle, “He was methodical, orderly, lovable, perfectly practical ... It is Father Fayolle’s admirable devotion to duty which has made this house what it is and what keeps it going. After twenty years in the same establishment he (Father Fayolle) enjoys the high favour of everyone . . . However, since Father Fayolle is something of a character, and has pushed his method as far as it can possibly go, I think it is my duty to make a few observations on that method. I can see two serious drawbacks: i. authority is losing ground, and ii. when the Superior does everything, the others do nothing, except complain.” It was a question of finding a suitable assistant for Father Fayolle at the school in Privas.

The author of the report, Father Julien Actorie, also felt obliged to mention certain practical matters concerning the living quarters of the confrères. He wrote, “The next time you travel down to Privas, please do not forget to take a look at Father Fayolle’s fireplace. The poor man spends three quarters of his time in his room like a fox being smoked out of its hole. There must be some way to remedy this inconvenience.” It was there nevertheless that the little group of confrères gathered for the different exercises – meditation, particular examen, spiritual reading. “And it was there too that every Thursday the teachers enjoyed the most intimate family life I have ever seen.” So wrote Father Actorie in his report.

Early in September 1861, André Fayolle was afflicted with rheumatism in his legs and wrists. Gradually, he lost the use of his hands and had to be taken care of like a child. But he refused to give up his position as Superior and Director of the school, for he knew and believed that everything depended on him. He remained in Privas until his death 27 April 1867.

\ In the course of my own research in the public archives in Privas, I learned that André Fayolle 1791 – 1867 had been buried in the local cemetery. Naturally, I wanted to pay a visit to his grave, and after some research in the records, the cemetery superintendent gave me

the exact location of the grave. I set off to pay my respects. The physical condition of all the graves in the Privas cemetery was impeccable: no brambles, no weeds. The French are faithful, by and large, to maintaining the graves of their relatives.

But there was one plot terribly overgrown with bushes; it stood out among all the other well-tended graves. Pushing aside a few brambles, what did I see, but a headstone clearly marked: *André Fayolle 1791 - 1867*. Horrified and embarrassed, I went back to my lodging and phoned Jacques Deglesne in Annonay to tell him of my discovery and to ask him what we could do about it. Jacques said he would come down as soon as he could with the necessary tools and that he did. With saw and axe and shovel, we set to work. Fortunately, the spot to throw the brush was not far away, and within an hour or two we had the Basilian plot looking as well tended as all the other plots. That was some years ago.

Back in October 2016, I think it was about October 21, a few days prior to the Feast of All Saints (November 1) and All Souls (November 2) I sent an email to Father Bernard Buisson, CSB in Annonay asking him if he had ever paid a visit to our Basilian plot in the cemetery of Privas, and if so, what was the state of our plot. I told him of my visit there some 30 years ago, and how Jacques Deglesne and I had made it look as well-kept as all the other plots. It was sort of a ploy on my part to see if our Basilian plot, and in particular the grave of Father André Fayolle was well kept. In due time, Bernard replied stating that the local town council, in this case Privas, now insists that all graves be well maintained and if one is neglected, the relatives are contacted and told they will have to pay the cost of the clean-up, plus a fine. So, Father André Fayolle and those confrères buried in the same plot can rest in peace <sup>(3)</sup>.

### **LAPIERRE, Joseph Bovier (1757-1838)**

Father Lapierre was pastor of the parish at Tain-l'Hermitage, a district in France famous for its wines. He swore the oath of allegiance to the Civil Constitution, but publicly retracted his oath once he learned of Archbishop d'Aviau's disapproval. He continued his ministry at Tain until late January 1791, when danger of his arrest forced him to flee.

Dressed as a layman and known as Citizen Lapierre, he crossed the Rhône River at Tournon, Ardèche, and found hospitality in the chateau of a devout laywoman, of noble lineage, Mme de Clavière, who offered him food and shelter in return for instruction in the faith for her young son. When religious persecution became more severe in that part of the country, Citizen Lapierre moved out of the chateau to a hay barn on the property, where he hid in the hay by day and made his way back to the chateau by night to celebrate Mass, teach lessons to the chatelaine's son, and receive food for the next day. Madame de Clavière had cleverly fixed two of the iron bars on one of the ground-level windows of the castle so that she could raise them up from the inside and remove them to let Citizen Lapierre in, all of this in the dead of night. He exited in the same way before daybreak. There was, of course, no romantic over or under-tones in this 'rocambolesque' arrangement, but one has to admit that sometimes history can be stranger than fiction.

Just how long this hay-by-day hideout lasted we do not know, written records on matters such as these are scarce. What we do know is that France underwent a rapid succession of different governments in the years following 1789: the National Assembly (17 May 1789), the Constituent Assembly (1790), the Legislative Assembly (1791), the Commune (1792), and the Convention (1794).

Under the new Directory government in 1795 persecution of dissidents and out-laws eased somewhat, so that we find Citizen Lapierre, still dressed as a peasant, cautiously serving the parish of Sarras in the Ardèche, not far from Tournon. He was soon forced to leave there because of threats from revolutionaries. He went farther west in the department and farther into the hills, so that by 1797 he had reached Saint-Symphorien-de-Mahun where he became pastor once Archbishop d'Aviau (who was Citizen d'Aviau) returned from his exile in Italy. It should be noted at this point that another good and devout chatelaine, Mme de l'Hermuzière, gave rooms to both the archbishop and Father Lapierre during the summer of 1797 in her spacious country seat only a short walk from the village of Saint Symphorien.

A relative religious peace followed the coup d'état of 18 Brumaire of the Year VIII (9 November 1799) when Napoleon Bonaparte overturned the Directory government and established what he called the Consulate, with himself as First Consul. Archbishop d'Aviau

decided to establish a school at the parish of Saint-Symphorien-de-Mahun, in the rectory itself. It was to be in fact a seminary/college, but no official mention could be made that it would encourage vocations to the priesthood. At Father Lapierre's suggestion, the archbishop appointed Father Joseph Actorie as director of the school. For two years, pastor and school director worked together to establish religious worship in the parish and to help young people of the local families, boys, acquire basic religious instruction and the basics in elementary education: reading, writing, arithmetic and some Latin.

Before long the school attracted more students than the rectory could accommodate, and a few more teachers. Registration in the year 1800-1801 included 12 boarders, 50 day students, total 62. In 1801-1802 there were 32 boarders and 60 day students, total 92. A move to more classroom space was imperative.

Thanks to the diplomacy of Father Picancel, pastor of Notre Dame in Annonay, some fifteen kilometres away, negotiations were successfully carried out to acquire the abandoned convent of the Franciscan Friars in Annonay for the school that became known as “le Collège des Cordeliers.” When the director, Father Joseph Actorie, became too royalist in his teaching, the State inspectors insisted that he step down as director; Father Lapierre took his place and also served as bursar. It was during these years between the beginning of the school in 1800 and the year 1822 that the nine teachers joined Father Lapierre in his work to become the founders of the Association of Priests of St Basil.

### **MARTINESCHE, Henri (1797-1879)**

Henri Martinesche was born 15 July 1797 in Vinezac, Ardèche, a hamlet some 50 miles south of Annonay. He came to the Collège des Cordeliers in Annonay in 1809 when he was about 12 years old. He enrolled as an aspirant to the priesthood, what we would call today an Associate. He was a very good student, so good that the Director, Father Joseph Lapierre, asked him to do some teaching. The young student accepted readily; he also liked to join the priest teachers for their regular religious exercises. Moreover, he and three other young teachers (Jean François Pagès, Julien Tracol, Jean Antoine Vallon) met together to hold extra religious exercises at fixed times: visits to the Blessed Sacrament, various novena prayers, regular culp, monthly

retreats, plus an annual retreat of eight days. The Director of the School, Father Lapierre, did not oppose or try to discourage those extra devotions, but he thought it would be advisable for these young men to have an older spiritual guide, so he asked Father Augustin Payan to meet with them regularly.

As time went on, all the teachers at the school in Annonay, le Collège des Cordeliers, began thinking of forming a religious congregation. Toward this end, they prepared a formal request to be presented to the Bishop of the diocese of Viviers. The four young men, however, Martinesche, Vallon, Pagès and Tracol, felt they could not in conscience sign the petition, their reason being that the proposed new teaching order made no mention of religious vows. The petition did mention a solemn promise to lead a life of poverty, chastity and obedience as they carried out their work of teaching and priestly ministry. After some time of fervent prayer and discussion with their spiritual director, Father Augustin Payan, the four young men agreed to sign the petition. They hoped that in time the new Congregation would profess the three religious vows, which it did in fact in 1850.

Henri Martinesche was ordained a priest on 1 June 1822, and on 21 November 1822 he became one of the ten founders of our Congregation who bound themselves to the common life and to the teaching apostolate, be it in schools or in the parish ministry. He taught minor seminarians at Maisonseule (Ardèche) from 1822 - 1828 where Father André Fayolle was his Superior. When that school closed in 1828, he returned to Annonay, to the Collège des Cordeliers, where he taught until his eyesight began to fail in the early 1830's. In 1833, he moved to the village of Vaudevaut, about 12 miles south of Annonay, where he served as Chaplain to the Dienne family for the rest of life, 46 years. Up to 1874, he came regularly to the annual Basilian retreat in Annonay, despite nearly total blindness. He died in Vaudevaut on 24 February 1879 and was buried in the local cemetery. The parish register of burials records that Father Henri Martinesche was "a man who loved the poor and who deprived himself of necessities in order to help them . . . In the parish, he was loved as a father and venerated as a saint. His motto was: 'You must never say anything bad about anyone. Let us not judge others and we ourselves shall not be judged.'"

In the parish register at Vaudevaut we read the following entry: "In the year 1879 on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of February Abbé

Martinesche was solemnly interred, deceased at the age of 83 years. In spite of the cold and snow, all the faithful of the parish (Vaudevaut) and a large crowd from the surrounding area flocked to the funeral." None of the confrères from Annonay were able to attend the funeral because of the heavy snowfall.

### **PAGÈS, Jean-François (1793-1861)**

Father Pagès came from a poor family near Les Vans, Southern Ardèche. Of his younger days he wrote, "I was condemned, like so many others, to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, and henceforth, to live an obscure and laborious life." He described his own character as "irascible and violent." Although a graduate of Sainte Claire and the college in Annonay, he had no intention of joining the group of priest teachers there until one day in 1819, on a visit to the college from his newly assigned post as curate, at Vanosc, he met Fr. Joseph-Marie Actorie, who greeted him with his habitual graciousness and said "you are one of us. The bishop told me to take you wherever I found you." Within a week, the young priest moved into the College and began teaching. He led a life of severe mortifications; rising regularly at 4:00 a.m. and even 3:30 a.m. to pray privately before saying Mass. He wrote letters of direction to his young friend and confrère, Fr. Julien Tracol, in which he gave his explicit instructions, even the amount of recreation he should take after the noon day meal, how he was to fast, how to apportion the days of the summer vacation. He told Tracol that these rules of conduct were "a sure and efficacious way of advancing towards the perfection to which the Divine Goodness is calling you." Seeking after perfection was the sure way to salvation for Father Pagès, and although he repeats often that one must be faithful to grace, he gives the impression in his spiritual direction that salvation is largely a matter of personal effort.

**On Unworthy Teachers** he wrote: "I left home for the first time at 14, and went off to Les Vans. There I encountered teachers who, instead of edifying me as models, gave me an example of dissipation and vice. How children are to be pitied who fall into the hands of such masters."

This experience may have marked him for life and determined him to be a model for his own students throughout his entire teaching

career. In any event, he saw the vocation of the priest teacher as one of dedicated service.

**On the Community**—“If we wish the Community to succeed, we must be men of dedication.”

He did not hesitate to scold Fr. Tracol when he went off to the Jesuit Novitiate at Avignon without notifying anyone or saying goodbye. In a letter to Tracol he wrote:

*“O Barbare! O cruel! Est-ce donc ainsi que vous en agissez avec vos amis ? Que vous ai-je donc fait, pour me traiter si cruellement? . . . Pourquoi me priver de la déchirante satisfaction de vous embrasser à votre départ?”*

“O barbarous one! O cruel one! Is that the way you act with your friends? What have I done to you that you should treat me so cruelly? Why have you deprived me of the heart-rending satisfaction of embracing you at your departure?”

A few lines later in the same letter of September 22, 1824, he asks Tracol to write and tell him all about the Jesuit Novitiate:

“To see if I might have the courage and generosity to go and join you, in case our congregation were to be destroyed. You know that it’s not based on a very solid foundation.”

Father Pagès remained a Basilian, but he also remained very attached to his family, probably to the detriment of his services to the Community. He sent money to the struggling members of his family, and also considerable sums to religious congregations of nuns, as much as 5,000 francs (\$1,250) at a time, which probably explains why he opposed the move in the community in 1852 to take vows, in particular, a stricter vow of poverty.

### **PAYAN, Augustin (1771-1847)**

Father Payan came from a family dubbed “aristocrats” by the Revolution. He was educated by the Jesuits in Aubenas, where he greatly admired a Fr. Rouville, SJ, who was to die on the guillotine with

a faith and courage the young Payan could never forget. When Fathers Lapierre and Joseph Marie Actorie opened the little school in St. Symphorien-de-Mahun, Augustin Payan came there and studied philosophy. In February, 1822 he began directing a small group of young priests at the college in Annonay who set themselves a religious rule of their own. Father Tracol was of the opinion that this “work of zeal and charity” presaged the formation of the Association in November 1822.

Father Payan was a model of regularity and exactitude. He rose each morning before 4:00 a.m., opened the church, made the Stations, then called the domestic help together for morning prayer and a meditation, which he conducted for them. Then he would recite Little Hours, hear confessions, and go off to say the Community Mass for the Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

That Father Payan was a man of patience and long-suffering can be seen in the case of the lady who came to him for spiritual direction for 35 years. During the first 15 years, she confessed at the usual intervals, but for the 20 years following, she came to confession almost every day, and usually for more than two hours. The confrères told Father Payan this was excessive. The curé of Annonay even alerted the bishop. Fr. Payan said in his letter of explanation to the bishop that—he was willing to suffer the loss of his reputation in order to save a soul exposed to the greatest dangers. The bishop replied that he could let the critics say whatever they wanted, that he was to continue directing the person in question with his characteristic prudence. Later, when the woman finally died, Fr. Payan said, “That this penitent had been his heaviest cross to bear.”

Father Payan had no interest whatever in the events of the day, in scientific discoveries or in politics. He read the newspaper only for the religious news, but he did like to read it, and reminded the confrères often not to keep it too long before passing it on to him. Whenever Fr. Polly got the chance, he would bring the paper to Father Payan’s room at about 11 o’clock at night, knock on the door, get him out of bed and say, “Dear confrère, I hasten to bring you the newspaper.”

As mentioned above, Father Payan was the victim of more than one prank pulled by Father Polly. In winter Father Payan liked to catch little birds in box traps and put them in a big cage where he took the

greatest care of them. One day Father Polly came knocking at his door with excitement, urging him to hasten down, a bird had just been caught in one of the traps. Father Payan hurried down and carefully put his hand in to grab the prisoner, only to find it was an array of feathers carefully arranged on a bird of clay.

On the General Council (he was 1st Councillor) Father Payan, according to Tracol, made no contribution whatever; he said nothing, showed enthusiasm for nothing. He did vote, however. He seemed scarcely to live with his times. He was absorbed in prayer and in the duties connected with his classes in Rhetoric and Theology. The following are some of his reflections:

**On the Future of the Young Community** – “If it is God's work, and if He is to derive glory from it, it will survive; if not, why weep over its destruction? Let us work at becoming saints, neglecting nothing, fulfilling all our obligations, let us abandon ourselves to Divine Providence.”

**On Fraternal Charity** – “Never shall I allow myself to make a joke at a confrère's expense, to turn him to ridicule or mock his manners. If I am the butt of a joke, I shall not take offence. I shall bear with the manners of my confrères, no matter how painful this may be, and I shall say to myself that I am more trouble to them than they are to me.”

**His Refrain in Old Age** – “How good God is! Oh yes, how good He is! Let us love the good Lord!”

### **POLLY, Jean-Baptiste (1772-1846)**

Father Polly was the son of a prosperous farmer in the area of St. Symporien-de-Mahun. He studied philosophy under the Sulpicians in Le Puy up to 1789, and took his theology secretly during the Revolution from a Sulpician teacher in Lyons, along with some twenty- four other young men. They had to move from house to house to avoid detection by over-zealous patriots. He taught science at the school in Annonay. Fr. Scollard describes him as

“methodical and conscientious . . . he was mechanically inclined and constructed many of the instruments used by his students.”

After making a special study of clock-making, he used to fix clocks and watches for people in his free time. He also studied astronomy and weather conditions, supplying the confrères regularly with a meteorological bulletin. He learned to play the French horn and, if stopped by a passer-by on the road to Toyssieu and asked what he had in the sack slung over his shoulder, he would take the horn out, show it in detail to the curious pedestrian and then play a few pieces of his repertory, delighted to send the clear notes echoing across the green fields of the Ardèche plateau. Father Polly had a special liking for onions, he also liked to play tricks on his dear friend and confrère, Father Payan, who was about the same age. One day, in the garden, where he was sure Fr. Payan could see him, he jumped over the wall, seized two healthy onions from the neighbour’s garden, jumped back, and proceeded to peel and eat the onion in the shade of a tree, along with a huge chunk of bread he had brought for the occasion. Fr. Payan reported the theft to the superior and Fr. Polly, upon being reprimanded for scandalous behavior, smiled and said that he had bought the onion plot from the neighbor on condition that he could pull the onions himself, as he needed them *afin de les avoir plus frais et plus savoureux*: in order to have them fresher and more savoury. He was naturally quick-witted, and also irascible. He made heroic efforts to contain his ire, not always successfully. Women caused him great grief. He preferred to have nothing to do with them, and would talk to no woman except in an open place, standing; during the conversation, he appeared to be suffering intensely.

Father Polly was well read in theology and in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. Here are some of his own reflections, as recorded by Father Tracol:

**On Poverty** – “As long as an institute is poor, a love of work will reign there and will banish the thousand temptations that idleness engenders. Once it is well-off, little by little, under one pretext or another, people will make things more convenient, they will imagine that the common good requires a certain little improvement here, then another one there, and then another, so that eventually a certain luxury is acquired, with sad results for the life of rule. On the

other hand, when a community has only what is necessary, then poverty will be evident in the building, the furniture, clothing, food; and the religious who are true to the spirit of poverty will be more humble and mortified.”

**On the Prayer of Youth** – “The young man who prays is a force that nothing can overthrow or weaken.”

### **TOURVIELLE, Pierre (1780-1859)**

The name of Tourvieille dominates the early years of Basilian history. Pierre Tourvieille came to the little school at St. Symphorien-de-Mahun in 1802 to study Theology; he was twenty-two years old at the time and had already completed brilliant studies in mathematics at Grenoble. He followed the school to Annonay, taught Mathematics there, became Director in 1822, Superior General in 1838, and held these two important positions in the Community until his death in 1859. He was rigid and austere throughout his life, but always human and understanding when it came to personal problems and difficulties.

He preached retreats every summer—all summer long—to priests and communities of sisters. He and Fr. Polly teamed up for several years to preach the Basilian Community retreats: Fr. Polly giving the spiritual and theological conferences, Fr. Tourvieille the conferences dealing with the practical problems of the priest-teacher.

**On Preaching** – “Preaching is one of the most essential functions of our ministry, one of the most sacred duties, one of our undeniable obligations. The preacher should speak in such a way as to be understood by everyone, developing the consoling truths of our religion with elegance and a noble simplicity. The preacher should speak in such a way as to maintain the dignity of his character, so that the sacred word can be proclaimed in a dignified manner. It is at the foot of the crucifix that he should make his preparation so that God's word will be presented with order, clarity and precision.”

**On the Priest and Prayer** – “The heart of the priest is

that altar spoken of in the Book of Leviticus (Chapter VI) where the sacred fire must burn without ceasing.”

**On Complaints about the Diocese** – “Stifle your complaints so that God alone knows them. If sometimes you have injustices to suffer and crosses to bear, do as your Fathers did from 1824 - 1843: They were content to lament to God, accomplishing for the bishop, whom they revered, the sacred duties of the good priest and imposing on themselves the most religious silence about actions of the diocesan administration.”

As Director of the Collège des Cordeliers in Annonay, Father Tourvieille was urbane and affable. He met people graciously, the parents of students, and quickly put them at ease. Within the school, he was always careful to consult senior teachers before implementing new policies. Within the young Basilian Community, Father Tourvieille was more autocratic. He often found his own experience setting him against the views of the younger confrères. Perhaps imbued with Jansenist tendencies, he had a horror of comfort.

He rebuffed appeals to human weakness with the reply that as he had lived through persecution and trials, so austerity would be good for seminarians and their teachers. Father Charles Rouné wrote of him: “rigid and austere in his youth, he remained so to the end.”

In Father Tourvieille’s final illness, when it came time to recite the prayers for the dying, the young priest assigned to administer the last rites felt very nervous and couldn’t find the right page in the Ritual book. Father Tourvieille, stretched out on his bed, looked over at him and said in a loud voice, “It starts on page 62.” He died 6 August 1859 at the age of 79. He was waked seated at his desk, dressed in soutane, surplice and biretta. It is not recorded how they got him into a coffin.

### **TRACOL, Julien (1796 – 1885)**

Julien Tracol was the son of Julien Tracol, a wholesale merchant in Annonay, and Anne Lagrange, a Protestant. He registered in the Collège des Cordeliers in Annonay in 1808 where he was the top student of his class for the next three years. At age 15, he expressed

his desire to become a priest. His father thought he was too young to make such a decision, and put him to work in the family business. Two years later, the young Julien returned to the Collège in Annonay, where he studied philosophy and theology. He was ordained a priest for the diocese of Viviers on 28 March 1819 and appointed assistant at Notre-Dame Parish in Annonay, but his delicate conscience made parish ministry too trying for him. He returned to the Collège des Cordeliers in Annonay in 1820 and two years later joined the little group of priest teachers who in 1822 formed the Association of Priests of St. Basil.

After the General Chapter of 1822, Father Tracol accepted the Office of Secretary General, an assignment he held for next 37 years. He contributed a great deal to the history of the Congregation of St. Basil by the records he kept as Secretary General and editor of the College Journal. His style of writing was simple, free, pure and lucid, with rarely a correction either in his private diary or in the College Journal which he kept until his retirement in 1869. He learned Hebrew by himself in order to study and meditate better on the books of the Bible.

Julien Tracol suffered from scruples all his life. On obstacles to the practice of perfect charity he wrote: “The least annoyance upsets me, the least spiritual dryness casts me down, an act of self-denial makes me ill, contradiction gives me a headache, the thought of the smallest sacrifice spoils my temper, and I have to think the matter over a thousand times before I can submit to it and render it less painful . . . With a temper like mine, it is difficult to be all things to all men.”

**On Holiness** – “I do not have to do anything new to become holy, but only to do everything in a new way.”

**On Travelling** – “If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we have too little virtue to expose it to the risks and dangers inseparable from travelling.”

**On Visiting** – “There are people who invite us out, who even urge us to come, but who, deep down, are charmed when we decline.”

**On Prayer & Teaching** – “Let us be men of prayer and

recollection, and then we shall be able to say that our students will receive our lessons with a respectful silence, that they will not dare to add anything to our words which will fall on them like a refreshing shower. They will long for our teaching as a parched soil waits for water from the skies, and their ears will open to listen to us as the earth to the rains of a late season.”

**On Union with God** – “To enter entirely into God, we must renounce sensuality, timidity, the spirit of propriety and vanity, and we must embrace mortification, abnegation, renunciation and humiliation. Such is the darkness into which we are to plunge in order to arrive at the light of all.”

**On the Priest and Prayer** – “The essence of the priesthood requires a life which sanctifies and renders divine all the actions of a priest. But only a life of faith and prayer can thus render all our actions supernatural . . .”

**On Living by Rule** – “It is a series of exquisite acts of self-renunciation; we cannot go where we like, dress as we wish, rise when it suits us, work as we like or when we like, pray to God and perform our spiritual exercise in our own way, or see certain persons whose company gives us pleasure; in a word, we see our little plans upset, our attractions resisted; we can do nothing without some strange will intervening in our operations; indeed we no longer have the free use of self, and of our will . . . Like St. Paul, we are prisoners of Jesus Christ. What honour, what glory and happiness!”

### **VALLON, Jean Antoine (1775-1840)**

Jean Antoine Vallon was born 20 December 1775 at Lafarre, Ardèche, a village not far from Lalouvesc (we think at once of the shrine of Saint François Régis). It’s in the northern part of the Ardèche, not exactly in the mountains, but in high hills where the winter is usually

severe by French standards. The difference between Vinezac, the home of Father Henri Martinesche, and Lafarre where Jean Antoine Vallon grew up, is about that of Windsor, Ontario and Timmins, Ontario, although the distance between them is not as great. No vineyards or luscious gardens in Jean Antoine Vallon's part of the country; only hills, strong winds and rigorous winters. The people there tend to be rough and tough, and so was our 10<sup>th</sup> Founder, Father Vallon.

Jean Antoine Vallon was 25 years old when our first school opened in the rectory of the parish of Saint-Symphorien-de-Mahun. He is listed among the teachers there from 1800. He went with the school to Annonay in 1801 and taught in the Collège des Cordeliers. It's not known where he did his seminary studies, but he appears to have been ordained about 1800 for the diocese of Vienne.

Like his fellow teachers, Julien Tracol, Jean François Pagès and Henri Martinesche, he practiced extra religious exercises in addition to those of the regular schedule at the Collège des Cordeliers, and at first refused to sign the original petition to form the Association of Priests of St. Basil. But he did join the others on 21 November 1822 when, it was made clear that the whole group of ten solemnly promised to lead a truly religious life. He died in 1840, that is, ten years before the group of priest teachers, Basilians, professed religious vows.

Jean Antoine Vallon served for nearly 25 years at the Collège des Cordeliers in Annonay, as teacher and as prefect of discipline. He was "a living example of the Rule" wrote the historian Adrien Chomel, "setting an example of hard, mortified life; to his onerous duties he added mortifications which certainly enfeebled his condition." Bishop Armand de Charbonnel, who was a student at the school in Annonay at that time, remembers him as "a holy priest – but to be classed among those saints who inspired fear in their subjects." In the College Journal, written by Julien Tracol, Vallon's contemporary, we read: "His presence alone was enough to ensure order and silence. Even with up to 160 pupils in the study hall, he saw to it that the Rule was respected. He himself was a living Rule, and set the example of a hard, austere life." As a teacher in the classroom, his philosophy of education could be summed up in the words, "Learn it, or else."

It is not known for what reason Father Vallon left the Collège in Annonay to retire to his native village of Lafarre. Tracol writes in the College Journal: "perhaps his health, weakened by the rigours he added to his trying work, made him feel the need of a more peaceful life." He

was to die suddenly 13 August 1840 at the foot of the altar where he was preparing to celebrate the holy sacrifice of the Mass. He was buried two days later, on the Feast of the Assumption, in the cemetery of Lafarre.

## CONCLUSION

How can we sum up this glimpse at our Founders? I think we can say they were all dedicated to an ideal: the Christian education of youth, the parish ministry, chaplaincies of one kind or another. They didn't all think alike, in fact, Father Tourvieille noted in one of his reports after a Community discussion: "Our confusion was very great." In that respect, I would make bold to say that their apparent "confusion" came from the fact that each one had his own ideas on how the matter at hand under discussion should be resolved; and in that respect, they were simply being very French. They all may be in heaven; we sincerely hope so, but their cause has never been put forward for canonization.

At the Mass on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2 February 2017, Pope Francis, in his homily, spoke of the "hymn of hope" pronounced by Simeon and Anna when they saw the Saviour appearing in the Temple. "We too," the Pope said, "have inherited this hymn of hope from our elders," (could we interpret here 'our 10 Founders?') "so that we can prophesy in our day, and once more encounter what originally set our hearts on fire. Let us accompany Jesus as He goes forth to meet His people, to be in the midst of His people . . ." I conclude saying, "to be in the midst of His people: in our own Basilian way."

## NOTES

1. Terence Forestell, CSB
2. For a concise review of the French Revolution 1789 – 1801, see *Religious History of France*. Adrien Dansette, Volume 1: *From the Revolution to the Third Republic*, Herder and Herder 1961.
3. Basilians buried in the Privas Cemetery: Jean François Arnoux, Jean-Antoine Chanteperdrix, Léopold Fayolle, Louis Michel Monot, Joannès Etienne Oudin, Benjamin Serey, Emile Suchet, Jules Verger.

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KJK

## Map of France with the Ardèche shaded at lower right



## Map of the Ardèche

