

Terraillon. Déclas was thirty-two.

We have practically no documents going back to 1815 and 1816, although stories were written years later where Etienne Terraillon spoke of Déclas' passion for the Society of Mary and enrolling others in the project.

Déclas' influence on us today

As heirs of the pioneers of the Fourvière promise, like Etienne Déclas we can recall when we first heard about the Society of Mary, what inspired us about the Marist project. We remember what motivated us to respond to this call and can better understand our choice to be Marist today.

Etienne Déclas understood the Marist project at the very beginning and the call to reach out to those who do not have easy access to the word of God. This is why he went to preach in the Bugey with Jean-Claude Colin.

Today we ask how the Marist project meets the needs of our society?

We can speak of the Marist project, especially to young people, and like Déclas, share our enthusiasm for Marist life and mission.

Conclusion

All in all, it was a question throughout this work of presenting Etienne Déclas, 'the doyen and the first Marist of the Society of Mary.'

For this purpose we presented his life, then we lingered on Marist call and to finish we had to see a prospect until today.

The Marist project concerns each and every one of us, who has each of you to freely and voluntarily make a contribution to the construction of this building.

In this year of mercy, as our illustrious founder,

Jean Claude Colin always wishes, let us be true instruments of mercy. Let us be it not only for ourselves, but also for others. Let us seek to reconcile with ourselves and God at the same time.

May this year of celebrating the Bicentenary of the Fourvière promise inspire us with memories of our past and new visions for the future.

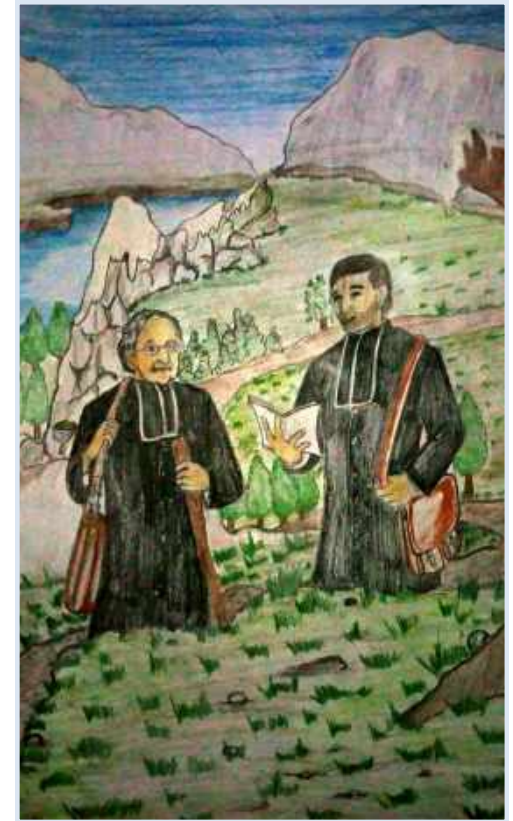
Christian Ngoura SM



Christian Ngoura, author of this paper, with fellow seminarian, **Joseph Ondoua**, who illustrated with impressions of Fr Déclas.

Cover: Fr Déclas, reading his breviary, stumbling along the track to La Balme with Fr Jean-Claude Colin, on the way to the first Marist mission of the Bugey mountains.

Etienne Déclas *Apostle of the Bugey*



In 2016, Marist seminarian, **Christian Ngoura SM** prepared this paper for fellow students at Maison S. Pierre Chanel, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

200 years after the Fourvière pledge to form the Society of Mary he reflects on one of the pioneer Marist aspirants, **Fr Etienne Déclas.**

The promise of Fourvière

2016 is a year of grace for the Society of Mary celebrating the bicentenary of the promise of Fourvière in the ancient chapel of the Blessed Virgin overlooking the city of Lyon, France. On July 23, 1816, twelve seminarians signed a promise to bring the Society of Mary into existence.

Fourvière represents a commitment to the Marist project and this reflection invites us to revisit the history of those who made the promise, each in his own way contributing to the establishment of Mary's society.

The pioneer group, bearing the name of Mary, included names now well-known: Jean-Claude Courveille, Jean-Claude Colin, Etienne Terraillon, Marcellin Champagnat - and Etienne Déclas.

Let us look at the role to be played by Etienne Déclas in the foundation of the Society of Mary. Who was he? How did his call to be Marist go? What impact does he have on us today?

Who was Etienne Déclas?

Etienne Déclas was born on December 1, 1783 in Belmont (Loire). He came from a family of strong Christian and moral values and love for education. At school he studied Logic in the school of logicians and then theology in seminary years.

On January 6, 1814, he received the minor tonsure and the sub-diaconate and the following year on June 23 he was ordained deacon, then priest on July 22, 1816, the eve of the promise of Fourvière. The next day he participated in the consecration ceremony at Fourvière.

The young Fr Etienne began his pastoral life as curate in the parish of Saint-Igny-de-Vers and continued in a number of other places before being appointed in July 1821 parish priest of Saint-Julien-sur-Veyle where he officiated for three years.



This made it easier for him to visit the Fathers Colin in Cerdon. Despite his many multiple visits, he was aware of the various correspondences with Rome and other procedures, for fear of carelessness on his part.

October 16, 1824 is an important date for him, signing the registers at Saint-Julien for the last time.

On October 29 he came to settle in Cerdon, an historic date for Jean-Claude Colin who was to keep this date as the effective beginning of the Society of Mary.

Fr Etienne participated in the winter missions of 1824-1825, preaching alongside Jean Claude Colin in the Bugey.

He came to know the struggles of these early days of the Society of Mary, the numerous attempts of Bishop Devie to make the Marists a diocesan body and signing many documents of commitment to the Marist project.

On September 24, 1836, he was one of the first twenty professed in the Society of Mary and continued to preach the missions. Indeed he would one day be accorded the title 'Apostle of the Bugey'.

In the fall of 1862, he retired to La Neylière where he died on March 4, 1868, when Fr Colin acknowledged him 'the doyen and the first Marist of the Society'.

The Call to be Marist

Étienne Déclas first heard of the Marist project as a seminarian in the major seminary of Lyon in 1814. He was already thirty-two years old, rather old in a seminary where most of the two hundred students were between twenty and twenty-five.

At that time, Wednesday was day off, and the seminarians left the city to get some fresh air at a country house on a hill overlooking Lyon. As usual, they ate the meal in silence while one of them read a book to them aloud. Around Easter, a new student arrived from another seminary. His name was Jean-Claude Courveille, he was almost thirty years old, and he was ruminating on a project which he told Déclas on one of the Wednesday days off.

Etienne was giving Courveille's a haircut, the latter speaking about the life of Saint François Régis that was being read in the refectory 'If, like Saint François Régis, we were doing missions in the countryside, we would go on foot, simply, eating the food of the peasants. We would eat milk, country bread. We would teach them, and they would have the advantage of having confessors other than their parish priests.'

For Étienne Déclas, this was the beginning of a story that led him to sign, at Fourvière, on July 23, 1816, the promise to help found the Society of Mary.

Twenty years later, he made his vows as a Marist and spent the rest of his life preaching parish retreats in rural villages. His story can serve as a reflection on our own commitment to the Marist project.

Déclas was keen to enlist a new member to join the ambitious project, presenting the idea to a fellow seminarian, twenty-four year old Etienne