

The Confluence of Julian's Life in France with Josephites Today



This fountain, in Lyon, created by Frédéric Bartholdi, depicts France as a female seated on a chariot and controlling the four great rivers of that country, La Seine, La Loire, Le Rhône and Le Garonne, each represented by wildly rearing and plunging horses.

I will share the 'confluences' between the Josephite Story and Julian's that I noticed when I visited France in 2013.

UPLIFT: Explorations in France

In July 2013, Mary-Ann Casanova and I arrived in Lyon, France. On reading the description on the fountain during our day of sight-seeing, I wondered what it would be like to compare our streams of consciousness: our pre-conceptions, rumours, myths, stories or comments about Julian. Mary-Ann and I hoped to discover places where Julian had spent some time, what he felt and thought, what problems he had, his ambitions for the future and the later real-life application he made of his religious and scientific formation in France.

FROM THE DEPTHS: Connecting with the Divine

We went to see the ancient shrine of Our Lady of Fourvière three times. We watched the stream of people visiting this shrine, which was dedicated in 1170! We saw plaques with familiar names including, 'Mary's Men and Women', who were keen to do Mary's work as missionaries to Oceania and other parts of the world. Marists I knew and worked with were surprised whenever I claimed links with Marist spirituality. I think Julian already had a personal 'shrine in his heart' and a strong devotion to Mary which was nourished amongst the Marists in France.

GOLDEN SPIKE: Transitional Moment

Like Julian, it wasn't in the city we felt at home. It was going to explore the village of Ars, about 30 km from Lyon, by train and bus. We loved the brightness of the sky, the colours of the crops, the sunflowers. The landscape was awesome with rolling hills, blue in the distance, the 'sounds' of green, and the many shades of blue in the streams and rivers. In Ars, where the Curé, Jean Vianney, lived a sparse life, we found 'La Providence', a house founded by him in 1824. When the parishioners complained to him about how much it was costing them, the Sisters of St Joseph took over and were there when Julian visited. It is now a retreat/reception centre for pilgrims and is still run by Josephites from around the

world. I had presumed the House of Providence, in Adelaide, was Mary MacKillop's idea. However, there is no doubt that it was the inspiration of Julian who had seen Sisters running La Providence at Ars. The conversation between the Curé and Julian during their meal remains between the two of them. I like to think that this may have been the point when Julian learned to trust in the providence of God, a Christian, a Marist and a Josephite value.

MASSIF CENTRAL: Le Puy

"Expanding the Global Heart" was the theme of the Seminar at the International Centre of St Joseph, Le Puy. Illia Delio's quote, used on our programme, had us in high hopes:

"We are called to love this created world as God loves it. We are to help transform this universe from within by seeing Jesus as the Heart of Matter – in all peoples, creatures, elements, stars and galaxies. Such vision requires openness to new relationships, new ideas, and abandoning messianic expectations, accepting incompleteness as part of life, recovering the capacity to wonder and living in the primacy of love..."

Today's Josephites, we hoped, were going to explore cosmology which includes evolution at its core. Evolution means that now we are impelled to move beyond the First Axial Age (a "pivotal age") characterising the period which exists in the church of France and the rest of the Christian world. The divide between science and religion was so ingrained in Julian during his time in France, 1853, and continued throughout his life. This is especially evident in his writings about Religious Life and the prayers and hymns he composed.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born on 1 May 1881, in the same French region of Auvergne. This was forty-nine years after Julian E. Tenison Woods' birth. Teilhard was only eight years old when Julian died on 7 October 1889. Therefore, Julian did not have the benefit of Teilhard's thinking and recent theological writings of many women and men have unwrapped it for us today. We must continue awakening to this new evolutionary consciousness and change our beliefs, values and way of life accordingly.

Illia Delio, in her July 2019 articles in Global Sisters Report, claims:

"The hierarchy of theology needs radical revisioning if we are to address the needs of Earth. An integrative vision of science and theology is not an option but essential in the 21st century."

LA SEYNE-SUR-MER AND MONTBEL: Seismic Shift

Just before our seminar in Le Puy, we took the few days we had spare to travel to the Mediterranean town of Le Seyne-sur-Mer to look for the two institutions where Julian had studied as a Marist seminarian. One was the Naval Boarding College where Julian taught English and studied theology and science near the end of his study year. His health failed again at the Mont Bel Seminary. Following a local map, we walked towards the College of La Seyne. Seeing an old church named Notre Dame Bon Voyage, we popped in for a look.

The stained-glass windows were replicas of Frederique Duran's, which had been destroyed by bombardments during World War 11.

Duran had used Teilhard De Chardin's theme: *"The creation, like a spiral, has no beginning and no end, entirely towards God."*

We took in their symbolic significance and mystique as we continued to look for the Naval College which Julian claimed was ... *the happiest of my life ... and now succeeded a period which I shall ever look back to...my theological tutor was a most amiable man who took great pains to instruct me...I was at liberty to follow any of the other classes that I wished...enrolled myself for drawing, chemistry, natural philosophy and natural history...gave me the use of the laboratory and scientific instruments...Professor of natural history, Mons. L'Abbé, was a name well known in France for his writing on entomology. He was an enthusiastic botanist as well. He took great interest in me and constantly took me with him in his excursions...the happy hours we spent in collecting and wandering through the mountains were times of unmixed delight to me..."*

Memoirs Vol 1.



It took the rest of the day for us to work out where the Seminary of Mont Bel could be found. Even the police could not locate it for us! After many twists and turns, conversations through lap-top and mud-map, we were shocked to find that it was in ruins! Either 'squatters' or legitimate residents occupied some apartments around the back! We discovered that fifty years after Julian's time, the French authorities had evicted the Marists and stripped the seminary of valuables and set it on fire. When we crossed the River Ar, we saw the grape vines, cedars, mulberry and stone pines, date and orange trees Julian had spoken of in the district of Hyères.

In his "Memoirs" Julian also described a scene from the summit of a nearby mountain. His description illustrates for me that he experienced the natural world with intuition and insight.

"I walked with a young priest who was just ordained. The way led through the mountains, on the summit of which I came to a scene which I shall never forget. The valley of Hyères on one side with the blue Mediterranean lying so placidly under the still bluer sky; the valley of Mont Bel with its snow-clad summits (for it was winter), around me the stone pines and the cedar trees, with a form that would have delighted the heart

of Turner, made a scene which actually took my breath away, it was so much more beautiful than anything I had ever imagined.” Bulger, Memoirs, p51

Discovering these ‘confluences’ between Julian Wood’s in France with Earth, simple peasant lives, the Sisters who modelled a fresh way of living religious life, the Marists and Curés from whom he learned so much, is a memory I will always treasure.