Henri Marchal
1875-1957

An Apostolic Approach to the Algerian World

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Father Henri Marchal.
Foreword

In September 2013 I suggested to Fr. François Richard who was then visiting Paris to read the biography of Father André Demeerseman that I had just written. As he handed back the manuscript, he advised me to mention another confrère for the series of blue booklets, on historical subjects.

Since the life of Fr. André Demeerseman coincided with that of Father Henri Marchal, I suggested his name: he was Assistant General for 35 years and remains an emblematic figure in the North African mission.

We quickly agreed that we should offer the confrères this important model of an 'apostle'. I arranged with Father Jean-Claude Ceillier that I would read several of Fr. Marchal's writings and contact the Chancery of the Diocese of Nancy before drafting this booklet entitled "Henri Marchal : an apostolic approach to the Maghreb world."


Further to that, I have referred to other documents produced by Fathers François Dornier¹, Jean-Claude Ceillier² et Jean-Marie Gaudeul³, to the latter two of whom I express my fraternal gratitude.

Gérard Demeerseman
The Years of Training

Henri Joseph Auguste Marchal was born on Tuesday 21st September 1875 in Vého, a little village of 300 souls in Jorraine, hidden away to the east of Lunéville. An earlier native of the same village was the Abbé Grégoire, an emblematic figure of the French Revolution and father of the first article of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

We know almost nothing of the childhood or school-days of little Henri. Because of the war, the parish records could not even give us the date of his baptism. His father, Joseph Ernest and his mother, Florine Claire, née Jollain, had six children of whom four died in infancy. Henri, the fifth of these children, knew only his brother Charles who was four years his senior, and who died at the age of 33. The family home, profoundly Christian, tenderly and thoughtfully encouraged Henri's wish to become a missionary priest.

We can presume that Henri completed his secondary schooling at the junior seminary of Renémont-Jarville, in the southern suburbs of Nancy. It is almost impossible to say more, since the archives of the Diocese of Nancy do not retain the lists of pupils of the junior seminaries, their results or their reports.

In 1893 young Henri, then aged 18, entered the major seminary at Nancy. Each year, this imposing building situated in Rue de Strasbourg welcomed about thirty new students. It offered a solid intellectual and spiritual training spread over five years. This ensured its reputation ever since Mgr Lavigerie, who was bishop of Nancy from 1863 to 1867, had expressed a desire to have a 'scholarly clergy'.

Reverend Henri Marchal spent two years there studying philosophy as well as the start of his theology studies. At the end of those two years, on 7th July 1895, he received the tonsure even though he was about to
leave the diocese of Nancy to join the White Fathers. Feeling that he had a missionary calling going back over several years, it was on 9th June 1895 that he wrote his formal request for admission to Mgr Livinhac, the Superior General. “Ever since I was a child”, he wrote, I have dreamt of the missions; please, My Lord, let this dream become a reality”. This application was supported by a letter from the superior of the seminary:

“He is an excellent young man who has long thought of Africa. We have noted his piety, his talents and zeal to work; he has a rather sombre and melancholy character. Once he is engaged in something his spirits rise and he blossoms out to show all his good qualities. I recommend him to you and ask you to welcome his request.”

This application was accepted, much to the joy of Reverend Marchal. He replied to Mgr Livinhac in these terms:

“May I sincerely thank you for such a gift. From now it is God alone and for ever. What joy!”

After his holidays, Reverend Marchal went to Marseilles whence he would take the boat to Algiers and then on to Maison Carrée where the novitiate Sainte-Marie was entrusted to Father Pierre Viven as novice-master. After the initial 8-day retreat came the clothing-ceremony and Reverend Marchal exchanged his black cassock for the white gandoura over which he wore the burnous and the rosary around his neck. It was at the novitiate that the young brother got to know Father Paul Voillard who was attached to it as director.

That year the novitiate welcomed 17 novices, among them two Dutchmen and one Luxembourger. Life was quite austere with a 4.25 am rising and long periods of silence. In addition to prayer-times, the day included morning lectures by the novice-master with the aim of helping the novices to fit the mould of the Society of the White Fathers. There were also two hours of daily manual work to keep the house and grounds tidy and a time of studies in order to assimilate the structures of the Society in which the novices hoped to live their lives.

There were also language courses. Brother Marchal, without any hesitation, launched himself enthusiastically into the study of Arabic, a language that he continued to learn when he arrived at the scholasti-
cate in Carthage in 1896. At that time the superior of that house was Father Hippolyte Bazin who later became the apostolic vicar for French Sudan. It was there that Brother Marchal completed the theology studies which he had already started at Nancy. The staff of the scholasticate are unanimous in recognising the moral and intellectual talents of Brother Marchal. He received minor orders on the feast of the Annunciation, 25th March 1898. On 23rd September of the same year he made his missionary oath and was ordained sub-deacon the next day.

The collective assessment of the priests who taught him can be summed up as follows:

“An excellent scholastic according to all his reports; above average intelligence, very good character, very pious and calm, the best scholastic of the year. Good at Arabic; he would make a good teacher of theology or of Arabic; dreams only of the Sahara; much liked by his confrères for his gentleness and gaiety.”

On Saturday 18th March 1899, the vigil of the 1st Sunday of the Passion, Brother Marchal was ordained deacon. He received his priestly ordination a year later on Saturday 31st March 1900 which was also the vigil of the 1st Sunday of the Passion.

**The First Appointments (1900-1905)**

Having completed his theology studies, Father Marchal was available for his first appointment. On 15th April he was sent to the Diocese of Carthage, to the junior seminary, known as the “Institution Lavigerie”. This was at La Marsa, in the buildings of the Archbishopric. He taught Latin and Arabic there during what was a temporary appointment, while awaiting something more permanent.
So it was that at the beginning of July 1900 he rejoined the Scolasticate at Carthage which he had left just three months earlier. He taught theology there and even Arabic. On 3rd October he wrote to the superiors at Maison-Carrée:

“It is now three months since Providence brought me gently back to the starting-point after leaving me a moment in which to hope for several years of pilgrimage in Jerusalem. But I have already tasted the good life of the Scolasticate and the Good Lord has blessed me with so many graces that I cannot complain about being here again; on the contrary, it is what comforts me most and leaves me happy and full of gratitude towards Divine Providence, since here everything points to God... If it were not for my duty of obedience, I would not feel at peace here because what I am doing and the responsibilities I have here require a training that I only have at the level of my own desires” 6

So it was that the young professor set about assuming his functions without, however, giving up the Arabic language. For that he was allowed to go to Tunis to attend certain discussions organised by a recently-founded cultural association called Khaldounia. Its aim was to broaden the general culture of the students of the Zitouna. On 2nd May 1903 Father Marchal wrote to the president of this association to thank him for letting him attend several of these sessions.

This letter leads us to believe that the father’s health was not at its best and that he had wisely taken steps to limit his activities to his principal function, all the more since he was never without things to do. As the months passed, however, Father Marchal felt more and more tired on account of the serious troubles he had with his stomach. The superior of the community, Father Alexis Maillot, felt it his duty to inform the superiors at Maison Carrée:

“He can hardly eat anything anymore and what he does manage he brings up again within half-an-hour or an hour. I’m hoping that the holidays or a spell in France will do him good and that next year he will be able to start teaching again. I do want to keep him at the scholasticate even though the sedentary life here isn’t really to his taste and affects his health.” (Notice p. 4).

The superiors preferred to bring forward this time of recovery and Father Marchal left Carthage in February 1905 for the village of Binson in
the Marne where the philosophy seminary was situated. There he gave courses in Holy Scripture until the end of the academic year.

It was there that he learnt in early July that his dream was about to come true: he was appointed to the Apostolic Prefecture of the Sahara with residence in Ghardaïa. He immediately expressed his gratitude to Mgr Livinhac in the following terms:

“I really don’t know how to express my thanks for your goodness to me and for your concern for my health. I trust that Our Lord will allow it to fully suffice for the task that you are entrusting to me. So it is that I am now turning all my thoughts and actions, as well as my prayers, towards the desert. Praying more, getting more used to prayer, going deeper into the supernatural and divine charity, those are things that I want to concentrate on more and more during the time I still have here...

I know the Muslims well enough to have no enthusiastic illusions about the life that is awaiting me in the Sahara; if disappointments occur, I believe that it will be for the best since I am determined to work for results that I won’t see with my own eyes and that only others coming later will be able to harvest. But none of that can diminish either the joy or my resolve to work faithfully and to confidently prepare the future.” (Notice... p.4)

We can see in these lines the lucid realism and the spiritual disposition that Father Marchal possessed and which were precisely those that Cardinal Lavigerie had asked of his sons sent on mission to North Africa: to be “men of God” seeking acceptance by the local people through the exercise of apostolic charity and prepared to accept that there would be no immediate fruit.
Ghardaïa (1905-1908)

Ghardaïa is a town 600km south of Algiers. It is the capital of several fortified towns built in the Mzab Valley. Its Muslim inhabitants belong to two distinct communities: one of them is Sunni Arab of the Maliki jurisprudence whilst the other, the Mozabites, is of the Ibadite jurisprudence, marked by a form of extreme rigorism. When the White Fathers arrived there in 1884 they settle, out of prudence, in the Jewish quarter of the town, living in somewhat precarious conditions on account of the mistrust, if not scornful hostility of the inhabitants. In those days the leaders of the Ibadite community had forbidden any contact with the Fathers. It is said that if someone found themselves obliged to offer a glass of water to one of them, he had to then break the glass become 'impure'!

When Father Marchal arrived at Ghardaïa in October 1905 it was already a year since the Fathers had sold their house in Baba-Salah in the Jewish Quarter and settled at Bâb er-Ra’î in poor Arab houses. Among the confrères who lived there was Fr. Charles Guérin, Apostolic Prefect of the Sahara since 1901, and Father Louis David whose notes proved so valuable for our knowledge of the newcomer's activities. Father Marchal was appointed headmaster of the little school in which French and Arabic were taught to Arab children and a few Mozabite ones.

His first impression of the hovels that made up the mission was not exactly favourable; they had nothing in common with a proper White Father post.

“So one of his first tasks was to bring to an end our camping by helping the Reverend Father Prefect to carry out a plan to provide lodgings more suitable to a White Father community” (Notice p.5).

Without delay Father Marchal tenaciously set about getting to know the people, despite the lingering suspicion that they still held towards the fathers:
“By going out regularly every day, he increased his contact with the local people, starting with our immediate neighbours the Medabih, an Arab tribe who were more open to our influence than the austere Mozabites…

We also continued going from shop to shop, at that time the only place where it was possible for us to meet the Mozabites. Once Father Marchal had himself tried this form of apostolate, he admitted that it was sometimes quite painful and even humiliating” (Notice p.5).

Pastoral contact and encounter were the only way to be accepted in that milieu and had to be practised with prudence and perseverance no matter how one was received. The Fathers were not there to shake the dust from their sandals!

In a spirit of compassion for the poor of the neighbourhood, Father Marchal formed the idea of coming to their help without making them too dependant; Father David notes on this subject:

“His charitable spirit took pity on the conditions of the poor of our neighbourhood. With the aim of helping them without offending their dignity, he came up with the idea of starting a workshop for the fabrication of goatskins which could then be sold, he thought, to the Saharan Companies. It didn't work. His guerbas didn't find any buyers because their price was too high. He had to abandon this unsuccessful enterprise.” (Notice p. 5).

This setback in no way impaired the Father's drive. Since he had no shortage of ideas on which he was taking the time to reflect, he started organising evening classes for adults. This is how Father David speaks of this:

“The long winter evenings were given up to courses for adults. The magic lantern that we had bought from Mazo was extremely useful in drawing local people to our house where they could marvel at the scenes taken from the Old and New Testaments that the Father showed” (Notice p. 5).
We can be sure that it wasn't some form of catechism. Using magic of the projected image, the Father talked of religion in the form of edifying traditional stories which, according to him, would be useful in engendering “good ideas” and healthy sentiments. In doing that he was respecting what Cardinal Lavigerie had agreed at the Chapter of 1886: talking about religion in the historical way without going beyond that.

While continuing his aim of transmitting “good ideas” to the people according to this historical method, the Father realised that there were insufficient books for teaching in the spoken language of the people. He therefore decided to produce, in the local dialect, stories inspired from biblical sources. In order to do this he had to find both a Saharan sufficiently capable of handling the spoken Arabic and material for reproducing the texts. For the material he managed to import Arabic characters from Beirut and to set up a printing press. For the translating into spoken Arabic he arranged to have the help of an Arab from the Medabih tribe: Aïssa ben Yacoubi, a blind man of lively disposition who knew the language well. On top of the translation work, there was also the composition, the printing and the binding of the books, work which took up a lot of time in the prevailing conditions.

The Annual Report for 1907-1908 reflects this continuing work:

“Father Marchal has used all the free time that he had left after is all too persistent stomach ailment to begin the translation of a Bible story into popular Arabic... during the year he has succeeded in translating the stories of the Creation, the Fall, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and David” (pp. 39-44)

So it was that Father Marchal's first books in spoken Arabic appeared. They were biblically-inspired stories which could be used as the basis for moral or religious commentaries and were capable of capturing the attention of both readers and auditors. The first of them is the story of King David: *Sîra Sidna Dawed el-malik,* (Ghardaïa, Imprimerie des Pères, 1907, 135 p.)

These easily-understood texts were much appreciated by the schoolchildren and the Medabih of the area, which was a source of joy to their author and encouraged him to offer them to the Mozabite cheikhs. But, as Father David tells us:
“The educated people such as the Mozabite tolbas scorned these texts for not being written in the beautiful language of the Quraysh, making us feel incapable of satisfying them. This disaffection upset Father Marchal who would have had so much to say to them. How often we heard him repeating this proverb so often used by the nomads when they can't find the words they seek: “I've got the music in my head that my feet can't dance to”. (Notice p. 6).

Rather than discouraging him, this somewhat humiliating experience engendered a twofold reflection: on the one hand the inability of the Fathers to express themselves in good classical Arabic when meeting 'well-read people', and on the other the fussy respect that they had for literary Arabic which was considered to be almost sacred.

In a letter to Mgr Livinac on 6th April 1907, the Father speaks of his commitment to Ghardaîa and his approach to the milieu:

“No doubt the results of our efforts and our achievements here give you little consolation, but at least our mood is what you would like it to be. We have faith in the future, and it is that which guides us and sustains us in our present labours. Our little native school is going well and the number of pupils has risen somewhat… my wish would be to help as many as possible of the natives to read and to understand what they are reading in their own current language and to give them to read material that will help them to know us and which will bring them close to us.

We have got a little printing-press – whence the need for us to prepare the texts and the copy, thus working to put the truth in a language that is both appropriate and within their capacity to understand. Whence also the need for us to know them with their Muslim prejudices, so that our words ring true...

We are also working to produce Bible and Gospel stories in the common language, something that the people appreciate. What I
would really like is to find some gifted children whom we could “train and prepare to help us later on in spreading our good ideas.”

This letter clearly shows the apostolic hope which drove the Father as well as the inventive and appropriate zeal which he used to get closer to the people, up to the point of wanting to use suitable 'natives' as a bridge between them and the Fathers. What is more, this letter indicates that the Father didn't confuse the 'time for sowing' with the 'time for harvesting'.

Some of the Fathers took to following the Mozabites when they spent the summer in the palm-groves. During the summer of 1907 Father Marchal, seeking a means of improving his knowledge of literary Arabic, joined the group of fathers at the oasis. Father David recounts how the stay went:

“During this oppressive period the Father gathers the confrères together away from the house in a little palm-branch hut where we studied Arabic. Despite our efforts we didn't achieve much. So one day Father Marchal shared with us one of his little 'cogitations', as he used to call them: “Irrespective of their good intentions to learn the language, the missionaries' efforts will remain sterile unless they have properly qualified teachers.” In his opinion it was neither at Cairo nor at Tunis that the Fathers destined for the North African mission would acquire the necessary scientific standards, either of idiom or of questions about Islam.” (Notice p. 6).

The content of this 'cogitation' would need to be chewed over and modelled before being hatched twenty years later in the form of a “study centre” opened at Bou Khris, not far from Carthage. In the meantime the Father printed a new volume of spoken Arabic recounting the story of Joseph: Sîra Sidna Yousef.

Father Marchal's stay at Ghardaïa was not without its difficulties: those arising from the opposition of the local people and those coming from his own confrères. He met with incomprehension from some of them who were not far from believing him to be a dreamer, even a utopian! What is more, he suffered from not being able to adapt physically to the Saharan climate, his fragile stomach accommodating ever less the hard water from the wells. In the end the Father had to decide to leave his post for a period of rest in the Aurès where the climate was
less harsh. Those three years spent at Ghardaïa were crucial to his future apostolic life. They were like the humus on which would germinate his thoughts about an apostolic presence in the Muslim world.

**In the Aurès (1908-1909)**

The Father left Ghardaïa on 29th June 1908, but not before leaving a manuscript in spoken Arabic on the story of Moses: *Sîra Sidna Mousa*.

He arrived in Medina on 17th July 1908 to spend the summer there. The Fathers had arrived there in October 1900; they ran an experimental farm for breeding animals and growing cereals. The Medina plateau, having ample rainfall, was renowned for its pastures and its fertile land. This stay of several months regaining his strength allowed him to envisage a return to Ghardaïa.

It was not to be. In the annual report for 1908-1909 we read in the section about Ghardaïa:

"Father Marchal has not yet returned: our superiors consider it necessary for his health that he prolong his stay in the North and they have appointed his superior at Arris for this year" (p.95).

So the Father moved from Medina to Arris, also in the Aurès, where the Fathers had been since 1893. They looked after a much-frequented dispensary, a small boarding-school with a few boarders and the beginnings of a Christian village. We know very little about this year spent in Arris, simply that the Father had retained his feelings for the malnourished poor and that he tried his best to help them. To do that he sought aid from elsewhere, as we see from this thank-you letter that he sent to Mgr Livinhac in April 1909:

"Thanks to your generous alms I am going to obtain wheat which I can give to the most needy; I will probably have to buy it in Batna because the countryside is empty and those who do still possess it demand high prices. This help will facilitate our reaching out to people’s hearts." (Notice p. 6)

So we can see the Father remaining steadfastly in the apostolic line of the Cardinal who had suggested "using charity and bounty to win the hearts and the confidence of the people."
Regional Superior of Kabylie (1909-1912)

On 1st September 1909, Father Marchal, then 34, was appointed Regional Superior of Kabylie. Other than the missions in the Aurès just mentioned, the Region consisted of six posts in Greater Kabylie: Taguemount Azouz, the Ouadhias, and Aït Larba in the Beni Yenni area founded in 1873, then Bou Noh and Ouaghzen in 1876. There were also two posts in Little Kabylie: Ighil-Ali in 1879 and Kerrata in 1896.

In those days the strict orders given by the Cardinal in 1873 aimed at avoiding problems with the civil authorities and the sensitivities of the environment were relaxed. They continued to run dispensaries and day-schools, whilst occasionally accepting to board a few poorer pupils. These latter would thus be more open to the “Christian ethos”, allowing them to hear talk about religion in a catechetical way. In that way they ended up with several young Christians who, for the most part, remained close to the mission having been cut off from full integration with their roots.

Father Marchal settled in Beni Yenni. The Fathers there had a school with a single class of about forty pupils, a much-frequented dispensary, boarding for 4 children and a little catechumenate. It was from there that the Father organised his visits to the different posts of his Region without really having the time to start learning the Kabyle language. We know that he insisted that the confrères should be seen to be “men of God”, and not simply teachers or nurses. He advised them to make time to get out and about to meet the locals so as to improve their knowledge of the culture and the language, and invited them to make best use of some of their neophytes who could 'zealously' diffuse the “Fathers' spirit” among their people.

We can turn to some of the annual reports written by the Father himself to give us an idea of the prevailing apostolic climate:
“Well managed schools, always full of pupils, dispensaries daily invaded by hundreds of sick people, which attract from afar the growing reputation of goodness, of knowledge of the art of healing and of a warm welcome from the missionaries – is that not an achievement? These successes themselves are to be appreciated, and we see in our posts "humanum dico". I could add more. We are sufficiently supernatural to be dissatisfied, and we won't be satisfied until we have built all the rest on those foundations. It is for that alone that we have come; the one thing that delights the hearts of the missionaries is the building up of the spiritual Church.”

The edification of the spiritual Church would remain constantly at the centre of the Father's thoughts. It would find its achievement in the publication of the first volume of his work *L'invisible présence de l'Église, son action et ses fruits dans les terres d'Islam* (Algiers, 1950, 177 p.) destined for the confrères of North Africa.

In the same annual report the Father asked the confrères to invite the people to pray with their hearts and to set their minds on God, since those are the paths to grace:

“The missionaries are happy. We speak about God to people of good will. We encourage them to truly pray from the heart …. many souls are ill at ease in their religion, but we don't imagine that they will be able to join us”.

In the annual report for the following year the Father mentions the little boarding-schools maintained in each post and expresses his concern for the schools in which the desire is for the moral education of the children as well as their basic instruction:

“The schools continue, they are even more and more frequented, and it would be a shame if we had to close them because of the injunctions of the Law of 1904; for us they are becoming one of the most effective means of action”.

This concern for education that the Fathers should cultivate in their teaching work would be further covered in the second volume of *L'invisible présence de l'Église* (volume 2, 1951, 214 p.)

Since the Father was never short of ideas, he proposes in the same report that the young catachumens could live in and around the post during the time of their preparation for baptism:
Several times I have noticed that we need to keep young people who come to us with the sincere intention of converting close to us for a certain time, a bit like a novitiate in Christian terms; in fact, is the catechumenate all that different? I note that in general these young people neither make an effective catechumenate nor reach the point of baptism unless we have given them a bit of peace and security in which to prepare themselves... what they ask for, and what they need, is to escape for a time from the many obstacles that their relatives and compatriots put in their way, and to be able to consolidate peacefully their Christian faith and its practice.⁽¹⁸⁾ (1911-1912, p. 99).

As Regional Superior he was called on to make visitations beyond the borders of Kabylie. He had the joy of going to Ghardaïa:

On 5ᵗʰ April 1910 the Reverend Father Marchal came to visit the post, staying with us for a fortnight. He was glad to tell us that our work is going well and that he too finds the people more open and more affable than they used to be.⁽¹⁹⁾

These visits to the posts opened the way to 'visiting cards' and a correspondence with the superiors at Maison-Carrée. Such is this letter written from Taguemount Azouz on 6ᵗʰ February 1911 and addressed to Mgr Livinhac:

"Monseigneur, I can hardly say how urgent it seems to me is the need for the missionaries to be supermen if we want this mission to progress... I most strongly draw the attention of the missionaries to this point and urge them to work hard to convert these souls by means of a deeper effort of will."⁽²⁰⁾ (Notice p. 8).

The same year, after a visit to the post at Bou Noh, the Father left his confrères with a 'visiting card' dated 25ᵗʰ April 1911 in which he specified that their apostolic work should be based on three means: visiting the villages, being welcoming at the post and the training of 'zealots' whose rôle is to be that of contact between the Fathers and the people. Concerning this last point, he says:

"Your mission will make real progress when you have instilled into the best of your neophytes (young people are the most easily influenced) and into the best of your Christians the supernatural zeal for souls and the firm desire to convert their unbelieving friends to the love of God so as to then bring them to you to make into disciples of the Our Lord."
Take note of this gradation and strive to find these auxiliaries, to sanctify them and to initiate them into the secret of how to win hearts.”

During his mandate as Regional, Father Marchal, always attentive to helping the needy without making them dependent, formed the idea of founding two mutual-aid associations aimed at supporting the needs of Kabyle Christian households. One of them, called “Le Foyer Kabyle” was a company providing cheap accommodation, with its offices in Tizi Ouzou. The other, the “Mutuelle des Beni Mengallet” was implanted in the zone of that tribe (at Ouaghzen) and sought to provide help in cases of death, of retirement or of other major need.

What can we say about this period as Regional? The Father's concern to be close to his confrères shows him to be enlightened by the Founder's advice: be men of God, wanting to win hearts through education and the care of the sick, ready to visit the people in their villages and to support the Kabyle Christians who can be witness-links to their own people. If Father Marchal concentrated on dealing with the situations on the ground, he thought nonetheless that the Kabylie mission should work to make the whole area more open, rather than concentrating on a few individuals who had become Christian.
Member of the General Council 1912-1947

Assistant General (First Mandate 1912-1920)

Monseigneur Livinhac convened the General Chapter at Maison-Carrée for Monday 15th April 1912. Father Marchal was an ex-officio member, being the Regional Superior of Algeria. His circumscription included 14 posts of which 3 were in the Apostolic Prefecture of Ghardaïa.

Bishop Livinhac was Superior General for life. He held the election for his assistants: three of them were re-elected and Father Marchal was elected, at the age of 37, to replace Father Mercui.

His apostolic experience in the Muslim world, his knowledge of the formation houses, his faithful adherence to the Founder's orientations, his rich spirituality and deep piety, his interest in the theology of the mission and his imagination in seeking appropriate solutions to different situations would have all played a part in his being chosen.

How can we depict this new Assistant General? Father André Demeerseman who met him regularly over a period of twenty years, had this to say:

“A conversation with Father Marchal was a bit like going into a sanctuary. He was a lord of thought awaiting his visitor. He was never banal .... always ready to dig deep into a subject rather than to dominate it from on high. Such a contact with him, however brief, was a beneficial cure, bringing reasoning, logic and wisdom.”

Even so, the author of these words adds that meetings with this man of such reserved appearance would cross a threshold so as to discover “a welcoming human heart, steeped in spiritual fatherliness”.

Once having elected its General Council, the Chapter set to work. The first task was to finalise the Constitutional Directory which Father Mercui had prepared for presentation. It wasn't a question of reworking the whole of the proposed text, but rather enriching it by adding details, by introducing nuances and by making a few additions. Thus it was that the Chapter, dealing with the subject of educative works, asked that Article 153 of the former Constitutions of 1895 be included:

“At the top of the list (of works) are schools and orphanages because they are the most important activities in many countries... among the Muslims they even represent the only thing that is possible or appropriate to do initially.”

Having examined the proposed Directory, the Chapter authorised the General Council to produce a new text based on the advice given by the assembly.

Several other topics were dealt with, with Father Marchal contributing to the discussion. One of them concerned the languages that should be taught in the formation houses. That led to a full debate: “should the teaching of Kiswahili at the novitiate be abandoned and the time given to Arabic be reduced in order to leave time for English and German?” Referring to the apostolic works in Kabylie, the Father underlined “the crucial importance of the schools as a means of making the initial apostolic contact,” adding that “we are not there to baptise people but to create a Christian society.” Finally, in answer to a proposal for uniform pronunciation of Latin in all the Society's houses, the Father intervened to demand that the circumstances of each place should be considered in allowing certain exceptions!

With the Chapter ended, the Father had to move to the first floor of the Motherhouse. Out of respect for the Cardinal's wishes, it was out of the question to smoke in the main building. But Father Marchal had taken up smoking a pipe in order to calm his fragile stomach. He was therefore authorised to set up a “smoking-room” in an outbuilding of one of the workshops of the Motherhouse, naming the place “Jeremy.” He made it
his 'den' and spent all his spare time there composing and typing lectures, retreats and documents, especially in order to help the mission of the confrères in North Africa. About this we read:

“His legendary pipe which reigned supreme in his 'den' at Maison-Carrée always seemed to be a welcoming sign to visitors. The confrères who ventured there had to pass through a curtain of smoke before discovering, in a hidden corner, a thick beard from which stared two eyes sparkling with intelligence.”

At this time in Louvain they were preparing the 1st Week of Religious Ethnology which was due to open on 27th August 1912. Its aim was to give those training as missionaries a technical initiation in sciences such as ethnology and sociology. The authorities in Rome were hesitant about this project, fearing that the missionaries might be contaminated by the prevailing positivism.

It required all the support of Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines, for it to open. Father Marchal who was in charge of the formation houses agreed to take part. It was known that he regularly read La Revue Africaine and he advocated taking account of ethnological data in order for confrères to have an adequate presence where they worked. He gave a talk on “Muslim Institutions” and the following year, during the 2nd Week of Religious Ethnology at Louvain, he gave a lesson on “Islam in Africa”.

As part of his work as Assistant General, he was asked to coordinate the final editing of the Directory; this was a task of clarification which he was to submit to his confrères on the General Council. This 550-page document went to press in 1914, but the start of the Great War on 1st August that year meant that it couldn't be distributed to all the houses or missions.

Father Charles de Foucauld was in contact with Mgr Livinhac who had received him at Maison-Carrée on 1st September 1901 when he was
a priest of the diocese of Viviers planning to serve in the Apostolic Prefecture of Ghardaïa. Later on he welcomed him for a visit of several days at Maison-Carrée when he was passing through on his way to Marseille (February 1909) and before his return to the Hoggar (March 1909). In 1912, wanting to found a missionary vocation association, Father de Foucauld approached Mgr Livinhac, who entrusted the matter to one of his Assistants. Between 1912 and 1915 there was a correspondence between the Hermit of the Hoggar and Father Marchal about the launching of this project of “The Association of the Brothers and Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”, as testifies this letter from Brother Charles of 22nd March 1913:

“A thousand thanks for your letter of 8th December and the enclosed pages. As soon as I receive those that you mention I will reply as best I can to the questions they contain.”

In the same letter the latter announced his next visit to France: he would leave Ahaggar at the end of April so as to be at Maison-Carrée in early June. Thus it was that from 8th to 11th June and again from 29th September to 2nd October 1913 that he was a guest of the General Council along with his travelling-companion, a young Targui called Ouksem.

Following the start of the Great War, Father Marchal did not escape the general mobilisation decreed on 1st August 1914. On 16th November 1914 he was appointed as a medic in the health service and posted to Salonika. Then he was transferred to Algeria, serving successively at Fort National and Tizi Ouzou until the day that Mgr Livinhac arranged for him to be closer to Maison Carrée so that he could take part in the weekly Council meetings. He was set to work at the Hôpital Parnet in Hussein-Dey. It was from there that he was demobilised after four years and three months of service so as to return full-time to the Mother House on 21st February 1919.
As a result of the War and its repercussions for the progress of the Mission, the General Chapter programmed for 1918 was postponed sine die. On 12th May 1919 Mgr Livinhac convoked it for the month of April 1920.

So it was that on 14th April the chapter opened. The Superior General, appointed for life, informed the assembly of the steps he had taken in order to be relieved of his charge on account of his age and health. That was not accepted by the Congregation of the Propaganda, so the election of the Assistants went ahead:

“In the first round of voting Fathers Voillard and Marchal were re-elected, soon to be joined by Fathers Michel and Constantin. The meeting ended with the election of Father Voillard as First Assistant.” 26

Among the subjects to be treated were the definitive adoption of the Constitutional directory, its harmonisation with the new code of Canon Law and the defining of criteria for the erection of new provinces whilst
preserving the role of the Motherhouse in respect of the houses in Europe. It also fell to the Chapter to reflect on the missionary results diversified according to the major areas of apostolate in order to avoid emptying a less profitable zone in favour of a more profitable one. So it was that on 21st April the situation in southern Oran was evoked: it was proposed that the sector be left to another congregation! The Chapter rejected the proposal, even citing its link to the origins of the society:

“This withdrawal would signify that we were no longer interested in the mission to the Arabs in that world, something that would go against the whole history of our Society or admit that that mission will never succeed”!27

Hardly had the Chapter ended than, on the 6th June 1920, the beatification of the Uganda Martyrs took place. Unfortunately the health of Mgr Livinhac prevented him from going to Rome for the ceremony. The following year, feeling his health failing and his strength diminishing, he placed almost the whole government of the Society in the hands of his Assistants, especially those of his First Assistant, Father Voillard.

Each one of them took on part of his work. Father Marchal, entrusted with the formation houses, made sure that the necessary steps were taken to include the study of the English language at the novitiate, in accordance with the wishes of the Chapter. The Father, being more present than he had been in his previous mandate, visited the formation houses and made himself available to preach retreats both at the novitiate of Sainte-Marie at Maison Carrée and at the scolasticate at Carthage. He composed an educational booklet for use by the superiors and staff in containing many wise suggestions.

The Petit Echo of August 1922 told the confreres that the Superior General’s health had declined seriously. Three months later, on 11th December, Mgr Livinhac died. This great man had steered the Society for thirty years. With the agreement of Propaganda Fede, Father Voillard immediately succeeded him, becoming Vicar General of the Society until the next Chapter due in 1926. The Generalate team, now reduced to four in number, dealt with all the business for the good of the Society and of the mission.
During these years Father Marchal made several journeys. In September 1923 he accompanied from Maison-Carrée to Carthage the novices called to begin their theology studies there. In January 1924 he visited the confrères at Djelfa and at Laghouat, two Algerian posts opened in 1920. The same year, in May, he visited the houses in France and the following year it was the turn of those in Tunisia.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his priestly ordination, Father Marchal celebrated a solemn Thanksgiving Mass on Easter Monday, 13th April 1925. For the event the three communities of Maison Carrée came together at the Motherhouse. The evening before, the confrères of the Motherhouse had gathered around the ‘guest of honour’ and Father Cuche, the Treasurer General, expressed the feelings of each and all, to which the Father replied with a talk which took the place of ‘spiritual reading.’

In June 1925 he went to visit the houses in Europe. Then it was time to start thinking of preparing the centenary of Cardinal Lavigerie’s birth and in particular the celebration planned for the 4th November at Maison Carrée. Finally, they had to get ready for the next General Chapter which was due in the spring of 1926.

In a circular dated April 1925 Father Voillard announced that the Chapter would begin on Wednesday 14th April 1926. A general report on the development of the Society and its works had to be written for the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fede.

Father Marchal agreed to compose, for the members of the Chapter, a five-page document entitled: “General Chapter 1926: report on the recruitment for the Society and its formation houses.” In the first part he deals with recruitment, giving the number of students and listing the formation houses. In the second part he presents everything touching on the spirit and the functioning of those houses. This generally positive presentation does however point out that “the post-war youth” was developing “a self-willed mentality, an individualistic and independent affectedness” which made the task of training more difficult.
3rd Mandate: General Assistant (1926-1936)

After the inaugural session the Chapter proceeded on 15th April 1926 to elect the Superior General. Father Voillard was elected by an overwhelming majority. The election of the Assistants followed: Fathers Constantin and Marchal were re-elected. The team was completed by Fathers Jeuland and Meuleman, with Fr. Marchal being elected First Assistant.

During the Chapter, Father Marchal, speaking in the name of the commission on the missions, presented two projects relating to the mission among Muslims. The first project emanating from Mgr Lemaître, archbishop of Carthage, proposed founding an inter-confessional college open to both Tunisians and Europeans like that founded in 1880 in Carthage by Cardinal Lavigerie. After several objections were raised, the assembly did not support this proposal.

The second project concerned the founding of a “study centre” dedicated to the Arabic language and the Muslim religion for confrères destined principally for Algeria. We know that this idea had been turning in Father Marchal’s head for about twenty years, such that he knew now to defend it with conviction:

“It is a fact that the Muslim question preoccupies everyone, starting with the Sovereign Pontiff who, in his latest encyclical draws attention to the Islamic question to the point of founding a chair of Islamology at the Oriental Institute in Rome.

Secondly, the Catholic world expects something in this direction, especially from our Society which since the beginning has been devoted to the evangelisation of the Muslim world.

Thirdly, the fulfilment of this apostolate requires the creation of a ‘centre for Islamic studies.’ Indeed, we are faced with an ancient
civilisation with which we must become familiar if we are to make contact with the ruling classes and through them with the Muslim people. What is more, the setting up of this study centre need not require an increase in personnel in Muslim countries since as things are at present a greater number would not produce greater results: a) the time is not yet ripe for a general activity undertaken with government aid. b) even if it were, we could not make the most of it since we do not yet have the right people ready.28"

Without any major debate, the proposal was adopted by a show of hands and it was decided to “set up a study centre for the White Fathers of the Sahara and Kabylie in which they would undertake for a relatively long period of time, studies of the Arabic language and the Muslim religion.”

How can we explain this twenty-year delay between the first conception of the project and its fulfilment? A first reason would be the character of Father Marchal: he was more one to ‘chew over’ a question than to act impulsively: to bring this project to fruition he needed to clearly identify any obstacles that the confrères of Algeria might meet as well as their practical ignorance of the Muslim mentality.

A second reason would be linked to the events that had marked the period between 1912 and 1926. Father Marchal’s first mandate had been seriously affected by his mobilisation which had lasted for over four years. As for his second mandate, that had been marked by the death of Bishop Livinhac in November 1922, after which date the General Council had had to manage the affairs of the Society without any possibility of innovation right up until the Chapter of 1926.

There could be a third reason coming from the humble deference that Father Marchal cultivated in his relations with the Superior General of the day. Bishop Livinhac and his successor had such a desire for faithfulness to the ‘instructions’ of the Founder and such a feeling of apostolic urgency that they couldn’t see themselves departing from the Cardinal’s directions about the length of language studies. Indeed, that is why the wording of the Chapter remained somewhat imprecise: “a relatively long course.”

During the Chapter Father Marchal also spoke up in the debate about the stability of personnel in Kabylie. The fact that this mission
was so close to the Motherhouse made it a sort of ‘reserve-depot’ where confrères could be sent short-term and from which one could withdraw people for use in other missions according to need. This was a request made to guarantee a greater stability among the personnel and for the appointment of an autonomous superior with his own council and his own budget. Despite being a perfectly legitimate demand, the General council exercise prudence in putting this into effect, taking account of the people concerned.

Once the Chapter was over it was time to put into action the decisions it had taken. Naturally enough it was Father Marchal who was entrusted with setting up the ‘Islamic studies centre.’ Thoughts turned to Father Roberto Focà appointed to Ghardaïa. This Italian was one of the best Arabic experts in the Society and had even obtained diplomas in Arabic in Algiers. Another possibility was Father Joseph Sallam, the Egyptian who had already suggested creating “an establishment in which confrères could be trained through perfect assimilation of the Arabic language and civilisation.” Even though Tunis was chosen for this implantation, there still remained the question of finding a place to host it.

In the meantime, Father Marchal, still regularly bothered by his stomach problems, decide to live at the sanatorium where he could adopt a life-style more suitable to his state of health whilst still keeping his office on the first-floor of the Motherhouse and his smoking-room in the outhouses.
The Study Centre at Tunis

The creation of this ‘Arab home’ and the follow-up of its functioning were really the work of Father Marchal. He undertook this task with a pernickety solicitude and an indefatigable perseverance from the very first groping around right up to the end of his last mandate as Assistant. Through detailed visits and a constant correspondence with the local superior he made sure that everything remained on course. We read about this:

“We can state that the organisation and methodical development of this school were for Father Marchal the greatest work of his life. He attached a rare tenacity to it and one might be permitted to think that without him the school might have had a thousand chances of failing or of deviating from its aim ... For a long while questions of whether the work could survive, whether it was going in the right direction, even its very existence, were the subject of considerable doubt. The great merit of Father Marchal was that he was the unruffled protector of a controversial work.”

Without further delay the General Council decided on the provisional opening of this study centre at Bou Khris where there was already a White Father community in residence in a small estate near La Marsa. Besides Father Focà, the superior, and Father Salaam his assistant, two confrères were presented for Arabic studies there: Fathers Ordonneau and Ruffier. The latter, having in the meantime received another appointment, did not arrive at Bou Khris.

Father Focà left Ghardaïa on 6th November 1926 for the Motherhouse. He stayed there a week or two in order to receive instructions and advice from Father Marchal about the opening of this study centre. A note dated 15th November 1926 was composed by Father Marchal giving in detail the articulation of the two communities living in the same building. The length of this time of study remained somewhat vague: Father Marchal oscillated between the point of view of Father Voillard
who opted for a course of several months and that of Father Focà who envisaged something lasting several years. On 18th November Father Focà arrived at Bou Khris where he found Father Salaam who had arrived from Jerusalem a short time before.

Both of them began by learning Tunisian dialectal Arabic, since Father Marchal had laid down that the programme should begin with several months of spoken Arabic before taking on classical Arabic and the realities of Islam.

“You have two languages to learn, both of them indispensable to your next apostolate. 1) the Arabic spoken commonly by all classes of the local population, 2) literary Arabic, the only language… that those who know something of Arabic literature consent to read.”

The purpose envisaged by the Father for this training period, and which he subsequently recalled whenever there was a change to the programme, was to provide not a scientific study of either Arabic or islamology, but rather a practical study suitable for getting the confrères to forge relationships with the local people in a climate of respect for their cultural and religious background. It was for that reason that he advocated the “tours of the bled” during the holiday-time. He felt that these outings formed part of the training and he counted on them to instil in the confrères “a love of apostolic contact” during which they would be able to “speak about God using Arabic expressions” all the while being attentive to the beliefs and sentiments expressed by the people. This practical approach to Islam-as-it-is-lived should, in Father Marchal’s eyes, take precedence over “the study of the doctrinal books of the ulémas.”

Father Focà gave this ‘Arabic centre the name of Dâr el-ittihâd wa-l-ijtiḥâd (House of Unity and Effort) and while awaiting the arrival of the first student he and Father Salaam made contact with several Tunisian intellectuals. On 22nd December 1926 Father Marchal sent a note to these
two confrères in which he spoke of the spirit in which such contacts should be made: do not confront ‘the Muslim spirit’, but rather

“1. Move away from their concepts and introduce the truth into their habitual way of thinking.
2. Raise this thinking and these traditional concepts to the full truth, freeing them from ignorance and error.
3. Operate not by contrast or opposition but by rising, advancing and passing from the incomplete to the complete.” 31

The Father advocated therefore approaching Islamic questions “by the principle of non-controversy... a kindly interpretation which brings people closer and makes doctrines that are susceptible to bringing it one step further towards the complete truth.”

The house of studies had a difficult start. Its real beginning was on 2nd February 1927 with the arrival of Father Raphaël Ordonneau. Informed of his arrival, Father Marchal immediately went to Bou Khris to inaugurate the ‘House of Unity and Effort’ to give a reminder of the apostolic spirit of which should direct this time of formation and to finalise the courses to be given. Father Ordonneau’s course lasted only a few months. Overwhelmed by the educational demands of Father Focà, needing three weeks of hospitalisation in Tunis due to illness, Father Ordonneau left the study house at the end of September to take up work more in line with his aptitudes and his zeal.

In September 1927 two new students arrived at Bou Khris. Father Jules Cussac came from Djelfa and Father Paul Py, newly ordained, came from the scholasticate at Carthage. They were joined in mid-December by Father Léon Lepers on his return from Nyanza. He and Father Cussac spent a year at the ‘Arabic Centre’ whilst Father Py was the first to study there for three years, the last two of which were with Father André Demeerseman.

In the meantime Father Marchal made a visit to the houses in Tunisia from 9th February to 2nd March 1928. During his stay the question was raised of the study centre being set up more independently in Tunis. In connection with this Father Marchal made contact with the White Sisters who were in the process of making available a house in the Rue des Glacières. Following a letting agreement, the ‘Arabic Centre’ moved in the-
ere on 18th May 1928 while awaiting the chance to acquire a house.

During the year 1929-1930 Fathers Py and Demeerseman had several difficult moments, not just because of external reasons like the Eucharistic Congress of Carthage but also because of the apologetic approach to Arabic texts as well as the somewhat aggressive way in which Father Focà conversed with Tunisians. As for them, the two students wanted to be able to appear more pacific and to be accepted as brothers in a shared humanity. This internal tension needed a solution.

In order to resolve it Father Marchal left for Tunisia on 19th September 1930. After visiting the scholasticate at Carthage, he arrived at the Rue des Glacières on 7th October. Having talking to everyone individually and before leaving on 10th October, he produced a reorganised teaching plan. The study cycle, previously set at two years, would begin with five months of Tunisian spoken Arabic. The purpose of the studies would be as much spoken Arabic as classical Arabic. As for the knowledge of Islam, that would no longer be done through an apologetic approach but rather with the aid of a proposed bibliography. In addition, Father Demeerseman would take on the supervision of studies with Father Focà remaining superior of the community. However, feeling himself overly criticised, the latter asked to be returned to the Sahara and so left the ‘Arabic Centre’ for Algiers on 22nd January 1931.

One of the first steps taken by the new director was to change the name of this ‘studium arabicum.’ He didn’t really like the word ijtihâd which emphasised the combative ‘effort’ practised by his predecessor. The choice made was Maḥad el-Adâb el-‘arabiyya which was translated into “Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes” (IBLA) or “Institute of Arabic Literature.” This name was put to Father Marchal who, in a letter dated 30th March 1931, accepted the Arabic title but found the French translation a bit pretentious: “School of Arabic Literature” would have been simpler.”
Orientation Letter of 8th December 1932

Whilst closely following the evolution of the study house, Father Marchal was fully committed to his job as General Assistant. So it was that in the years 1927 to 1930 he presided on several occasions at the clothing ceremony of brother postulants and at the first oaths of brother novices. He also made visits to the houses in Europe from 16th April to 27th May 1928 and again from 1st June to 14th July 1929.

On 25th July 1930 he left for the Social Week in Marseilles which had as its theme “The Social Problem in the Colonies”. He gave a talk on “The condition of the Native Woman” in some of the tribes in French West Africa and Algeria (24p.). While there he met Louis Massignon who was giving a course on “Artisanal corporations in Muslim areas”. On top of that, in view of the forthcoming International Colonial Exhibition in Paris beginning on 6th May 1931, Father Marchal prepared three typed documents for the Missions pavilion: “Our Mission in the Sudan” (13p.), “Our Mission in Kabylie” (13p.) and “Our Mission in the Sahara” (7p.).

On 7th November 1931 the fathers at IBLA were informed that the house they were renting in the Rue des Glacières had to be made available for sale. Hearing that, Father Marchal went there with the intention of buying rather than renting. Since the house-hunting would take time, he envisaged a temporary solution of returning to Bou Khris. He went there on 1st December accompanied by Father Demeerseman. In the end, on 8th December they found a house situated in the Rue Djemaa el-Haoua with which Father Marchal fell in love.

On his return to Maison-Carrée he wrote on 12th December to the superior of IBLA that the General Council had decided to buy this house just near the Place aux Moutons:

“As I write this I am thinking of your whole community, so blessed by God and so tenderly watched over by Mary; it was for her feast-day of the Immaculate Conception that she reserved such a beautiful example of her favour, and our beloved little Saint Theresa has made way so that the final gift should come from her Mother.”32
While waiting to move in, the IBLA community moved back to Bou Khris from 29\textsuperscript{th} December 1931 to 29\textsuperscript{th} February 1932.

In commemoration of the first anniversary of the acquisition of the house, Father Marchal addressed a long missive to the Fathers of IBLA. On 8\textsuperscript{th} December 1932 he wrote a 40-page typewritten document in which he shared, in reply to a request from the students, his apostolic approach to the Algerian world. This text, the fruit of a long reflection on his part, is the first document we have which presents his vision of the apostolate to the Muslims.\footnote{33}

To put this guidance letter in context we should remember that its author did not want to be an armchair theologian even if he did remain open to the theological questions concerning the mission and the salvation of souls. He had certainly studied the master work of Louis Capéran\footnote{34} published in 1912: \textit{Le problème du salut des infidèles}. Father Marchal, being a pragmatic thinker with a concern for people’s apostolic encounter, tended to see himself as a pastor imbued with a number of basic questions: should one aim for conversion to God or for entry into the Church through baptism? How should one carry out the apostolate in a way that is adapted to the Muslim interlocutors? How should one recognise the action of grace on a soul with good intentions? It is to these questions that the Father replies in his letter. He bases his arguments on the one hand on the Founder’s instructions and on his own experience and on the other hand on the basic apostolic motivation that he expressed when he was Regional of Kabylie: “to serve the edification of the spiritual church.”

Let us pause a moment to look at the contents of this letter, addressed principally to the IBLA students

“to turn (their) thoughts to the delicate subject of the apostolate to the Muslim peoples of North Africa, to the way that such an apostolate should be understood and to the aim that (they) should be given.”\footnote{35} (p.1)

The beginning of the letter recalls the Founder’s directives. He had asked his sons to respect three “rules of wisdom”. The first was to exclude all proselytism and to concentrate on the “essential truths” concerning the One God, Creator and Provider of the Universe, who
recompenses good deeds, who makes His will known through his messengers and who raises all people on the Last Day. The second rule of wisdom demands the practice of “all things to all” with tact and prudence through charitable works, and the third invites us to be seen as “men of God” attached to prayer and to kindness.

The second part of this letter aims to update these “rules of wisdom of the Cardinal, 50 years after he wrote them. This results in practical advice supported by two theological principles. The first deals with the question of the salvation of unbelievers. Following the example of Lavigerie, Father Marchal bases his pastoral reply on this text from the Epistle to the Hebrews: “Anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” (Heb 11:6). In other words, a sincere believer, one seeking God, can achieve salvation through the effect of grace.36

The second principle rests on the distinction that must be made between theological conversion and trans-confessional conversion. Indeed, Father Marchal did not use this vocabulary, but he is no less firm about the distinction to be made. Theological conversion, which he usually refers to as “conversion of the heart”, is that which every believer, irrespective of his or her confessional affiliation, is led through grace to put into practice so as to remain turned towards their God. One can help each and every one of them to awaken their conscience by reminding them of the truths to be lived.

Trans-confessional conversion, on the other hand, which can be seen as an accomplishment rather than as a rupture, leads in Christianity to baptism and integration in the Church. When accompanying such conversion it is best to be circumspect in view of opposition from those around:

“At the present stage of the apostolate among the Muslims, we cannot be more than sowers. ‘The one who sows is not necessarily the one who harvests’ (1 Cor 3:7). We must be fully convinced of this truth so as not want to be both ‘he who sows and he who harvests’. Convinced of this, we should cut out any impatience which might lead in the end to disheartening disillusion. (p. 21-22).

From these two principles Father Marchal draws four pastoral orientations to be applied to the apostolic approach to the Muslims of
North Africa. The first is to never tackle face-on the “Muslim spirit”. By that the Father means that “implacable bias” of possessing excellence in religious matters, that “extreme susceptibility to religious sentiment” and that “fierce opposition” to anything that might appear to be critical of Islam.

The second orientation follows on from the first. One should never embark on an apologetic discussion. Three times in his letter the father makes this point:

“Apologetics is not an instrument of conversion: it affirms faith, it doesn’t give it.” (p. 26)

In fact, when meeting the people, the aim should not be to situate Islam according to Christianity or vise-versa, but to accept each other as brothers in God.

The third orientation consists of revitalising in the Muslims we meet the religious and moral values of the “essential truths”:

Beginning with the Essential Truths, preaching them ‘in good times and bad’ and nothing but them, from the beginning and for as long as it takes, everywhere we have a hold over these states of mind: they lead to the soul’s reflecting on itself, on its supreme good, on what it instinctively feels, what it is called on to achieve” (p.7)

The final orientation is about how to behave towards people who might be open, through our mediation, to a “conversion of the heart” and who wish to follow a spiritual path:

“It often happens that their souls whom we have noticed as listening to the teaching about the Essential Truths confide in us their worries and their desire for and their need of God, before the final hour of their death. These people try to meditate on them, to practise them in their personal conduct, in their dealings with others, in their religion with God. Under the influence of these salutary truths and through an interior grace they ask us to further enlighten them” (p. 6).

So it is advisable to accompany these people along a more interiorised way, at the Spirit’s pace and respecting the times and the moments chosen by the Father.
These pastoral orientations addressed to the IBLA students would make of them a crucible in which they would develop an apostolic approach to the Muslims of North Africa. The letter would later have its own particular history as we will see later on. For now, let us just note the following:

Father Marchal... had the merit of updating Cardinal Lavigerie’s thinking in function of the new conditions pertaining to his time, his personal reflection on acquired his experience and his own knowledge of the Arab-Muslim culture”.

Father Henri Marchal.
Towards the 1936 Chapter

The composing of this letter did not prevent its author from carrying out his duties as Assistant General for the whole of the Society. In the spring of 1932 he undertook a long journey around Europe. Then, from 11\textsuperscript{th} July to 30\textsuperscript{th} August of the same year he left for Jerusalem and the Near East in order to take part in the celebration of the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the founding of the seminary at Saint Anne’s. It was in January 1882 that the White Fathers had opened an ‘apostolic school’ for young Greek-Melkites. The ceremony was planned for the 25\textsuperscript{th} and 26\textsuperscript{th} July 1932, the dates of the feast of Saint Anne, the patron saint of the seminary according to the Greek-Melkite rite and later the Latin rite. This double celebration was presided over by Mgr Valerio Valeri, the Apostolic Delegate for Palestine, Egypt and Arabia, assisted by Father Marchal and the superior of Saint Anne’s. The Father took advantage of the occasion to make a pilgrimage in the Holy Land before returning via Rome and Carthage.

From 13\textsuperscript{th} January to 5\textsuperscript{th} February the Father was in Tunisia to visit the communities and especially the scholasticate at Carthage. Returning to Algiers, he gave two talks, on 12\textsuperscript{th} March and 9\textsuperscript{th} April, to the White Sisters at Saint Charles in Birmandreis. The titles of these talks were “The Principles of Cardinal Lavigerie’s Evangelising Method”. They repeated some of the ideas expressed in the 1932 letter addressed to IBLA, in particular the aim of the apostolate: addressing not just individuals but the whole people, reminding them of the “essential truths” in order to awake their consciences. Furthermore, on 19\textsuperscript{th} April 1933 the Algiers Social Week opened and the father participated by giving a talk entitled: “The North African Indigenous Family”, a vital question requiring knowledge of the human setting and of the constitutive elements of patriarchal families.
Being always concerned about supporting the apostolate of the confrères in North Africa, the Father published for them a first work in 1933 along the lines of his letter to IBLA. Its title was: “The Essential Truths”\(^{38}\) (Maison-Carrée, 1933, 132 p.). This work begins with a preliminary chapter entitled “Cardinal Lavigerie’s Apostolic Method”. The following four chapters deal with what can be taught to everyone: the essential truths and life-principles emanating from them. Here are the chapter titles: ‘God’, ‘Mankind and God’, ‘The Great Days of God’ and ‘collection of maxims and advice for organising one’s life, ensuring God’s indulgence and deserving the esteem of others’. 

Later on this book would be published under the pen-name of Rachid Abd Ennour\(^{39}\) with the title "Le château bâti sur le roc"\(^{40}\) (The Castle Built on the Rock). An Algerian Arabic version, \(Qsar el-metîn\)^{41} would also appear, as well as a partial edition in classical Arabic \(Qût al-nufûs\)^{42} (The Food of Souls, 1938, 79 p.). There was even a Kabyle translation produced by Francis Bouricha, a Kabyle Christian from Bou Noh.

The book was not limited to proposing that the believer goes back to the “essentials truths.” It was an invitation to live one’s life coherently with them, notably in searching for “what is pleasing to God.” This Quranic expression, rdwân Allah opens up not only a way to a moral life but also a spiritual life for the souls touched by grace.

How did Father Marchal go about getting this work written and published? We already know that he put all his free time and any spare money he had towards it with an unequalled zeal. We also know that he knew how to get others to help him, notably for getting his texts translated into classical Arabic by Father Sallam on the one hand and the Paulist Fathers of Harissa in Lebanon on the other.

His writings were mainly destined either for his confrères in North Africa to help them enter into the apostolic method that he advocated or open-minded Muslims who had acquired some sympathy for the mission. For the latter he suggested a classical Arabic translation as well as one in the Algerian spoken dialect, using the pen-name Rachid Abd Ennour. He even occasionally used a different pen-name with a regional flavour: H.J. Lelorrain.
At the start of the year 1934 he was once again in Tunisia, from 12th January to 13th February to visit the communities and to see how the construction of the new scholasticate of Sainte Croix at Thibar was progressing. Several months later, from 28th August to 5th September, he preached the annual retreat for about fifty confrères at the Motherhouse. A week after that retreat he went to the Attafs to visit the confrères at Saint-Cyprien and at Sainte-Monique and to see for himself the damage occasioned by the earthquakes that the region had recently suffered.

Also in 1934, Father Marchal published two works. The first was entitled: "Instruction sommaire pour disposer les cœurs à la contrition et les préparer éventuellement au baptême" (Basic Instructions for inclining hearts to contrition and preparing them for possible baptism) (Maison-Carrée, 290 p.). This book carried the dedication: “To the White Sisters, daughters of Cardinal Lavigerie”. The Father would willingly make himself available to them when needed. This work was destined for postulants and catechumens. It consists of four sections.

The first, entitled ‘La conversion du cœur’, (The conversion of the heart) (pp. 1-23) aims to incline hearts to contrition. It has an Algerian Arabic translation, Hedayat el-Qulûb. On reading it people spontaneously gave it the name Kitâb el-mout ez-zîna (Book for a good death). The second section ‘La Foi, l’Espérance et la Charité (les actes essentiels et nécessaires au salut)’ (Faith, hope and Charity – what we need to do to be saved) (pp. 29-56), also has its Algerian Arabic translation Bab el-Rahma (Chapter on mercy). The third part is ‘La règle de Foi: le Credo et les devoirs primordiaux du baptisé’ (The Rule of Faith – the Credo and primary duties of the baptised) (pp.57-137), Na’men billah (We believe in God) in Algerian Arabic. The fourth section is ‘Mahomet et la religion de l’Islam’ (Mohamed and the Islamic religion) (pp.153-182). These four sections are followed by two appendices: The first is ‘Élimination des griefs musulmans contre les chrétiens’ (Eliminating Muslim grievances against Christians) (pp.191-227) and the second is ‘Textes du Coran et notes’ (Koranic texts and notes) (pp.231-284).

One page of this book clearly shows the authors conviction about the link that can exist in a Muslim soul between salvation and prayer ‘in spirit and in truth’:
“As soon as a soul begins to pray sincerely we can be fully confident in the presence of grace. It is impossible for someone to pray humbly and with perseverance and not receive the graces of Redemption... God listens to everyone who turns towards Him, praying humbly and asking for salvation. He answers them through the Redemption earned by his Beloved Son, Our Saviour Jesus” (p. VI-VII).

From this we know that there are souls which are not far from the Kingdom of God, even while remaining Muslims. They deserve the discreet concern of the apostles in their search for the ‘God’s indulgence.’ That in no way means that a healthy prudence is not needed in the apostolate:

“Prudence and charity impose a duty to not go beyond exhorting the conversion of the heart and contrition when dealing with souls who are not disposed to go beyond that... they will accept our religious exhortations only to the extent that they do not upset their own religious convictions”. (p.III)
The second work published in 1934 was "Al-Haqq al-mubîn fî ta’-rîkh inzâl al-dîn" (The evident truth in the history of religious revelation. It is an adaptation by Father Marchal of Father Maurice Bouvet’s book “Histoire biblique. Abrégé de l’Ancien et du Nouveau Testament” (Biblical History – a Summary of the Old and New Testaments). This book is notably the history of God’s supernatural intervention in the world. By offering this adaptation, Father Marchal follows the same line as Cardinal Lavigerie in asking “to speak about religion only according to the historical method.” So this adaptation was destined for Muslim readers who were both educated and open-minded. The Father asked the Paulist Fathers of Harissa to undertake both the translation into classical Arabic and the printing of this book. Its first part is devoted to the Old Testament and is more in line with the desired aim than is the part dealing with the New Testament, which could not avoid touching on the Christian mysteries. This biblical history was his only work of this nature. Later on the Father produced writings whose contents would be graded according to ‘ordinary souls’, ‘souls being touched by grace’ and ‘privileged souls’.

In 1935 the Assistant General was absent from the Motherhouse from 2nd April to 18th June, visiting most of the communities in Europe beginning with Saint Laurent d’Olt and finishing with the scholasticates in Tunisia. In this way he showed his concern for all the formation houses. During these travels his mail was forwarded to him and so it was that on 17th May 1935 he replied from Anvers to a letter received from IBLA.

During the same year he published at Maison-Carrée a trilogy entitled ‘L’Évangile et le Coran” (The Gospel and the Koran) each volume of which bore as title a Koranic verse. The basis of each volume was to present the dogmatic content of the verse in question and then follow it up with a brief report on the Christian faith about the same theme: The truth has come and the falsehood has vanished. The last of these volumes was produced under the pen-name of Rachid Abd Ennour. According to the author’s thinking, this trilogy was not intended to support some sort of comparativism, let alone controversy. The author’s aim was pastoral: to offer to ‘Believers’ who had done their studies in French a knowledge of religions which could be understood within their secular capacity. That’s quite unusual!
In his publication the father wanted to give his confrères ever more suitable tools for nourishing their encounter with the Muslims of their milieu. These tools, translated into classical Arabic, could also be offered to cultured Muslims, ones who were open to the religious convictions of others. It was with this in mind that he published two works in 1936.

The first, under the name of Rachid Abd Ennour, carried the French title ‘Rayons’ (Rays) and in Arabic ‘Al-Achi’a’. “It is, says the author, “to facilitate the use in conversation of the contents of this book that it has been written”. He followed it up with a work entitled ‘Le château bâti sur le roc’ (The Castle built on a Rock) in which he expands several chapters of the previous book that had been somewhat sketchy. It revolves on three axes: ‘Rays of Light’ which invite the reader to penetrate the mysterious attributes of the One Almighty God; ‘Rays of Life’ which produce the principles capable of directing human activity in the world; ‘Rays of Glory’ envisaging the meeting in Heaven of God and his creation. The conclusion, which has an evangelical flavour, purports to be a call to observe the commandments in order to enter blessed and eternal life. The author likes to rely largely on the wisdom books of the Bible: their proverbs, maxims and aphorisms are well suited to the frame of mind of those addressed.

The second work, also signed Rachid Abd Ennour, is like a supplement to its predecessor. Its French title is ‘Le Dieu vivant’ (The Living God) and in Arabic ‘Allah al-Hay’. It is a short presentation of the mystery of the Trinity destined for educated and well-intentioned ‘Believers’ who might ask how they could reconcile faith in the One God with that of the Trinity of Persons in God.

At the end of the year, on 9th December 1935, Father Marchal left to visit the houses in Tunisia, returning to the Motherhouse on 8th January.
The General Chapter was approaching. It was planned for the month of April 1936. A few weeks before it’s opening Father Marchal was busy reviewing his short work ‘Les vérités essentielles’ in the hope of producing a classical Arabic edition. We should acknowledge that one of the merits of the Father was that he had brought into the light the possibility of offering a reminder of these truths to those who could use them tactfully when meeting others.

Anyway, as a member of the General Council he was called on to take part in the writing of the report on the state of the Society and its work during the previous ten years. This included three areas that were of particular concern to him: recruiting in Europe, formation houses and the apostolate in North Africa. This report contained a certain number of statistics showing the development of the three main mission areas: North Africa, West Africa and the Great Lakes. This statistical presentation appeared to give the impression that North Africa was the weak link in terms of apostolic results.

The General Chapter began on 20th April with a day of retreat followed the next day by the elections. First of all was that of the Superior General. Mgr Joseph Birraux, Apostolic Vicar of Tanganyika was elected to succeed Father Voillard. Then the election of the assistants took
place: Father Joseph Jeuland was elected in the first round of votes, Father Jan Meeuwsen in the second and Fathers Frans van Volsem and Henri Marchal in the third. Father Jeuland was elected First Assistant. These elections were followed by the division of the capitulants into commissions. Father Marchal was naturally chosen to be part of the “Commission on Formation”.

The big question debated by the Chapter was that of the erection of new provinces: might they not interfere with the unity of the society and its international character? Opinions were divided and gave way to proposals and counter-proposals. On 25th April, speaking on behalf of his commission, Father Marchal declared that there was no urgency to create provinces. It was therefore left for the General Council to decide when they felt the time to be right.

This sort of problem arose again with the proposal to double the number of formation houses, especially the novitiate: in view of the increasing number of novices, would not the possible opening of a second novitiate endanger the sense of unity of formation understood as a sort of ‘moulding’ common to all? After a long debate the General Council received a mandate to open a new novitiate in whichever circumscription it considered most appropriate.

Another question was raised. It called into question the value of the apostolate in North Africa. The “Commission for Missions and Native clergy” presided over by Bishop Roelens and with Bishop Nouef and Fr. Milinault among its members introduced a note formulated thus:

“The state of our missions in North Africa presents a lamentable aspect. Can nothing be done to infuse a bit of life into them? The prudence that can be seen there seems almost lethargy.” (9th plenary session Minutes p.425)
Father Marchal, who had somewhat made himself the advocate of the work of IBLA among the capitulants, was so sensitive to this question that his writings called for a renewal of the apostolate among the confrères of North Africa. During the plenary session of 27th April the commission’s spokesman transmitted to the Assembly the note received, something which caused a certain confusion among the capitulants: was it inviting the confrères of North Africa to opt for a form of apostolate that was less discreet and which would have more visible results or was it calling on the Society to take better note of the apostolic specificity of this Mission?

The Assembly found itself caught short and somewhat embarrassed and felt no need to enter into such a debate. So nothing was decided on the subject. Nevertheless, at Mgr Nouet’s suggestion they put forward “the wish that the Chapter declares its support for this mission”. After some words from the Superior General expressing his full attention towards this mission “the Chapter votes unanimously by a show of hands in favour of the proposal.” This appears in the closing minutes as follows:

“The Chapter expresses its full support for these difficult and thankless missions.”55

After the Chapter

From the beginning of 1936 the students at IBLA campaigned for making normal the 3-year course. In a letter dated 12th February 1936 addressed to the superior in Tunis Father Marchal wrote:

“Most certainly a third year would be invaluable to all so as to render this initiation fully effective and taking it to its desired end. We will see what can be done.”56

Just before the Chapter, on 23rd April, he reaffirmed that he had “not lost sight of the general view that the session should be extended to three years.

Then, ten days after the closing of the Chapter, on 12th May 1936 he wrote to the superior in Tunis that he felt he could say that it would be “easier for him to be more useful from now on than in the past”. How
can we interpret that idea? Bishop Birraux who had himself done specialised studies was open to the idea of a form of long-term investment, especially in linguistic and cultural subjects. He also appeared in favour of a third year of studies and even to reserving some subjects for an even longer course.

This position of the Superior General is apparent in Father Marchal’s letter of 24th July 1936 addressed to the superior of IBLA:

“You are going to begin the new year with six new students: might they be left in Tunis for 4 or 5 years, and the same for those who follow them? Undoubtedly that would be excellent. It is impracticable in the present circumstances. So it remains for us to obtain the best yield possible from what is possible. The Council is well aware that failing to take account of that would compromise the future of that work to which, I can assure you, it attaches growing importance. We are now far from the half-year or year to which the course at Tunis had to be limited.”

This extension led to a reorganising of the study-programme over three years. We can see signs of a greater convergence between the idea of Mission as understood by the new Superior General and the apostolic vision that Father Marchal had been developing for years. This would allow the latter to believe that it would be “easier for him to be more useful from now on than in the past.”

Where his written output was concerned Father Marchal was not short on ideas. At that time he was working on a work destined for the Algerian neophytes. He took up in substance a text dating from the period of the 1st and 2nd centuries, the Didache. The French edition is entitled ‘La voie du bonheur’ (The Way of Happiness). This text, then, addresses the first generations of Christians coming from the pagan nations. It presents a rule of virtuous life and good morals in accordance with the Gospels and invites honest souls to loyally seek
‘God’s indulgence’ and good practice. This short work was translated into spoken Arabic by Hassen el-Kebaïli under the title: *Tariq es-sa’da*. It was also produced in Kabyle.

It is from 1937 onwards that Fr Marchal’s most important writings will be published. They will direct the views of the Society concerning its apostolate among the Muslims of North Africa. That was due to the support and open mindedness of the new Superior General to whom Fr Marchal was able to make known his views, including the weak points of this apostolate: a lack of unity in the commitments undertaken by the confreres, an insufficient mastery of the local languages and a paternalistic concentration on the indigenous Christians who were living on the margins of their original milieu.

Mgr Birraux, who had a keen interest in the mission to Muslims, took it upon himself to make his own evaluation of the situation. So, from 20th February 1937, he went on tour in Kabylia. There he visited four mission posts: Oued Aïssa, Fort National, Ouaghzen and Beni Yenni. Reference to this visit will be made during the meeting of the General Council on 8th March 1937. The report of this meeting concluded as follows:

“Fr Maze will be asked to draw up a programme of questions which could be dealt with by a committee which Mgr Superior General would like to meet in order to study a way of unifying the mission in North Africa with regards its aims, its spirit and its methods”.

The next day, 9th March 1937, Fr Marchal began writing to the person in charge of IBLA in the following terms:

“Monsignor intends to call a meeting at the Mother House this summer, if possible, on his return from Europe, to be attended by the two heads of mission for N.A. Each of them should be accompanied by two of their missionaries who are best qualified in this matter. They will undertake a week of study of this mission and put in place a methodology and directives well adapted to the demands of our mission… Monsignor Superior General will preside over these meetings. He intends to associate me with this enterprise and obviously I see no reason for refusing this... Without delay, a set of questions will be circulated to the members of the conference.”
Fr Joseph Mazé, who was at the service of the General Council, was the obvious choice for drawing up this questionnaire, even more so because he had been living in Bou Noh since April 1936. Together with Fr Marchal he drew up a document in the form of a general enquiry consisting of 48 questions. This document was sent on 11th May 1937 to the confreres in question. They were to reply in writing before being called to this evaluation committee in the course of which an assessment of the past would be made and orientations for the future proposed.

On the 15th June Fr Marchal let it be known that the commission could not be constituted in the form proposed. It fell, then, to the Regional Superior of Kabylia to pick up the baton by calling a consultative meeting of the houses in Kabylia to which the Superiors of Tunis and Algiers were invited. The meeting took place at Bou Noh from the 6th to the 16th July 1937.

On the basis of the synthesis of the written replies, compiled by Fr Mazé, an evaluation was made in the light of the instructions of the Founder covering all the aspects of the mission in Kabylia. Fr Mazé carefully recorded the deliberations and recommendations expressed. Three of these merit our attention: ‘A directory for preaching to Muslims’ should be drawn up without delay. It should be based on the works of Rev. Father Marchal, especially *le Château bâti sur le roc* and *les Rayons* (p. 13); that a designated house, similar to the one in Tunis, be established in Berber country for the missionaries in Kabylia... (There) for two or three years they will begin their studies in the kabyle language and customs’ (p. 86); the numerical increase (of local Christians) is only welcome in so far as they all can find locally the way to live an honest life without becoming dependent on the Mission.” (p. 77). And so, it was suggested that a return be made to the first missionary method which focussed on speaking about religion to everyone according to an approach which would respect[s] their culture.
Glana I

The first implementation of the wishes expressed at the Bou Noh conference was the establishment, at Ouaghzen, beginning in September 1937, of a language course in Kabyle. Three young confreres followed the course full time for two years. This course would come to be known, thanks to the suggestion made by Fr Marchal, as the Centre for Berber Studies (CBS). In fact, this idea of developing a language course adapted for the confreres in Kabylia had been in his mind for some time, as is shown by the letter he wrote on the 29th May 1936, in his capacity as a member of the General Council, concerning a project for formation in Berber at Algiers and addressed to the one in charge of the IBLA:

“An Arab-Kabyle replica of the Mâhad (IBLA)is foreseen for the preparation of the missionaries in Kabylia: this will be, in sha’Allah, the solution to the problem which I have been turning over in my own mind and even sharing it with you, without being able to find, in locating this preparation in Tunis, a decent, satisfactory solution”\textsuperscript{66}.

In order to replace the directory, explaining the way of speaking to Muslims about religion, Bishop Birraux asked for the publication, in 1938, for the confreres involved, of the letter which Fr Marchal had addressed to the confreres of IBLA on the 8th December 1932. The title of the letter was: \textit{The Main Lines of the White Fathers’ Mission in Muslim North Africa (instructions of Cardinal Lavigerie), known in French as Glana}.\textsuperscript{67} This duplicated version of 43 pages is preceded by the following note:

“250 copies of these pages, approved by H.E. Bishop Birraux, Superior General of the Society, have been made for the use of the student fathers in the IBLA at Tunis and for other missionaries who would like to read them”\textsuperscript{68}.

In fact, Fr Marchal had revised his text; he had improved the way he expressed himself by changing, here and there, one or another formula.
so that his thoughts flowed more freely. He added a paragraph (p. 37) recommending prudence if one was drawn into broaching the subject of the ‘prophetic’ character of the founder of Islam. He introduced two footnotes which brought his proposal up to date: the first (p. 14), inviting us to take into account the unrest which North Africa had known during the years 1935 to 1938; the second (p. 35), proposing that we use with discretion, in dealing with people who were well disposed, publications like *Le Château bâti sur le roc* (1933) and *Les Rayons* (1936) as that had been suggested at the Bou Noh conference.

Without repeating the analysis of this document as previously presented, let us recall briefly what constituted the ‘Marchal method’. He was convinced that the primary aim of mission was the salvation of souls and not the administration of baptism. So Fr. Marchal, basing himself on the directives of the founder and on his knowledge of ‘the Muslim spirit’, maintained that one cooperated in the salvation of souls when one made appeal to everyone concerning the ‘essential truths’ and invited them to conform their lives to those truths through a sincere search for ‘what is pleasing to God’.

Thus, through the influence of Bishop Birraux, the ‘Marchal method’ became the preferred line of mission for those working in a Muslim environment without having recourse first of all to immediate individual conversions. This method prevailed, from 1932, in the formation given to White Fathers at the IBLA. But its further development, after 1938, was impeded by the Second World War and the mobilisation of the confreres.

Moreover, this method was not attractive to all of those involved; certain confreres, by temperament or by concern for visible results, were clearly in favour of a much more direct, even a more aggressive mission approach. Fr Foca was such a one. In a document, he argued that the directives of Cardinal Lavigerie were circumstantial and inappropriate for the current situation. He adopted a stand contrary to the ‘Marchal method.’ This divergence of approaches would lead Fr Marchal to clarify and refine his vision of the mission in some publications which would appear after the Second World War.

From the 24th January till 21st February 1938, Fr Marchal was in Tunisia making the visitation of different houses. On the 10th February,
he was at IBLA together with Fr Voillard, former Superior General, for the blessing and opening of a new building with eight rooms.

On 11th March, Fr Assistant left for the Sahara for a fortunight. He visited, among other places, El-Goléa to represent the Superior General at the blessing of the new church built near the tomb of Charles de Foucauld. This ceremony, presided over by Bishop Nouet, Apostolic Prefect of Ghardaïa, took place on Sunday 20th March.

The following month, Cardinal Tisserant, secretary for the Congregation of Oriental Churches, stopped off at Algiers on his return from Fès. It was foreseen that he would visit the works of AMINA70 (Aide Morale aux Indigènes du Nord de l’Afrique) situated on the boulevard Gambetta since 1935 and supported by the confreres of Algiers. Bishop Birraux, together with Fr Marchal, welcomed their illustrious guest before accompanying him to the Motherhouse for a meal.

In that same year 1938, Fr Assistant published a fascicule entitled, *L’aspect moral et religieux de la question indigène dans l’Afrique du Nord française*71 (The moral and religious aspects of the native question in French North Africa). It was at the request of his audience that he reworked this conference, given on the 13th June 1937, in the context of “la Journée d’amitiés rural” (The Day Of Rural Friendships), organised by the Young Christian Farmers of Arba (Algiers). In this conference Fr Marchal insisted on the role that the moral and religious uplifting of the natives must play when one is concerned with the improvement of the social and material conditions of their lives. It is through the education of their consciences that ‘the native question’ must be tackled.

Fr Marchal gave few public conferences. This can be explained by the fact that each Assistant General, of which he was one, had to obtain permission from the Superior General to present something for an external audience and this permission could, sometimes, be refused. This can also be explained by the fact that he gave all the free time left to him, after the discharge of his duties, to reworking the material destined for the guidance of his confreres in North Africa in their apostolate and to proposing texts for them which could be given to Muslims who were open and sincere. A man of reflection himself, he tried to make these reflections available to his confreres working at the grass roots.
In the Shadow of the Second World War

On the 19th May 1939, Fr Assistant accompanied Bishop Birraux to Tunis for the ceremonies planned for the occasion of the death, on the 16th May, of Bishop Lemaître, Archbishop of Carthage. The solemn funeral rites took place in the pro-cathedral of Tunis on the 22nd May.

The threat of a new war in Europe was making itself felt more and more because of the expansionist ambitions of Germany and Italy. On the 22nd May 1939, these two countries signed the Pact of Steel which united their forces. On the 1st September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and, two days later, this dragged France and Great Britain into the Second World War. Mass mobilisation was decreed and, progressively, many of the confreres were enrolled under the flag of their country.

Fr Marchal, aged 64, was no longer eligible for mobilisation and shared the sentiments expressed by Bishop Birraux in his letter of the 26th September 1939:

“The tragic drama, which we have been dreading for the past few months, is now taking place before our helpless eyes... In matters related to the Society we are disorganised; the work of today can no longer be carried out in many places and the work of tomorrow is compromised: our confreres, in their hundreds, have joined their armies.

To illustrate this, he noted: “Nearly all of the posts in Kabylia have seen their personnel changed or severely depleted. For the time being none have had to close. It is the same for the Prefecture of Ghardaïa.”

The primary concern for the members of the General Council was to re-establish links with the scattered confreres. They wanted the confreres to make themselves known and to exchange what news they had and so create, through the Petit Echo, a communications network which could offset the difficulties caused by all this moving around. For this conflict was bound to hinder the visits of members of the General Council beyond certain frontiers.
Always in charge, on the level of the whole Society, for matters of formation, Fr Marchal did not fail to continue writing so as to ‘equip’ his confreres in North Africa. So it was that he published in Algiers, in colloquial Arabic, a work in three volumes of 459 pages with the title: El-Adab el-moukhtar and translated into French as, “La morale choisie.”

The first volume, published in 1940, begins with an eastern style preface expressing clearly the author’s intention: “Conduire à la pratique du bien sous le regard de Dieu”. (Leading to the practice of good in God’s eyes). In four chapters this volume deals with love for parents, for the family and family values and, finally, love for one’s neighbour. The second volume, published in 1941, deals, in three chapters, with responsibility for oneself, the dignity of man and, finally, with the power, dignity and beauty of God. The third volume, published in 1943, concerns, in the first part, ‘the search for heavenly things’. Here he deals with the prayer of the heart, with the faith of God’s friends, with the condition of angels and of men, of the saints and the martyrs and of their love of God. He consecrates the second part of this volume to the ‘spiritual people’ and presents to us “the goodness of the friends of God” and “the way of love.”

For the Arabic text of this third volume, Fr. Marchal worked in collaboration with a scholarly Tunisian, well known to IBLA, who sent him, at the beginning of July 1941, his manuscript in a style which was rather grandiose.

Each of the three volumes is abundantly filled out and embellished with moral stories originating from a diversity of backgrounds composed in a style which the religious and believing soul would find attractive. It was, then, a mine of edifying stories which could be used in conversations or in lessons on morality.

Restricted in his movements because of the war, Fr Marchal could no longer easily go to Europe to visit the houses of formation. However, in May 1940, he made a quick journey to France to accompany, as far as Pau, Bishop Groshenry who suffered a stroke which deprived him of his speech. The following year, in April, he attended all of the sessions of the ‘Social Studies Week of Algiers.’ From the 22nd April, he preached the retreat for the White Sisters at Saint Charles of Birmandreis. The following month, he made a tour in the south of
Algeria with stopovers at Géryville and at Aïn Sefra where he administered confirmation. On the 4th September 1941 he left for Tunisia to give several retreats for the Sisters and for the scholastics at Carthage.

These small outings did not prevent him from giving time to his publications. In this way he edited, in French, *Le livre de lumière* (The book of light)\(^{75}\), (Maison-Carrée, 1942, 5 volumes). Under this title, it is the whole content of the four gospels combined in a single narrative which is presented. In doing this the author was inspired by the synopsis of Fr Lavergne\(^{76}\) and he suggested a division into volumes in order to allow the Moslem of good faith to approach, in stages, the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

The title of the first volume is “*La lumière vient dans le monde*” (The Light comes into the world). It begins with an important introduction intended to make the reader aware of certain points such as the Word of God, grace as a gift from God, the Gospel of Christ, and the preparation of the heart for the Gospel. Following that there are 280 ‘lessons’ which were developed in the other volumes. The title of the second volume is: “*La lumière de l’Évangile en Galilée*” (The light of the Gospel in Galilee). It presents the beginnings of Jesus’ ministry: the Sermon on the Mount and the teaching in parables. The title of the third volume is: “*La Voie du Salut*” (The Way of Salvation). It presents the intermediary phase of the mission (apostolate) of the Divine Master, from the discourse on the Bread of Life until several days before the final Easter. The title of the fourth volume is: “*La Grande Semaine*” (The Great Week), which takes us from Palm Sunday to Holy Thursday. The title of the last volume is: “*La Passion de Notre Seigneur et sa glorieuse Résurrection*” (Our Lord’s Passion and his glorious Resurrection) to which is added the Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the announcement of Salvation for all nations. This fifth volume concludes with a series of recapitulative ‘themes’ such as the Virgin Mary, the miracles of Jesus, the person of Jesus, King of the world and Redeemer of mankind, the faith and the faithful in the light of the Gospel.

In order to help his confrères make good use of this work, the author did not fail to give several prudent recommendations:

“The division into five volumes... allows a progressive reading, taking into account the dispositions present in those to whom we judge it worthwhile to communicate. That is why the Sermon on the Mount
and the Parables are put together in one single volume so that we can arrange for them to be read in this first instance. The rest can follow when we are confident that the reader is ready to benefit from it.”

Having said this, in order to prevent confreres from being mistaken concerning the dispositions of the reader, the Father asks them to be on their guard against a triple illusion.

“The first is that they should not expect the reading of the Gospel, put into the hands of non-believers, to leave the same profound impression on them as it does on us... It does not work in the same way for someone outside our faith, in the eyes of whom, in the best of cases, Jesus Christ is a ‘prophet of the past’, sent by God to the people of his own nation as were the prophets who preceded him...’

“The second illusion is to convince oneself that the non-believer could, by himself, through a simple reading of the text, grasp its exact moral and religious sense and meaning... The notes, some short, others more fully developed, which follow each ‘lesson’ in the "Book of Light", have been drawn up with this in mind...

“The third illusion is to imagine that a simple reading of the Gospel will give birth to the faith in someone’s soul, even if it is that of the most reflective reader, someone humanly speaking well disposed. Faith is a gift of God, it is the work of his grace.”

Always concerned about reaching his reader, Fr Marchal envisaged a partial edition “in a refined spoken Arabic”. He confided this task to Fr Sal-lam; and so several years later, the Kitab en-Nour was published. Why this choice of a refined spoken Arabic rather than the literary Arabic accepted by the educated? Father Marchal made this choice for pastoral reasons in order to be on the same level as the ordinary Moslem in the street:

“This work, when put in the hands of less literate Moslems, has the advantage of making them reflect, on discovering the beauties in our doctrines, that they are not inaccessible to them.”

In that year 1942, the Father attended, as he had done the previous year, all the sessions of ‘the Algiers Social Study Week’. On the 19th May 1942 he left for France in order to participate in a conference, in Lyons, of the superiors concerning the status of congregations under French law.
Glana II

When one takes into account what Fr Marchal had already published one could ask oneself what it was that urged him to continue with this type of activity. In truth, he really wanted to contribute to the ongoing formation of his confreres. He wanted to guide them in rethinking their apostolate and to make his point regarding the openness of the Moslem spirit, “to the open religious spirit” as he used to put it. Writing was his way of being an “apostle” and of putting at the service of the apostolate, his powers of reflection and his understanding of the situation in North Africa. Such works required a real effort in order to assimilate them. Here is the testimony of one of his disciples:

“He is a master... whose message cannot be assimilated without an effort. In each of the subjects he deals with he knows how to grasp the essential and how to choose his ideas and develop them in all their complexity. His analysis is always detailed, with a cogent logic never failing to draw attention to the crux of the problem.”

It goes without saying that certain confreres at the grass-roots level found it difficult to enter into his way of thinking. They stumbled over his style with its long sentences and over the progressive development of his thoughts. That did not call into question the content of his works, which he continued to produce. He was concerned about renewing the manner of conducting the mission (apostolate) through knowledge which would always be better adapted to the situation on the ground.

In a letter dated January 4th 1944 addressed to Tunis, Fr. Marchal envisaged, early on, the return to a situation of peace:

“It is necessary to take into account the effects on the spirit and the life of the local people, produced by the new state of affairs, which is beginning to unfold and in which they will play their part. Which part? It is pretty well impossible to foresee at this moment, when the whole political and social order is being called into question in the search for a new structure.”

It is with this perspective in mind that, in 1944, Fr. Marchal published, under the pseudonym of H. J. Lelorrain, a work entitled, “The Evolution of the Muslim Peoples in the Near East and North Africa.”
This work aimed at an up-to-date presentation of certain Muslim countries on the domestic, social, economic, political and religious level.

The year 1945 saw the publication of two documents which will form, with the letter of the 8th Dec 1932, a trilogy called GLANA (The Great Lines for Apostolate in North Africa). One of these documents has for its title: *The Muslim Soul*. This title helps us to understand that the author would like to present several mental, moral and affective dispositions which will shape the human conscience of the Muslim:

“Let us be at pains to observe the Muslim way of life, to sound out, dare I say it, the spirit they have in common, which moves and activates the population, as much in its reflex actions as in its conscious actions with its concerted and unanimous movements... This people is a gathering of families forming a natural environment (in which) there reigns a common spirit which is sincerely religious, and fundamentally Muslim... All of them are proud of their Islamic faith. Moreover, it is good for us to be convinced that this spirit remains human, that it harbours in each and everyone a basic humanity and a religious sensibility which makes it accessible to us” (p. 4).

These introductory lines show the plan of the document which is developed in seven proposals. The first affirms that “the Muslim spirit has not stripped away human nature,” which remains close to us. The Muslim, in fact, is, before all else, a human person, a brother in humanity and, in virtue of this common humanity, we are called to live together:

“We have to adapt ourselves mutually, through a common effort of intelligence and good will, inspired by our common desire of human kindness... It is necessary for us, if we are to succeed, to free ourselves from our racial prejudices, our artificial conventions, from the demands and narrow minded spirit of our environments, to go beyond stereotypes, to rethink our own human values, to discover, by going beyond appearances, the attitudes and gestures, all the profoundly human sentiments which we share in common” (p. 6-7).

In a word, it falls on us to discover and appreciate, among the Muslims, this basic humanity. It is by giving it emphasis that that we can gain the confidence of the Muslim population, and for that:

“One must continue to visit them, to love them sincerely, to leave them in the tranquil conviction that in devoting oneself to procure...
their welfare one is not trying to force a breach in their beliefs and
that one has only one ambition: to be pleasant and helpful toward
them and to make them love God and, in the measure that they are
prepared to give themselves, to love their neighbour” (p. 10).

The second proposal expresses itself as follows: “The Muslim spirit
is close to us because of its sincere belief in God and its habitual recour-
se to God” (p. 13) since we are meeting with a monotheistic believer.

The third proposal wants to show in what way the Muslim spirit is
marked by Islam:

“The most characteristic mark of the Muslim spirit... is its pride, the
inmost conviction of its superiority over anything which is not
Muslim... this pride of the Muslim spirit is common to all, it is latent in
all, even when it does not display itself out of courtesy” (p. 21).

From that flows a quiet certainty of possessing the unique religious
truth and a formal determination to ignore any other form of religion.
Such a state of spirit suffices “to convince us of the uselessness of any
religious discussions between Muslims and those who are not
Muslims” (p. 25).

The fourth proposal asks that, in our encounters, we stress ‘the
essential truths’ in order to guide our partners towards a religion which
is more interior. There is:

“A collection of primary truths that we can and must plumb to
their depths without ever becoming weary of coming back to them,
just as they themselves never grow weary of invoking them and
taking pleasure in them. These simple and sincerely religious souls
are seized with respect and admiration when they hear us develop
them in accordance with their own intimate sentiments of adoration
and of submission with regards to God. They offer us every possi-
bility, if we want to avail ourselves of it, of guiding them to a religion
which is more interior, of leading them to the love of God” (p. 29-30).

In a fifth proposal, Fr Marchal proposes “the necessary activity of
grace” for leading the believer to open himself up to the love of God.
For that:

“Three virtues are especially necessary for the Muslim spirit in
order to remedy its indisposition and help it receive grace... 1) a
deep humility in prayer, baring his soul totally to his Creator... 2) the
desire to be honest with himself and with others... 3) an active love for his neighbour” (p. 34-35).

The sixth proposal is formulated thus: “The practice of the love of God is accessible to the Muslim spirit.”

“Before presenting to the Muslim soul the revelation of the supreme love of God in the person of Jesus, his Son, our Divine Saviour; before placing the Gospels in his hands, let us begin by making him put into practice the teaching of Jesus on the love of God and of one’s neighbour. Let us strive to make each person live in the concrete reality of daily life according to the goodwill of each one and to the grace he receives from God in return for his heartfelt prayer” (p. 42).

In this way of putting into practice the love of God and of one’s neighbour it is our duty to walk according to the rhythm of grace out of respect for the intimate sentiments of the soul.

“Should we go a step further and invite them positively to become Christians? No. 1) because, it is not for us to make the first move, to encroach imprudently on the hidden movements of grace... 2) because, in taking such an indiscreet course of action by hastening the movement towards conversion, we will provoke unrest among the masses; we will be accused immediately of working to snatch Muslims away from Islam, we will lose a lot of our trustworthiness, we will create for those who are coming closer to us a difficult situation in their environment and they will see no alternative but to distance themselves from us in the future” (p. 46-47).

A final proposal, expressed more briefly, tells us how to behave before “the tendencies which are at work currently in Muslim environments”:

“if the cohesion of this people begins to break up religiously, if the movements of ideas, the closer contacts with our civilisation penetrate it and free some individuals from their strict conformity to the traditional way of doing things, do not jump too quickly to the conclusion that this people will abandon Islam” (p. 47).

This document, which follows much the same line as GLANA 1, shows how much Fr. Marchal had, as his first concern, the transfer of his sociological and psychological knowledge of the North African Muslim environment into pastoral directives full of apostolic wisdom.
Glana III

This concern is clearly present in the other document which came out in 1945: *Le milieu humain et la vie en terre d’Islam*. (The human milieu and life in the lands of Islam). This work is divided into two main chapters: the first looks at “the Muslim world and its diverse milieus” (pp. 3-62), the second deals with the “the experiential knowledge of the milieu” (pp. 64-95).

The first chapter begins by assessing the degree of unity existing in the Moslem world. Over and above the membership of belonging to a nation-state or a certain race, which is a source of diversity, there is the fundamental membership of belonging to the *Umma*. In the *Umma* “every Muslim feels himself, with a great sense of pride, closely united with all the Muslims throughout the entire world” (p. 5). This sense of belonging to the community generates a powerful instinct of preservation which “stiffens the resolve of the community against any threat which comes from the outside and any innovation which arises from within” (p. 25). In that way this community protects its faith and its cohesion. Consequently, in a Muslim milieu,

“the apostolate must progress very slowly, in a way which is hidden and without acclaim, making its way in people’s souls without arousing any animosity from the milieu, without arousing any defiant or anxious sensitivity (p. 46).

The author then indicates three dead ends which should not be followed in our apostolate. The first would be to make a direct comparison of Christianity with Islam.

“To make use of our superior knowledge, of our extensive culture to overwhelm the masses, to show them the falseness of their beliefs and the truth of our own, to shake their convictions by sowing doubt in their mind... would be to use practices which Muslims would immediately seize upon as having an ulterior goal and motive which they would not easily forgive, since they would see in it an attack on their religion, a dishonest undertaking to undermined their convictions in order to snatch them from the good that they prize above all else, their Muslim faith, their dignity and privilege of being believers, their unbreakable cohesion in Islam” (p. 46-47).
The second dead-end would be to restrict oneself to a few individuals to the detriment of the mass of the population.

“It is no use fishing with a rod, to make Christians of a few groups, a small nucleus of families, painfully gathered round a mission post, where they absorb all the well-meaning activity restricted to their tiny community” (p. 48)

The third dead-end would be to try to give pastoral care to these communities outside their original milieu.

“If they remain artificially grouped outside their milieu, our Christians will exercise no influence in the midst of the population which tolerates them but which refuses them the right of citizenship with regards to their social life, because they are Christians and because they are living their lives outside the mass of the population.”(p. 49).

The only apostolic attitude to be encouraged is one which is directed toward “the mass of the population.”

“We have to act in the situation as it really is, to work in it in such a way that many, if not the majority, come to nourish in themselves feelings of religious respect for our persons, to express these feelings freely among their circle of friends, to be appreciative of the moral and religious education which we give to their children. This mission (apostolate) is possible, everywhere where we are in regular contact with the Muslim population, and, if it is well conducted, with gentleness, patience and perseverance, it will penetrate and be beneficial to the mass of the population. The goal which it aims at is to create in everyone the desire for a better life. It is, eventually, to create a climate in this population for the first germs of the supernatural life” (p. 50-51).

And he adds:

“To have an influence on the population, it is necessary to love these people, to love them sincerely and profoundly, and to love in this manner we need to recall in the presence of each one, in our way of approaching him and dealing with him, that Jesus shed his blood for him. We have to win their hearts by our witness of goodness which is always one of welcome” (p. 52).

While the first chapter of this document emphasises what it is that constitutes the unity of the Muslim community, the second chapter goes on to show what constitutes the diversity within each people. Drawing on his Algerian experience, Fr. Marchal
will present in turn the urban milieus with their many ways of behaviour, and the rural milieus in which the individual subjects himself to the group and the nomadic milieu.

Other, more specific milieus, are also evoked; the milieus of women which must be observed in themselves and for themselves; the milieus of the influential elites whether they be purely Arab and Muslim or whether they have been formed in French colleges and faculties. This milieu of elites allows the author to develop, with clarity, the problem of the relations “between Europeans and Natives” and in so doing taking a stand with regards the colonial status:

“Tomorrow will not go on like today: the French state will have to come to terms with the urgent thrust of a people whom it has liberated and who claim access to citizenship with the same rights as its nationals who are much less numerous and yet continue to hold on to the advantages of sovereignty for themselves alone” (p. 86).

For the time being, it is advisable to work at improving the relations between the two populations; “they rub shoulders together without really seeing a lot of each other, they meet without upsetting each other, they regard one another without much respect for each another:

“Two forms of pride have formed and maintain a gulf between Europeans and Natives... Two mentalities confront and oppose one another, seemingly impervious one to the other... It is incumbent upon Christians to take the initiative in creating better relations; their privileged condition makes this a social obligation for them, the principles which their civilisation and culture value compel them to do so... In truth, too few among them care about social justice and the works of charity which are the prime responsibility of a Christian toward God and his neighbour... True charity does not limit itself to alleviating extreme poverty only; it knows how to recognise the neighbour as a brother, one like ourselves and to help him, in lightening his burden, to lift up his spirit and comfort his heart” (p. 87-88).

This analysis of Fr Marchal concerning the relation “between Europeans and Natives” will be tragically corroborated by the massacres in Sétif and Guelma perpetrated by the colonial forces the 8th
May 1945, the day of the armistice which brought to an end the Second World War.

With the return of peace, the members of the General Council were able to resume their schedule of travel. On the 30th January 1946, Fr. Marchal went to Biskra to participate in the fiftieth anniversary of the hospital run by the White Sisters. The celebrations took place on the 3rd February in the presence of Bishop Mercier, of the mayor of Biskra and of Fr Marchal, delegate of the Superior General. Fr Marchal profited by the occasion to make several visits in the region.

On the 11th March 1946, Fr Marchal left again for more than two months in the Near East. He made a stopover in Cairo to see a confrere, Bishop Arthur Hughes, the Apostolic Delegate for Egypt and Palestine. From there he went on to pay a visit to St. Anne’s in Jerusalem. He travelled around in Palestine, in Syria and in Lebanon. In Beirut he began negotiations in view of setting up the Greek-Melkite junior seminary in the premises vacated by the French army.

A few months later, Fr Marchal was involved in a very private ceremony concerning his trusted translator, Fr Sallam. On the 14th August 1946, the latter celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his baptism. For the occasion, he celebrated Mass in the Superior General’s chapel, the place where Bishop Livinhac had conferred baptism on him, at the age of 18, in 1896.

On the following 4th September, Fr Voillard passed away at the age of 86 years. Since 1941 he had been staying at the sanatorium of Maison-Carrée. Whilst in charge of the Society, he had had Fr Marchal as Assistant from 1922 until 1936. In the absence of Bishop Birraux, who had left to visit the provinces in Europe, it was Fr Marchal who presided over the solemn Requiem Mass, while Bishop Leynaud, archbishop of Algiers, performed the committal.
It was by a circular letter of the 12th April 1946 that Bishop Birraux invited the members of the Society to elect the representative of their circumscription and to reply, in view of the Chapter of June 1947, to a preliminary enquiry intended to take the pulse of the Society during this time after the war. By the same mail, the Superior General informed the confreres that the members of the Chapter would have to foresee his replacement at the head of the Society due to concerns about his health.

On the 21st November 1946 Frs Marchal and Van Volsem began to go through the replies received from the confreres. Afterwards, Fr Marchal was asked to collect the data necessary for drawing up a general report of the activities and presenting them to the Chapter. Meanwhile, on the 4th March 1947, Fr Marchal accompanied Bishop Birraux to the celebration of the 100 years since the birth of Mother Mary-Salome, first Superior General of the White Sisters.

Bishop Birraux prepared a moving letter dated 29th April for publication in the forthcoming edition of the Petit Echo. He began by saying: “It is with deep emotion that I write this letter to you since it is
my last one as Superior General.” And so, on the advice of his doctor, he acted on the decision which he had taken the previous year. On that same 29th April, towards 3 o’clock in the afternoon, Bishop Birraux collapsed, victim of a stroke, in front of the door of one of his secretaries. After eighteen painful hours he was called back to his Saviour. For Fr. Marchal it was the second time, as Assistant, that he had experienced such a situation.

The Chapter would open, then, under the presidency of Fr. Jeuland, Vicar General of the Society. The first capitulants began to arrive at the Motherhouse from the 18th May. On the 2nd June, after a Mass of the Holy Spirit, the members of the Chapter held a preparatory session intended to clarify the right of all those present to attend and to verify their mandates.

The elections for the General Council were foreseen for the following day. Fr. Marchal knew that at 71 years of age he was no longer destined to serve the Mission at the level of the General Council.
The elections took place in record time. Bishop Louis Durrieu, bishop co-adjutor of Ouagadougou, was elected, almost unanimously (45 votes), in the first round. In rapid succession Frs. Van Volsem, outgoing assistant, Côté, Volker and Gelot were elected as assistants. In the session which followed these elections, Fr. Marchal, who had prepared and drawn up the report of the progress of the Society for the previous ten years, was congratulated by the members of the Chapter for the long and fruitful work which he had rendered as member of the General Council during the past thirty five years.

In constituting the commissions, Fr. Marchal, because of his familiarity with the files, was appointed to the ‘Commission on Houses of Formation.’ Both in the commission and in the sessions Fr Marchal made several interventions. And so, on the 9th June, he asked that care should be taken to inform someone who was dismissed of the reason for his dismissal. Three days later, he intervened to clarify that the directors of the scholasticates, while voting simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’, could always be more nuanced in their decisions and make it known whether their decisions meant simply that the person should be delayed in taking orders. The same day he welcomed the idea that, for a good formation of the students, no scholasticate should be opened unless there was a qualified staff available and that the minimum number of students should be about forty or fifty.

Finally, on the 16th June, concerning our daily life, Fr. Marchal asked that the question of the head dress should be settled. After an exchange of opinions, a modification was proposed for article 23 of the Directory:

“Inside our residences, the ordinary head dress will be the red woollen chechia. Outside, the missionaries in North Africa will wear the red woollen chechia and elsewhere they will conform, except in cases of dispensation, to the ecclesiastical norms of the country.

This Chapter, which adopted French and English as the official languages of the Society, lasted two weeks and came to an end on the 20th June 1947. In the first period following the Chapter, Fr Marchal remained appointed to the MotherHouse where he was always able to make use of his ‘Jérémie’ (his den) in which he could continue to prepare his spiritual talks and to write and to edit, thanks to the printing house which was near at hand.
Retirement
1947 – 1957

Resident of the Motherhouse

In the time immediately following the closure of the Chapter, Fr Marchal remained at the disposition of Fr Gelot for the passing on of files concerning the houses of formation. But quickly enough, the director of IBLA, always on the lookout for able pens, capable of contributing to his magazine and using the pretext that he had now more free time available, wrote to him asking for his collaboration in writing some articles. On the 18th July 1947 he replied to him in the following terms:

“You would like to be able to count on the free time which I now enjoy to establish collaboration with IBLA. This free time has not yet been clearly defined and my desktop is full of writings in prospect, for a considerable time to come. Writing articles is not my cup of tea, I have never really tried it. The right milieu and occasion is required. For that, I feel quite differently from the precious collaborator that you have in L. Gardet.”

So he turned down this offer out of modesty and intellectual honesty because the milieu which inspired him was Algerian and not Tunisian. On the other hand, Fr. Marchal accepted, quite willingly, to be professor of Arabic at the noviciate of Sainte-Marie in order to be in contact with the new generation.

His first concern as always was to complete the works he already had in hand or was in the process of planning. This would be the crowning achievement, so to speak, of his reflections on missionary methods. The first of these works is entitled: Pages de sociologie missionnaire (Pages on missionary sociology) with the subtitle “Enquêtes et monographies en A.F.N.” This work, for which the manuscript was ready in 1949, is the fruit of an ongoing interest that the author had for “understanding the milieu” through the practical application of the tools of the human sciences of psychology and sociology. His interest in sociology had been aroused since 1912, through his participation in the first week of missionary ethnology held at Louvain and then his participation in the Social Studies weeks in France and in Algiers. It is less well known that, in 1935, he re-
ceived at the Motherhouse, M. Wilbois, a professional sociologist, whom he later recommended, in view of making some surveys, to Fr Demeerseman (Tunisia, February 1935) and to Fr Milinault (Kabylia, March 1935).

This book was not like his previous books. It was more like a practical manual intended to be used for ‘knowing the milieu’ by the Fathers and Sisters who were living their mission (apostolate) in Algeria. However, this manual was presented by Bishop Durrieux to the confreres of sub-Saharan Africa in the following terms:

“We are well aware of the difficulties of our missionary apostolate, whatever the circumstances might be. One of the most indispensable conditions is knowledge of the local situation. To hope to evangelise a pagan people, to convert them and to help them become serious Christians without taking pains to get to know them well is a major error – and a dangerous one! For this, knowledge is not acquired easily and without method. There is a whole world to explore.

“The work of Fr. Marchal will be a precious guide for all of those – and there are many among us – who have not been sufficiently well introduced to a rigorous method of observation and a study of human society. Here they will find well presented and explained the conditions and the rules for “Methods for monographs” (Chap. 1), “The Practice of conducting surveys” (Chap. II), especially “Surveys on Social Data” (Chap. III), on the social data of “the Mission” (Chap. IV).Chapter V (the alphabetical index of families) should not be the least valued.

A sixth chapter, entitled “Knowledge and Action”, allows the author to use the surveys for apostolic action in conjunction with surveys with a more scientific goal and those used for more personal ends. In his presentation of the different ways of conducting surveys the author makes use of the books he has studied and the works of his confreres in the IBLA, the CEB and the CDS as well as with documents supplied by the White Sisters.
To indicate the spirit of this manual here are the first lines of the first chapter:

“In order to act upon a given human milieu, in order to exercise an influence which will permeate this society, it is necessary to know it well, to be familiar with its mentality, to have appreciated, with accuracy and balance, its material possibilities and its moral resources. It is necessary to be in touch with its collective aspirations, to have measured the sharpness of its dislikes, the strength of its illfeelings, of its hatred, the intensity and swiftness of its common reflexes...

“Knowledge is not enough; it is also necessary to have, in this human milieu, the reputation of belonging to it through some title which is clear and recognised by all and to be capable, under this title, of working together effectively for the common good. It is necessary for this people to feel heartily that we are one with them, to have the conviction that we understand them, that we share their sorrows and their joys, that we have at heart their moral interests, their sufferings, their anxieties and their legitimate aspirations” (p.7).

Golden Jubilee

In that same year 1950, it was fitting that the 50 years of Fr. Marchal’s priestly ordination should be celebrated. The date for it was fixed for the 11th April, a good twelve days after the ordination date itself. This was arranged to allow a priest from the diocese of Nancy, who had been with him in the junior seminary, to be present.

The celebrations began, in the afternoon of the previous day, at the Noviciate. The novices of Sainte-Marie offered their best wishes and congratulations to the venerable jubilarian. They thanked him for his Arabic classes, for the major role that he had played in producing the Directory and for all that he had contributed to the Society during his time on the General Council. Fr. Marchal replied by giving a few thoughts on ‘the White Father spirit’ which should be maintained in its entirely.

The same day, before lunch, in the presence of the community of the Motherhouse, the confreres from nearby and the Fathers and Brothers who had come for the retreat, Bishop Durrieu addressed the jubilarian as follows:
“In union with you, dear Father, we give thanks to God for the graces he has bestowed on you over this half century, graces which you alone are able to enumerate and to appreciate in detail in all their richness”.

After briefly retracing the first 12 years of his priesthood, Bishop Durrieu continued:

“The zeal which you had shown over these years, your penetrating insights into the mission to the Muslims, attracted the attention, in 1912, of the capitulants who felt themselves drawn to include you in the group of Major Superiors. This show of confidence in you has been renewed over 35 years consecutively. Consequently, you have gained, after Fr Voillard, the second prize for stability in the Council...

“Over and above the production of the Directory, of the care brought to deal with the multiple issues concerning the progress of our congregation, it has been given to you, dear Fr Marchal, to bring your talents to bear on more than one sector: supervision of studies in our different houses of formation, preaching retreats to our scholastics. You were also able to participate actively in Social Studies Weeks in France while your collaboration was no less sought after here in Algeria for similar meetings...

“But history will remember you for your role in setting up IBLA in Tunis and AMINA in Algiers: choice of location, organisation of programmes, establishing teaching methods, outreach, appointing qualified staff: all of that rightfully belongs to you...

“Always, in the same line of apostolic concerns and employing whatever free time was at your disposal, while putting into practice what St Alphonsus of Liguori calls “the economy of minutes”, you have had the will and desire to compile a series of works, of which the number alone is impressive: twenty-one volumes in French and thirteen in Arabic. These essays converge around the theme of missionary apostolate: they present methods of approach, reflections on ethnography and sociology, they develop a moral and religious teaching which is prudently adapted to Muslims...

“For all of these numerous and varied contributions, from which our work and our institutions benefit greatly, I have the pleasant responsibility of expressing our gratitude. I do this in my own name and in the name of all the confreres, present and absent. It is a gratitude which the passing of years will not diminish.”
The jubilarian, who was a model of discretion, was particularly moved and, it is said, even “overcome”, by the praise and reminders of the past which he had just heard. He said he was embarrassed by the stories, far too flattering, which circulated about his “poor self.” If any good had come out of his efforts, the merit, he assured everyone, rebounds to the Society, to which he is indebted for his formation, and to Providence which surrounded him with such favourable circumstances. The following day, 11th April, Fr Marchal celebrated a Solemn High Mass of Thanksgiving at which Bishop Durrieu, resplendent in his cope, assisted from the episcopal throne. Six days later, in order to recover from his emotions, Fr Marchal left for a journey in Kabylia and the Sahara, together with his fellow student from his junior seminary days.

Chaplain at Saint Charles

Fr Marchal did not see himself remaining at the Motherhouse. It was suggested that he should go, as superior, to the small community of Birmandreis, which served as a chaplaincy for the Motherhouse of the White Sisters. These sisters had come to appreciate him and were happy to welcome him. There, he could continue to finalise his works for publication. So it was, on the 20th November 1950, that he left the Motherhouse after 38 years, for a ministry of tending to the spiritual needs of the Sisters.

At this time he published the first volume of *L’invisible présence de l’Église* (The invisible presence of the Church). This volume, written as an extension of the three GLANA, can be considered the crowning achievement of his thoughts concerning the method of the apostolate in the lands of Islam.

Right from the introduction the question is raised: “What can we do, we missionaries, in these ancient lands of Islam”? (p. 9).

“Under what form can we present our teaching on religious truths so that it becomes an agent of grace and reveals to these Muslim souls ‘the Way which leads to Life’” (p.10). The answer is immediately forthcoming: “We are already agents for spreading the saving action of the Church, her invisible presence and her hidden actions when we awaken in these sincerely religious souls, supernatural faith in God, the Remunerator and Saviour. This is, eminently, our missionary work” (p.10).
Every word here has its importance. The sincerely religious souls are those who, under the influence of grace, reduce the influence of their native religious self-sufficiency through serving God ‘in spirit and in truth’ and seeking to ‘please him’:

“Our apostolate must make an effort to increase their numbers, to create, through them and around them, a favourable climate, to multiply through the ways and means available to us, these hidden members of the invisible Church, alive through her grace and assured of their salvation. This is the great task we have at the moment” (p.14).

To make our presence felt to these members, to gain their respect and confidence, to converse with them about “essential truths” which can lead to salvation, to make them live according to a supernatural faith, which is within their reach, and to help them become ‘just’ in God’s eyes, this is our great task at present.

In the following chapters, the author begins to present the doctrine of salvation in Jesus Christ by emphasising the universal redemption of Christ, the Saviour, whose grace has always been available to all people. Here he specifies:

“Let us not try to anticipate the work of grace out of an indiscreet and intemperate zeal. Let us rather follow attentively and in a spirit of docility the work of God in each soul. In this way we shall be able to discern this divine action in the souls of Muslims, who have begun to have confidence in us, whom we see making meritorious efforts to lead a moral and religious life which is pleasing to God, but who, nevertheless, are neither prepared nor disposed to receive the revelation of the Christian mysteries” (p. 42-43).

Then the author affirms that such religious souls “belong to the Church”, given that they belong to that category of ‘the just’ in the sense of being justified by God. He bases himself first of all on the Scriptures (Psalm 15: “Lord, who has the right to enter your tent…?” and Ezekiel 18, 5-9 describing the just person) and on the quotation from Saint Augustine in his Contra Faustum:

“In all the nations of the Gentiles, there is not lacking people who belong by the spirit to the true Israel, city of the heavenly Fatherland and who are linked to it not by temporal and earthly bonds but in a heavenly company.”
Fr Marchal continues then his reasoning by showing that truly religious souls are attached to the Church in a manner which is invisible and spiritual:

“This invisible presence of the Church in these milieus, deprives of the Christian faith in its fullness, is not only possible: it is real and it is necessary. It is real because God does not refuse the grace of justification to anyone of good will, who sincerely believes in him and wishes to love him by keeping his commandments, in so far as his conscience makes them known. It is necessary because in order to be saved one must respond to the movements of grace, be justified in Christ and by that same fact belong to the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ and the family of the children of God” (p. 48).

It remains to be shown that divine grace is at work in the lands of Islam and that upright souls can find the possibility of salvation:

“If there are only a few of them, then it is up to us to increase that number; it was for that reason... that God sent us to them, as missionaries in the lands of Islam. They can, even within Islam, achieve salvation, by co-operating with the graces that God offers them and, by using the means that he gives them, to distance themselves from formalism... and become “worshippers in spirit and in truth” as God wills (p. 51-52).

One year after the publication of this volume, *L’invisible présence de l’Église* (the Invisible Presence of the Church), the second volume appeared. It is intended more specifically for the moral and religious education to be promoted in schools, in workshops and youth activities. Two thirds of the volume present formation programmes for boys, girls and young adults. Some of these programmes draw on the experience of certain Fathers such as Fr. Alliaume and some White Sisters. Before presenting these programmes, the author had concluded the two chapters of introduction saying:

“The Church, in directing souls to God and leading them on the road to salvation, does not turn their exterior lives inside out but rather transforms their interior lives. That is why the ‘return to God’ of a whole people will in no way mean its denial or the abandonment of its own civilisation and the adoption of a civilisation or culture which is alien to it” (p. 104).
The Final Years at the ‘Sanatorium’

As the years passed by so the health of Fr. Marchal declined. It became more and more difficult for him to render his spiritual services to the Sisters. After a period in hospital he went to the sanatorium of Maison-Carrée on the 31st July 1953, assured of the support of the Generalate.

There, he continued to show his concern for the apostolate in the lands of Islam. In 1956 he published Notre vie avec Jésus95 (Our Life with Jesus). One can well imagine that it was composed of the spiritual conferences he had shared with the Sisters of Saint-Charles.

At the beginning of October 1957, Fr. Marchal suffered from liver failure.

“Taken to the hospital on the Boulevard Verdun, for a blockage in the gall bladder, he was operated upon but could then only be fed by intravenous injection. That lasted for a fortnight. The doctor, noticing a kind of paralysis in the intestines, held little hope for his survival with this kind of diet.”96

The confreres took it in turn to sit with him in vigil. He breathed his last on the morning of Oct 20th; it was Mission Sunday. The requiem Mass took place on the 22nd October in the chapel of the Motherhouse in the presence of Bishop Duval, Archbishop of Algiers who conducted the committal.

Following his death the Generalate received many letters:

[These] “were unanimous in their praise of the outstanding qualities of this man: his deep humility, his zealous desire for work, interrupted only by the periods of compulsory recreation, his lively intelligence, always alert, and the knowledge he had acquired in a variety of fields.”97
Before performing the committal, Bishop Duval had given a brief eulogy for Fr Marchal, concluding with these words: “He is a model of fidelity.”

Yes, he was a model of filial fidelity to the founder of the White Fathers and to the directives he gave for our missionary presence in Algeria; directives which Fr Marchal knew how to update in keeping with the times. He put them into practice himself before proposing them to his confreres in order to keep their mission up to date in North Africa.

Four directives of the Cardinal were lived out in full by Fr Marchal. Before all else he was “a man of God.” He was convinced that he could not respond to his vocation without being deeply spiritual and attentive to the grace of God which is at work in people’s hearts and which invites them to be better.
He was also a man of “enlightened zeal”, totally respectful of the human milieu. He never gave way to proselytism or apologetics, while still trying to awaken the supernatural, by recourse to the “essential truths”, in the souls of people of good will. Had he not written, “Apostles in everything we do, apostles in all we want to do, nothing but apostles, relating everything to our missionary endeavour.”

A “lover of Arabic” himself, he was convinced of the necessity of being completely at ease in the language and culture of the people we wished to encounter. Was it not his wish that the language of our host should become our ‘second mother tongue’? It is through mastery of the language that one gains acceptance in the milieu to which one is sent.

He was also an “informed pastor” of the milieu thanks to his recourse to the social sciences. Through these he acquired a practical understanding, which was both detailed and intimate, of the people whose lives he was sharing.

While he remained faithful to these four directives from the Cardinal, Fr Marchal followed them by practicing one or other virtue, particularly recommended by the founder for his children working in Algeria, namely, wisdom and patience.

It is true that Fr. Marchal was appreciated for his wisdom, tempered by common sense and balanced judgment, by his sense of moderation and serenity, which helped him rise above hastily formed ideas. Fr. André Demeerseman was not wrong when he entitled his tribute to Fr. Marchal: Wisdom and Apostolate.

Concerning the virtue of prudence, it is clearly there to see in the documents he prepared for his Muslim readers. He never made these writings available to all comers. He placed them in the care of his confreres or Sisters who could offer them, at their discretion, to Muslim readers whose religious sentiments seemed to be suited to the material contained in these writings. In doing this, Fr Marchal exercised a pastoral ministry for those who were not able to be visibly united with the Church.

Let us leave the final word to someone who was in touch with Fr. Marchal for nearly twenty years and who has continued to hold his memory in esteem:
“In conclusion, it gives us great pleasure to take a final look at this portrait of an apostle of which he had sketched the image and brought to life with such magnificent persistence...

The portrait of the apostle which Fr. Marchal sketches owes little or nothing to the imagination... it is not an ideal but is based on what the human and divine really demand. And that is why, in taking a closer look at this apostolic man, so characterised by balance and moderation, it is difficult not to think that Fr. Marchal, inadvertently, is showing us a portrait of himself...

Whoever knew him was aware of his natural revulsion for acting on impulse, for hasty and immoderate action. Whoever has read him will have noted, in his rich use of vocabulary with all its nuances, a marked preference for the word “wisdom”. This did not occur by chance. Fr. Marchal was a wise man in the biblical sense of the word. It is our good fortune that he is the one who has drawn for us the portrait of an apostle in the lands of Islam, portraying him as a man with complete self-control.

Should we go further? Is this not the very portrait of an apostle which the Cardinal dreamed of for our missions in North Africa? Zeal, prudence, patience! Are these not the virtues which the Cardinal specifically desired for his missionaries in the lands of Islam? Was Fr. Marchal not simply following in the footsteps already marked out by Cardinal Lavigerie?” 100
Notes


5 Notice..., p. 3.

6 Notice... pp. 3-4.


9 Notice pp 6-7.

10 Henri Marchal, Sîra Sidna Yousef, Imprimerie des Pères, Ghardaïa, 1908, 60 p.


12 In 1908, there were 11 catechumens and two Christian Chaouïas households (Cuoq, Lavigerie, op. cit., p. 188).

13 Rapports annuels, 1909-1910, p. 73.


15 Rapports annuels. 1909-1910 , p. 81-83.

16 Rapports annuels, 1911-1912, p. 98.


20 A.G.M.Afr 0056053.

21 idem.


24 *Sagesse et Apostolat*, op. cit. p. 75.


27 Id p 56.


29 *Sagesse et apostolat*, op.cit., p. 99-100.


31 *Sagesse et Apostolat*, op. cit., p. 20.

32 *Sagesse et Apostolat*, op. cit., p. 102.


In the conclusion We can read: “God gives to the pagans sufficient grace; and if they use it properly, He leads them step by step to the state of grace which establishes them in his friendship... It is enough to desire to belong to the visible Church, and the person who accepts God’s will, can wishfully belong to the Church by desire, even not knowing Her”.

35 The pagination refers to the original letter of 1932.

36 This statement is near that of Lumen Gentium §16 : “Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience”.


39 *Serviteur de la Lumière*.


44 *Sagesse et Apostolat*, op. cit., p. 77.


“La Vérité a paru, l’erreur s’est évanouie”, (7,81), 354 p.


50 Imp. St-Paul, Harissa, 36 p.

51 Apostolic Vicar of Upper Congo.

52 Apostolic Vicar of Ghardaïa.

53 Regional superior of Kabylie.

54 J.-C. Ceillier, Ibid, p 100.

55 Id 101.

56 *Sagesse et Apostolat*, op. cit. p. 122.

57 Fr Lanfry was a member of this group. He will remain three years at IBLA before joining the “Centre d’Études Berbères” at Ouaghzen.

58 *Sagesse et Apostolat*, p. 124.

59 Full title: *Doctrine du Seigneur transmis aux nations par les douze apôtres*.

60 Algiers, 1937, 31 p.


62 *Sagesse et Apostolat*, p. 142.

63 AGMAfr. 279290 with this title: *Projet conférence nord-africaine*.

64 Conference of the superiors in Kabylie who met at Bou-Noh with Rev. Fr. Milinault as President - 6 - 15 july 1937, duplicated. 94 p. (AGMAfr L 55).

65 It means: the ministry of the Word.

66 *Sagesse et Apostolat* op.cit. p. 141.

67 The acronym GLANA comes from the title Grandes Lignes de l’Apostolat dans le Nord de l’Afrique.

68 This document of 43 pages (AGMAfr H 13) was copied by IBLA in a smaller format (61 p.).

Association founded in 1930 by Father Joyeux. It dealt with the human and moral advancement of Muslim Algerians. This association had the solicitude of Fr Marchal.

Maison-Carrée, 1938, 41 p.

Petit Echo, Octobre 1939, pp. 233-236.


Id. pp. 25-26.


Letter of 22nd July 1943 mentioned in *Sagesse et Apostolat*, op. cit., p. 155.

*Sagesse et Apostolat*, op. cit., p. 95.

*Sagesse et Apostolat*, op. cit., p. 126.


Born on 3rd March 1847 and dead on 18th October 1930.


Letter mentioned in *Sagesse et Apostolat*, op. cit. p. 130. Louis Gardet (1904-1986), anthropologist, Islamologist, and Little Brother of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. From 1944 onwards, he published articles in the Ibla review. He had just proposed an article dealing with Property in Islam (Ibla, vol. 10, n° 38, 2nd trim. 1947, pp. 109-134). Fr Marchal and Louis Gardet knew each other since the time when Gardet was received at Motherhouse where he worked as a gardener in the early 30s. Marchal introduced Gardet to René Voillaume, the Founder of the Little Brothers.


91 Centre de documentation saharienne.
92 Petit Echo, mai 1950, pp. 115-120.
97 Id., p. 27.
98 *L'invisible présence de l'Église*, II, p. 16.
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Marchal Henri : Instructions sommaires pour disposer les cœurs à la contrition et préparer éventuellement au baptême, Maison Carrée, 1934, 290 p.


– Colons et indigènes, Maison Carrée, 1938, 41 p.


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Sîra Sidna Yousef (Joseph le juste), Ghardaïa, Imp. des Pères, 1908, 62 p.
Sîra Sidna Mousa (Saint Moïse), Ghardaïa, Imp. des Pères, 1910, 122 p.
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Tariq es-sa`da (La voie du bonheur), Alger, 1937, 50 p. (Adaptation de la Didaché)
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Kitâb en-nûr (Le livre de la lumière), 5 vol., Alger, 1942 et 1948 (Les quatre évangiles en un seul)
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