

## History of the Gold Ring in the Society of Mary

by Bertrand Clemens

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The gold ring was introduced into the Society of Mary from the very beginning. On September 5, 1818, the first seven members of the Society made their first public profession of vows at the end of the retreat. Each of the seven members at that time took the vow of stability and each received a gold ring. From 1818 to 1850, all the religious, even the temporary professed, wore the gold ring on their right hand as a reminder of their total devotedness to the Blessed Virgin. In 1850, Cardinal Donnet of Bordeaux objected to the wearing of the gold ring. His diocesan priests began wearing rings. Further, Cardinal Donnet interpreted the wearing of the ring by the Marianists as a symbol of marriage. The Cardinal, therefore, wanted to forbid not only his priests but also Marianist priests from wearing the gold ring. Father Caillet, then Superior General, submitted the difficulty to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Religious in Rome.

On March 17, 1854, Rome decreed: "One ought to refrain from wearing the gold ring in the dioceses where the Bishops would not approve of it." This restriction was only applied in the Archdiocese of Bordeaux. In 1864, at the third General Chapter some Marianists wanted to suppress the wearing of the ring and inserted into the Constitutions the previous decree of Rome, but interpreted it as referring only to the priests, for the objection of Cardinal Donnet was made concerning the priests. However, when Rome published on June 17, 1865, the animadversions with regard to the Constitutions, animadversion number 30 demanded that both priests and brothers do not wear the ring where bishops disapprove. This suggestion of the Holy See was then incorporated into our Constitutions.

When the 1885 edition of the Constitutions restricted the vow of stability only to the perpetual professed, the article on the ring was again changed and assumed the form that it has today in article 57. Since that time, there was only one further difficulty concerning the wearing of the ring. In 1923, after the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law, Rome questioned the legality of our priests wearing the ring at Mass or liturgical function. Finally, we asserted that the wearing of the ring at Mass has been an immemorial custom, for it had been in effect for more than 100 years. The Sacred Congregation of Religious then confirmed officially the right of Marianist priests to wear the ring at Mass and liturgical functions.