

Champagnat: Priest, “Country-Bumpkin”¹, Founder of Schools in the Countryside?

In fact, a promoter of schools for the poor² in country- and urban- environments.

Brother André Lanfrey

April 2020

Translated by Brother Colin Chalmers

In 1816, when the Marist aspirants were seeking to found their Society, Marcellin Champagnat expressed his desire to found a branch of Brothers. According to Brother Jean-Baptiste (*Life of the Founder* Chapter 3 Page 51) he would have said to his companions, “We must have Brothers to teach catechism, to help the missionaries and to conduct schools.”³ Whether or not these were his exact words, there are numerous testimonies from the Marist Fathers to the fact that he was the only one to think of a branch of Brothers. Father Maîtrepierre (*Origines Maristes* Vol 2/752 no 53) presented a second argument made by Marcellin: “My early education [...] was lacking; I would be happy to contribute to procuring for others the advantages that I myself was deprived of.”

In this proposal the word “countryside” was not used, but it was underlying when it was an issue of helping missionaries or of Marcellin’s recalling his own lack of early education. Moreover, he was very strongly aware that any new Congregation could not rival the Brothers of Christian Schools⁴ in an urban setting. Brothers for the countryside was not a choice, but the only possible area for the birth and expansion of a new community. Marcellin knew from experience that the needs there were crying out.

A Society of Mary vowed to mission in the countryside?

The other Marist aspirants were not concerned about schools but for a long time submerged themselves in the idea that their Society was made for mission in country areas in imitation of John-Francis Regis and Vincent de Paul. Around 1846 (*Origines Maristes* Vol 2/736 and *Acta Societatis Mariae* Vol 6 Page 24) Father Mayet noted that Father Etienne Séon, who entered the Society at L’Hermitage in 1827, and Father Déclas, one of the 1816 Marists, held onto this conviction, even though the Marist Fathers fairly soon were exercising their activities in town,

¹ [Translator’s Note] The French word used here, “Campagnard” might simply mean a man who lives in the countryside, but, in the context of this Paper, it seems to me to have its more pejorative sense of a man who is uneducated and unsophisticated.

² [Translator’s Note] The original French, “écoles populaires” is difficult to translate into English. While “populaire” can mean “popular” in its usual sense, that is not the meaning here; “public schools” has different connotations in different countries. I have preferred “schools for the poor” while being aware that this does not completely translate Marcellin’s intentions.

³ [Translator’s Note] All quotations and page numbers quoted from the *Life* are taken from the standard English translation.

⁴ [Translator’s Note] Also known in English-speaking countries as the De la Salle Brothers.

for example at the College⁵ of Belley around 1830. In 1846, Father Colin would just have confirmed what was the fact of the situation when he said, “We are not like the Vincentians, who only work in country areas, we must work everywhere, modestly, but everywhere, doing everything.”

Father Mayet⁶ considered that this limiting to the countryside came from the fact that “the majority (of Marists) were incapable of preaching to an educated audience, being themselves illiterate and making mistakes in French.” This judgement seems aimed particularly at Father Déclas⁷, but it also reflects the feeling of the second Marist generation of priests who entered after 1825, at once admiring the sanctity of their elders, but also concerned to note among some of them human and intellectual poverty. The first Marists, themselves astonished at their success in spite of the weakness of their human resources, had contributed to this opinion, in particular Marcellin: “For us who are at the beginning, we are rough stones which are thrown into foundations; they are not to be confused with polished stones.” (*Origines Maristes* Vol 2/438) However, Father Coste (*Origines Maristes* Vol 2/736 Note 2 Page 616) is not wrong in recalling that this idea of a rural mission surfaced in 1816 when John-Francis Regis, the apostle of the countryside around Velay, was the model for the original group.⁸ We are also at the start of the Restoration, when the clergy began to undertake a massive re-christianisation of the people through missions. Marcellin’s statement contemplating the founding of Brothers “to help missionaries” is therefore eminently credible.⁹

It is also necessary to consider that, in the Diocese of Lyon, the diocesan Society of Missionaries of Chartreux was composed of remarkable wise men who were capable of dealing with a select audience. The Marists were second-rate clerics and the ecclesiastical authorities in Lyon only accepted their missionary services after a lengthy delay and for country areas.¹⁰

Marist views on Marcellin

In the *Life of the Founder* Brother Jean-Baptiste noted numerous attacks on Marcellin and his work. Father Mayet, in his memoirs, collected opinions of the Marist Fathers which were less than flattering: for example, Father Etienne Terrailon’s in 1850 (*Origines Maristes* Vol 2/701), “Father Champagnat brought the Brothers together to educate them, but he did not know what he was teaching them. He taught them to read, but he could not read; to write, but he could not

⁵ [Translator’s Note] In France, a College is the most academically-advanced type of secondary school.

⁶ This great chronicler of the Marist Fathers, particularly concerned with recording the deeds and acts of Father Colin and the major events of the origins, tended to exalt Father Colin a little and to reduce the part played by other Marist aspirants.

⁷ See *Origines Maristes* Vol 2/537, 551. The judgments are on the first four Marists.

⁸ This is why the Marists thought about founding their Society at Le Puy, which had been the centre for John-Francis Regis’s mission.

⁹ Since the Brothers never had subsequently to accompany Marist missionaries, it is difficult to see why Brother Jean-Baptiste would have noted this statement if it had not been authentic.

¹⁰ The situation would be different in the Diocese of Belley where the Marists were at the forefront of diocesan missions.

observe the rules of grammar when he was writing!!!” This is the astonishment of a Marist finding it difficult to explain the success of a confrère without any talent; it is also an unjust criticism since weakness in French syntax and orthography was quite common in the clergy as only Latin grammar was taught in the seminaries and courses were given in Latin. Many priests, including Jean-Claude Colin, left the seminaries quite incompetent in French grammar and spelling.¹¹

Father Maîtrepierre (1800 - 1872) joined the Society of Mary in 1831 and in 1853 appointed himself gossip-monger on Marcellin: “In the beginning he indiscriminately took in the halt, the lame and the blind, the wise, the ignorant, the sophisticated, the unsophisticated, and with that lot he founded establishments.” He even had Marcellin saying that it did not really matter who he employed in the schools since he had confidence in Our Lady.

These statements are a malicious interpretation of a reality reported by other testimonies¹²: one function of the La Valla community was to welcome tramps and travellers of every condition. However, Father Maîtrepierre, although a level-headed man, wrong-headedly amalgamated this charitable mission with the creation of a novitiate for the Brothers and the building up of educational communities. Thus old tales of the Lyon clergy about Marcellin and his work would have been around the Marists of the Diocese of Belley well after his death.

On another occasion, being questioned by Father Mayet (*Origines Maristes* Vol 1/537 1842), Father Maîtrepierre commented on Marcellin’s statement, “The marvel of the Society is that God wanted to use such instruments for this work.”. He added: “Father Champagnat indeed had everything necessary to prevent the success of his enterprise. [...] and it is necessary to note here the harsh, uncivil tone he used, and the somewhat savage way he said it.” Father Mayet confirmed this comment in his story of the origins of the Society by giving an example of Marcellin’s “fairly characteristic language” a few weeks before his death. Giving Brother Jean-Marie, the house Bursar, a letter from a parish priest recommending a young man, Marcellin said, “Some parish priest is presenting a young man. He is quite well brought-up, but that will not pull his teeth (his gentility will not prevent him from eating); even if he has an elbow (if he is quite robust) we will get him to work, but he is only fifteen; that could be bread as much as good fortune (unfortunately, he will eat your bread without any profit to you) and he will pay you with a fry-up of heels (and he will pay you by running-off at the first opportunity)¹³ These are certainly very picturesque statements, using popular expressions which are difficult to translate into modern French and which Father Maîtrepierre understood very well, but disapproved of in the mouth of an ecclesiastic. If he very much admired Marcellin’s virtue, he deplored his lack of ecclesiastical sophistication. Father Colin appears to be of this opinion in his letter of 27th

¹¹ *Origines Maristes* Vol 2/537 note c Page 296) “The Reverend Father Superior General did not have the principles of the French language.”

¹² In particular by witnesses during the process for beatification.

¹³ A translation into more usual language: “He is quite well brought-up, but we have to feed him. If he is robust, we can get him to work. Unfortunately, he will consume our resources without any profit for us and he will pay us by running off at the first opportunity.”

October 1837 (*Colin sup* Vol 1 doc 21): “Avoid treating business in an off-hand manner; equally avoid all types of joking, which I regard as entirely opposed to the religious spirit.”

In summary, Marists had two kinds of criticism against Marcellin: the first, and certainly the oldest, rested on the gossip of the clergy equating the beginnings of the community of Brothers to a crowd of no-hopers run by an ignoramus; then, in second place, an astonishment mixed with esteem in the face of the manifest success of a Founder who, humanly-speaking, had so little to recommend him.

Ultimately, the criticisms of Fathers Maîtrepierre and Colin had a cultural basis: at a time when the clergy conveyed an ideal of refined gentility, Marcellin held onto the manners and language of the countryside. He himself was conscious of this and perhaps played with it, as he illustrated in the following story (*Origines Maristes* Vol 2/11): disembarking from the steamship on the banks of the Rhône, he and Father Terraillon wanted to go to the nearby major seminary. As his companion was hesitant about carrying his luggage there, Marcellin, who was already carrying a large package, said, “Give it to me, give it to me. I’m just a country-bumpkin; it’s nothing to me.” He then took both packs and carried them. In the *Life* (Part 2¹⁴ Chapter 12 Page 419) Brother Jean-Baptiste tells the same story in a slightly different way but has him say, “I am from the country and used to heavy work...”

The description “country-bumpkin” that Marcellin appeared to assume, perhaps provocatively¹⁵, might also be applied to the great majority of Marist Fathers: it is sufficient to see in their biographical notices (*Origines Maristes* Vol 4) that almost all of them came from rural towns, sons of smallholders, merchants or artisans¹⁶. However, from 1816 onwards, they did not see their relationship to the countryside in the same way as Marcellin. Their ideal was to be there as itinerant missionaries, not to stay there.¹⁷ This lack of understanding between Marcellin’s project and that of the 1816 Marist aspirants would rarely be overcome. Moreover, coming from Marlies, a mountain village at the edge of the diocese, Marcellin might have appeared more “countryfied” (less urbanity) than the others insofar as his prolonged contact with Brothers from the country-areas did not bring with it highly refined language and behaviour. Because of this, the Brothers felt that their Superior was from the same world as them and the Marist Fathers felt the opposite. This explains the ambiguity of Marcellin’s status in the Society of Mary: at one and the same time priest and Brother; an ecclesiastic who should have been imbued with urbanity but remained terribly rough-hewn, with his country-manners.

We should undoubtedly not exaggerate Marcellin’s rustic nature. He knew how to adopt a more select language and behaviour for educated people. However, this reputation he had overlaid a fundamental disagreement in the Society about apostolic strategy: from 1816 only Marcellin perceived that, from henceforward the heart of mission to the people - both rural and urban -

¹⁴ [Translator’s Note] In the original Paper, Brother André gives this reference as from Part 1 of the *Life*. It is, in fact, from Chapter 12 of Part 2.

¹⁵ Etienne Terraillon was quite deceptive and had no love for Marcellin’s work.

¹⁶ Father Pompallier was the exception: his father had private means.

¹⁷ Becoming a priest meant leaving the land and peasant culture. It was one of the principal factors in a priestly vocation.

would be the school rather than preaching; children rather than adults. There was nothing more significant in this regard than the extract from a letter of Jean-Claude Colin to Marcellin¹⁸ “A Brother at the service of the Fathers of the Society does twenty times more good, in my opinion, than if he were employed in a commune, where, thank God, the means of instructing young people are not lacking today. But you never understood this arrangement and aim of the Society clearly.”

Jean-Claude Colin was wrong: Marcellin had the same apostolic aim as he did, but not the same point of view on the means of achieving it. Also, at the moment he was writing these lines, events were beginning to confirm Marcellin’s intuition: the Guizot Law (1833), which imposed a boys’ school on every commune, specifically demonstrated the importance that the State attached to schools for the poor. However, Jean-Claude Colin only saw in this the diminishing of a lay function which had little to do with priestly ministry. In fact, there were two opposing conceptions of the Society of Mary and, in this particular affair, the “country-bumpkin” reputation of Marcellin and his Brothers badly covered up the idea, very much present in the environment of the Marist Fathers, that, lacking the exalted view of the apostolate, they were squandering their energies in a secondary domain: the school for the poor, particularly in country-areas.

Marcellin, country-schools and others

The idea that Marcellin wanted to found the Marist Brothers to work with children from the country-areas is backed up by quite a large number of documents, some of which are very explicit. One of the oldest is the preamble to the Prospectus of 19th July 1824 (*Origines Maristes* Vol 1/108):

“The education of the lower income class is generally confided to the De la Salle Brothers and everyone is well-aware that they operate in the towns in which they have been established [...] The majority of communes, and particularly those in the countryside, cannot enjoy these advantages due to lack of sufficient resources. To obviate this inconvenience an establishment [...] of the Little Brothers of Mary has been opened.”

This Prospectus was doubtless drawn up by Marcellin himself, or rather by Fathers Courveille and Cholleton¹⁹ but conforming to his idea. If it distinguishes two types of spatial occupation, town and country, it is preoccupied with the “lower income class”, either urban or rural. Finally, the preamble does not talk about “parishes” but about “communes”. It therefore recognises that teaching the poor is the responsibility, not just of the Church, but also of the civil authorities. Article 8, which states that the Marist Brothers “go into parishes [...] in threes and even in twos” just tones down this recognition.

The Prospectus, therefore, does not confirm a rural vocation for the Marist Brothers, but only takes note of a fact: that rural communes have a greater lack of good elementary teachers than

¹⁸ *Colin sup* Vol 1 Page 106. 22nd February 1839. Colin was irritated by Marcellin’s hesitation in sending a Brother as an aide to the Fathers in Verdely in the Diocese of Bordeaux.

¹⁹ A draft of a very one-sided Prospectus was toned-down considerably in the definitive text.

towns have. Moreover, Marcellin's practice was clear, even before the Prospectus: in addition to La Valla, Marlhes, St Sauveur-en-Rue, Vanosc and Boulieu, schools in rural communes, the establishment in the town of Bourg-Argental was founded in 1822. On this occasion, Marcellin gave a talk that he sent out to the Brothers and which was reported by Brother Jean-Baptiste (*Life* Part 1 Chapter 8 Pages 112 - 113) in which he theorised about the difference between rural and urban populations on the religious level.²⁰

The issue of the exhortation to the Brothers leaving for Bourg-Argental

The founder [of the school], M. de Pleyné, was not the parish priest, but the mayor of this commune which was considered to be a town since its urban centre had around 2,000 inhabitants and the total population was already more than 4,000.²¹ It was the chief town of the canton and so a minor administrative centre, with a Justice of the Peace, police... and indispensable services such as a boys' school, not to speak of small manufacturing and business activities. The mayor was one of the foremost men of the area. For Marcellin, this was an exceptional opportunity, but also a considerable risk and he selected as Director the oldest (28 years old) and most capable man he had available, Brother Jean-Marie Granjon. We do not know who his two assistants were.²² According to the *Life*, the Brothers opened their school on 2nd January 1822. Before their departure, Marcellin had given them a lengthy talk on the art of education in an urban environment.

“Brothers, our aim in coming together to form this little Society was to impart christian instruction and christian education to the children of small country parishes; but now we find large towns looking to us for the same service. It is one that we certainly ought not to refuse them, seeing that the love of Christ, which should be our guide in loving, goes out to all men and that city children, too, have been redeemed by his Blood. But there are two things I want to say on this point: we should never forget that we were founded principally for country parishes and that we should give special preference to their schools; religious instruction in large parishes and in the towns, needs to be at greater depth because of their greater spiritual needs and their more advanced primary education. In those centres more than anywhere else, pride of place must be given to catechism and religious practice. It is the Brothers' duty to bestow all the greater care on the christian education of children, the more neglected they are and the less their parents bother about them.

Go, my dear Brothers, [...] The authorities, who give you charge of their school, and the parents, who can't wait to entrust their children to you, rely on you to give those children sound secular

²⁰ However, this talk, probably reconstituted from the memories of some of the Brothers, might reflect more or less the thinking of Brother Jean-Baptiste.

²¹ A note in the *Life* (Part 1 Chapter 8 Note 26 Page 112) tells us that at that time the number of inhabitants was less than 2,000. However, we are specifically talking about the population of the entire area, not just the commune since, in 1880, in *Annales de Maisons*, Brother Avit attributes to it a total population of 5,447 inhabitants.

²² In *Origines Maristes* Vol 1 doc 75 no 2 Guillard, the inspector, spoke of three Brothers. Brother Avit, in the *Annales de Bourg-Argental* spoke of a 15 year old assistant that Brother Jean-Marie Granjon left alone to conduct the school in the spring of 1822.

instruction. The Church [...] asks you [...] to make them into good Christians and your school into a seed-bed of saints.” (*Life* Part 1 Chapter 8 Page 112)

This talk was certainly not given as recorded, but is not pure invention on Brother Jean-Baptiste’s part. It comes from an oral tradition collected by the author and put into literary form²³ when he was able to add later elements. Indeed, certain expressions clearly correspond to the environment of 1822 when the Institute was only a “small society” created for small country-parishes. Also found there is a universalism characteristic of the Marist origins: salvation is for everyone and the Institute did not have to choose between town and country. However, other parts of the text might be much later: there is the question of “country-parishes” and also of religious education “in populous parishes and in towns”. A value-judgement breaks through: the town is more open to secular instruction than the countryside, but is more negligent in matters of religion. This is both a traditional idea and awareness that the school is free of its catechetical matrix. Nevertheless, the secular and religious cultures, which were very much mixed in popular culture up until then, tended to be separate.

In 1822 Marcellin was already very conscious of these facts, but he counted on utilising secular instruction given by the Brothers as bait to attract children to school and allow them to also instil the catechism.²⁴ In 1856 Brother Jean-Baptiste preferred to insist on the fact that Marcellin accepted the supervision of the civil authority and society’s desire for secular instruction in the measure that his Brothers retained their freedom to catechise. It was an application of the ideal of the good Christian and the virtuous citizen. So, even if Brother Jean-Baptiste remodelled the 1822 talk, he did not betray its spirit: a spirit which ratified the early secularisation of the school by recognising the authority of the civil power in educational matters, and the desire of society, whether urban or rural, for legitimate education.²⁵

The letter to the king and the need to become established in towns and cities

In a letter to King Louis-Philippe on 28th January 1834 to obtain legal authorisation (*Letters* Vol 1 no 34) Marcellin, in seeking to obtain his legal authorisation, presents himself as a Founder of rural origin who learned to read and write “only after making tremendous efforts, for lack of capable teachers.” and who then had the idea of “providing for rural children the same good education which the Brothers of the Christian Schools provide for the poor in the cities.”

This proposal restated the terms of the 1824 Prospectus and insisted on the rural vocation of the Marist Brothers because it was absolutely necessary to avoid appearing as competitors of the De la Salle Brothers who were part of the University and were favoured by the State. To present themselves as auxiliaries and rural imitators of the De la Salles displayed the most elementary diplomacy but did not really reflect the situation of the Marist Brothers.

²³ See Volume 2 *References* of Marcellin’s *Letters*: the note on Brother Jean-Marie Granjon (Pages 305 - 307 Standard English translation).

²⁴ This theory is very clearly formulated in the *Life* Part 2 Chapter 20 Page 515.

²⁵ The 1822 talk was still significant in the attitude to be adopted from the start: visiting the church, the parish priest, the mayor and the good example to be given to adults and children.

In 1834 Marcellin envisaged communities of at least three Brothers, which supposed communes sufficiently rich and populous to support them, so large rural villages or small towns. There was a risk of competition with the De la Salles. This would be the pretext invoked by the Minister, Salvandy who proposed to Marcellin civil authorisation for communes of 1,000 inhabitants at most.²⁶ The De la Salles would be of the same opinion. Replying to a request for support for his petition from Marcellin on 28th June 1838, Brother Anaclet²⁷ wrote a subtle letter in which style and substance contradict each other. He rejoiced that the Marist Brothers were destined “for communes in which the population was not sufficiently considerable for an establishment of our Institute to be set up”, that is to say, for “small localities”. Marcellin was not happy with such a limitation:

“A large number of our establishments would be ruined by that condition; several of the towns where they are located have more than 4,000 inhabitants.”²⁸

He therefore had nothing against education in a rural environment, but not at any price. If he did not envisage accessing the large urban centres, he aimed at this mixed space that could be called semi-rural just as much as semi-urban, large villages and small towns.

Urban schools

It is true that, in the early years of the community, the Brothers were involving themselves at the level of the hamlet, and sometimes on their own (Brother Laurent), but Marcellin very quickly gave preference to town and large villages²⁹ suitable for providing a livelihood for three Brothers, strewn with hamlets and concentrating on agricultural activities. Becoming a Brother would benefit adolescents from the hamlets who were sent off to agricultural work, with a modest change of location and activity since the school was opened in the centre of the communes, near the town hall, the church, in a busy area of non-agricultural activities usually called “the town-centre”. Even if they were surrounded by countryside, their universe was at least partly urban. That was no small reason for the attraction that the exercise of the vocation of a Brother could have on youth seeking some social mobility.

The outlying areas of hamlets devoted to agriculture were not, however, abandoned because the school in the “town centre” of the commune admitted to its ranks pupils from near and far. If the commune was, like La Valla, very extensive, the pupils slept at the school during the week.

There might even be pupils from neighbouring communes. Their presence could cause problems as the commune looked badly on these intruders but they increased the school’s workforce and

²⁶ Brother Avit wrote 1,200.

²⁷ [Translator’s Note] The then-Superior General of the De la Salle Brothers.

²⁸ [Translator’s Note] Brother André quotes Brother Avit as the source of this quotation. The letter can also be found in *Letters* no 227. Monsieur Jovin-Deshayes was an industrialist in St Etienne and Mayor of St Jean Bonnefons.

²⁹ [Translator’s Note] One of the words Brother André uses, “bourgs” has no direct English translation. However, he defines these as “large villages which have a fairly important urban centre”.

resources. So, without being urban in the strict sense, the Brothers' school was "urban-like" because it involved a daily or weekly migration of children to a centre where they were initiated into an elementary urban culture: the practice of French, reading, writing, good manners... Quite often the village-school was the first stage of a movement towards urbanisation which pushed populations towards medium-sized and large towns.

It was, moreover, the scenario experienced by Marcellin himself: coming from a hamlet, he knew multiple periphery - centre migrations from the hamlet of Le Rozey to school in the town of Marlihes around 1800; from Le Rozey to his brother-in-law's at St Sauveur to take up studies again in 1804; from Le Rozey to the junior seminary at Verrières (1805); finally from Le Rozey to the large city of Lyon (1813). He was a country-boy transplanted to increasingly urbanised environments.

Overlapping urban and rural environments

At the beginning of the 19th century there still existed in Europe a rural civilisation which distinguished itself from the urban by language, clothing, customs, and beliefs... Nevertheless, the overlapping of urban and rural spaces was already strong. Let us take the example of Marlihes, a large commune on the Velay plateau with 2,500 inhabitants, made up of about sixty hamlets around an urban centre of a few hundred inhabitants. It was undoubtedly a rural area, but quite intensely linked to St Etienne where Jean-Baptiste Champagnat, sometimes called a merchant, often went to trade in wood or other products. We still think of the manufacturing and trade of ribbons, the merchants of St Etienne distributing thread to the women from the hamlets and getting the finished product back to sell on the European market. The La Valla - St Chamond relationship very much resembled that of Marlihes - St Etienne. There we find textile-works in the large village and the exploiting and trading of wood in the high valley of the Gier. During winter the peasants of the hamlets manufactured nails for the merchants of St Chamond. The markets of this town were the occasions of weekly migrations of peasants going to sell foodstuffs.

The town - country relationship was also a permanent rural exodus to towns which offered all sorts of employment. This was particularly true of the industrial region of St Etienne and the Gier valley with its large metal-factories and the mines grouped around them with populations of rural origin participating in the transformation of urban spaces. This is why the Institute very soon took on an educational role in schools founded by industrial companies just a few steps from L'Hermitage, such as Terrenoir (1832) or Lorette (1834).

The early Marist community even participated concretely in this concentration of rural populations around urban centres at the height of their expansion. It left the village of La Valla in order to establish itself at the gateway to the concentration of population at St Chamond in the low Gier valley where workshops benefitting from the propulsion provided by the river were set up. L'Hermitage, more intensely than La Valla, lived at the rhythm of an urban, industrial region in rapid expansion.

We need, therefore, to avoid speaking too lightly about the country- or the urban- school since there was scarcely a school without an urban coating and with activities which were not exclusively agricultural, however modest. And then, in the 19th century, even for large towns, the fields, meadows and villages were never far away. It was in this dynamic, intermediate world that Marcellin situated his work, without being too preoccupied with knowing whether they were country- or town- schools.

Schools in 1840³⁰

Statistics confirm Marcellin’s thinking: the majority of the Brothers’ schools were in large villages or small towns, quite often the central town of the canton. Even if the populations of the suburbs of St Etienne (the schools in Terrenoire and Firminy) and St Chamond (the schools in Izieux and Lorette) were much less numerous than in 1880 since industrialisation was only beginning, the average population of the places where there were Marist schools could not have been much below 3,000 inhabitants. If we compile a quick classification of the populations of the communes, we obtain the following:

Populations of the communes	Number of schools
Above 2,500 (range: from 2,995 - 11,500)	15
2,000 - 2,500	6
1,500 - 2,000	10
1,000 - 1,500	4
Less than 1,000	3

We are far from the “little communes” envisaged in the early years of the Institute since three quarters of the commune- and parish- schools had populations greater than 1,500 inhabitants. The schools of these villages and small towns were day-schools, but they frequently provided, during the winter and in a more or less improvised fashion, weekly boarding for children from the surrounding area.

Children’s Homes or Orphanages

From the beginning Marcellin considered that Children’s Homes, that is, boarding-schools for orphans or homeless children, were part of his plans. This was completely natural since the

³⁰ [Translator’s Note] Brother André opens this section with an extensive table listing all the Brothers’ schools in France at the year 1840, together with the population of the location. I have omitted this table as it would be of limited interest to non-French speakers and the second table, which I have translated, summarises the information.

primitive community at La Valla had the daily habit of welcoming the destitute and the homeless. However, in the towns this type of establishment, possibly requiring a more detailed educational framework than boarding-schools, was most often under the supervision of wealthy benefactors or urban administrations. It was through these Children's Homes that some Brothers had the experience of average-size or large towns such as St Chamond and Lyon.

Boarding-schools

Marcellin was no more against the establishing of boarding-schools which presumed setting-up in a town or somewhere nearby where there might be a clientèle of sufficiently wealthy families who could afford the increased costs of boarding. As it was also necessary to have available a large number of high-quality educational personnel, Marcellin did not have any strategy for founding boarding-schools, but he showed himself to be pragmatic. Thus, the boarding-school at La Côte-Saint-André, a small town, was originally a small seminary endowed with a boarding-school run by a priest, Father Douillet. In 1831, after the July Revolution,³¹ he became acquainted with Marcellin and sent him vocations, receiving in turn four Brothers to work as teaching-assistants. In 1837 the boarding-school had around fifty boarders: it was officially recognised and Father Douillet withdrew, leaving the management to Marcellin's Brothers.³² Contrary to La Côte, Millery was, even in 1883, only a small commune of 1275 inhabitants³³. However, "the population [...] was almost completely packed together" like in a town. (Brother Avit) also found that "this village" seemed to be a labyrinth of streets. The inhabitants seemed to be comfortably off since they cultivated vines. As Lyon was only about 15 kilometres away, they had no difficulty in selling their wine³⁴. Although the village had a state-run school and a small boarding-school, in 1829 the mayor and the parish priest requested two Brothers to be sent and they would be installed in the parish-committee's property to run a private school. Brother Avit added, "even though their salary was too little or they were made to wait too long" a small boarding-school was opened next to the school around 1833.

Unlike the majority of the Brothers' establishments, it was not a question of weekly-boarders only paying small amounts, but of full-time boarding. It was that at Millery, in the environs of Lyon, that the lesson was learned in the most profound way that here and elsewhere, people had means. It is also possible that the inhabitants of Lyon, a city with a polluted atmosphere, were sending their children for the clean air of the nearby countryside. However the annals tell us only that success came from the fact that the assistants of Brother Antoine, the Director, "were good at calligraphy" and that "this was the principal means of success for the Brothers of that time". They also mentioned Brother Theodose, a former seminarian who was well-educated, "was a

³¹ [Translator's Note] July 1830. King Charles X was overthrown and replaced with his cousin, Louis-Philippe, who reigned until 1848.

³² Relations between Marcellin and Father Douillet had some difficult patches. See the extensive correspondence in the *Letters*.

³³ Around 1840 there were perhaps 1,500 inhabitants.

³⁴ Even today the vintage is very much appreciated.

great help in the boarding-school". In any case, in 1837, Marcellin, encouraged and perhaps assisted by the parish priest, bought a piece of land which enabled the Brothers to own the accommodation in which Brother Antoine lodged up to thirty boarders. Thus, in 1840, the only educational establishment owned by the Institute was a boarding-school in a semi-urban area.³⁵

Conclusion

When considering schools for the poor from 1816, particularly those in rural areas, as major sites of apostolic endeavour, Marcellin must be seen today as a precursor. However, this was not the early Marists' normal way of seeing things. It stayed like that until Marcellin's death, in spite of the success of the branch of Marist Brothers. The priority given to children from country areas must not be viewed in too strict a manner. Very quickly, Marcellin became anxious to insert his work into a changing space where large villages and towns of varying sizes were becoming focal-points for development. At his death, the general configuration of his work was fairly clear: more semi-urban than clearly rural, from the fact that the schools, in a very pragmatic way combining day- and boarding- facilities, were included in the centre of communes where the population often exceeded 2,000 inhabitants, in industrial suburbs under development and even in important towns. Marcellin was not a country-priest and his Brothers, although coming, for the most part, from a rural environment, became agents of an urban culture, however that is interpreted, because of their work and lifestyle: raising spirit and refining morals. They also brought alive the experience of urban-life which was characterised by high-density population and the domination of non agricultural activities.

³⁵ In 1876 it would be established in St Genis-Laval to be even closer to Lyon.