

# 24

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# fms

## MARIST NOTEBOOKS

### INFORMATION

- **Concerning the secularisation of the Marist Fathers**  
Fr. Bernard BOURTOT, sm
- **Account of the defence of Richard Hemeryck's thesis**  
Br. André LANFREY, fms

### STUDIES

- **Jean-Claude Courville "The lost leader" (1<sup>st</sup> part)**  
Br. Frederick Mc MAHON, fms

### ACTS

- **Acts of the Marist inter-branch symposium on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2006**
  - Patrimony Research
  - Formation in Marist patrimony

### DOCUMENTS

- **Letter 40 by Brother François to a master of novices**  
Br. Eduardo GATTI, fms

Institute of the Marist Brothers



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## SUMMARY

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# INFORMATION

## *A new publication*

Br. André LANFREY, fms

Father Bernard Bourtot SM has recently finished a study on the secularisation of the Marist Fathers in France at the start of the twentieth century. The work, 295 pages in length, is entitled:

***The Wounded Memory of the Society of Mary in France.***

*The civil dissolution in 1903; the liquidation of goods;  
the life of the congregation  
1897 – 1922*

To obtain a copy of the work (€15, postage not included)  
contact the author directly:

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The expression “wounded memory of religious congregations” used by the political expert and historian René Rémond is used by Bernard Boutot in its two-fold meaning of both a memory of a painful ordeal and of a memory overlooked by the congregation itself. He thus endeavours to open to history a phase of his congregation that is not well known. For that he does not content himself with internal sources but his research refers unceasingly to general history and uses public sources extensively, especially the justice documents conserved in many public archives.

His conclusion appears to me all the more remarkable because it can be applied largely to other congregations, including the Marist Brothers.

At first he presents a dispersed congregation, losing lawsuit upon law-

suit, seeing its members scatter and often experiencing a profound crisis of personal identity, having trouble to recruit, managing from day to day an avalanche of disagreeable or disastrous events. In short the Society of Mary was forced to live its motto: “ignoti et occulti” in an unforeseen and painful manner.

But this calamitous time was also one of a resistance which was to bear fruit: transfer to Rome of the General House; creation of new Provinces; a more profound entrenchment in the Society by an increased stability of its personnel; and considered formation of young people.

I was particularly interested in a small table (page 226) which compares the membership of 1903 and 1920: 763 professed priests in the first case; 766 in the second. Behind this overall stability, which is a healthy situation in itself, one finds a significant trend by the congregation towards internationalisation: in 1903 there were 209 priests in England, Ireland, USA, Mexico and New Zealand, but in 1920 these countries totalled 292. At the same time the Provinces of Lyon and Paris passed from 346 priests to 209.

It is important nevertheless to point out that, contrary to a myth well anchored in congregations, it was not French secularisation that caused this expansion for that had started well before. Secularisation, rather, unsettled it, made the more spectacular by the fact that the membership of France diminished so quickly. Thus the spread of the religious congregations across the world occurred essentially from their own dynamism and in spite of secularisation, even if one cannot deny some positive effects from it.

# *Defence of a thesis*

**Br. André LANFREY, fms**

In 2005, Brother Richard Hemeryck from the community of Beaucamps defended a history thesis entitled *Congregational Schools in the Department of the North under the Second Empire (1852 – 1870)*.

It is an extremely well researched work, fruit of thirty years of research. It is arranged in four volumes: 1745 pages of the thesis itself in three volumes, and a volume of notes and sources in 763 pages. Unfortunately, such a wealth of information is not easily mastered by the non initiated and we hope that Brother Richard will extract a more accessible work from all his research, or at least a summary article.

In fact the thesis offers a chronology a little larger than that suggested by the title: it concerns rather the years 1850 to 1880. Let us remember that the Department of the North, bordering Belgium, was affected by an intense industrialisation and a powerful effort of popular schooling in which the congregations, and among them the Marist Brothers, played a major part.

It was a time of hesitation between two worlds: in 1850 the Falloux Law encouraged congregational expansion for ten years, while the more liberal Empire of Napoleon III (1852 – 1870) curbed the congregations that appeared to it to be invading. A little before 1880, as the Republicans came to power, they brought with them a decidedly anti-congregational policy.

The interest of the work is thus in its offering a synthesis of the action of twenty-four congregations of sisters and six congregations of brothers, in a

transition period, across a relatively large territory and a large population (close to 1.5 million inhabitants).

In the conclusion (from page 1735) the author develops a few lines of reflection:

First, the congregations knew how to respond to needs that were not being entirely satisfied by civil society, and provided pedagogical models for this. But “two paths opened in front of the progress of lay institutions. The first was one of quality: to continue their mission as pioneers, forerunners, animators, in a Christian spirit. They chose, rather, the second option, that of competition” [...] “In a struggle that became more and more unequal, the increase in the number of works exhausted the energies of the religious and drew them onto a terrain that was more human than supernatural ...”

Second, highlighting the hostility of a lay and republican France towards priests and religious it considered as “citizens different from the others” – in other words inferior – Brother Richard recalls:

“In 1870-1871, the separation was less pronounced in the Department of the North. The majority of its inhabitants did not ask for much. The congregational school was accepted there. It was more a national debate than a local one. The Republic was going to partially take over from the Church, often with lively force.”



# *Marist Interbranch Meeting on Patrimony*

During the annual meeting of the Marist Brothers' International Patrimony Commission in Rome earlier this year, Brother Pedro Herreros CG and the members of the Commission invited the superiors of the other Marist branches to gather on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2007 at the General House of the Marist Brothers for a seminar on topics of mutual interest.

During the morning, various participants presented summaries of the state of research in their own Institutes: the people who are involved in it, the relationships between them, and the formation of future researchers. A time was taken to make a succinct account of the results obtained and new pathways of research concerning each of the Marist congregations.

The final presentation of the morning was made by Brother André Lanfrey who gave a paper which discussed the validity of understanding the Marist Brothers as "The Society of Mary of the Hermitage".

The afternoon was given to some information sharing on initial and on-going formation in patrimony as well as the resources that were being used for that.

## MORNING: THE DEVELOPMENTS IN RESEARCH AND FORMATION IN MARIST PATRIMONY

### I. THE MARIST FATHERS

Fr. Kevin MOWBRAY, sm

#### October 2003

At the initiative of the Superior General, a workshop brought together about twenty Marist Fathers engaged in one way or another in Marist studies. The theme of the workshop was to conserve, reinterpret, communicate our Marist heritage in a changing context. (cf. *Forum Novum*, December 2005) It had the objective of developing lines of action for the years ahead.

Outcomes of the workshop:

- A decision to centre Marist studies on the period of the generalate of Colin, with a special accent on what constitutes Colin as *man and founder*, and, besides, what he lived and did as *Superior General*.
- A decision to organise a symposium on “Colin and Oceania: the Superior General of the Marist Fathers and his role in the history of the Catholic Church in Western Oceania”,
  - at Suva, Fiji, five full days, in August 2007
  - with a double dimension (academic and formative)
  - with representatives from FMS and from SMSM
- The continuation of the publication of sources
  - Letters from missionaries to the General Administration of the Marist Fathers during the Generalate of Colin (published by Charles Girard in hard copy and digital formats, from 2003 until the symposium)
  - Colin’s letters during his Generalate: “Colin sup”, Documents for the study of the generalate of Jean-Claude Colin (1836-1854). The first volume has been printed: “From election to the voyage to Rome (1836-1842)”, (doc. 1-392).
- Enhancement of the archives of the Marist Fathers (APM)
  - Preparation of a computerised systematic inventory
  - Reconditioning of the historic archives (boxes have been replaced by metal files)
  - And adaptation in the former locations, renovated and equipped (air conditioned, fire protected).

### **May 2005**

The Council of the Society of Mary adopted the following recommendation:

*In the setting of our life in Christ, to deepen our understanding of our relationship with Mary and to renew our Marial prayer.*

Initiatives were taken to follow up this recommendation: retreats (Justin Taylor, Peter Westerman), work groups (France).

### **June 2006**

A memorandum of understanding was signed between the Society of Mary and the Vatican's Apostolic Library concerning the Pagès Library: the SM confided its goods, while remaining owner, to the Vatican library which would do what was necessary for its conservation and its promotion to the academic community.

### **January 2007**

Appointment of Fr Alois Greiler, from the Province of Germany, to the General House for three years from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007. Alois will dedicate himself to research on the Generalate of Jean-Claude Colin. The first year will be essentially dedicated to the preparation and follow up of the symposium 'Colin and Oceania'; the second and third will allow him to deepen this theme and to develop other research, notably in what concerns Colin's relationships in France within and outside of the Society. These works could allow for a book on Colin as Superior General.

### **Work in progress**

- The programme of renovation and modernisation of la Neylière
- Planning for a workshop for formators to focus on a syllabus of Marist reference texts for formation.

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## **2. THE MARIST MISSIONARY SISTERS**

Sr Mary Emerentiana, smsm

The SMSM are much less advanced than the other branches of the Society of Mary on research on the patrimony. We are still in the process of try-

ing to assemble our source material and we are presently editing and translating the letters of our first Sisters.

For the sake of those who may not be familiar with our history, we have no foundress or founder as such but rather eleven French women (whom we call our “Pioneers”) at our origins who went out to Oceania between 1845 and 1860. None of them could be called a foundress as none had a founding vision. Yet our charism was born from the initiative of these women. Their letters are not written to explain the vision, charism, etc., or to give spiritual advice and counsel to others – they are about life - on what they were trying to live and cope with in nineteenth century Oceania. The early documents and the letters show how our vocation was taking shape there though the question of identity was not settled once and for all, especially in regard to relations with the Society of Mary, the Bishops, formation, status of Island sisters and so on. All of this makes life a little more complicated for us.

Then there was a long period between this first departure in 1845 and our emergence as a congregation of pontifical right in 1931. Somehow it seemed to take all this time and effort, especially on the part of the Marist Fathers’ general administrations, to find an acceptable structure that would express our particular vocation and have it approved by the church. We usually divide our history into three periods:

**I. Third Order of Mary for the Missions of Oceania (TOMMO) 1845-1881**

with a vow of obedience to the vicars apostolic  
including entry and then later withdrawal from the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions

**II. The Third Order Regular of Mary (TORM) 1881-1931**

consecrated by vows  
as diocesan congregations under the authority  
of the vicars apostolic in Oceania  
with a house of formation in France  
under the responsibility of the Superior General of the Society of Mary

**III. The Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary (SMSM) 1931...**

approved as an institute of pontifical right

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**I. 1845-1881**

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This first period was the time of the pioneers. Between 1845 and 1860 we were just coming into existence as a fifth branch of the Society of Mary. Our very existence is evidence that the original inspiration of Fr Colin and the early Marists was not just for them, nor for the older branches only.

This is the period on which, for the most part, we are concentrating our present efforts. I think it would be true to say we face a few difficulties particular to us.

1. It is highly probable nothing was further from the minds of our pioneers than collecting material for posterity – they didn't even know if there would be any TOMMO posterity!
2. We had no mother house or generalate and consequently no central administration or place for archival material before 1931. However, some had been saved, thanks largely to efforts of the Marist Fathers, e.g. Frs Favre and Poupinel, Fr Yardin and others who kept some of the letters written to them at that time as higher superiors, spiritual guides or procurators. One historian of the Society, Fr Auguste Detours, even made copies of some of the letters of Marie Françoise Peroton, Marie de la Miséricorde, Marie de la Ste Espérance and one or two others. Of course, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Fr Jean Coste.
3. Having no established archives from 1845-1931, our material is found in various other archives. It has had to be gathered up from
  - a) that retained in the Marist Fathers' general archives, Rome.
  - b) that with the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions as their archives contain the correspondence of the pioneers with the foundress of their congregation, M. Marie du Cœur de Jésus. This was an important chapter in the search by the Marist Fathers and our own sisters for a stable organisation.
  - c) all the letters and other related documents in diocesan and arch-diocesan archives of Wallis-Futuna, New Caledonia, Samoa, Fiji,

Tonga, and later other dioceses which hold the originals of many of the letters written by our sisters to Bishops and priests as well as some copies of their letters to them.

4. Of course it has to be admitted one problem is the SMSM themselves; there is a lack of a sense of what is of historical value on the part of many of us and some precious material has been discarded. Admittedly though there was often no place to store it; much less to protect it.

For this period 1845-1881 we are conscious that we have benefited from what has been researched for these earlier years by the Marist Fathers, Brothers and Sisters. To give one example from among many: *Marist Laity: an Anthology of Historical Sources*, Charles Girard sm, has helped us enormously to understand our own links, historical and spiritual, with the Third Order of the Society of Mary. Our early sisters received so much in the way of the Marist spirit from the Fathers and Brothers with whom they worked in the pioneering days in Oceania. Many brothers are mentioned in their letters and greetings regularly sent along with those to the priests.

Mother Mary Rose, our first Superior General, named by Propaganda Fidei in 1932, began to gather up some of this material but needless to say a lot had already been lost. In setting up the general house in Lyon, she tried also to establish SMSM archives and assemble some of our source material.

### ***In the way of research of this period, what has already been done?***

1. There is the *Les Pionnières Maristes en Océanie 1845-1931* - a history of our origins covering this period and that of the Third Order Regular of Mary.
2. The four volumes *Our Pioneer Sisters – from correspondence 1836-1885* of letters and extracts of letters that speak of our vocation taking shape in Oceania – as missionary, Marist, religious. These were the criteria for the selection made. Also Volume V – *Our Pioneer Sisters – from legislative texts and documents of an official character 1855-1932*.

3. *Une Lyonnaise, Marie Françoise Perroton (1796-1873) Missionnaire en Océanie*-published in French and English in the one booklet. These are the work of Marie Cecile de Mijolla assisted by Fr Jean Coste, sm.
4. *La Figure Juridique de la Congrégation des Sœurs Missionnaires de la Société de Marie à la lumière de ses origins et de l'évolution de son droit propre de 1857-1931*, doctoral thesis, P.U.G. by Immacolata Oc-corsio, smsm (French only).

***What are we doing at present? The simple answer is that we are not really doing any research in the strict sense of the word but rather engaged in the process of working on the letters of the eleven pioneer sisters.***

1. *Letters of Marie Françoise Perroton*, the forerunner, has been completed. The booklet, edited by Ancilla Groperrin and Emerentiana Cooney, has been published in 2001.
2. Those of Sisters Marie de la Miséricorde, Marie de la Pitié and Marie de la Ste Espérance have been edited, but there remains work to be done in indexing, illustrating, translating etc. Those of the other pioneers have been transcribed but need checking, annotating, editing etc. Of course in trying to transcribe, edit and translate the letters of our early sisters we find reference to questions that require more study and research e.g. impact of the historical context of the Pacific on the sisters, the sisters and colonialism, cultural contact, relations with political authorities in the different Islands, pastoral, liturgical practices as well as celebrations, relations between religious denominations in the Pacific before the days of ecumenism, the contribution of these women to evangelisation, education, health care, promotion of women in Pacific societies. These and others would all merit much further study and research in different sources; of course, some questions are larger than the pioneers.
3. Photocopies have been made of the *Manuals of the Third Order of Mary* – 1857, 1859 and 1874 since so few copies exist. These are an important source for us also, together with the early *Rules written* for us by Marist bishops and priests that contain phrases describing the Marist spirit from the Constitutions of the Society of Mary.

4. Sr Marie Cécile de Mijolla has just completed a biography of Sr Marie de la Croix – one of the pioneers who lived and worked in New Caledonia. *Une Vendéenne au bout du monde* is the title. It will be published when it is translated.
5. Recently, we have completed a small booklet, *The Vocation of the Pioneers*, (presently with the printer) which is a somewhat global presentation of their vocation. In the text, S. M. Ancilla tries to respond to two fundamental questions: how did the pioneers see their vocation and from the witness of their lives, is it possible to draw out some elements of their spirituality?

In response to the question as to who is engaged in this work we have several sisters in various countries of the world assisting but, as they are engaged in full time work for the most part, they do what they can in their 'spare time' in the way of transcribing, translating etc. Sr Marie Ancilla comes from France twice a year to assist Sr Margaret and me who are the only two engaged full-time in it.

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## **II. 1881-1931 - THIRD ORDER REGULAR OF MARY**

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This is the period when new attempts at organisation were made: at the beginning of the period we were formed into little diocesan congregations still under the authority of the Vicars Apostolic in the different vicariates of Oceania, with a house of formation in France under the responsibility of the Superior General of the Society of Mary.

This reorganisation was desired by the Sisters themselves, by the Marist Fathers and the Vicars Apostolic but political events in France delayed the project for a while.

Documents relating to this period are largely stored in the Marist Fathers' archives and the different diocesan archives of Oceania.



***For research on this period, what has been done?***

1. *Madame Adèle Marie Troussel des Groues (1835-1898), Marie de la Croix TORM Correspondence 1881-1897* – presented by Catherine Jones, smsm. Madame des Groues was a lay woman, a widow, recruited by Fr Méchin, sm to take charge of the formation programme for postulants of the TORM, preparing for the missions of the Marist Fathers in Oceania. She was within a year or two named the novice directress. A valuable source for us on formation at that time.
2. *Madame Adele Marie Troussel des Groues Mother Marie de la Croix TORM 1835-1898*. A short biography by Sr Marie Pia, smsm, revised and published.
3. An attempt has been made to gather up material from letters and reports that concern the sisters from 1885 until 1912 (the date of death of the last pioneer), written by bishops or priests of Central Oceania and of Fiji but this is not yet ready for publication.

***What are we doing at present?***

1. We are presently working on Mother Marie Denyse who replaced Madame des Groues as novice directress from 1898-1903.
2. Her *Rule and Directory* (1903) has been translated into Italian and English within the last year or so. I could mention here that, as the Marist Fathers did not keep their constitutions just for themselves even at that time, M. Marie Denyse used large extracts from the Constitutions SM 1872 – about 84 articles are reproduced in whole or in part in this *Rule and Directory*, just as they are. Not even any change from masculines to feminines.
3. Her 250 letters or extracts of letters are being transcribed and translated at this time. Again this will be another source of information on formation and spirituality in which the sisters were formed at that period.

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### **III. 1931 – SMSM**

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This is the period since 1931 when we became one congregation of Pontifical Right under the name given us by Propaganda Fidei: Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary. Constitutions had to be written, the first published in 1931, was done by Fr Grimal SM, after some consultation with our superiors at Ste-Foy at that time.

We are not working on this period. However, there has been an oral history project participated in by certain sisters in the senior age bracket. There is limited access at this time according to congregational norms as agreed upon by each sister.

I would like to conclude by saying that as we have neither the capacity, the resources nor the means to do what your researchers are doing, I do want to assure you how much it is appreciated – how important it is for us in helping us interpret certain expressions and experiences of our pioneers. It is certainly a help in trying to enter more deeply into our particular way of living Marist life as missionaries and religious, and in re-appropriating our charism for today. We can only beg you to continue and pray that the Lord will bless and fructify all your efforts.

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## **3. MARIST SISTERS**

Sr Vivienne Goldstein, sm

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### **3.1 Introduction**

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Our position with regards to research is rather like the SMSM sisters. We, too, have very few resources but we have been helped greatly through the years by the two male Marist congregations. Particularly, our research has been organised by Father Coste and Father Lessard. After the Vatican Council both worked with an historical commission of our sisters composed of Sister Marie Therese Aubague and Sister Hyacinth who were followed by Winifred Rose whom a number of you would have met at our historical centre at Belley in France.

Thanks to the work of that Historical Commission we have had access

for some years to two collections of documents that refer to the time of our Foundress' life - the Recollections of Mother Saint Joseph and the Correspondence of Mother Saint Joseph. The whole story is there, but it remains to draw out what it is telling us. So in more recent years we have concentrated on bringing those documents to life. The reason that we have concentrated so much on that period of our history is that, as you may know, our foundress' original vision was lost. For one hundred years our sisters lived in a somewhat different way from the intention of Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn. Her death was in 1858 and it was not until the 1950s that her vision began to be more fully realised. However, the influence of Jean-Claude Colin was not lost - thankfully. As our founder, he is very dear to us and his vision precious. It is this which formed our spirituality – he was able to articulate the vision; whereas Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn showed us how to live it. This is not the time to go into the misunderstanding that occurred between the two of them, and there are far more erudite people who would elaborate on that for us. But it is important to note that the Marist Sisters claim both foundress and founder and are proud to do so.

### **3.2 Recent Research and Publications**

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#### ***Focus on the time of the foundress***

Within the last five years, some publications have been produced to bring to life what we have in those two collections of documents:

1. “*Hidden Fruitfulness*” by one of our Irish Sisters, Myra Niland. Myra did a thesis on the spirituality of Jeanne Marie Chavoïn and in particular the phrase from our origins “Hidden and Unknown”. It is a substantial work and has been translated into French.
2. Another idea followed and I was commissioned to write Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn’s story in a more popular style - “*Patterns: the fashioning of a foundress*” is in English and Portuguese. One of the newer features is the place of her companion, Marie Jotillon. Very little research had been done on Marie and it is a joy to us to have discovered this person, with whom Jeanne-Marie engaged in faith-sharing on a weekly basis, spanning some 17 years before our foundation.
3. “*A Simple Pattern*”, a simpler version of the above, has been produced in five languages. It is a very basic introductory text which serves as a first resource for interested young people.

### ***History of Constitutions***

Three years ago one of our Australian sisters, Joan McBride, completed her research into the complex history of our Constitutions. Her publication is entitled “*You alone know*” – referring to Jeanne-Marie’s words to Jean-Claude Colin when she was urging him to write the rule for the Marist Sisters, “You alone know what it is, it was given to you.” She really believed that.

## **3.3 Current Research**

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### ***Marist Sisters in Australia***

Joan is currently in the final stages of writing the history of the Marist Sisters in Australia. This history has a particular importance in that it covers an event which has bearing on major changes within our congregation and about which no one has spoken publicly. Indults had been obtained for three consecutive General Chapters to exempt the Oceanian delegates from attending in person with the exception of two each for the 1932 and 1938 Chapters and one for the 1948 Chapter (legislation allowed for around 8 delegates). The matter was raised by an Australian sister and it led to an ecclesial enquiry. Ten sisters from Oceania attended the 1954 General Chapter – among the Chapter outcomes were the re-discovery of our foundress, the better understanding of our identity, (with no further references to us as semi-enclosed) and the creation of provinces.

### ***Marist Sisters in France***

In France another of our sisters, Françoise Merlet, is working on the history of our sisters there. She has done a lot of research into those early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century around the expulsion of religious. Now Françoise continues to research other periods.

### ***Superiors General following the foundress***

1. Sr Donal Moran from Ireland began some work on our second Superior General - Marie Mortier, Mother Ambrose. I’m not sure how far she has progressed. We need to look carefully into the life of Mother Ambrose as it was her generalate which took our congregation along a different path from that envisaged by our foundress. Interestingly, she is the author of one of our documents in those two volumes that I consider most precious (Recollections Doc.163). She was a young

superior at the house where our Foundress was recuperating from a broken leg. Realising that she had a wonderful opportunity, she got the 54-year-old Jeanne- Marie to talk. Being an educated woman, and having heard Fr Maîtrepierre expounding the importance of historical records, the young Sr Ambrose wrote for us a truly significant account of Jeanne-Marie's early relationship with Marie Jotillon and of their encounter with the inspired young director Jean-Philibert Lefranc who really gave them their spirituality. It is a remarkable story. So Mother Ambrose is very important; certainly something happened and she took us in a different direction but she gave us something wonderful.

2. Denise Husson, in whatever spare moments she can find in her work as General Councillor, is reading and transcribing the letters of the other Superiors General who followed Ambrose.

### **Development of our Historical Centre in Belley**

Both the past and current General Administrations have put considerable money, time and energy into building up our historical centre in Belley, the Jeanne-Marie Chavoin Centre. The last Administration established a proper museum. Our Administration was given the mandate of establishing the centre as a place of formation, of study and of renewal, and it was our task to find the personnel as Winifred Rose was well in her eighties. We managed to find two sisters: Teri O'Brien, an enthusiastic Canadian, and Marie Chalacombe, an enthusiastic Englishwoman who belongs to the New Zealand Province. The two are very different but they have really given themselves totally to the task of transformation of that place. They have built on what Winifred established over twenty-five years.

Teri and Marie, amongst other things, are working on making accessible the History of the Marist Sisters by Father Gobillot. Up until recently it has been only available in French on pages copied in purple type. Others have done work on the translation into English, notably Sr Edmund Leonard. Teri and Marie are refining the translation and putting it all onto disk.

We have others who are faithful to the work of translation. Grace Ellul, who worked in Brazil for years, translates everything she can get her hands on into Portuguese in order to support the formation of our sisters in Brazil. Similarly Mari Aranda in Mexico translates everything she can into Spanish. So we have a few very dedicated women on the job. Denise Husson works on the French when she can. The Italian sisters have engaged lay help in translating and printing our more recent publications.

## Formation of Researchers

What are we doing about forming people for this? Nothing really! What happens is that people either take the initiative themselves or are “spotted” by someone interested in furthering the cause. In my case, Joan McBride approached me, saying “Viv, I think that you can write about Jeanne Marie Chavoïn in a new way.” I had no background training for this, but I was very enthused. Joan acted as my mentor, and Gaston Lessard accepted to be my tutor.

So I think this is a form of formation, mentoring, tutoring; I believe it is the passion that people have for the task that seems to not only drive them to do it, but to seek the help they need. And so we will be turning to members of the family as usual, we will be relying on you to support us in continuing this significant work.

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## 4. THE MARIST BROTHERS

Br. André LANFREY, fms

The subjects treated below provide only a brief overview of research carried out in the last ten years. Much of this has provided subjects for articles in the *Marist Notebooks*. As it generally happens, such research can generate more questions than it resolves, but helps to persuade us that the Marist origins remain a fruitful worksite and that it is appropriate to pursue the scholarly and historical tradition generated by the *Origines Maristes* of Fathers Coste and Lessard.

As to the study of internal primary sources, Brother Paul Sester is putting the finishing touches to an edition of the writings of Champagnat other than his letters, a critical edition of which appeared in two volumes in 1985 – 87.

An intense work of putting into digital form the manuscripts of the first successors of Champagnat, of the first General Chapter has largely been accomplished thanks to the perseverance of numerous retired brothers and particularly to Brother Louis Richard. Therefore, with the Marist Brothers the research has not been hindered by the difficulty of access to the sources but rather by the lack of competent people to exploit them. In this context, the co-ordination between formators and the Brothers responsible for the Patrimony could be improved.

As to the historical research carried out on sources exterior to the Institute, there are a number of results to report:

#### ***4.1 The Society of Mary of Spain and the Marists***

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The cleric Bernard Daries attempted to create in Spain, between 1792 and 1796, a Society of Mary hoping to revive the Society of Jesus under another form. The Marists became aware of this Society between 1827 and 1830 (copy of a letter by Champagnat: OM1 doc. 418). Fathers Coste and Lessard supposed that the informer was M. Pierre Babad, a Sulpician exiled in Spain then in the United States of America before returning to France towards 1820.

Some research at Saint Sulpice and at the Foreign Missions in Paris allowed me to confirm this hypothesis. Having come to the diocese of Lyon in 1826, Pierre Babad provided the information to his nephew who communicated it to the Marists (Séon, Terrailon or Cholleton?) at a time (1827 – 1830) when they had need of being emancipated from the revelation of Le Puy. Courveille having always denied any filiation, the legend of the old priest (Jesuit) of Le Puy seems clarified, even if the idea of Courveille is inscribed in a certain sensibility and a certain milieu.

#### ***4.2 Le Puy***

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We know that Courveille and Champagnat came from parishes of the old diocese of Le Puy and that the Marists nourished the project of coming together in this city.

My research, quite disappointing because the archives of the bishop have been burnt twice – at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries – however, was not useless. It seems to me to have given three notable results.

I could identify in Puy an old Jesuit, Jacques Bertrand, retired there before the Revolution and still active in 1802. It is unlikely that he had an influence on the Courveille project. Still, there is an old Jesuit in Puy at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Above all, Le Puy is famous for the victorious resistance to the Revolution carried out especially in its most mountainous part, in the district of Yssingeaux whose parishes of Champagnat (Marlhes) and Courveille (Apinac and Usson) are extensions. From 1795 onwards, the defiant priests more or less allied to the royalists exercised a significant influence there. M. Mijolas, particularly defiant, looked after Marlhes and St Genest Malifaux.

Bishop de Galard, exiled in Switzerland, maintained in his diocese a typically defiant spirituality: sacrificial, missionary, royalist and ultramontane. That is probably why the diocese of Puy would not be re-established in 1802. There could be a link between this resistant ambiance, continued by Vicars General such as Richard, and the desire of the Marists to come together there.

### **4.3 Convergences with Pierre de Clorivière**

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Pierre de Clorivière, ex-Jesuit, founder of the priests of the Heart of Jesus and of the Daughters of the Heart of Mary during the Revolution expressed a spirituality whose convergences with that of the Marists are troubling: eschatology of the fifth and sixth ages (persecution then apostasy), glory of God under the auspices of the Virgin Mary, universalism, secret, welcome of all states of life, devotion to the Apostolic See...

Is this a coincidence of intuitions or can we detect a causal influence? In any case the Clorivière project enjoyed the favours of the clandestine administration of the diocese (Linsolas) and in 1802 Clorivière had a strong contact in Lyon with Claude Cholleton, uncle of Jean Cholleton, the protector of the Marist project, who seems himself to have been very committed in the secret societies of seminarians.

### **4.4 Influences on the Pledge of 1816**

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Father Coste has shown that J.C. Colin had been strongly influenced by *The Mystical City* of Maria d'Agreda. No doubt it is necessary to widen this influence to the whole of the Marist project because the Fourvière pledge bears the trace of two passages of *The Mystical City*: the one that relates to Pentecost (in connection to the Second Letter to the Corinthians) and an-



other that describes the sharing of the universal mission between the twelve, one year after Pentecost. Nor does the Summary of the rules of the Society of Jesus seem foreign to the pledge.

#### **4.5 *The Friends of the Cord***

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The in-depth examination of the archives of “Chartreux” allowed me to show that the Marists were not the only fervent group of seminarians: they were preceded at St Irénée by a pious and secret association, the “Friends of the Cord” founded towards 1805. They involved themselves in exercises of devotion and of charity and pronounced at the time of their ordination a very detailed promise that made them true religious, but without vows. Numerous sympathisers and followers of the Marist project belonged to this: Jean-Philibert Lefranc, Pierre Colin, Jean Cholleton, Félix Pichat, Jean-Antoine Gillibert, Pierre Pousset, and other. J.M. Chavoïn was subjected to their influence (by Lefranc) and probably also Champagnat. The “Chartreux” of Bochard seem also largely to have come from this milieu.

The memoirs of Mioland, of Pierre Pousset and the letters of Gillibert give us a good idea of the atmosphere that prevailed in the seminary during the years 1807 – 1816: spiritual resistance more and more manifested, then the oscillation of a great number towards the mix of royalty – Church, of which the consecration of Fourvière bears the trace.

#### **4.6 *The lasting division of the diocese under the Vicars General of Fesch and under de Pins***

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An anonymous letter of 1816 (of M. Chézelle) denounced the oblates of Bochard who attempted secretly to monopolise the formation in the seminaries. The Marists seem to be included in these oblates.

The Synod of de Pins in 1827 was the occasion for the Gallican and “Feschist” opposition to manifest itself. Jean-Antoine Gillibert seems to have played a major role in this opposition.

On the contrary, Cholleton, an active member of the society of the friends of the cord and close friend of M. Emery, the superior of Saint

Sulpice, had to renounce his plans of entering Saint Sulpice and became one of the poles of the legitimist milieu of Lyon behind Bishop de Pins, as his Vicar General.

In 1839, de Pins, the administrator of the diocese of Lyon, compromised too much with Legitimism, had to renounce succeeding Fesch. Cholleton, whose ecclesial career was blocked, becomes a Marist to avoid making allegiance with a royalty that wants to offer him a sideline: a canonicate. But, in what measure was this joining compromising for the Society of Mary?

#### ***4.7 Evidence concerning the Marists between 1819 and 1830***

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The letter of Pierre Colin to Bishop Bigex, bishop of Pignerol, is perhaps the major discovery of these last few years as it gives the first history of the foundation of the Society of Mary three years after the pledge of Fourvière and it provides the complete text.

The account of M. Faillon, Sulpician, reminds us that in 1827 a secret society survived that seemed to serve as a nursery for the Marists. Perhaps it was a continuation of the “Friends of the Cord”.

The papers of Mioland, superior of the “Chartreux” give us some important information on the personality of Bochard and the foundation of his society of the fathers of the Cross of Jesus. They describe the state of the spirit of the Marists in Belley in 1830, at the time of the quarrel with Bishop Devie who wants to make them diocesan missionaries.

Finally, a document discovered with the Brothers of the Holy Family of Belley, and whose author seems to be Pompallier, gives us some “Statutes of the Society of Mary” of the Hermitage in 1830. These make the Brothers the centre of the Society, and the priests a periphery of chaplains and missionaries. Such a perspective seems to explain the opposition of Séon and of the majority of the priests of the Society of Mary of Lyon to such a society.

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## **CONCLUSION**

From all this research, it seems that we can isolate or confirm some attainments and major documents:

- The weight of the counter-Revolutionary (“refractaire”) spirituality in the Marist spirit.
- Marie d’Agreda as an inspirer of the first Marist group and not only of Colin.
- The Friends of the Cord as an accompanying milieu of the Marist project.
- The personality of Cholleton: perhaps more inspiring at the beginning and later less Marist than one had believed.
- The documents of 1819 and 1830, which shed light on the important stages of the development of the Society.



# *Unity and Diversity in the Society of Mary Mysticism, History and Canon Law*

**Br. André LANFREY, fms**

*This text is not exactly the one that was presented to the representatives of the various Marist branches but its author thinks it presents the spirit of it.*

*It was inspired by a previous reflection on the nature of the Institute of the Marist Brothers of which it takes up numerous elements, and which poses the question: what is the identity of the Brothers? A branch of the Society of Mary or the Society of Mary of the Hermitage?*

*Everyone will understand that it is not a matter of a simple problem of vocabulary and that this question naturally leads to another larger question: basically, what is the Society of Mary?*

- A confederation of congregations stemming from various original branches incarnated in particular histories?*
- An original common spirituality having evolved differently according to the different branches but still with a fundamental link between them?*
- A common history, at least during the first decades of the Society?*

*These definitions do not exclude each other but their understanding has evolved in Marist history and the time has perhaps come to open a discussion on this complicated and delicate subject.*

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## **I. THE SOCIETY OF MARY, FROM DREAM TO REALISATION (1816 – 1836)**

In the pledge of July 1816, the twelve Marist aspirants declared they would devote themselves to the institution “of the pious congregation of the Mari-ists” that they named a little further on as “the society of the blessed Virgin Mary”. *Origines Maristes* (OM) note that the expression “Societatis Mariae” appeared for the first time in the Latin letter from the Marist aspirants to the Pope on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1822 (OM1 doc. 65) but the letter of Pierre Colin to Bishop Bigex found in 1996 mentions “Society of Mary” from the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1819<sup>1</sup> clearly fixing its origin in the revelation of Courveille at Puy.

When he presented the Society of Mary to the Roman authorities in December 1833 in the *Summarium regularum societatis Mariae* (OM1 doc. 294) J.C. Colin mentioned that it includes four “ordines”: priests, brothers, sisters and lay confraternity. We know that Rome found “che il piano è mostuoso”<sup>2</sup>. Also J.C. Colin only obtained Roman approval for the congregation of priests of the Society of Mary (OM1 doc. 373 § 7) by the decree of the 11<sup>th</sup> March 1836 which does however mention the other branches of the society (§ 3) left waiting. The brief “Omnium Gentium” of the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1836 (OM1 doc. 384) no longer mentions them and thus obliterates the memory of the original plan as the commentary of the document mentions in OM1 p. 874. Thus, the equation is implicitly posed by Rome: Society of Mary = Society of Marist Fathers.

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### **I.1 Society of Mary or Society of Marist Fathers?**

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This canonical definition did not prevent the various Marist branches from keeping the essential idea of a Society of Mary mystically alive, but it makes the term “Society of Mary” very ambiguous<sup>3</sup>; and especially it makes the Society of Fathers the owners of a title that, in practice, places the Brothers, Sisters and Third Order laity as auxiliaries.

In short, the three branched tree planned in 1816 and augmented by the branch of the Brothers makes way for a new image that implicitly situates the

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<sup>1</sup> André Lanfrey and Paul Sester, Complement to “Origines Maristes”, in *Marist Notebooks* n° 11.

<sup>2</sup> Doc. 304 § 16, Report by Cardinal Castracane, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1834.

<sup>3</sup> Nothing more significant in this regard than the title of the work of Jean Coste: *Cours d'histoire de la Société de Marie (Pères Maristes). 1786 – 1854*, Rome, 1965.

Society of Fathers as the trunk while the Brothers, Sisters and Third Orders constitute the branches. One of the foundation stones of 1816, the *Cor unum et anima una*, which supposed a rigorous equality between the members and the branches of the Society, found itself somewhat weakened. Under the weight of history and canonical rules, the definition of the Society is confused.

## **1.2 Towards a congregational logic**

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As an immediate consequence, the Roman intervention forced each of the other entities of the Society of Mary to question the nature and the extent of the links with the Marist Fathers, and whether to keep with the Fathers or not. It would seem, that shortly before his death, Champagnat considered the possibility of an association with the Marist Fathers that did not involve a complete merger, but kept Father Colin in a role as centre of unity more than as a superior. We know that later the Marist Brothers would be freed from such a union, which in one section of the Fathers hid a desire for guardianship of the Brothers.

This way of positioning the Marist Fathers at the centre of the Society, and the rest at the periphery, led to a generally accepted historical rhetoric, the attempts of the Society of Mary before 1830-36 coming to be seen as preliminary foundations for the work eventually accomplished by the careful efforts of the man of Providence: Father Colin. That is why, even though very conscious of their own originality and their success, the Marist Brothers never contested conceptually the title of the Society of Mary with the Marist Fathers.

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## **2. THE MARIST BROTHERS CONSCIOUS OF BEING A SOCIETY APART**

The *Little Brothers of Mary* have an historical claim to be the *Society of Mary of the Hermitage* because:

- a) Champagnat never dissociated the foundation of the Brothers from that of the Society of Mary;
- b) the Hermitage was the first attempt, in part successful, to constitute it;

c) if the inspiration of Champagnat and the first Brothers drew largely from the source of the pledge of Fourvière, it had its own originality. In short, there is a Society of Mary of the Hermitage, sister to that of Belley and not its daughter or prototype.

This is what the Marist Brothers have always strongly felt and Brother Seán Sammon in his circular “A Revolution of the heart” of the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2003 is very clear on this subject:

“Since 1976, the expression *Marist apostolic spirituality* has often served as a reference for discussions on this subject. For several reasons, I prefer the expression *the spirituality of Marcellin*. [...] The treasure that he passed on to our first brothers and to each one of us within the Church is unique and different from the heritage of Jean-Claude Colin for example. The influence of the latter is evident on the spirituality of the members of the other branches of the Society of Mary, but **not so much** on our own.”

It could not be better said, suggesting the inevitable consequence of the Marist Brothers being an autonomous Society of Mary.

## **2.1 The need for balance of judgement**

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Let us prudently retain, from the quotation that I have just made, the phrase “not so much”, one that merits further exploration, because the documentary evidence of the origins invites us to avoid a point of view that is too identity-based. In *Origines Maristes*, Fathers Coste and Lessard remind us that the Society of Mary was, indeed, a collective work, able to accommodate diversity and unity with considerable success, at least until 1854, that is to say until the end of the Generalate of Father Colin.

On the other hand, working myself on the origins of the Marist Brothers, I could be convinced that no serious work on this subject can be undertaken without a deep knowledge of all the Marist sources, at least during the first half century of the Society of Mary. For example, many words of Father Colin agree with and enlighten those of Champagnat, and vice versa. The letter of Marie Jotillon in 1820, built around the motto *Cor unum*, sheds light on a fundamental trait of the spirituality of the Society. Therefore, the various branches of the Society of Mary, and in first place the Marist



Brothers, must consider that they are not the descendants of any particular founder as exclusively as they may believe. Perhaps we should borrow from the Marist Missionary Sisters the concept of “Pioneers” to explain the Marist origins more authentically: a network of multiple poles and various personalities, the leaders of which became separated bit by bit.

In proposing, therefore, a hypothesis of a *Society of Mary of the Hermitage*, albeit strongly supported historically and spiritually, I must concede that the Brothers are only fully understood at the heart of a utopian and mystical matrix, one largely rooted in the context of the Hermitage. If there is a *Society of Mary of the Hermitage*, it can only be understood as one pole of the single *Society of Mary*.

But this can only be conceived in the image of the Church: realised fully in each of its communities, which at the same time are only legitimate in the communion with the other expressions of the same Spirit. Thus no branch of the Society is the exclusive proprietor of the label “SM”; all can claim it on the condition that they recognise themselves part of a whole. The Brothers are indeed the Society of Mary, but of the Hermitage, not of Belley, of Lyon or of Oceania.

It is in this way that the various branches of the Society experience their links, but not without numerous ambiguities that are useful to raise.

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### **3. WHY CLARIFY THE MARIST LINK?**

I have already highlighted above certain ambiguities of this link: the tendency to see the Society with a centre and a periphery; too exclusive a devotion to each particular founder or foundress; a conception of Marist spirituality too limited to each particular branch. But these are the less important matters. The pivotal question is the founding event of 1836, when Rome granted canonical recognition only to the Marist Fathers.

The Society of Mary, until then founded on an ecclesiology based on fervent egalitarian groups and networked to serve a Church context faced with impiety, had to submit to an ecclesiology founded on the hierarchy,

the primacy of the priesthood, Christendom. A narrow *congregational* logic prevailed over that of *society*, the notion of branches being absorbed by that of congregations specialising in certain tasks of varying importance: to the Marist Fathers the colleges, the seminaries, the missions; to the Brothers the primary schools; to the Sisters the education of young girls. One cannot deny that this clarification had its benefits, and Father Colin made a worthy contribution in accepting an imperfect incarnation of the Society that allowed each branch to cultivate its own way of being Marist.

But today, the debate on the nature of the Society of Mary takes place in a post-Vatican II context, in a Church that has been conceived as the pilgrim People of God in a secular world. In this new understanding, priesthood and religious life have a new relativity as expressions of the one Christian baptism, and therefore the image of the Society of Mary as a confederation of congregations – as branches – has largely lost its relevance. In its stead, the Society of Mary understood as a mystical reality, or as a current of spirituality capable of gathering Christians from all ecclesial horizons, must come to the forefront.

In reality, such an re-imagining of the Society of Mary for this new time in the Church and the world comes easily and naturally because the ecclesiology of Vatican II ratifies the Society's initial inspiration.

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#### **4. THE CONCEPT OF THE SOCIETY OF MARY OF THE HERMITAGE AS THE BEGINNING OF A SOLUTION**

In practice, however, the realising of this is not so straightforward, for we cannot delete the long history from our memories or rid ourselves lightly of the congregational contexts that have evolved. It is, therefore, on more mystical and conceptual levels that we can most easily act and that is why I have attempted to introduce for the Marist Brothers the idea of the *Society of Mary of the Hermitage*, as larger and better approach to the spirit of the origins than that of the Marist Brothers on their own.

On two points at least the concept of the *Society of Mary of the Hermitage*

would allow us to develop questions that are particularly crucial, specifically the relationship with the laity and the priesthood.

If one works only from the framework of a religious institute, laypeople who are associated with a specific Marist entity always figure as auxiliaries – a “third order” or “fraternity”. The idea of a society, on the contrary, represents equality and polycentrism. It suggests that individuals or groups can exist linked with the group that is the historical bearer of the spirit of the society, without necessarily making exclusive commitment to it but keeping communion with it.

Vis-à-vis the priesthood, the Marist Brothers, as an institute, have in recent times rejected the proposal that one can be a brother and a priest at the same time. But in a vision of an open society, one cannot see why priests could not be, individually or collectively, recognised in communion of spirituality with the *Society of Mary of the Hermitage*. Even sisters inspired by the *Society of Mary of the Hermitage* exist: recall the “hermanitas” in Latin America.

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## **5. THE SOCIETY OF MARY OF THE HERMITAGE AS AN INCOMPLETE SOCIETY**

The hypothesis of a *Society of Mary of the Hermitage* only makes sense if we include the notion of incompleteness, something that plays out at several levels.

On the one hand, Champagnat’s project aimed to create a body of capable laypeople to catechise children and young people; on the other hand these laypeople had to be spiritually directed by priests living the same life as they. In fact, after 1830, with Champagnat and some Marist Fathers set apart, the Brothers became an intermediary body between the laity and a priesthood jealous of its autonomy but somewhat cornered in narrow perspectives.

The incompleteness of the *Society of Mary of the Hermitage* is clear in the context of the whole Society of Mary: neither Father Champagnat nor his successors challenged the link to the whole of the Society, even when this was strongly distended. In the same way, despite times of conflict, none

of the branches of the Society challenged the legitimacy of another to claim to be Marist. That is why the specificity of the qualifying phrase “of the Hermitage” is so important. It implies other sister societies established in other places both symbolically and physically.

Overall, the concept of an incomplete society opens to us a future by proposing that the Brothers are not a single congregation fixed on lionising its origins and glorious history: an association of old warriors. On the contrary, this society has the mission of taking up the original project at a new cost: the universal mission in society for the glory of God and the honour of Mary, but interpreted by Champagnat: “We need brothers (in the larger sense and not only congregational)”.

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## **CONCLUSION**

I do not know if the proposition of an incomplete and localised Society of Mary can inspire the other branches of the Society because I am aware that the image of the tree with three branches and the strong link with Father Colin have given them a strong identity in belonging to the Society of Mary. The Brothers, the fourth branch attached relatively late in the piece and strongly constituted, seem to me to be a specific case: more than just a branch, but less than the whole Society. I cannot find any better definition for them than the expression “Society of Mary of the Hermitage”.

It is the idea of incompleteness that could be the most fruitful for the Marists of today. In effect, if we relativise the notion of congregation, each of the Marist branches can undertake to construct a network of laypeople, priests, male and female religious, of men and women, not primarily defined by an old limitations of a religious institute, but by the Marist spirit that belongs to all of them and for which new possibilities could be developed.

As to the Society of Mary as a whole, incarnated in all the particular Societies of Mary but transcending them all, should it not have the vocation to become a place of research, of debate, and of defining of the Marist spirit: in short, a school of spirituality?

## **AFTERNOON: FORMATION IN MARIST PATRIMONY**

Father Kevin Mowbray could not be present in the afternoon so there was no presentation from the Marist Fathers.

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### **I. MARIST SISTERS**

Sister Vivienne, sm

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#### **I.1 Preliminary Remarks**

How do we Marist Sisters keep our spiritual patrimony alive?

In addressing this question, let me say that we never see our spiritual patrimony in isolation from the rest of the Marist Family, nor do I believe we ever have. There has always been an understanding and appreciation of the whole “Marist Project”. That term is not used very widely among our Sisters today, yet there seems to be a growing sense that this “Tree-with-many-branches” is not exactly a family either. However, whatever terminology we use, the concept treasured by the Marist Sisters is one which includes men, women, lay and religious - all called to live out their lives in a *certain way* as Father Craig Larkin has put it. For our early Sisters, especially for our Foundress, to see the Marist Sisters without reference to what the group at Fourvière pledged was unthinkable. The Marist Sisters grew from that foundational moment, just as did the Marist Fathers, the Marist Brothers, and later, the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary.

Therefore, Marcellin Champagnat, as well as Jean-Claude Colin and others, has been part of our story from the beginning. For us, Marcellin is one of the early Marist Fathers, who was part of the group at Belley, who visited our Foundress, who wrote her that wonderful letter treasured by us because it shows the understanding between the two.

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#### **I.2 Learnings from Marist Family Renewals**

As a congregation, we take every opportunity to be with other members of the Marist Family and to have times of sharing and learning from one another. One strong expression of this is through our appreciation of what

used to be known as ***Marist Family Renewals***. They began in Fribourg – I’m not sure of the year. My experience was in 1998 in Belley which was the last renewal of its type. During that time, as well as seeing the closeness between Marcellin and Jeanne-Marie, I also came to appreciate in a deeper way the SMSM expression of Marist charism and spirituality. Towards the end of that renewal, one of your brothers shared an insight which had struck him quite profoundly – namely, that the Marist charism is not contained in any one branch of the Tree. This links with what I understood André to be saying earlier today.

What I find interesting about the insight of my FMS companion is that it was something I already knew – I had grown up with that understanding from my initial formation – that our congregation is part of something much bigger, that it belongs to a wider group and that each part of this group is unique, having its own special contribution to make, and no one of us can claim that we have the Marist charism to ourselves. It is a gift that comes through the total group.

### ***1.3 Interbranch Commissions across the Marist General Councils***

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Perhaps what was stirred in me during that Renewal was a new strong sense of the need to keep sharing across these different parts of our family. The opportunity to do just that has been offered to me here in Rome. At the first gathering of the Marist General Councils we decided to form Interbranch Commissions, I joined the one on Marist Spirituality and have worked with Marie Emmanuel Fuchs SMSM, Théoneste Kalisa FMS and Jan Hulshof SM. The four of us have received so much from just being with each other. More than that, we have explored and opened up one or two ways to promote an approach to Marist spirituality in the global sense referred to earlier by André. I believe it is through this “global approach” that we will learn best what it is we are called to be and do as Marists in today’s world.

### ***1.4 Initial Formation***

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This global concept of the Marist enterprise is one of the principles upon which we have based our Congregational Guidelines for Initial Formation. From the outset our members are aware of our belonging to the wider group. Their study of Marist history is set in the context of Fourvière. From there, in

studying the history specific to the Marist Sisters and in pondering our charism and spirituality, they learn that we have our own specifically feminine way of engaging in Marist life and mission and, therefore, a unique contribution to make. Another aspect of our spirituality is its internationality, its trans-cultural nature. So, before final profession a sister would usually come away from her own country in order to have a broader experience of Marist life.

### **1.5 On-Going Formation - Programmes**

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At all stages of a sister's life, we encourage renewal. We have come to see the benefit of a specially Marist aspect of all forms of renewal. Our current administration is in favour of more Marist Family Renewals, if that were possible.

Initiatives since the last General Chapter include:

- **International Renewals** for our Sisters:
  - ***Meaning, Mission and Vision 2005***: for younger women, from twelve countries and four language groups but the whole underpinning of what we did was Marist and included a pilgrimage to France. We looked at the vows, at ministry and mission, we looked at the person of Mary, a number of different topics, but it was all set within the context of who we are all called to be as Marist women in today's world. Our base was your centre at Manziana and we had an input from Brother Seán and a Marist Father as our chaplain. So there was the wider dimension too.
  - ***Pathways of Promise 2006***: this year we have another group based in France, for older women from only two language groups, but still a number of countries. The whole renewal is based on the pilgrimage. An interesting comment from this group of sisters came from one of our very strong missionary women, recently forced to retire due to poor health. At 70 she had thought she was too old to do a renewal but claimed "I am coming alive again". The whole group expressed that they do not want renewals that are based solely on religious life, theology, Scripture. What they need and desire is the Marist connection. It is this which gives them new life and energy for mission.

- **Combined SM-SMSM Leadership Course 2004**

This was a wonderful experience of collaboration with the SMSM. Our focus was what leadership means for Marist women religious. The comments from the participating sisters were very heartening. We know our two groups are different but there is a spiritual bond between us that, given the opportunity, can be felt very readily. And I believe that once it has happened it is not forgotten. Because it is something that is not to do with the head, it is an experience. At the conclusion of our combined programme we had a memorable session; the SM leadership team sat with the SMSM participants and the SMSM leaders were with the SM participants. We simply asked, “Is there anything you want to say to us?” What ensued was full-hearted appreciation of the other branch, which could be summed up as: “We are *sisters*, we really are!”

- **Development of the JMC Centre**

In this morning’s input about research, I mentioned the Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn Centre in Belley. We encourage individual sisters to go there, to take up a particular topic, to study and to discover more. Certainly that can have a lasting impact. My two months in 1998 with Winfred Rose as my mentor gave my life as Marist a whole new meaning.

- **A Regional Initiative:**

Our sisters of the Asia-Pacific Region have done their own study of the pioneer women who began Fiji, New Zealand, Australia and the Philippines. They have produced materials for individual and community use. The story of each pioneer sister is based on detailed research and is accompanied by a process to make the link with “What does that mean for us now?”

## **1.6 On-Going Formation - Approach**

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Generally, whatever congregational study we undertake or renewals we plan, we always try weave in the Marist dimension. For us this implies more than an intellectual approach. We usually design processes for the integrating of the new learnings into our lives. In other words, we never undertake any in-depth study without somehow connecting it to our Marist



heritage and to the living of Marist Mission today. Further examples of this are the congregational studies undertaken in the last few years:

- **2002: JPIC**

Our topic was “*The Transforming Power of Gospel Non-violence*”. A package was sent to each sister covering various aspects, including *Marist Charism and Gospel Non-violence* and *Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn and Gospel Non-violence*.

- **2004–2005: Religious Authority and Obedience**

The General Chapter of 2001 asked for a common study at congregational level to help us reclaim our understanding of religious authority and obedience. This study became another way of looking at Mary as *our first and perpetual superior*. Responses were collated at general level and a booklet compiled for personal and/or communal reflection. It has been received very well.

Another example of the use of process was in regard to the publication of “Patterns”, the most recent version of Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn’s story. We did not want to leave it just as a book. So there is an accompanying set of Reflection Leaflets, one per chapter. The process provides for initial personal reflection, sharing with one or two others, discussion at a more intellectual level, further personal reflection and then prayer. Our sisters really appreciate that approach.

## **Conclusion**

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I believe it is true to say that, when we Marist Sisters take the opportunity to savour our spiritual patrimony, it is not difficult to “fan into a flame the gift of God within us”. The spark is definitely there. Furthermore, in taking the time to savour, to ponder as Mary did, we find the energy, the passion to live what the treasure implies.

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## 2. MARIST MISSIONARY SISTERS

*Sister Marie Emmanuel FUCHS, smsm*

The SMSM Chapter of 2001 expressed in its mandate to the new General Council as a priority to help the congregation to return to its sources, to deepen our SMSM life at all levels, then to express the Marist dimension of our charism for community and for mission and also how to exercise authority in the way of Mary.

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### 2.1 First, the deepening of Marist Spirituality

We are lucky having Sister Emerentiana in the house at Rome who is working without respite at providing all the necessary elements to deepen our charism and to better define the specificity of our Marist religious and missionary vocation. She works in tandem with Sister Ancilla who comes twice a year to Rome to collaborate with Sister Emerentiana. They have just presented us the fruit of their reflection in a booklet that is precious for all our sisters on “THE VOCATION OF THE PIONEERS”.

During these last few years, Sister Emerentiana has produced several spirituality booklets well developed on precise Marist themes coming from the sources, both from the Marist Tradition and from the lived experience of our pioneers. These booklets are entitled: “Mary, First and Perpetual Superior”, “Through a Choice of Favour”, “Family of Mary”, “Instruments of the divine Mercy” etc... They are always presented in the same format. There is a good explanatory introduction followed by different sources: Holy Scripture, the texts of the Church, Father Colin, our first rules and Constitutions, our current Constitutions and of course extracts from the letters of the pioneers. These documents are very practical for deepening, teaching, reading, praying and sharing about our charism in order to take hold of it and understand it better.

These base documents serve as material for all our formation groups.

We have a great concern for **Marist formation at all levels.**

**The General Council** itself enters this formation by reading and working on these booklets which then serve as material during our visits and sessions.

All the renewal groups that come to Rome enjoy a Marist renewal: the second novices, the new Provincials, the formators and the sisters in formation for leadership.

Since last year, we have organised each year a **Marist month** following a rather complete and intensive programme with subjects that are specifically Marist. As we had to study the Marist Spirit with the formators, we invited other sisters from different Provinces, who wanted to constitute a group of all ages in one same language.

On their arrival, the sisters find in the library a table well garnished with Marist base documents. We encourage them as much as possible to read and to share what they have read. This is very stimulating.

Then we use the Spirituality booklets on the Marist/SMSM sources of Sister Emerentiana mentioned above.

As well, this year I was invited to give a Marist month in Senegal. It was a bit different to Rome because the sisters had to try to free themselves in the afternoon to take part in this formation while maintaining their apostolic activities in the morning.

## **2.2 Openness to the other Marist branches**

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Each year we are making progress in the collaboration between brothers, fathers and sisters.

There was a session with **the Marist Sisters** on leadership. We also received a Marist Sister from Senegal for a few weeks during the last French language Second Novitiate.

**The Marist Brothers** invite us to Manziana to present our congregation to each group.

During the Marist month of 2006, we organised a panel of four General Councillors who presented an aspect of their Marist life. It was interesting to hear everyone express themselves with their own convictions.

I have also noted something lacking to be made up for. I received a gentle reproach from the African Marist Fathers during the Marist month in Sene-

gal. “And us? Are we not invited to your meetings?” As well, Father Hubert SM was at the same time visiting this country. Couldn’t we have organised something together? For me, I said to myself: “Never again.” Never again would I want to ignore the other Marist communities that are found in the same country as we are during my visits.

**It is a call to advance the welcome of other Marist communities** and to anticipate it in our programmes by taking it into account in our visits and formation sessions.

Father Jan Hulshof was able to bring all the Marist branches together in New Caledonia and that was beneficial for them afterwards for a better collaboration.

We are also trying to participate in the formation of laypeople in the villages and we have asked to have a delegate in each region and Province to whom we send material.

We are lucky to have more formation, more materials, more documents to take hold of our spirituality and we hope that the sisters, when they are better formed will be more at ease in living and sharing what makes our richness, that is to say, the Spirit of Mary.

*Bearing her name,  
We do not cease looking at Mary,  
To learn to think,  
speak  
and act like Her  
and to live her life.*

*(Constitutions SMSM N° 49)*

### **3. THE MARIST BROTHERS**

#### **3.1 At the level of the Institute**

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*Br. Antonio RAMALHO, CG*

First, a small word on formation in general across the Institute. For initial formation, each Province has its own programme of formation and usually it is during the novitiate that each person is initiated in the patrimony of the Institute, in spirituality, in the knowledge of the Founder, etc. There are also local or regional experiences concerning the initiation or deepening in our patrimony, addressed both to brothers and laypeople. Some will be presented below. For ongoing formation at the level of the Institute, there are courses organised either for midlife or for the third age in the various official languages of the Institute. Sessions are offered regularly at Manziana (Italy) and at El Escorial (Spain). At Manziana, we have the sessions in the English language, but also the third age courses for the Spanish and Portuguese languages. In 2005 there were sessions in the French language (in place of English) for the two age groups. We are repeating this in 2007. At the Centre of El Escorial we have the courses for the midlife, in the Spanish language for the Spanish and Portuguese language groups.

For all these groups there is always the pilgrimage to the sources of the Institute. That means a presence in general of about two weeks at the Hermitage, for a deepening of the knowledge of Father Champagnat, of our origins, of the history of the Institute and also for a physical contact with the Marist places.

Certain courses or special projects also have a particular regard for the patrimony of the Institute. This is the case at present for a group of seventeen brothers from about fifteen countries and fourteen Provinces who are at the Hermitage where they are finishing a year long course for Formators. The course was held in Nairobi, Kenya, but the last month, that is to say this month of June, they are completing this formation at the Hermitage, in order to live this immersion in our patrimony. Brother Aureliano Brambila has helped this group a great deal for twenty days with the intention of preparing these brothers for initial formation, impregnating them also with this dimension of our spirit, of Marist patrimony.

One can ask oneself if these courses include a larger vision of our Marist branches. Yes they are an occasion for knowing better the history, the per-

sonalities and some significant places of the Congregation of the Fathers, the Sisters and the Marist Missionary Sisters.

Finally, in our Patrimony committee, within the General Council, we are now seeking means to assure on the one hand the preparation of a new generation of researchers on our patrimony and on the other hand the formation of people capable of passing it on well at all levels of Marist formation of brothers and laypeople.

### **3.2 In Mexico**

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*Br. Aureliano BRAMBILA*

At Guadalajara, in Mexico, a centre of studies on the Marist spiritual patrimony, CEPAM, has existed since 1989. Each year we give three courses, each one being of three weeks' duration. The "normal course" has a duration of nine weeks (Cycles A, B, C)

Who is invited? We take all the Brothers and laypeople who ask to come. Up until now nearly two hundred brothers have attended courses. The majority come from Latin America (Argentina, Brazil and Mexico) or from Spain. For the members of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family a cycle of four days of study of Marist patrimony is organised during the year.

CEPAM is not a centre of fundamental research but simply a centre for the diffusion of the patrimony of the Marist Brothers. We work on the three hundred and thirty-nine letters of Father Champagnat, the letters to Father Champagnat numbering two hundred and fifteen, and the thirty-five letters about Father Champagnat. Then come all the testimonies – major, minor and indirect – including those that come from the branch of the Fathers of the Society of Mary. CEPAM uses also all the legislation of the Institute: prospectus, statutes from the start until the current Constitutions.

We also study the historical, geographical and cultural contexts of France at the time of Champagnat. We also treat the Society of Mary in all its branches for we are truly opposed to the teaching of an isolated Champagnat: a kind of *Lone Ranger* or *Rambo*. Also, every person who passes through CEPAM cannot ignore the Society of Mary.

In Mexico, CEPAM operates on a weekend for small courses (three days) with laypeople and parents from our schools in Mexico. Currently, at Guadalajara, we are working with our Marist University to obtain university recognition of various courses given at CEPAM. CEPAM has its own website<sup>4</sup>. Its presentation is sober but it contains a great quantity of documents of Marist patrimony, in French, Spanish and English. Normally the documents (but not the studies) are in two columns: French and Spanish, French and English, French and Portuguese.

Two CEPAM centres function outside of Mexico: one in Brazil which is now an extension of the University of Porto Alegre; the other at Les Avelanes and Barcelona in Spain. CEPAM is invited to the Hermitage and other places of international renewal (Rome, El Escorial, Cochabamba, Nairobi, Manila, Davao) to give courses of eight to fifteen days on the patrimony.

The Centre of Studies on Marist Spiritual Patrimony believes in the Society of Mary as a whole, in more a mystical sense than a juridical one. Besides, the presence of the Marist Sisters and Fathers at Guadalajara offers a lot of advantages. Thus, CEPAM has organised, due to the request from Sister Gemma Woods, a one-week session on the Marist patrimony for a group of nine Marist Sisters from eight nationalities.

### **3.3 In Spain**

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*Br. Jaume PARÉS*

#### ***Formation of laypeople in Marist patrimony***

The formation of laypeople in Marist patrimony by the Provinces that are close to the places of origin of the Institute is organised around the contact and knowledge of the “Marist places”. A key part of the work of the Provinces is to facilitate this contact, the journey to the Hermitage. For other Provinces of the Institute this can come late in the process, but we have the opportunity of early contact.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/3630>

There are a number of themes and phases that make up this formation programme. There are three main stages:

- The first stage is focused on knowledge of Marcellin and the first Brothers, a study of the man himself and the reasons that gave birth to the Institute.
- A second stage aims at linking the Marist project with each person, on the human, Christian and Marist levels. What does Marcellin Champagnat's project say to me personally?
- A third stage aims at making the step of commitment with the project. To what am I ready to commit myself? In what measure does the project of Marcellin Champagnat and of the first Brothers involve my life? The forms and ways of making this commitment are varied.

Another aspect of formation is based on charism and spirituality, understood as ongoing formation, is the "formation routes", where each person deepens a certain aspect of the charism.

All of this formation, in each of its the stages, is planned for both laypeople and Brothers. This common work is the key for deepening and advancing together, and incarnating Champagnat's project today.

### **3.4 In Brazil**

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*Br. Ivo A. STROBINO*

Each Province has its own programme for the formation of laypeople: in the Province of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) it is called JEMAR (Marist educational days); in the Province of Brazil Centro-Norte (BCN) it is called SEMEAR and in the Province of Brazil Centro-Sul (BCS) it is called VIVEMAR (days of Marist life). In principle, these are courses in which information is given on Father Champagnat, on the first Brothers, on Marist spirituality and pedagogy, on Champagnat's letters, on the development of the Institute, on restructuring etc. There are also times for prayer, meals and community leisure activities during which one tries to make our Marist and Marial spirituality come alive.

Brother Ivo spoke mainly about the VIVEMAR programme, developed in his Province. It is a programme consisting of three levels: Vivemar I, Vivemar II and Vivemar III, done in that order. Each stage runs for a five-day



session for groups of forty to fifty laypeople each time. From March 2005 to June 2006 this is a summary of activity:

- Vivemar I: 6 sessions with a total of 245 participants
- Vivemar II: 3 sessions with a total of 110 participants
- Vivemar III: 1 session with a total of 47 participants
- Retreats for lay Marists: 2 totaling 31 participants
- Formation meetings for affiliated members: 1 session with 12 participants

Concerning Marist spiritual patrimony in Marist Brazil (three Provinces) it is worth noting:

- An inter-province Commission composed of six members (two brothers from each Province) of whom three did the Patrimony Course in Rome in 1993. It meets once a year.
- A Centre of Marist Documentation (CEM = Centro de Estudos Maristas) at Belo Horizonte, in the Province of Brasil Centro-Norte. The Centre occupies four floors, with specialised libraries, a museum, iconographic material, etc. for research and studies on Marist themes.
- The translation of important Marist works. The next anticipated publication is the translation in Portuguese of “Présences de Marie”, by Father Antoine Forissier.
- The regular publication of “Manancial Marista”, a publication for our lay Marists for the follow up of formation, with spirituality articles, celebrations...

### **3.5 In Oceania**

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*Br. Michael GREEN*

#### ***Programmes in Marist Spirituality and Mission***

In our part of the Marist world – Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific – the priorities are very similar to those that Jaume outlined for Spain. Our number one priority is the formation of lay people in Marist spirituality and mission because, almost entirely, our Marist schools and other ministries are now conducted by lay people. To preserve and to enhance the Marist identity and integrity of these ministries, it is essential that they are led by and staffed by people who are Marist: who self-identify as Marist, and who understand their life, the work and their mission as Marist.

We are currently taking forward this priority in a number of different ways. I will describe four key ones. First, for 13 years now the Sydney and Melbourne Provinces have run a short, four-day residential programme in Marist spirituality and mission for people in our schools and other ministries. Over 2000 people have now completed that programme. We have now begun a second stage of the programme, something that cannot meet the demand for places from people who wish to complete it. But these courses are just an introduction. What is interesting, and heartening, is just how much even a short touch of this Marist way will fire people, will capture their imagination.

A second strategy has also been quite successful. For seven years now we have conducted a longer programme of four weeks. This takes place in France (at l'Hermitage and other Marist places) and here at the General House in Rome. This is a more intensive, serious programme. It is accredited with the universities for people who wish to credit it towards a masters degree, but that is not mandatory.

Third, we also publish an academic journal, through the Champagnat Education Commission which is the educational arm of the Province of Melbourne. The name of the journal is *Champagnat, a Marist Journal of Education*. It is an attempt to develop, at a higher level, some Marist discourse. It is particularly important for those in leadership positions in Marist education.

The next project for us, something that is being considered at the level of the Institute, is to develop a structure or strategy that will deliver more intense formation in Marist spirituality and mission for English speakers. We are looking at meeting the needs and aspirations of people who wish to undertake such study at a graduate level – diploma, masters, and doctorate – and also to provide a centre for short-courses for people undertaking sabbaticals, summer programmes, and other seminars. Where and how this could happen is something about which we have been talking for a few years.

When I say “lay people” I do not mean to imply that the Brothers are excluded. The Brothers take part in these programmes, certainly. But, mostly the participants are lay people. It is they who undertake our Marist mission today, and it is, therefore, their formation as Marists that we are giv-

ing such priority. However, we do have some programmes that are for the Brothers only. For example, for three years now we have conducted a seminar on aspects of our patrimony. Last year the topic of this seminar was Pompallier and the Marist pioneers to the Pacific. This year, the topic is “Marcellin and his Marvellous Companions”, that is to say, Marcellin and the first Brothers. These seminars are conducted by the Province’s Patrimony Committee.



# *The lost leader*

## *(1<sup>st</sup> part)*

*The story of Father Jean-Claude Courveille (1786-1866)  
and his part in the Society of Mary*

**Br. Frederick McMAHON, fms**



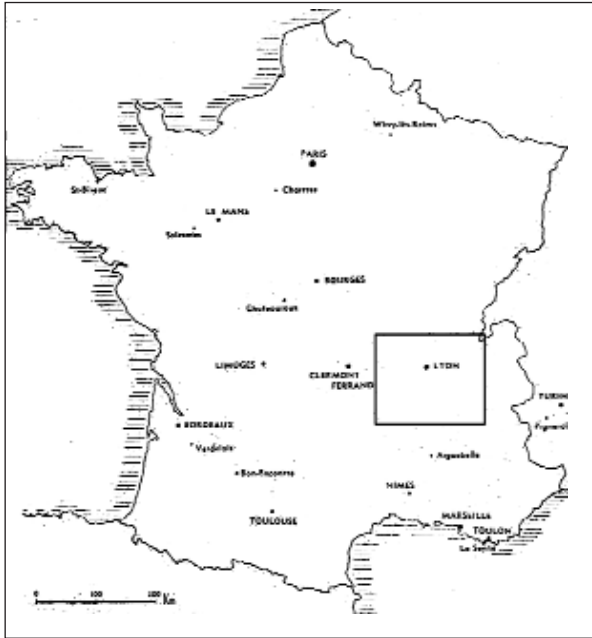
*Jean-Claude Courveille as  
a Benedictine monk later  
in life*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

*This story of the life of Jean-Claude Courveille appears in two parts. The first section is in this present edition (No. 24) of Marist Notebooks. It deals with Courveille's early years in family, his life in the seminary and his initial action in proposing a Society of Mary. The story continues with his sundry appointments after priestly ordination and his many efforts to establish branches of the Society of Mary. We then come to the dramatic events of 1826 and Courveille's subsequent retirement from the Marist scene after his sojourn in the Trappist monastery of Aiguebelle in 1826 – ten years after his ordination.*

*Courveille, however, was not yet finished with matters Marist. In the second section (No.25 'Marist Notebooks') we shall trace his continued efforts and his wanderings for the next ten years until his admission to a Benedictine monastery in 1836. His thirty years of life as a monk, his 'resurrection' as an animator of souls, his character and his place in Marist his-*



tory will be treated in this second section of the story of Courveille, the 'Lost Leader'.

This story of the life of Father Courveille is based partly on the contents of Br Louis Laurent's (Pierre Zind) doctoral thesis "The New Congregations (1800-1830)", on his conferences that appear in the Marist Brothers' "Bulletin of Studies" Nos 156-162. (1955-1956) and in the Marist Brothers' publication "Voyages et Missions". The four volumes of "Origines Maristes" are a further

source of information; they are extensively quoted.



Two maps showing the location of Marist origins and places mentioned in this article

## MIRACLE MAN

Born in 1787 in Usson-en-Forez (Loire), forty kilometres west of St Etienne (Route D104), Jean-Claude Courveille was the son of Claude Courveille and Marguerite Beynieux. Jean-Claude, the seventh child in a family of thirteen children, many of whom died young, was born into a family of merchants. During the French Revolution his mother hid in a wall of their home two statues of Our Lady, one of which was the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Chambraic. Madame Courveille frequently went with her children to pray before the miraculous statue. It is quite understandable, then, that Jean-Claude became attached to the cult of honouring the Virgin Mary and her statues.



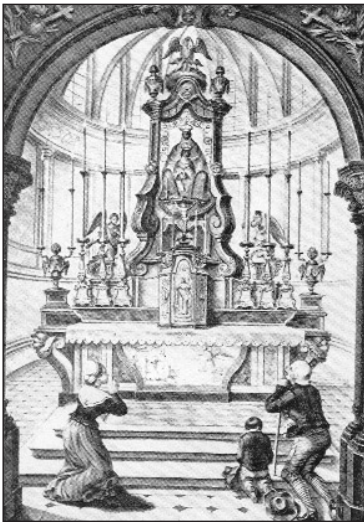
*Le Café Michel, on the site of Courveille's birthplace*

At the age of ten Jean-Claude contracted smallpox which affected the corneas of both eyes and made it impossible for him to study normally. Since the doctors despaired of curing him, young Jean-Claude, who earnestly desired to become a priest, turned to Our Lady of Le Puy, whose shrine was some fifty kilometres to the south. To add to his misfortunes, when he was eighteen years of age, his father died on 26 April 1805.

Something of the miraculous entered the young man's life when he was twenty-two. In 1809 he was cured of his blindness in the cathedral of Le Puy. He smeared his eyes with oil from a lamp burning before the statue of the Blessed Virgin and his sight was restored. At once he could distinguish the smallest objects in the cathedral and from that day he always enjoyed excellent vision. Henceforth he was considered among the most fervent pilgrims at the shrine. In 1810, before the miraculous statue, he consecrated himself entirely to Mary and made her a triple promise "to do all she wished for the glory of Our Lord, for her own honour and for the salvation of souls."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 718, Para. 4

It would appear that in this same year, in full fervour, the young man started his Latin studies, first, some say (the matter is by no means conclusive), at the minor seminary of Verrières, where he made the acquaintance of four of his future companions. He then continued his priestly formation under the direction of his uncle, Fr Beynieux, parish priest of Apinac (Loire), a small town quite close to Usson.

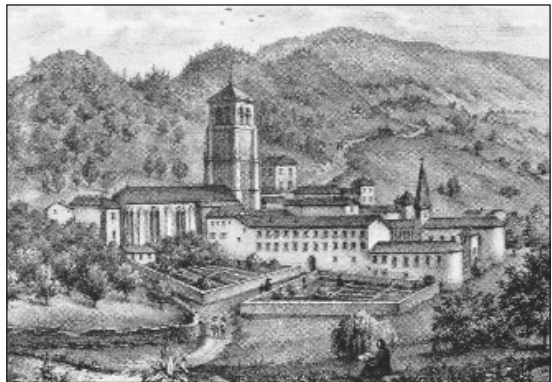


*The main altar at  
Le Puy Cathedral*

### **At the minor seminary in Verrières**

Courveille's Marial consecration was renewed regularly each year. On 15 August 1812, Feast of the Assumption of Mary, again in the cathedral of Le Puy, Jean-Claude acquired a deep certitude that the Blessed Virgin wanted a society bearing her name. The revelation of Le Puy was to be the starting point of the Society of Mary. On this day, at the foot of the same altar, he heard, not with his bodily ears, but with those of his heart, interiorly but very distinctly, "See...here is what I desire. I have always imitated my divine Son in everything and followed Him to Calvary itself, standing at the foot of the cross while He gave his life for men's souls. Now that I am in glory with Him, I imitate what He

did on earth for His Church, of which I am the protectress, like a powerful army defending it and working for the salvation of souls. When a fearful heresy threatened to convulse the whole of Europe, my Son raised up his servant Ignatius to form a Society under His name, calling itself the Society of Jesus and its members 'Jesuits', to fight against the hell unleashed against the Church of my divine Son. So, in these last times of impiety and unbelief, my wish is that there be also a Society consecrated



*The minor meminary at Verrières*



to me, which will bear my name, being called the 'Society of Mary'. Its members will be called Marists; they are to battle against Hell."<sup>6</sup>

It is almost certain that the end of the last phrase replaced a more detailed text which Fr Jeantin, one of the early historians of the Society of Mary, recalled in these terms: "This Society will last until the end of time; it will produce great saints; it will have great glory and will sustain the last struggles with anti-Christ."<sup>7</sup> Astonished, even terrified by this revelation, Jean-Claude Courveille at first kept silent about it, trying to despise this voice which he regarded as a diabolic illusion. At All Saints 1812, however, he entered the major seminary at Le Puy, even though his home town, Usson, had been attached to the diocese of Lyon in 1801. Sentimental reasons clearly explained this choice; the seminary was then very close to the cathedral, so the young seminarian could renew almost daily his earlier promises of 1810 at the foot of the venerated altar.

More and more Courveille became convinced that Mary was reproaching him for resisting her wishes and this caused him great anxiety. In order to gain peace of conscience he heard as many as six Masses one day. He seemed to hear the words, "Speak of it to your directors, disclose all to them and you will see what they will tell you about it."<sup>8</sup> He then spoke to two of his directors, especially the professor of Moral Theology. After time for suitable reflection, they told him that the revelation appeared to be all right to them, that it could well have come from God, that it could be His will, and that Courveille must not despise it. This decided him to consecrate himself to the service of Mary, to whom he attributed his cure.

At All Saints, 1812 Courveille began Philosophy at the major seminary of Le Puy. The next year he began Theology there, but an unexpected incident altered his plans. Since he was soon to receive the tonsure and Minor Orders at the Mende (Lozère) Cathedral on 26 May 1814, he was obliged to obtain from the diocesan administration of Lyon a transfer note authorising this step, but, on 30 April, in the spring of 1814, when he requested dismissorial letters for tonsure, the Lyon archdiocesan councillors decided to refuse this for the reason that the young cleric was totally unknown to them, and they requested him to present himself before the archbishop. He was then reclaimed by the archdiocese of Lyon, to which the parish of his birth

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<sup>6</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 718, Para. 5

<sup>7</sup> O.M. 3, Doc. 881, Para. 2

<sup>8</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 718, Para. 10

had belonged since the Concordat with Napoleon. Jean-Claude thus entered St Irénée, the major seminary at Lyon, at All Saints in 1814 and completed his second and third years of Theology there. It was during this period that he would hold discussions on “the Society”.

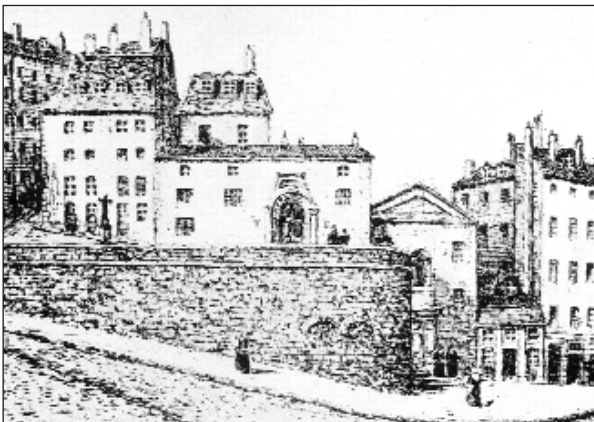
### ***At the major seminary in Lyon***

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In as much as he was in charge of seminaries, Vicar General Bochart had to effect the administrative negotiations relating to the seminarian’s transfer. He was struck by the reluctance shown at Le Puy to release such a subject and, intrigued by this, he asked the reason: “It is because of the project of the Blessed Virgin that I hoped to establish at Le Puy,’ naively replied Courveille. ‘My friend,’ answered the Vicar-General, ‘You will also find in me as good a father as those at Le Puy, and you will do here what you wished to do at Le Puy.’”<sup>9</sup>

Thus it was that, in that one year, 1814, within a matter of a few weeks, three people at the Lyon major seminary revealed their intention of founding a religious society: in June, Father Claude Marie Bochart and Father Nicholas de la Croix d’Azolette, and, now, Jean-Claude Courveille. It was difficult for the Vicar General responsible for religious congregations in the arch-

diocese not to see in this occurrence a sign from Providence and, naturally, Bochart interpreted it according to his personal views. For this reason he favoured the plan of the new seminarian, interviewed him frequently and discussed with him the choice of subjects, even going so far as to say to him, “No, don’t take so-and-so; they are blockheads.”<sup>10</sup> By this man-



*The site of the former major seminary at Lyon – St Irénée*

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<sup>9</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 591, Para. 6

<sup>10</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 551, Para. 3

ner of action Bochard hoped to draw Courveille towards his own project – the Society of the Cross of Jesus - as he had Father Nicholas de la Croix.

To create an atmosphere favourable to the Missions (within France) and therefore to the ideas of "Pious Thoughts", the brochure which Bochard had disseminated among the seminarians to induce them to join his proposed congregation, the life of St John-Francis Regis was read in the refectory. One Wednesday holiday, probably before Easter 1815, Courveille was giving Déclas a haircut, and disclosed to him "that he had the idea, when he became a priest, of doing as St Jean-Francis Regis had done - going through the country districts helping poor people, who often had more need of a visiting priest than people in the towns and cities. There were several priests to choose from for the latter, whereas the former had only one priest, and people were thus liable to make bad confessions."<sup>11</sup> He then asked Déclas if he wished to join him. Déclas replied, "Yes".

Without losing time Courveille began to speak of the future Society of Mary. Sympathisers were not slow to group themselves around him and his project. He was the oldest of them and he dominated by his forceful character and his ready speech. He was the equal of his fellow-students in piety and zeal, and it was he who gave them the idea of the Society of Mary.

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### ***Weaver of wonderful words***

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Father Jean-Claude Courveille was indeed possessed of a golden tongue. We have confirmation of this in the reflections of his contemporaries: "During that period, on one occasion when we went to the country house of the Grand Seminary of Lyon, he spoke to me of the Blessed Virgin in a tone so inspired that perhaps never in my entire life have I received an impression so profound. He had only very ordinary means available to him, but he found in his heart an inspiration that made him at times most eloquent. It is true that he was then a saint; you were transported in listening to him. During his course of Theology he went to Confession to Fr Cholleton, Spiritual Director in the house. Those who presented themselves to the penitential tribunal after him found that the prie-dieu was covered in tears."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 591, Para.7

<sup>12</sup> O.M. 3, Doc 798, Para. 3

Gradually, a group of fifteen seminarians was built up. They met secretly, sometimes in the rooms of Father Jean Cholleton, Professor of Moral Theology, who had been let into the secret and who had been chosen as their adviser, and sometimes at the country house of the seminary. At these re-unions, shrouded in mystery, they encouraged one another, “rejoicing in the honour of being the first children of Mary”<sup>13</sup> and seriously discussing ways of bringing their ideas to fruition. They also debated who should be admitted and the main needs of the people. Courveille presided. He stressed the need of imitating Mary “especially her exquisite humility.”<sup>14</sup> He frequently repeated the motto which the Knights of the Faith had taken from the Knights of Malta and which concluded all their prayers, “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your Name give glory.”<sup>15</sup> Interchange of ideas flowed freely: “They also discussed revelations regarding the project, notably, that the Society of Mary would emerge under the auspices of a most Christian king. This king was identified in 1817-1818, not with the reigning sovereign, but with the child of the Temple, Louis XVII, who would be a great Marist, and to whom the holy Virgin would give all the power she held. They also spoke of eschatology, of Mary as the support of the Church at the end of the world. In prophetic vein, the Society of Mary was imagined as a tree with three branches covering the whole world - Fathers, Sisters, and Third Order.”<sup>16</sup> Eventually, however, Father Gardette, Superior of the seminary, fearing that these private meetings might upset peace and union in the community, moved to moderate and control them.

The words of Fr Terrailon are seconded by those of the level-headed Fr Séon: “Here is what concerns M. Courveille. He commenced his studies very late. He had much zeal and had a natural eloquence; sometimes he even seemed to be inspired. When I was a young seminarian I venerated him and once I went to confess myself to him through veneration and, at the same time, through curiosity. I was very happy about this and very edified. He had studied Saint Chrysostom very extensively. Perhaps the Blessed Virgin would have been able to make more use of him, but, however, he was unfaithful to his vocation.”<sup>17</sup>

During the remainder of the year Courveille used to recall to his companions an attitude of apostolic fervour: “We shall act as did St Jean-Fran-

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<sup>13</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 750, Para. 5

<sup>14</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 750, Para. 5

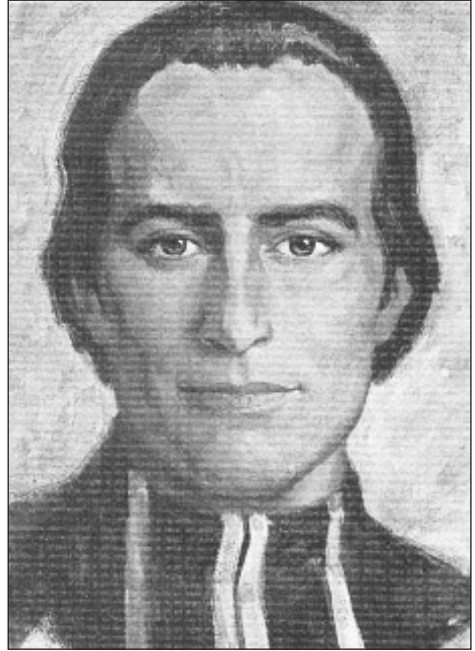
<sup>15</sup> Psalm 113

<sup>16</sup> V & M 138

<sup>17</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 625, Para. 3

cis Regis.”<sup>14</sup> But, when the long vacation came, Courveille, on the eve of the departure day, drew Déclas aside: “You know that what I’ve spoken to you about during the year is serious; there is to be established an Order which will be very similar to that of the Jesuits. Its members will call themselves Marists.”<sup>18</sup> They exchanged the usual promises to write to one another. What is more, they kept their promises.

Marcellin Champagnat had been following courses at St Irenaeus for two years when, after All Saints 1815, he was directly invited by Jean-Claude Courveille to join the Society of Mary. Champagnat, however, was realistic and always had in mind the thought of founding a congregation of teaching Brothers, a branch not provided for in the “original revelations”. When he joined the foundation members of the Marists, he said to them: “I have always felt within me a special desire to establish Brothers. I am very willing to join you, and, if you judge it fitting, I shall take charge of this section. My early education was inadequate; I should be happy to provide for others the advantages of which I myself have been deprived.”<sup>19</sup> As his proposal did not seem to meet with much response, Champagnat insisted: “We must have Brothers; we must have Brothers to teach catechism, to help missionaries and to teach the children.”<sup>20</sup> The usefulness of having Brothers was not disputed, but their founding did not appear in the original plan of the new society and only moderate importance was attached to his continual repetition of “we must have Brothers”.<sup>21</sup> Finally, to free themselves of his importunities, they said, “Very well, you take care of it since you had the first idea of it”.<sup>22</sup> These words, prompted by



*Saint Marcellin Champagnat - Marist priest and Founder of the Marist Brothers*

<sup>18</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 591, Para. 7

<sup>19</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 752, Para. 53

<sup>20</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 757, Para. 2

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

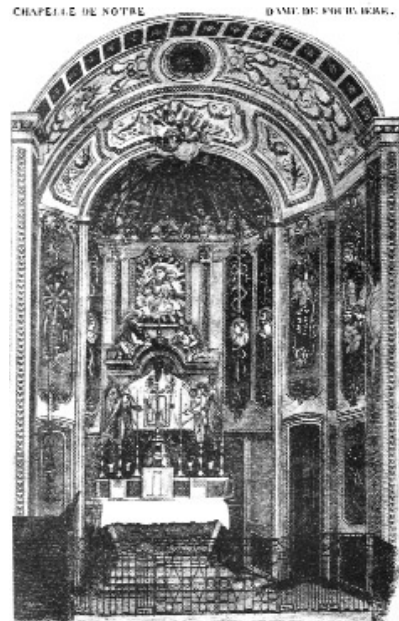
boredom and impatience, Marcellin accepted as a mission, and from that day his whole life, all his thoughts and desires, all his plans and labours were directed to the creation of this project.

## ***The pledge***

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However astonishing it may seem, Courveille had not yet been admitted to the clerical state. Indeed, a register of ordinations shows us that he did not receive the tonsure and Minor Orders until Saturday, 6 April 1816. By this time Father Champagnat was already a deacon. But Courveille quickly caught up - in 107 days. On 7 April he received the sub-diaconate, on Sunday 21 July he became a deacon, and on 22 July he was ordained priest with Father Champagnat and others, the whole ceremony taking place in the seminary chapel at the hands of Monseigneur Du Bourg, bishop of New Orleans. At that time the urgent need for clergy in France and the age of the candidates often forced the hastening of the stages leading to the priesthood.

On Tuesday, 23 July 1816, the day after their ordination, and exactly six weeks after Fr Bochard had given approval to the petition presented by the Director of the major seminary, Fr De La Croix, for the establishment of the Society of the Cross of Jesus, the first members of the Society of Mary, who had signed a formula of commitment some days before, went up together to Notre Dame de Fourvière so as to give a more formal appearance to their decision. They were twelve, like the twelve stars surrounding the Virgin of the Apocalypse<sup>23</sup>, twelve apostles of the Church in the last times. The pledge bearing the signatures was placed between the altar stone and the corporal and, in



*The altar of the Pledge – at the chapel of Fourvière*

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<sup>23</sup> Apoc. XII vi.



his role as founder, Jean-Claude Courveille said Mass, the others receiving Communion from him. Then they consecrated themselves to Mary, manifesting their wish to institute the Society of Mary, no matter what the work and suffering entailed, in true accord with the Roman Pontiff and the bishop, under the peaceful rule of a most Christian king.

They declared: *"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All for the greater glory of God and the honour of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*"We the undersigned, willing to work for the greater glory of God and Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, affirm and declare that we have the sincere intention and firm will to consecrate ourselves, as soon as it is opportune, to the institution of the most devout Congregation of Mariists. And so, by this present act and our signatures, we irrevocably devote ourselves and all that we have, as far as possible, to the Society of the Blessed Virgin. And we undertake this engagement, not lightly and childishly, not for any human motive or in the hope of any temporal gain, but seriously and maturely, having taken counsel and weighed everything before God, for the glory of God alone and the honour of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We dedicate ourselves in all troubles, labours and sufferings, and, if needs be, in tortures, being able to do all things in Him who strengthens us, Jesus Christ, to whom by this same act we promise fidelity in the bosom of our most holy Mother, the Catholic and Roman Church, attaching ourselves with all our strength to the supreme Head of this same Church, the Roman Pontiff, and likewise to our reverend Bishop, so that we may be good ministers of Jesus Christ, nourished by the words of faith and true doctrine, which, by His favour, we have received, confident that, under the peaceful and religious government of our most Christian King, this excellent institution will come into being. We solemnly promise that we will spend ourselves and all that we have in order to save, in every way possible, the souls of men, under the most august name of the Virgin Mary and under her auspices, accepting in everything, however, the better judgements of our superiors.*

*"Praised be the Holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Amen."*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 50

The objective of the Society - the regeneration of France perverted by the revolutionary ideas – was to be worked out in a ‘end-of-the-world’ atmosphere and in a sincere belief in the Society’s eschatological mission.

Being the only contemporary document of the Marist project at the seminary of Lyon and the first historical evidence in existence concerning the



*The chapel of the ‘Black’ Virgin at Fourvière –site of the Marist pledge*

this formula deserves careful attention. The text contains the official act by which the number of those who signed pledged themselves as solemnly as possible to found a congregation devoted to Mary, but without stating a specific work to be undertaken or any restriction as to place or time. On the other hand, the object of the project is the salvation of souls by every means, under

the name and protection of Mary. And, to stress their insertion into the Church, they proclaim full allegiance to the authority of the Pope before that of the bishop. Thus there is a basic difference between the Marist project and that of Father Bochard. The Society of Mary today readily recognises itself in this first exemplar, and the little document signed by the twelve seminarians still contains one of the best syntheses of what constitutes its mission and its spirit.

The heading is characteristic of Father Courveille and perhaps some of the text is his also. This is not to suggest that the final draft was prepared by him.

There was only the one document drawn up; it was signed by all beforehand. This pledge speaks of a congregation, not simply an association (yet to be founded), and it was to be ONE society, not several. The various branches, as far as they were foreseen, counted for little as against the unity of the whole project. The original document, written in Latin (the final



draft probably checked by Father Cholleton), was placed under the corporal during the Mass celebrated by Father Courveille in the old chapel of Our Lady of Fourvière on 23 July 1816. The promise of fidelity to the Holy Father is here very explicitly stated and is also found strongly expressed in the Constitutions of the Society of Mary.

All those who signed knew quite well that they had until then really only elaborated a plan and that it was their duty to work for its realisation as soon as possible. They also agreed to write to one another often, to maintain among themselves the union they had formed and to preserve and increase the spirit that animated them.

The group then dispersed. Father Champagnat went as curate to La Vallée and Father Colin to join his brother, the parish priest of Cerdon. Courveille was in succession appointed professor at Verrières junior seminary (February 1817 - June 1817), curate at Bourg-Argental (June to August 1817), Rive-de-Gier (September 1817 - October 1819) and then officiating parish priest of Epercieux. In the last-mentioned two places Courveille remained in touch by letter with his former seminary classmates. Besides that, he took very seriously his role as founder and Superior General of the Society of Mary, acknowledged by the clergy of the nearby area and by his adherents (in different degrees – but not by all).

### ***The first female branch of the Society of Mary in Lyon***

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At his very first appointment Courveille wasted no time. Although allocated to the community of priests at the Verrières minor seminary and not to normal duties in the parish, Courveille saw fit to address himself to a group of young people gathered into an Association of the Holy Family. There he sought to direct towards becoming members of the Third Order of Mary.

Evidence of this move by Courveille comes from a letter written at Verrières on 14 June 1824 by the priest-in-charge. He wrote to a Vicar-General of Lyon in relation to this Association of the Holy Family which he had set up in the minor seminary at Verrières. He wanted the Vicar General to extend the privileges of the Association to parishes in which it might be established: "I desire this Association to be given all the scope possible, be-

cause I do not know of any other being established in honour of the Holy Family. Father Courveille was anxious that this association might be the Third Order of the Marists.”<sup>25</sup> This attempt by Courveille would therefore have been in 1816-1817 when he was a priest at Verrières, Fr Meret being the priest-in-charge of the parish. Three months after writing this letter (September 1824) Meret was appointed a parish priest and had to leave Verrières. No trace of this Association remains in the parish records. Nothing concrete came of Courveille’s efforts towards establishing a Third Order.

At Verrières Courveille found himself under the influence of the Society of the Cross of Jesus. Fr Bochard still hoped to combine the Society of Mary with his own Society. It was, he thought, simply a question of patience, since his Society was the only one canonically recognised; any other could be so recognised only with his approval. Moreover, since 1816 at least two seminarians, former disciples of Courveille, had cancelled their signatures to the Marist formula, preferring the “Pious Thoughts” project. Time was needed to mature the effect of such an example. So the Vicar General continued to favour the rival group and brought Courveille closer to Champagnat by appointing him curate successively at Bourg-Argental (20 June to 20 August 1817) and at Rive-de-Gier (18 September 1817 to 1 October 1819).

In mid-September, then, Jean-Claude Courveille, presumed superior of the Society of Mary in Lyon, received his appointment as curate at Rive-de-Gier (Loire). Good fortune favoured him, for here he found a community of nine ‘pious young ladies’, assembled some ten years earlier by the parish priest of that area, Father Lancelot; they conducted a school for 130 girls. These “Sisters of Rive-de-Gier” are documented in official records: “(9 Sisters or novices). They teach 60 poor children gratis ; 70 pay. A house belongs to one of them; only one-third built. Income comes from legacies, gifts, manual work, board paid by the pupils or by the sick. They have not adopted a Rule as yet; they intend to do so ‘when ecclesiastical matters are decided’.”<sup>26</sup> Three of these ladies had the government teaching certificate (the brevet).

The new curate was delighted to discover in these young ladies the nucleus of the female teaching branch of the Society of Mary. The idea pleased

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<sup>25</sup> O.M. 1, Doc 105, Para. 1

<sup>26</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 55, 56

them and it would have been easily implemented but for the opposition of the parish priest: "I don't agree," he said, "that a new Order be established in my parish. If these young ladies wish to be religious, they may do so, provided they choose an existing order."<sup>27</sup>

*The opposition of the parish priest and, still more, of the Vicars General, allowed no official or canonical organisation. A less hostile diocese had to be sought for Courveille's group and so, by agreement with Monseigneur Simon, bishop of Grenoble, Father Courveille established a part of his community at Saint-Clair-sur-Rhône (Isère), where the Sisters soon took charge of the parish school. This transfer probably occurred in 1819 when Courveille himself was transferred to Epercieux.*

Deprived of serious formation to the religious life, having difficulties with the school and removed from their founder, the Marist Sisters of St Clair soon presented the spectacle of a community in confusion. It was then that Courveille applied to Father Colin to ask him for some support. At that time there was a certain Marie -Thérèse Jotillon, who had teaching experience and who was known to both the Fathers Colin at Cerdon. Yielding to the request they made to her, she went to St Clair in company of her niece, Marie Gardet, and helped to straighten out the school situation. She remained there until Cerdon became independent of the archdiocese of Lyon after 1823. Under the direction of Father Jean-Claude Colin, Cerdon, now part of the new diocese of Belley, became a Marist centre. Marie-Thérèse returned to this town to make community there with her good friend Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn. Hence the Marist Sisters counted three houses in all: in Rive-de-Gier (Lyon), in St Clair (Grenoble), and in Cerdon (Belley).

### ***Jean-Claude Courveille founds the Brothers at Epercieux***

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The impossibility of organising the branch of the Marist Fathers (archdiocesan opposition), the stagnation of the work of Marcellin Champagnat at La Valla (lack of vocations to his Marist Brothers) and the partial success of the "Daughters of Mary" led Courveille to the idea of founding his own version of "Little Brothers of Mary" in his new parish, Epercieux. The report of the inspector of the Academy on a school set up by Courveille at nearby

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<sup>27</sup> O.M. 4, Doc. 876, Para. 5

Feurs, plus one signature, are the only documents which mention the existence of these Brothers.

When, in the spring of 1822, about mid-May, after inspecting schools conducted by the new kind of Brothers in the Mt Pilat range (Champagnat's followers), Inspector Guillard presented himself in the town of Feurs (2,600 people, Loire), main town of the canton to which Epercieux belonged, he had something to say about Father Courveille, "who is considered here to be the only Superior General of the so-called Brothers of La Valla".<sup>28</sup> At the same time Guillard acknowledged the true dimensions of the Society of Mary of Lyon, even though it was clandestine, since it was authorised neither by the archdiocese nor by the King. Evidently, Marcellin Champagnat was only the agent for the parish priest of Epercieux, and he was not the only one. Courveille had another 'agent' at Cerdon (Ain); another at Saint-Julien-sur-Veyle (Ain), one in Dauphiny (Isère) one in Arthun (Loire), and some in other places. These were obviously the priests and Sisters who shared the Marist dream and who were working towards its fulfilment. He even had an 'agent' at Feurs. In fact, one of the curates (Father Jacob) of that parish was a member of "the type of corporation" (the Society of Mary) "which seems to want to spread as a rival to the true Brothers of Christian Doctrine".<sup>29</sup>

No detail has so far come down to us regarding the eventual novitiate of Father Courveille at Epercieux. It certainly must have existed, annexed to the school at Epercieux, for, on 19 February 1822, a Brother Saint-Louis witnessed a deed of marriage in that town, and, six days later, a school was opened at Feurs, with one Brother for a start, and then two Brothers.

Inspector Guillard, the same man who was at Champagnat's school at St Sauveur in April 1822, soon set about his inspection of the Feurs school. At this period Primary teaching was regulated by the famous Ordinance of 29 February 1816 which established town committees charged with supervising and encouraging primary instruction. According to Article 4, the chairmanship was by right assigned to the parish priest of the town, who had to give an account of his activities to the Rector of the University. It did not take Guillard long to note that the parish priest of Feurs was neither a model chairman nor a fervent supporter of the University. He writes: "The parish

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<sup>28</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 75, Para. 13-15

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

priest does not perform his functions as President very well, and agrees better with the parish priest of Epercieux" (Courveille) "than with us." <sup>30</sup>

Guillard's report runs thus: "This new school at Feurs was opened in February last by one Brother; a second arrived some five or six weeks ago. It is far from being the equal of those of the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine, but, nevertheless, under the name of 'Brothers' alone, it has caused the collapse of two other schools in the town, although, to tell the truth, they were in very bad hands."<sup>31</sup> Certainly, these Brothers were not men of genius, but their reputation was so great that their founding of a school closed those of the lay teachers, as was the case when Champagnat's Brothers arrived at St Saver. In fact, of the four teachers ruined by the Brothers' school at Feurs, "two who were authorised to teach failed in their religious duties", the third practised as a hairdresser, while the fourth "had gone through in gambling a fortune of 50,000 francs".<sup>32</sup> But the clergy's hold over the school did not please the Inspector, for it indicated a corresponding diminution in the control by the University; so he noted somewhat bitterly:

*"It is perhaps to be regretted that this town has not been inspected more often. It seems to me that the clergy of the area want, more so than elsewhere, to busy themselves personally with every phase of education and to consider ungodly whatever concerns the University – of which they have very little knowledge."*<sup>33</sup>

*Guillard's visit to the school was a revelation. He was astounded on reading the regulations: "The regulations I read posted up in this school swarmed with serious errors in both language and spelling. I noted over 40 in 8 articles, covering about 50 lines. I asked who had prepared it. The first Brother assured me that it was the priest at Epercieux who had composed and written it. These Brothers are very young."<sup>34</sup> Guillard remarked that, in contrast to the Little Brothers of Father Champagnat, those of Father Courveille made use of printed writing models, and that, in place of wearing, as at La Valla, a black coat, the Brothers of Epercieux wore a blue coat, sky-blue, Mary's colour. Inspector Guillard informs us, then, that, like the curate at La Valla, Courveille had also founded Marist Brothers.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 75, Para. 21

<sup>33</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 75, Para. 15

<sup>34</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 75, Para. 16

*Although Father Courveille was gifted with animated and eloquent speech, it seems that writing was not his strong point. Two autographed letters preserved in Marist archives give proof of this. We note that Courveille had drawn up a Rule for his Brothers and that, contrary to Father Champagnat's practice, he used printed writing models. To Guillard the two Brothers seemed very young. According to the inspector, the newcomer (the second Brother) knew nothing and could do nothing. Hurt by the Inspector's remarks, the first Brother let out some secrets. He went on to say "that he was very annoyed for not having gone to the true Brothers at Lyon, and that he still intended to follow that plan. He had been pestered and now realised that this institution would not last".<sup>35</sup> In short, this Brother was not a sound subject for Father Courveille. The next year, 1823, a second Inspector, Poupar, pointed out that at Feurs he found, not the Brothers of Father Courveille, but a group of Brothers who had replaced them.*

Inspector Guillard was uncertain what to recommend in regard to the Little Brothers of Mary whom he had come across in his travels. Finally, the inspector gave up trying to choose, leaving it to his superior, Abbé Régel, to examine in his wisdom "whether it would not be prudent to discuss the state of affairs with the Royal Council, and to ask for a decision before doing anything either for or against the new congregation".<sup>36</sup>

*Next year, in the spring of 1823, Inspector Poupar, by-passing the Little Brothers of Father Champagnat, verified the report of his colleague Guillard on the Little Brothers of Father Courveille. It was his turn for amazement! There were not two, but three Brothers and they depended neither on the parish priest of Epercieux nor on the curate*



*The house at La Valla purchased by Champagnat and Courveille*

<sup>35</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 75, Para. 16

<sup>36</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 75, Para. 19

of La Valla, but on Benoît Grizard, "an ex-Brother, recently set up and authorised at Charlieu"<sup>37</sup>, where he continued also to direct a novitiate annexed to the communal school. Some of these same Brothers taught at Panis-sière, a large centre of some 3,000 people. Shortly afterwards, Grizard agreed to unite his group with the Society of the Cross of Jesus. "He (Grizard) was at Lyon to come to an agreement with Vicar General Bochart, who agreed to pay Grizard's rather ignoble debts contracted at Charlieu and who declared himself the founder of this new body."<sup>38</sup> This explains the reference by Poupard to finding the Brothers of Father Bochart at Feurs.

Bochart had already turned his eyes towards the Society of Mary, which he earnestly desired to acquire since its beginning. As we have seen, two of the first dozen would-be Marist Fathers, Pousset and Verrier, had already rallied to Bochart's Society.

Fr Champagnat kept in regular contact with Fr Courveille, whom he regarded as his Superior. On the La Valla scene, where he was working, the young curate, after a good deal of contention with the parish priest, bought a house and garden for his Brothers. This he did in October 1817 with the support of Fr Courveille; they became joint-owners. The sale was agreed on by payment in current coin by Fathers Champagnat and Courveille, and by half each, supposing that they took possession in this proportion.

### ***The Society of Mary by 1818 – a review***

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In 1818, then, the Society of Mary, by the very fact that it was in competition with the rival Society founded by leaders of the archdiocese, did not yet have canonical existence and could not hope for it in the immediate future. Moreover, the would-be Marist priests were scattered throughout the extensive archdiocese of Lyon, which included the three governmental Departments of Ain, Rhône, and Loire. Its head, Jean-Claude Courveille, had at first been cleverly solicited to unite his disciples with the Society of the Cross of Jesus, a solicitation which he soon rejected, thus incurring the strong displeasure of Vicar General Bochart.

At La Valla, near St Chamond, however, Marcellin Champagnat had suc-

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<sup>37</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 86, Para. 1

<sup>38</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 86, Para. 1



ceeded in forming the branch of the Little Brothers of Mary, which, by 1818, was already teaching school in the country towns of La Valla and Marlhes.

At Cerdon in the Department of Ain, Jean-Claude Colin was doing his best in trying to realise the Marist dream. He induced his brother Pierre, parish priest of Cerdon, to pledge himself to join the Marists and he worked steadily at devising a Rule for the yet-to-be-founded congregation of priests. During this period Courveille kept in contact with these men in the far north-east of the vast archdiocese.

### ***Contacts with Le Puy and with Rome***

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To try to escape from the jurisdiction of the church leaders in Lyon, it was decided by Fathers Courveille, Pierre Colin and Jean-Claude Colin to seek a refuge in the Haute-Loire, a different diocese, for it was there that Our Lady of Le Puy had given Courveille the mission of founding the Society of Mary. Not being permitted to leave the archdiocese without special permission, they chose as their intermediary Jeanne-Marie Chavoin, who both visited le Puy and wrote to its Vicar-General. In a letter to her on 27 November 1821 this Vicar-General offered to entrust to the Society of Courveille the interior missions of the diocese of Le Puy for a year, if permission for their arrival were given by the archdiocese of Lyon. Following the collapse of this move (they had no hope of obtaining the required leave), the would-be Marists, in this extreme situation, decided ‘to go to the top’.

Unable to commence the Society in Le Puy and blocked by Bochart in Lyon, the Marist priest aspirants turned to having recourse to Rome. A first letter of 7 February 1819 having failed to elicit a reply, some aspiring Marists then tried to travel to the Eternal City. Father Déclas informs us: “We asked Bochart’s permission to go to Rome. Oh! Then there was a sudden change of attitude. Father Bochart, although formerly encouraging towards us, had views quite different from ours. Then the war began. From simple opposition, the superiors turned to persecuting us. They called the two Colins ‘Jansenists’ and they said I was a fool.”<sup>39</sup> The hopefuls then sought the advice of Monseigneur Bigex, bishop of Pignerol. This Bigex, at one time an administrator of the archdiocese of Lyon, had a reputation for practical wisdom and was someone to whom the would-be Marists could turn for sound

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<sup>39</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 551, Para. 6



advice. Following his counsels, they wrote to Rome again. The letter, signed by Courveille and the two Colins, was sent to Cardinal Pacca, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. No reply was received.

*These letters to Rome give an indication of Courveille's position in the Marist movement at this period. We have the words of Colin to Mayet on this score: "If his (Courveille's) name appeared on certain documents, it is because the Society seemed to be known under his name and because prudence appeared to require it."<sup>40</sup> It is obvious that, at this stage of the development of the Marists, Courveille was an important figure, one who, later, could not be denied a place in the early history of the Society of Mary.*

*At the end of 1819 they thought about sending another letter, this time addressed to the Pope. Once again they sought the advice of Bishop Bigex. He urged them to do so. Courveille drafted a letter, but it was considered unsuitable and the Colins put it aside. They composed a different letter, which all three signed. After Courveille's name appeared the letters "s.p.g.", clear evidence that Courveille was convinced of his right to be regarded as Superior General of the Society of Mary. The letter was dated 25 January 1822. There is evidence to suggest that Courveille was not at Cerdon for the signing of this letter. A burial certificate, signed by Courveille at Epercieux on the same date, indicates that he was not at Cerdon. We do not know whether, before its dispatch, he signed the document before or after this date.<sup>41</sup> We do know, however, that this time they surely had their reply.*

Courveille was the one to whom the papal response was sent. The address was that of Cerdon, so the delivery was not to Courveille, who was little known in that area, but to the parish priest of Cerdon. "On the day when the Colin brothers received the reply from Rome they went to the parish church to give thanks to God."<sup>42</sup>

The fact that the Cerdon address was clearly given in their letter of petition points to the distinct possibility of an arrangement among the three priests that the letter was to be opened by the recipient. Later, the Colins gave the letter to Courveille, but they came to regret what they had done, for they were convinced that Courveille was foolish in the use he made of

<sup>40</sup> O.M. 3, Doc. 806, Para. 9

<sup>41</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 70

<sup>42</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 689, Para. 6

it. Pierre Colin reports: “Ah! How he made us suffer! Having had this precious Brief in his possession for some time, he used to display it everywhere, even in public vehicles. He had even quite soiled it with his fingers. We carefully took it from him, and then, when he came to Cerdon, we placed the Brief in a safe house so that we could say that we no longer held it. What would have become of it in his hands?”<sup>43</sup> The pretext for the recovery of the Brief was probably Jean-Claude Colin’s need to produce the original of the Pontifical letter when he went to see the Nuncio in Paris, for it was the younger Colin who was chosen to represent the Marists in the capital city of France.

“Delicto filio cognominato Courveille” was the Latin inscription of the Papal letter. The substance of the communication was an invitation to Courveille or to one of his companions to speak to the Papal Nuncio in Paris. Which one of them was to accept the charge? Had they been able to look into the seeds of time to see which grain would grow, they would have learnt that he who made the journey would be the one to become the leader of Marist affairs – at least in dealings with the official Church.

Courveille was ostensibly the leader of the Marist movement – certainly in his own eyes. But it was the younger Colin who had written a Rule for future Marist priests, a Rule that could be presented as a basis for discussion with the Paris Nuncio, Monseigneur Macchi, and his advisers. Besides, it was Jean-Claude Colin who was mainly responsible for the drafting of the letter to Rome. It was Jean-Claude, too, who, unlike the others, did not have the responsibilities of parish management. Perhaps Courveille could sense that the direction of affairs was slipping from his grasp, and perhaps there was hot debate on the subject, but, finally, agreement was reached that Jean-Claude Colin would go. It was during these negotiations that the Little Brothers of Father Courveille finally passed over, with their school at Feurs, and probably that at Panissières also, into the control of Father Bochart.

### ***The effects of dividing the Archdiocese of Lyon***

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A decision at Rome at this period had a strong bearing on the affairs of the would-be Marists. In January 1823 the huge archdiocese of Lyon was divided, part of it becoming the new diocese of Belley. The Colin brothers

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<sup>43</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 689, Para. 7

and their associates belonged to the new diocese; they were thus separated from fellow Marists to the south. A letter from Father Colin to the bishop of Belley, dated 10 May 1824, gives an account of his journey to Lyon to obtain permission for the Society of Mary in that archdiocese. Part of the letter shows that Colin, unlike Champagnat, no longer recognised Courveille as Superior General: "Father Barou told me there was nothing to stop us from opening two houses at once, one in Belley and one in Lyon, and that it was only a matter of appointing a Superior General who could be chosen by the two bishops. I answered that we would be very flattered if our first Superior General were given to us by their Lordships."<sup>44</sup> The "first Superior General", in Father Colin's mind, would be, he hoped, Father Cholleton, Vicar General of Lyon.

After the diocese of Belley was created by the division of the extensive archdiocese of Lyon and after the accession of Monseigneur de Pins to the archdiocese of Lyon in 1823 (he arrived in February 1824), Father Champagnat, having received the approbation of the new prelate, went ahead



*The "Hermitage of Our Lady"— Mother house of the Marist Brothers*

<sup>44</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 100, Paras 5 – 6

with a far greater zeal, for he had been forced to attempt to conceal his work with the teaching Brothers during the time of Bochard. The departure of Father Seyve from La Valla, where he had been fellow-curate with Champagnat, now led the latter to seek another helper. On the advice of Father Gardette, superior of the major seminary, Champagnat asked the archbishop's Council for Father Courveille to help him.

Jean-Claude Courveille was the man predestined by Our Lady of Le Puy to found the Society of Mary, a chosen group reserved for "these last times of impiety and incredulity".<sup>45</sup> From 1817 this founder was the joint-owner of La Valla, and had himself tried to found Brothers at Epercieux. He did not hide from Inspector Guillard that he "was the sole superior of the (so-called) Brothers of La Valla".<sup>46</sup> Thus, without any difficulty, the diocesan administration authorised him to leave his parish: "Seeing that Epercieux is small and is within the reach of neighbouring churches, Father Courveille, who is priest-in-charge, is to go and help Father Champagnat in his institution of Brothers of the Schools."<sup>47</sup>

The day following this Council Minute Father Courveille met Father Champagnat in St Chamond in order to buy the land for Our Lady of the Hermitage, the future Mother house and new training establishment of Champagnat's Marist Brothers. They purchased 206 ares of wood, scrub, rocks and fields in the valley of the Gier, at a place called Les Gauds, between La Valla and St Chamond. The sale was settled, depending on the sum of 5,000 francs being paid in current coin to Pierre-Marie Montellier, the vendor, within one year, counting from that day, with interest at 4%. Further purchases in July and October of the same year added an additional 67 ares to their property for a further 600 francs. Courveille thus shared with Champagnat in ownership of both La Valla and the Hermitage.

Building on the new property commenced immediately. While Father Champagnat, with the title of "Priest Director" (Courveille's title), looked to the building of the novitiate, Jean-Claude Courveille, 'Priest Superior General', was concerned with matters less material.

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<sup>45</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 718, Para. 5

<sup>46</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 75, Para. 13

<sup>47</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 101, Para. 3

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## COURVEILLE'S PROSPECTUS

With Champagnat labouring in the depth of the valley with his hands, Courveille, on the heights of La Valla, set to work with his pen. The first matter was the drawing up of a Prospectus. It is interesting to peruse its introductory declarations and denunciations: "Christian instruction to-day is entirely neglected in country districts or replaced by anti-christian instruction. In the winter time, men without morals and without religion, by their immoral conduct, their impious speech and their corrupt books, spread ir-religion and anti-monarchist sentiments throughout the countryside (where the police are few). To remedy so great an evil and to drive from the countryside these impious teachers, these enemies of good order, of christian society and of the monarchy, pious teachers dedicated to Mary under the name of 'Petits Frères Ignorantins' go two by two, even to those poor districts where the De la Salle Brothers cannot go for want of resources."<sup>48</sup> This first text was so vehement and extreme, conforming, as it did, to the oratory typical of the missionaries of that era, that Vicar General Jean Cholleton (whom Jean-Claude Colin always wanted as "First Superior of the Society of Mary") moderated it and, on 18 July 1824, gave permission for its printing.

The Prospectus appeared as a pamphlet folded in two, printed on three pages and bearing on the last page a badge in black. It represents a bust of Our Lady on a pedestal with the infant Jesus blessing with his right hand as he sits, unusually, on his mother's left arm. Was this the effigy of the Virgin by the sculptor Tholnance which had cured the young Courveille at Le Puy in 1809 and revealed to him his mission? Beneath, the inscription reads: "Societas Mariae", and around her head is the crown of stars of the Virgin of the Apocalypse. One star, however, is missing. Nevertheless, there is no doubt about Courveille's genuine attachment to the Mother of God.

After praising the De La Salle Brothers, to whom "the education of the better-endowed is confided"<sup>49</sup>, the article points out their limitations: they can go only in threes and the cost of establishing them was considerable, so that the majority "of the parishes, and chiefly those in country districts, cannot enjoy the advantages of this education".<sup>50</sup> Thus, to complete this de-

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<sup>48</sup> AFM 132.08; Regla del Fundador, Br Pedro Herreros, p.21

<sup>49</sup> O.M. 1, Doc 108, Para. 1

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

iciency in the work of Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, “an establishment of teachers under the name of ‘Little Brothers of Mary’ has been formed”.<sup>51</sup> After this preamble, the Prospectus deals with two questions: the conditions for admission into the new Institute and the conditions for opening a school.

Young men desirous of embracing this state of life could enter between the ages of fifteen and thirty, provided that they “know how to read and to write fairly well and are furnished with a certificate of good conduct and morals”.<sup>52</sup> The novitiate would last for two years, for which they would pay 400 francs. Those who had already received a part of their inheritance would hand it in on their arrival and be given a guarantee of reimbursement in case they should leave the novitiate. Finally, an outfit was to be brought with them – 12 shirts, 6 towels, 4 pairs of sheets, 12 handkerchiefs, 2 pairs of shoes and the habit for their entry into religion, which was then the blue coat, Mary’s colour.

The Little Brothers went into the rural parishes in threes, and even in twos, but their salary was only two-thirds that of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The third one was generally a novice who, on leaving the house of formation, prepared the meals for the community and, after lunch, practised teaching under the direction of the Brother in charge of the little class. Unlike the Brothers of Christian Instruction, of Christian Doctrine, or of St Joseph, they always had their own house and did not live in the presbytery.

For a school of two classes the De La Salle Brothers sent three Brothers, two to teach and one to work in the house; they were paid (600 by 3) - 1,800 francs. On the opening of the school it was necessary to pay the novitiate for each Brother, once again, 1,800 francs. For clothing, travelling and the furnishing of their dwelling, the municipality had to pay 3,600 francs. Thus a total of 7,200 francs for the first year, and 1,800 francs for each year thereafter.

For a school of two classes the Little Brothers of Mary likewise sent three Brothers: two professed Brothers for the teaching and a novice for the kitchen; their annual salary was (400 by 3) – 1,200 francs. Nothing was asked for, the training of the Brothers, nor for clothing or travel. A suitably furnished house was asked for, a garden for the Brother’s physical exercise and a place for the children’s recreation.

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<sup>51</sup> O.M. 1, Doc 108, Para. 2

<sup>52</sup> O.M. 1, Doc 108, Para. 3

Thus, a first foundation of the Little Brothers of Mary came to 1,200 francs in money; the rest could be furnished in kind – which conformed to peasant psychology. All included, the opening of one of their schools was much below the cost of a similar opening by the De La Salle Brothers. Moreover, the amount paid could come down to 800 francs if the district needed only one class and two Brothers. Finally, an innovation characteristic of all the new congregations of teaching Brothers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (an innovation firmly refused by the De La Salle Brothers because of their vow to teach gratuitously), the district could have recourse to school fees paid by the pupils to make up the whole or part of the Brothers' expenses.

The subjects taught by the Little Brothers of Mary were confined to catechism, reading, writing, arithmetic, principles of French grammar, church music and sacred history. Naturally, they followed the Simultaneous Method of teaching, following the lines of the De La Salle Brothers.

The Prospectus of July 1824 concluded on a completely original note: "The Little Brothers of Mary rely as much on the prayers of the faithful as on their generosity."<sup>53</sup> It could not be more succinctly nor more discreetly expressed that a Christian school was based on the supernatural plane, and that it required divine grace as well as money.

### ***Courveille and the Marist Fathers and Sisters***

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At the same time Father Courveille was concerned with the development of the other branches of the Society of Mary. Thus, we learn from a priest's letter about Courveille's earlier activities in regard to turning the Association of the Holy Family at Verrières into a branch of the Third Order of Mary.<sup>54</sup> This occurred in the spring of 1824. As we have seen, it came to nothing.

From La Valla in 1824 it was easy for Courveille to busy himself with the branches of the Sisters of Mary, both at St Clair-sur-Rhône (Isère) and at Rive-de-Gier (Loire). These latter Sisters sought approbation for their Rule, which the archdiocesan authorities of Lyon granted provisionally on 28 July 1824.

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<sup>53</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 108, Para. 14

<sup>54</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 105, Para. 1

In 1824 the main branch of the Society of Mary, the priests, who were scattered through several dioceses, remained almost at a standstill. Jean-Claude Courveille now set out to organise this branch in the diocese of Lyon, in combination with the novitiate of the Little Brothers of Mary. Two large centres were envisaged in the south and in the north of the Loire Department, each consisting of a novitiate for the teaching Brothers and a “house for the missionary priests who were destined to help in the exercise of their evangelical ministry all secular clergy who might seek their aid”.<sup>55</sup> In the south, with financial backing from Monseigneur de Pins, the Hermitage of Our Lady, near St Chamond, was being built. In the north, Courveille planned to ask the archbishop to place at the disposal of the Society of Mary the large buildings of the seminary at Charlieu for similar purposes and for a primary school. If a novitiate of Brothers and a centre for priests were established there, the town agreed to help, at the cost of 400 francs annually for four years. In fact, this did not eventuate, and, under the period of the Restoration of the Bourbon kings (1814-1830), the Society had only a single novitiate for the Brothers and one residence for priests in the archdiocese – the Hermitage, which Father Champagnat, together with his Brothers, built amid the mockery of the local clergy.

While Champagnat devoted himself to building the house of “Our Lady of the Hermitage”, going back to La Valla only on Saturday evening to hear confessions and say Mass on Sunday, Courveille was busy exercising his function as Superior. The foundation of this school at Charlieu shows him in action.

### ***Foundation at Charlieu (November 1824)***

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The archdiocese of Lyon, entrusted with primary education since 9 April 1824, had received a request for teaching Brothers from the municipal council of Charlieu. Vicar General Cholleton duly answered, asking what the town proposed and stating that three Brothers from La Valla would soon be available. Evidently, the town Mayor, M. Ducoing, wrote immediately to Cholleton in reply. Unfortunately, the letter was not received before the three Brothers arrived, accompanied by Courveille, ‘the Founder of this congregation’. (Mayor Ducoing’s words to the municipal council members.) The town was totally unprepared.

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<sup>55</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 120, Para. 14



Courveille was far from being happy. With injured dignity he told the Mayor "that he could not allow his Little Brothers to stay with so low a salary from the town; that he was annoyed at having made this expensive journey; that he would go back with his Brothers; and that, later on, if the town wanted them, it might not then be possible to supply them".<sup>56</sup> Courveille then gave the Mayor a Prospectus for the Marist Brothers' establishments in the towns. Ducoing reported to his councillors that he advised Courveille to make arrangements with the administrator of the archdiocese to place at his (Courveille's) disposal the extensive buildings and gardens which the seminary owned in the town. There would be scope for establishing there all the centres that Courveille desired.

The inopportune arrival of the three Marist Brothers and Courveille was a clear indication that someone had blundered. It is quite obvious that the town council, having made a request for Brothers, had made no preparation for their accommodation. Cholleton had acted on the instructions of the archdiocesan council, whose Minutes record that the mayor was to be written to in order to know his terms in regard to this request. The Vicar General contacted the Brothers at the Hermitage, for the Mayor told his council that Cholleton had written to him thus: "They wrote to me from La Valla that the three Brothers that we requested for the little school at Charlieu would be able to leave next week. If you want to place them in the seminary, you have only to arrange matters with Father Crétin (the chaplain). We will have the Brothers leave here as soon as we have your reply."<sup>57</sup> Cholleton, in replying to the Mayor on behalf of the archdiocesan council, had perhaps been over-sanguine of the town authorities' success in obtaining the property desired, especially since the chaplain in charge of that church property explained to the mayor that he had received no instructions about allowing the property to be used by the Brothers. Perhaps, too, Cholleton should have restrained Courveille (and the Brothers) from setting out, but, in all fairness, we do not know whether he was aware of their departure.

Things happened just all too quickly. Cholleton had not received the mayor's reply, the chaplain had received no instructions, and yet Courveille was promptly on the mayoral doorstep. Some fault may be attributed to Cholleton, some to the mayor, some, perhaps, even to the postal service!

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<sup>56</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 120, Para. 7

<sup>57</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 120, Para. 4

But assuredly, it appears that a considerable burden of fault lay with Courveille. He dearly wanted this opening. Besides being an additional school for his (in reality, for Champagnat's) Brothers, the Charlieu foundation would do much for the ambitious Courveille. The Mayor's words, referred to above, are sufficient proof of this. A school establishment of Brothers would pave the way for those additional foundations which Courveille had in mind – a second novitiate house of formation for Marist Brothers and an establishment for future Marist priests. The enthusiastic Courveille was at it again, attempting to weave his dream into the fabric of reality.

Burdened with the construction of the Hermitage and the thousand and one other details attached thereto, and still not entirely free from parish duties, Champagnat was evidently content to allow Courveille to make the running in this matter. A mark of Champagnat's personal humility and of his respect for authority is that he stood aside in these arrangements for Charlieu, giving Courveille scope to act. We can be sure, however, that Champagnat would have kept an eye on the situation for the welfare of the Brothers whom he loved so well. At La Valla, and, later, at the Hermitage, Courveille played the role of Superior General with utmost confidence and with conviction of his claim to that title. Champagnat chose not to throw down a challenge.

Later, M. Ducoing, addressing his municipal council, spoke to its members: "So I put it to you to examine the good that this establishment can effect in this district, and to express your wishes on the propositions that Father Courveille has made. Since the departure of this priest it was conveyed to me by Father Crépin that the project was to make arrangements with Monseigneur the Administrator of the archdiocese to place at Courveille's disposal the whole of the extensive buildings which the seminary owns in this town, so as to establish in them, in addition to the primary school, a novitiate for the Little Brothers of Mary and a centre for missionary priests destined to help, by the exercise of their evangelical ministry, the various parish priests and priests-in-charge who would need them.

"This project seems so advantageous that a parish priest from a nearby town has already offered for this establishment 100 pine trees for the necessary repairs or building. To establish this work Father Courveille asks for an annual sum of 400 francs over several years. You will also need to take this into consideration.

"I now have to inform you of a proposition relative to the same end. The Prefect, as a result of your deliberations of 12 April last year, had allocated a sum of 300 francs to Teacher Grizard, primary teacher for the year 1824. Grizard closed his school and disappeared at end of June or early July. He would be due to receive only half of the salary allotted. In addition, Teacher Grizard, on leaving, took possession of, and sold, the furniture, a great part of which had been supplied by means of an appeal made in the region. Now, the people of Charlieu who gave to this appeal did not give to Grizard but to the establishment and school. He has therefore got away with what did not belong to him.

"After that, I propose to ask your approval that, by a fair compensation, we retain the 150 francs due to Teacher Grizard and that we allot the money, along with another 150 francs, so making the full allowance of 300 francs for Teacher Grizard, to Brother Louis Audras, Director, living at Charlieu since the beginning of this month, in order to help the establishment which seems to be going in a manner so favourable and so advantageous for the town."<sup>58</sup> Upon which, the town councillors, on 26 November, deliberated and agreed to all the propositions of their Mayor. From their conclusions they took out these resolutions:

*"1. The primary school for boys at Charlieu be given to the Little Brothers of Mary, of 'St Mary of the Hermitage', under the direction of the one who will be appointed by Father Courveille, founder of this congregation.*

*"2. That there will be admitted to the said school 25-30 children taken from indigent families.*

*"In the eventuality of Father Courveille's establishing, in the building of the seminary of Lyon situated in Charlieu, a novitiate of the Little Brothers of Mary, as well as an establishment of missionary Fathers, the town will pay, over four years, an annual sum of 400 francs.*

*"Finally, ... that the sum of 300 francs allotted to Teacher Grizard, primary teacher in 1824, to be paid, on 1 January next, to Brother Louis Arnaud, present Director of the school, to facilitate its establishment."<sup>59</sup>*

Thus, at the instigation of Father Courveille, Charlieu was to become a second Marist centre in Lyon, with a primary school and a novitiate of the Little Brothers of Mary, completed by a residence of Marist priests. Meanwhile, in the narrow valley of Les Gauds, thanks to the vigour of Father Champagnat,

<sup>58</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 120, Para. 13-17

<sup>59</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 120, Para. 23

“Our Lady of the Hermitage” was being built. As for Charlieu, the only tangible outcome was the primary school, staffed by Champagnat’s Brothers. All the other prospects Courveille had for it proved to be ephemeral.

### **Activities in the Diocese of Belley**

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At this time the two Fathers Colin at Cerdon, who were soon joined by Father Déclas, proceeded on 8 December of the same year (1824) to the clothing of eight or nine other Sisters of Mary at Cerdon. It is interesting to note that Courveille was invited by Colin to attend the official clothing ceremony of the Sisters, but was not invited to preside. This letter indicates the growing distance between these two men, for Colin, as we shall see, was angry with Courveille on a number of scores:

*“I have just made a journey to Lyon, where I had the honour of seeing Monseigneur the Administrator.”* (De Pins, titular Archbishop of Amasia.) *“I spoke to him of the steps that have been taken to further the work - the Rules, the letters which you signed to the Sovereign Pontiff and to Monseigneur the Nuncio, in which we spoke of the governing of the Society. I told him that these letters were in the hands of Monseigneur the bishop of Belley, along with all the other documentation and Rules concerning the Society. I told him that the Nuncio remitted everything into the hands of the bishop of Belley. The Administrator was somewhat surprised and astonished, for he told me that he did not know all this.*

*“You know that we are three now. M. Déclas has been with us since All Saints. We believe that our number will soon be augmented. We shall begin to carry out some apostolic excursions during the course of the month of January. Finally, we are going to have a beautiful ceremony on 8 December next, Feast of the Immaculate Conception. We believe that we shall be giving the holy habit and veil to eight or nine Sisters of the Congregation of Mary. This is the first ceremony of the Society. We hope that you will give us the pleasure of attending. We are expecting all three of you, and while waiting for you, we greet you with all our heart. Our warm regards to Father Champagnat.*

*“I am, with the most profound respect, Sir,*

*“Your very humble and obedient servant, Colin, priest.”<sup>60</sup>*

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<sup>60</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 122, Para. 1 - 4

Colin's cold tone in the early part of this letter no doubt comes from his anger with Courveille over the latter's handling of the Pope's letter and, perhaps even more importantly, from the fact that Courveille, being within the archdiocese of Lyon, had done nothing so far to inform de Pins about Marist plans. Colin, from the diocese of Belley had not been enthusiastically received by De Pins, which is quite understandable, because Colin was not of the archdiocese, whereas Courveille was. The oblique reproof from Colin should have been all the more painful to Courveille after the Charlieu failure.



*Monseigneur de Pins, Apostolic  
Administrator of the Archdiocese of Lyon*

### ***The Marist Sisters in the Dioceses of Lyon and Grenoble***

On their side, the other Marist Sisters had not remained inactive. Shortly after the arrival of Father Courveille at La Vallée, those Sisters who were at Rive-de-Gier asked for diocesan approval: "28 July 1824: The Sisters of Mary at Rive-de-Gier ask Monseigneur for approval of their Rule. They are authorised to follow it for the present while waiting till it is definitely approved."<sup>61</sup> At the beginning of 1825, then, there existed side by side at Rive-de-Gier the community assembled by Fr Lancelot, parish priest,

and some of the Sisters of Mary of Courveille. The latter exercised an attraction over the former, who so far had not decided on any Rule or on joining any existing community. The Archdiocesan authorities, already mistrustful, no doubt in regard to Fr Courveille's plans, were careful not to approve a combination which would have displeased the venerable Fr Lancelot. It was delicate situation, one which the archdiocesan authorities chose to defer. An archdiocesan Council Minute of 19 January 1825 reads: "Two Sisters of a community at Rive-de-Gier, tenacious in wishing to join the Sisters of Mary against the advice of Fr Lancelot, their director, and also of their Superioress, request authorisation to accomplish this end. A dilatory and evasive reply will be made to them."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 110, Para. 3°

<sup>62</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 132, Para. 9°

We do not know the outcome of this attempt for transfer. Eventually, the two groups at Rive-de-Gier split. Some, following the advice of Father Lancelot, went to the Ursulines at St Chamond and became the pioneers of the Ursulines set up at Rive-de-Gier. The others, followers of Father Courveille, moved to St Clair to join those already there. But already at Cerdon, on 8 December 1824, assisted by his brother Peter and Father Déclas, Father Colin had given “the holy habit and veil to eight or nine Sisters of the Congregation of Mary”.<sup>63</sup> So, in the Département of Ain, as well as those of Rhône and Isère, the Sisters’ branch of the Society of Mary was taking shape.

### ***Serious Crisis in the Society of Mary of Lyon***

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In the summer of 1825 the Little Brothers of Mary seemed to be more flourishing than ever. The archbishop supported them with all his authority; during the clergy retreats the parish priests were asked to send them postulants or, if it were possible, to call the Brothers into their parishes. In May the community took up residence in the new Mother house at the Hermitage, the foundation-stone of which had been blessed the previous year by Vicar General Cholleton, former adviser of the Marists at the major seminary. Since the autumn of 1824 Father Champagnat, freed from most of his duties as curate at La Valla, had devoted himself entirely to this work.

In May 1825, then, the community of Brothers from La Valla took up residence in the new Mother house; the idealistic phase of foundation days was over, the period of real life was just beginning. The chapel was blessed on 13 August. Ten days later Father Terraillon received an invitation to re-join his former seminary companion, Father Champagnat. He was not enthusiastic to do so. On 31 October he wrote to Father Colin: “I still do not know for sure whether Cerdon will become the cradle of the Society. My own feeling is just about the same as ever. If it were within my power, you would see me arriving as soon as possible in your little valley, for which I retain a love beyond words to express.”<sup>64</sup> It was therefore reluctantly, compelled by the resistance of Monseigneur De Pins, that Etienne Terraillon came to “Our Lady of the Hermitage”.

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<sup>63</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 122, Para. 3

<sup>64</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 115, Para. 4

There Terrailon met up with Fr Courveille, who was elated as ever. The service of the Brothers not being enough for Courveille's overflowing zeal, he still directed the Marist Sisters and worked in other spheres related to things Marist. The archdiocesan authorities finding all this somewhat excessive, gave him a warning: "25 August 1825: Father Courveille will be advised to confine himself for the present to the work of the Brothers of Mary, all other projects being inopportune."<sup>65</sup> We do not know exactly what was the purpose of this warning. His record with sundry parish centres, such as Verrières, Rive-de-Gier and Epercieux, as well as that with archdiocesan authorities, had not been a successful one in regard to harmonious relationships.

### ***A desire for power seizes Jean-Claude Courveille***

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Pride of achievement always went to Courveille's head. Now, since the archbishop restricted him to the Little Brothers of Mary – ah, well, he would get busy with them. In Courveille's mind it seemed that he himself would be Superior General, Father Champagnat the Director General and, probably, Father Etienne Terrailon the Master of Novices.<sup>66</sup> Being thus confined to the Little Brothers, Courveille saw no harm in displaying his position as Superior in their regard: "Dressed in a great long blue cloak" (Father Champagnat never wore the blue cloak), "he took on all the airs of an abbot, and passed himself off as such wherever he went."<sup>67</sup> "He brought out a Rule which he said he had composed, and had it read, but, as it did not suit the Brothers, they kept on living according to the rules of the house."<sup>68</sup> (Note: Brother Jean-Baptiste added in a note written in 1868 that nothing remained of this Rule, which was only a lot of fine theory.) Father Courveille was much offended by this. He was also concerned that, while the Brothers did not raise any objection to his authority (reasoning logically that his authority was to be exercised especially over the priests), they still persisted in going to Father Champagnat for their spiritual and temporal needs.

Courveille's position became increasingly uncomfortable. Although the proposed Statutes of the Marist Brothers had not been fully approved by the authorities in Paris, Courveille sought to make use of them in his own re-

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<sup>65</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 141, Para. 19°

<sup>66</sup> From "The New Congregations" Footnote P 318

<sup>67</sup> O.M. 3, Doc. 819, Para. 18

<sup>68</sup> O.M. 3, Doc. 819, Para. 19



gard. He had recourse to Article 4, which stipulated that the congregation would be governed by a Superior General elected for three years by an absolute majority of votes of the directors of the schools and the professed Brothers of the Mother house. Once properly elected, he would dispense real authority and all ambiguities would cease. This is why “he endeavoured to win the Brothers’ confidence and attach them to himself”, using for this end “all kinds of expediencies”.<sup>69</sup>

When he thought the time was ripe, Courveille called a Chapter at the Hermitage for September 1825. Contrary to Article 4 of the Statutes, no delegate of Monseigneur de Pins was present to preside. In his inaugural address, the founder of the Society of Mary dwelt at length on the good which the congregation was called to do and the many undertakings envisaged. Shrewdly, he asked the capitulants kindly to choose the one among the three priests in the residence at the Mother house whom they wished to direct them, adding: “I am devoted enough to sacrifice myself for you.”<sup>70</sup> In their simplicity the Brothers did not suspect anything. They silently wrote down the name of their choice. Father Champagnat’s name was on nearly every ballot paper. Father Courveille cast a look at Father Champagnat and said to him with a feeling he could not suppress, “One would think they had agreed together to give you their votes”.<sup>71</sup>

Instead of working out the way he wanted, things had obviously gone wrong for Courveille. Father Champagnat, quite convinced of his unworthiness and always regarding the founder of the Society of Mary as his Superior General, asked that the first ballot be annulled and, before the second ballot, he addressed the capitulants: “Do not think that, because we have known one another for a long time, that I am better qualified than anyone else to direct you. Instead of being occupied with manual work, they have devoted themselves exclusively to the cultivation of piety and the study of religion and have a knowledge of all these matters which I do not have.”<sup>72</sup> The second election was carried out as simply as the first. Father Courveille counted the votes. “‘The result is still the same’, he bitterly announced. Then, turning to Father Champagnat, he added, ‘You will be their Superior, since they will have no one but you.’”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 757, Para. 28

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, Para. 29

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, Para. 30

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, Para. 31



The candidate rejected by both these ballots of the Brothers did not consider himself beaten. To take command of the situation by indirect means he proposed to Fathers Champagnat and Terraillon that they should proceed to the election of a Superior General of the Fathers, for, until now, it was on his own authority and from his role as founder of the Society that he had arrogated the title of Superior General. He was given to understand that the election of a Superior General in a group of three people seemed improper; he did not persevere with this plan. Thus, Courveille's rank as Superior never became definitive.

### ***A financial crisis and the serious illness of Father Champagnat***

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The Marist Brothers' financial position was becoming more precarious from day to day. The spiteful criticism provoked by the building of the Hermitage gradually dried up all the sources of donations and there was no way of putting a stop to the agitation of some minds and the malice of some tongues. So it happened that, when the due dates arrived for the payment of certain debts, the coffers were hopelessly empty.<sup>74</sup> It was impossible to pay M. Montellier his 5,000 francs on 13 May 1825 for the first purchase of land. Montellier was satisfied with an interim payment of 2,000 francs. It was therefore necessary to obtain a loan. On 13 September Madame Justine de Divonne lent 12,000 francs at 4% interest, payable on 13 June and 13 December in gold or silver coin. As security for the loan, Fathers Champagnat and Courveille conjointly mortgaged all their property and rights thereto, present and future, especially a large house called the 'Hermitage of Our Lady': "vast buildings, courtyards, gardens, orchards, farm, fields, land, wood and a water-valve".<sup>75</sup>

More disturbing still than the financial plight was the awkward situation now existing between the founder of the Society of Mary and the founder of the Little Brothers of Mary, now the Brothers' elected Superior General. This was a situation which could seriously threaten the life of the Brothers' congregation. "Deeply offended by the preference shown for Father Champagnat"<sup>76</sup>, Courveille wrote letters to the Brothers in the houses, letters full of bitter reproaches, blaming the Brothers for not having chosen him as Superior and pretending that "this conduct was a gross insult to himself, a want

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<sup>74</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 142

<sup>75</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 142, Paras 3-5

<sup>76</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 757, Para. 33

of respect and confidence, and could only draw down God's disfavour on the congregation".<sup>77</sup>

When Father Champagnat returned from a general visitation of all the Brothers' houses in December, Father Courveille was still not in control of his chagrin and he fiercely criticised Champagnat. In his opinion, the Brothers were not well directed; the novices were not well tried or trained in piety and learning; the discipline of the house was neither strict enough nor sufficiently monastic; temporal matters were neglected and expenses were too high. In a word, Father Champagnat was a bad administrator; therefore, Courveille took the purse from him. But the purse in his hands was no better supplied. Indeed, it was very often empty; then his bad temper would give vent to invectives against his fellow-priest.

Physically exhausted by his recent travels and psychologically worn down by the conduct of the one whom he continued to regard as his Superior, the founder of the Little Brothers of Mary broke down. On 26 December 1825 he took to his bed. A week later he was at death's door. Courveille then ordered all the communities to pray, and have prayers said, for Champagnat's recovery – in all the parishes where the Brothers conducted schools. Not least among Courveille's motives was the terrible thought that, if Champagnat were to die, all the heavy debts would fall on him alone.

*All for the greater glory of God and the honour of Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus.  
From The Hermitage of Our Lady. 3rd January 1826.*

*Our very dear children in Jesus and Mary,*

*It is in the sorrow and bitterness of our heart that we write to you in order to direct you to pray earnestly the Father of mercies and our august Mother, the divine Mary, for our very dear and well-loved son, Father Champagnat, your very dear and venerated Father Director, who is dangerously ill.*

*I beg you, my very dear children, join with us in praying urgently the divine Jesus and the divine Mary, our Mother, to preserve for us a son who is so dear to us, and for you a father who should be no less dear to you. Ask the reverend parish priests to kindly pray for him and to recommend him to the prayers of the faithful.*

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<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

*Be assured of the paternal tenderness with which I have the honour to be,  
Your very devoted and fully-committed Father  
In Christ Jesus and Mary,*

*J.C.Courveille. f.D and S.p.g.m.* <sup>78</sup>

Both the initial and the final invocations were written in Latin. The initials at the letter's end probably mean "Director of the Brothers and Superior General". The use of the royal plural, usually reserved to bishops and major superiors, gives a good idea of the lordly assumptions of Courveille. Champagnat is for him a "well-loved son" and Champagnat's followers are "directed" to pray, not for Champagnat, their Founder, but for Champagnat, their "Father Director".

The sick priest decided to make his will and chose Father Terraillon as his sole heir. But Terraillon refused, being unwilling to be responsible for the debts. He and Father Courveille did not cease telling the Brothers that the creditors would come and drive them from the Hermitage. As for the two priests, they would leave the house and accept a parish. In this extremity Father Champagnat thought of Abbé Joseph Verrier, director of the minor seminary at Verrières, who had also been one of the twelve aspiring Marists of 1816. Later on, Verrier joined the "Society of the Cross of Jesus" of Father Bochard, in which he made his profession on 15 October 1820. These vows were subsequently annulled by Monseigneur de Pins – as were the vows of all Verrier's confreres at Chartreux (Bochard's Society of the Cross of Jesus). On 6 January, then, the priest testator named Fathers Courveille and Verrier as his sole heirs, but he did not even have the strength to sign the document.

### **Defeatism and an Episcopal Inquiry**

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In the Hermitage community discouragement was rife. Brothers and novices were convinced that, if Father Champagnat were to die, all would be lost and the community dispersed. Anxiety and despair led to relaxation and dissipation in the house. Instead of acting with prudence and gentle firmness, Jean-Claude Courveille resorted to severe repression, which excited general discontent and increased the bad spirit. Trying to conquer by force, he made severe threats and sent away some subjects. But irritation changed to exasperation when the founder of the Society of Mary announced that he

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<sup>78</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 147

was going to ask the archbishop for a parish. From then on most of the Little Brothers began to think of their future. Some intended to return home; others decided to join another congregation; still others intended to enter some business or profession. The congregation seemed lost.

Father Champagnat recovered relatively good health, only to be confronted by new difficulties. The Brothers' minds had been embittered by the trials they had undergone. On recovering from them, they felt no confidence in Jean-Claude Courveille, and he in turn was discontented with everyone and everything. Exaggerating the excellence and duties of the religious life, he required of the novices a perfection that one would be happy to find in seasoned religious. He imposed a yoke which nobody could carry and sent away anyone who tried to throw it off. Besides all this, he defamed the founder of the Little Brothers of Mary (who was then convalescing at Father Dervieux's presbytery in St Chamond) to Archbishop de Pins. He wrote a letter in which he accused Father Champagnat of receiving too easily all kinds of subjects, of not sufficiently forming the Brothers to piety and the religious state, of occupying them too much in manual work while neglecting their instruction, and of being so kind and indulgent that monastic discipline was weakened.

To find out what was going on, the archbishop directed Father Simon Cattet to conduct an inquiry at the Hermitage. Born at Neuville-sur-Saône (Rhône) and younger brother of Jean-François Cattet, Professor of Dogma at the University of Lyon, Simon Cattet had just been made a Vicar-General of Monseigneur de Pins (28 December 1825). With this title he took over from Jean Cholleton the care of religious communities. He was a forceful and abrupt character, a restless individual who tried to undo everything in order to rebuild it to his way of thinking. He descended on the "Hermitage of Our Lady" unannounced; he went into everything in great detail, submitted the Brothers and novices to a severe examination in religious knowledge and matters of primary teaching and made no attempt to hide his discontent. His conclusion was that the Brothers were not sufficiently instructed. He criticised this, found fault with that and made complaints about everything.

It was true that many postulants, on their arrival at the Hermitage, possessed a minimum of education, and, during the building of the Hermitage and the subsequent serious internal crisis, their little mental store was unlikely to increase to any extent. The complaints of the Vicar General were, then, partly well-founded, but they were, nevertheless, unjust.

Meanwhile, financial survival was a prime necessity. At Easter-time, since the country children went to work then, certain Brothers were free. To occupy them at the novitiate and procure finance to reduce the debts, Father Champagnat was authorised by the archbishop's council of Lyon, 15 March 1826, to establish a silk-mill at the Hermitage. Would this, then, be the end of their difficulties? No! The saddest and most humiliating trial was yet to be announced.

### ***Courveille falls from grace***

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In the month of May 1826 Jean-Claude Courveille, miraculously cured by Our Lady of Le Puy, charged by her with founding her privileged company reserved for the struggles of the last times, Superior General of the Society of Mary, a man who saw only faults in the Little Brothers of Mary and incompetence in their founder, Father Champagnat, sinned sexually with a postulant. To put his conscience in order, he set out on 'pilgrimage' to La Trappe at Aiguebelle (Drôme), which had been re-established twelve years earlier. Nobody was surprised at this pilgrimage. "Father Courveille was regarded everywhere as a saint, and, up to this time, it was true."<sup>79</sup>

It was Father Terraillon, his colleague at the Hermitage, who made this statement and who was the first to discover the evil. From La Trappe a letter written on 4 June 1826 by the unfortunate Courveille called for an important decision to be made. In this very long letter, part of which is quoted here, Father Courveille wrote:

*All for the greater glory of God and the greater glory of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the very venerable Fathers of the Society of Mary, Fathers Champagnat, Terraillon, and the very honoured Brothers in Our Lord Jesus Christ and Mary, His holy Mother.*

*I cannot tell you how happy I am with my pilgrimage to the holy house of Our Lady of La Trappe. I have found here holy peace of soul; I have accomplished towards God the promises I had made and now I am at peace.*

*It is true that among these good religious is not found that deep religious knowledge which very often (as says the Apostle) puffs up the heart. But al-*

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<sup>79</sup> O.M. 3, Doc. 798, Para. 6

*so I can assure you that here is found the true science of the saints. This alone is necessary for salvation, and of this, though I am very stupid in all things, I have not even the first elements.*

*These good religious received me with that charity which marks the saints; they have all kinds of regards for strangers; and it is clear that, guided by Faith, they receive them as they receive Our Lord. ...*

*The Superior of La Trappe seems to take all care to mortify and humiliate his inferiors on all occasions, and his inferiors seem to receive reproofs with a respect, a humility, I almost said a holy avidity, that make it easy to see that they are not amateurs, but that they leave to the Superior a complete liberty over their conduct.*

*Oh, my very dear Brothers, how I wish that the house of the 'Hermitage of Our Lady' might be a faint image, I don't say of the hard and painful life, of the extremely rigorous penance which is practised continually in the holy house of Our Lady of La Trappe (and of which a great sinner like me would have so great a need), but I know that it is not given to everyone to have such great courage, and especially to one as lax as I am. I should wish, I say, that the house of the 'Hermitage of Our Lady' were a faint image of the regularity here – of the mortification, the silence, the humility, the renunciation of one's will and judgement to conform oneself to the will and judgement of the Superior (which is that of God), of the abnegation and contempt of self, of the love of holy poverty, of union, of holy perfect charity one towards another, of respect and forbearance, and especially of submission, of blind and perfect obedience to the Superior which gives to him an entire liberty to command and order whatever he believes is most useful to the community and to the spiritual good of each one. So be it. So be it.*

*Now, my very dear and very tender Brothers, I am going to open my heart to you and let you share my sentiments, to ask your advice and to beg you to address yourselves to the divine Jesus and the divine Mary by fervent prayer so that you may be able to know what will be for the greater good, so that I may not act of myself, but according to their holy will.*

*If, therefore, you believe, after having consulted God, that I am only a stumbling block in the holy Society of Mary, more harmful than useful (and of this I am myself very much convinced), I pray you to tell me simply and*



A sample of Courveille's writing, with his personal seal.

then I will be able to live in the holy house in which I am located, in order to make sure of my salvation; for these good religious are very happy to have me. The Father Superior is anxious to have the favour of writing to the archbishop to obtain permission, but that will be only after your reply.

It is true that their way of life is hard and it could be said in a certain sense that their life is a continual martyrdom, but I hope that, sustained by God's grace, I will be able to support it. Besides, even if I were to die ten or even twenty years sooner, what does it matter, provided I have the happiness to die a saint?

I will not conceal from you, my very tender Brothers, that for some time I was in great trouble, seeing the very little regularity there was among us, the difference of opinions concerning the end, the form, the intentions and the spirit of the true Society of Mary, seeing our independence, our scant submission and our individual ideas. . . . All that threw me into disquietude and led me to think that, with the demon of pride, of insubordination, and especially of division putting himself among us, we could not carry on for



long. I accuse no one but myself and I regard myself as the true cause of all that. I am well convinced that I alone was preventing the blessings of heaven from coming to the Society of Mary and that my want of regularity, my lukewarm and irreligious conduct were for every one a cause of scandal. I indeed ask pardon of you all, and also for all the failings I may have shown in any way at all.

I believe that it will perhaps be more useful to the dear Society of Mary if I be not there; and, although it will be for me a most cruel blow to see myself excluded from it, nevertheless, for its greater good and greater usefulness, I am ready for whatever will be the holy will of God. No matter what happens, I can assure you that I shall never lose sight of it, and that it will always be for me something very dear, something I will recommend without ceasing to Our Lord, and I will pray continually for the members who compose it and for all those who will join it in the future – and all this in a quite special manner.

I very much desire that whoever will be set up as Superior and be charged with directing may be filled with the spirit of God and that he will in no way depart from the end of the Institute and the true intentions of the divine Mary, which I hope she will make known to him. I wish with no less ardour that all, without exception, will allow him a full and entire liberty to conduct them, that all will have great respect for him (whoever he may be), regarding him as Our Lord, and as holding for them the place of God, seeing that he is not acting against the will of God, the faith of the holy Roman Church, the Constitutions of the Order, the good and usefulness of the Society of Mary. Moreover, may they have in his regard an entire submission, a perfect obedience, not only of will and exteriorly, but also interiorly and in judgement, leaving him an entire and complete liberty to order and command according as he believes it best before God, more useful to the good of the community and of more benefit to the spiritual advancement of each one. Without this, no religious community can be at all regular and endure for long.

I can assure you, and the august Mary is my witness, that I am very much attached to you, that I bear you all dearly in my heart, and that it will be for me one of my greatest griefs to see myself separated from you; but, once again, for the good and benefit of the dear and holy Society of Mary, I resign myself to everything, even to being anathema, if necessary.



*Be so kind, then, my well-beloved and very tender Brothers, I beg you with tears, after you have examined the whole thing before God, having no other views but His sole glory and the honour of his holy Mother, to let me know as soon as possible what you believe is most for the glory of God, the honour of the holy Saint Mother and most useful to the dear Society of Mary. So that I may know to what I am bound, I will not make, nor allow to be made, any approach to Lyon, nor will I enter the novitiate, until I have received beforehand a reply from you, so as not to behave imprudently or take any steps which I would have to cancel later.*

*I pray you to believe in the friendship and sincere attachment with which I embrace you with all my heart, and with which I have the honour to be,*

*Your very devoted brother in Christ Jesus and Mary,*

*J-C Courveille. f.d. et s.p.g.l. + priest ind. n.n.s.d. etc.*

*Aiguebelle, from the house of Our Lady of La Trappe, 4 June 1826.*

*I desire my letter to be read to the whole community.”<sup>80</sup>*

On receiving this letter, astonishing in its candour, Father Champagnat entered into the views of Father Courveille. Was he not, after all, his co-owner of the property? He thought of advising him to return to the novitiate, but Father Terraillon, to whom Champagnat gave the letter to read, and who knew the social and moral danger which poor Father Courveille represented, insisted, on the contrary, that the insincere resignation of the “pilgrim” at Aiguebelle be taken at its word and that Courveille stay at La Trappe. The next day Father Colin arrived from Belley. Father Champagnat saw him first and influenced him to share his way of thinking. Alone against the other two, and unable to explain himself fully, Father Terraillon held more strongly than ever to the point of view which he had expressed the previous evening. “You are missing an excellent opportunity which might not occur again. You will regret it, I am certain. Father Courveille has the reputation of a saint in this district. If we are obliged to remove him later on, as could happen, all the blame will fall on us. By our taking advantage of this occasion, he will be excluding himself. It will appear that he is an inconstant person and we will be sheltered from all blame. Believe me, accept his resignation. You will congratulate yourselves on it later on, I am certain.”<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 152

<sup>81</sup> O.M. 2, Doc. 750, Para. 11

Father Terraillon then showed them a letter he had already written; it required Father Courveille to stay at Aiguebelle, since it was so good there. The letter also informed him that his resignation was accepted. Fathers Terraillon and Champagnat signed the letter; Father Colin was not supposed to know about it. The next day Father Terraillon posted it at St Chamond and then went on to Lyon. Vicar General Barrou, to whom Father Terraillon entrusted the whole affair, was very happy to learn how events had permitted such a great misfortune to be settled in the greatest secrecy, thus preventing a scandal. At least, so he thought. Gradually, however, the fault became known at the Hermitage.

The withdrawal of the founder of the Society of Mary was a violent shock for the Brothers. Everything seemed to have failed, at least in the priests' branch in the archdiocese of Lyon. Father Terraillon, who really had come to the Hermitage against his will and who had paid ten francs each month for his keep (an indication of tenant-status), profited by the great Jubilee<sup>82</sup> to leave the Hermitage discreetly and to be engaged as a Jubilee preacher. (Later, in May 1827 he was a curate at Ainay, Lyon.) Father Champagnat remained alone to face a most painful situation. It is hard to describe the depth of his grief in these circumstances. What a crisis must have shaken his soul when he discovered the scandalous conduct of the one whom he had always regarded, in spite of everything, as his Superior General and founder of the Society of Mary! The public accused him of being the cause of the departure of Fathers Courveille and Terraillon, and he could not exonerate himself without revealing scandalous behaviour, a procedure he had no intention of pursuing.

Far from discouraging Champagnat, this terrible lesson fortified him in his plan. In May 1827 he wrote to Monseigneur de Pins: "The lack of success up to now of the priests at the Hermitage prevents me from daring to present myself to your Grace to let you know my sorrow. God wishes this work in these perverse times; this is still my firm belief. But, alas, perhaps He wants other men to establish it. May His holy name be blessed! The unfortunate affair which involved the one who seemed to be its head shows clearly the terrible efforts the devil has produced to overthrow a work which he foresees is destined to do so much good."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> 29 October 1826 to 29 April 1827

<sup>83</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 173, Para. 13

Even seven years later, in the midst of a different crisis, Champagnat was unable to prevent himself from giving vent to his grief at the remembrance of the unfortunate step he took to have Father Courveille come to La Valla: "Very soon new dangers much more terrible than the early ones came to assail the Little Brothers of Mary. What a disastrous approach was the one I made to the Council, I mean to say, when I went to ask for Father Courveille, who was then Superior at Epercieux. Oh! Truly fatal day and more than capable of ruining a work which the divine Mary would support with all the strength of her arms!"<sup>84</sup>

After the departure of Courveille it was essential, first of all, to compensate for the evil caused by that wretched priest. Consequently, the archbishop's Council proposed a Retreat for the Brothers. The Council Minute reads: "5 July 1826. Father Cattet is happy to assume the task of trying to have a Retreat given to the primary teachers in the building of the Hermitage at St Chamond."<sup>85</sup> This Retreat probably took place. Moreover, apart from its moral objectives, the presence of Father Cattet, Vicar General, enabled two other matters to be broached: the financial state of the congregation and the question of fusion of Champagnat's Brothers with the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, a proposal put forward to archdiocesan authorities, most probably by Father Cattet. Both these matters ended satisfactorily for Champagnat. Finance affairs proved to be no great worry and Father Coindre, leader of the other congregation, was quite opposed to any union – as was Champagnat.

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<sup>84</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 286, Para. 2

<sup>85</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 155, Para. 24°



*Document*

*Commentary on Letter 1042  
of the personal letters of  
Brother François*

**Brother Eduardo GATTI**

*Brother François left, in two thick books, 1673 personal letters which were put in digital format and published in 1996 through the careful work of Brothers Jean-Pierre Cotnoir and Paul Sester. This enormous collection does not seem to have been the subject of any serious study up until then. The commentary below is on a letter situated on page 40 of the original manuscript. Not dated, like most of the letters of the collection, it is probably from the year 1842. We thank Br Edward Gatti for drawing attention to a too little known source of our patrimony.*

*To a Master of Novices*

*My very dear Brother,*

*The employment which has been confided to you is of the greatest importance and I do not seek to hide from you the fact that it is very difficult to fulfil. But, having accepted it through obedience, you may exercise it with confidence because it is God who has imposed it on you through the mediation of your Superiors and, in imposing a burden, God always grants the graces and the strength to bear the task in a manner which conforms to His designs. A master of novices must be a man of God, a man of prayer and of prayerfulness. Pray often, pray with fervour; ask the good God to fill you with His Spirit; pray that He may cause you to know your duties and that He may give you the strength to fulfil them, that He may give you wisdom, prudence, sweet-*

*ness, charity, vigilance, firmness and patience, all of which are necessary to carry out with care the honourable employment which has been confided to you. Lovingly present to Him all your needs and the needs of those with whom you are charged; expect everything, await on everything, from God. Carry out what you know. God will help you to do what you cannot do.*

*Begin by winning the hearts of the novices, by always showing interest in, and devotion to, them. Look on them as children of predilection whom the Blessed Virgin has confided to you to raise them to the perfection of their state. Have a very particular care, fearing neither work nor difficulty, to provide for their spiritual and corporal needs with an attentive and considerate charity. It is necessary to present virtue under aspects which make it pleasant. It is gentleness which it is always necessary to begin with, putting it to good use. You must employ strict remedies only as an extreme measure, and when you cannot do any better. Warnings, seasoned by gentleness, inspire gratitude for the one who gives them and stirs up an efficacious desire to make amends. But gentleness alone does not suffice; it must be accompanied by a prudent firmness. It is an act of love to the sick person to occasion the pain which is destined to effect the desired cure. God, the best of fathers, often employs the harshest of chastisements in regard to those whom He loves, and whom He wishes to save, in order that they regain their freedom. Request, urge, awaken the slack and the refractory. Use in their regard reproaches, menaces, corrections, always animated by sorrow for their faults and by desire for their advancement, acting always with that prudence which works so that that you work your way into the heart, and act in such a way that you diversify your conduct according to the range of characters and temperaments.*

*You must exercise a careful and continuous vigilance, but always in a peaceful and moderate way. It is necessary to see all without giving the appearance of being a scrutiniser. It is better to prevent faults than to be obliged to punish them.*

*In regard to the novices, it is desirable that you conform yourself to the rules and to the usages of the Mother House. You can scarcely put them aside without disadvantage.*

*Do not forget anything for the formation of good Brothers. Piety, humility, charity, and fraternal union are the virtues which you must specially recommend.*

*Be very regular, do your best to have the rule observed, especially the rule of silence - and you will labour with consolation in the work of Mary*

*Since the holidays the Hermitage novitiate has recruited about a dozen novices, all fine men and full of good will. We have very much need of the Blessed Virgin in bringing still more of them, for very few Brothers remain with us.*

*Receive the assurance of the very cordial affection with which I am,*

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### **Reflection on Letter No. 40 of Brother François<sup>86</sup>**

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When, for the first time, the young priest had before his eyes the little Gabriel Rivat, he surely did not think that their lives would have such a great affinity in the shaping of the charism of the future congregation, the Little Brothers of Mary.

Aged scarcely ten years, Gabriel received his First Communion from the hands of the young priest. This was in spring, 1818. A little time afterwards, the founder of the new-born congregation presented himself at the Rivat home, as someone else had done sixteen years before, in search of Gabriel. He followed with interest this little shepherd boy from Maisonnette who, very soon, had prepared himself to receive the Eucharistic Jesus.

In May, with a parcel of linen under his arm, and accompanied by Françoise, his mother, François crossed the Ban, heading in the direction of La Valla in order to complete the consecration that his mother had made at the feet of the Virgin of Valfleury.

It is thus that Mary handed over to Marcellin Champagnat one of the most precious of pearls which Champagnat would employ for the beginning of his new project. Then, like the adolescent Jesus, Gabriel plunged into a fruitful anonymity in the midst of common life with the other disciples of Marcellin. The closest in age to Gabriel was only fourteen years old. What task of formation will this priest bring to fruition in the little community which he would soon launch towards apostolic work?<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Personal Letters by Br.. Paul Sester, t. 1 n° 1042

<sup>87</sup> My brother was the second, and I the third. Couturier or Brother Antoine was the fourth, then Brother Barthémy and dear Brother François. For some time we were six in number. (Brother Laurent, O.M. 756)

Before 1822 the Brothers were busy with four schools and carried out catechetical work at Le Bessat. Gabriel had already taken a class at La Vallée. Later, he would be the cook at Marlhes. By taking the name-in-religion of François, the young boy would forever show honour to his mother, to whom he owed the great good fortune of his vocation (1819)<sup>88</sup>.

The experience of the refoundation of 1822<sup>89</sup> made Marcellin reflect on the subject of a more solid formation, of someone as an accompanying person in the formation of his novices. He undertook the preparation of the young François shortly to assume tasks as a formator. It was thus, that, in 1826, in the midst of the difficulties of the congregation, François made his perpetual vows and received as mission, the formation of the novices. As Guy Chastel tells us, the Founder did not permit him to work outside the Hermitage.

On that point, we can only conjecture as to the manner in which Marcellin Champagnat formed his Brothers and, in this case, the young François. We can also emphasise the “charismatic aspect”. What was it that attracted so strongly the young men who were knocking on the doors of the newly-born congregation?

The beautiful testimony of Brother Laurent gives us some idea of it.

*Like the most tender of fathers, he showed a great care for us. He truly loved us in God. He caused to be instilled in us the divine fire with which he was enflamed, in such a way that the difficulties, the labours and all the miseries of life would have been incapable of shaking us. The good Father Champagnat was of a joyful and pleasant character, but he was firm...*

*He had much to suffer from certain peculiar souls who were very difficult to direct. They were, nevertheless, sure of receiving a good remembrance in his prayers, but if, after having exhausted all means of winning them to God, they did not want to correct themselves - oh, then, it was necessary to show them the door.<sup>90</sup>*

Our Marist heritage has left us one of these pearls, which has remained hidden and which can now bring the Founder closer to us through his prin-

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<sup>88</sup> Decree for the cause of beatification of Br François (Artc. Proceso), 1910 p.13

<sup>89</sup> Brother Gatti Eduardo “1822” N° 18-19 Review, “Maristas Río de la Plata”, 1997.

<sup>90</sup> Brother Laurent, O.M. 756



cial disciple as intermediary. It is all about letter No 40 of Brother François. We do not know to whom it is addressed, although in 1842 the novices were few in number.<sup>91</sup>

Far from limiting itself to giving instructions to a Master of Novices, this letter is one of the most beautiful mirrors in which we can see how the charism of the Founder transmits itself in a concrete manner to his disciples and comes down to us, showing us his spirituality, his unconditional love, his human approachability, his charismatic strength, always centred on Christ, through the maternal eyes of Mary.

*My very dear Brother,*

*The employment which has been confided to you is of the greatest importance and I do not dissimulate about it - it is very difficult to fulfil. But, having accepted it through obedience, you may exercise it with confidence because it is God who has imposed it on you through the intermediary of your Superior, and, in imposing a burden, God always grants the graces and the strength to bear the task in a manner conformable to His designs.*

How many times, to encourage him in his work at the Hermitage, would Marcellin not have repeated to Brother François what he was later to say on his death-bed:

*Poor Brother, I feel sorry for you, for the government of the Institute is a heavy burden; but the spirit of zeal, the spirit of prayer, and confidence in God will help you to carry it. Remember that you can be useful to others and procure the salvation of souls only by sacrificing yourself. Do not forget that you have the Blessed Virgin, who is the resource of the house. Her protection will never fail you.<sup>92</sup>*

The Founder, conscious of the importance of forming the Little Brothers well, thought of the young François for bringing about a good outcome in this rather delicate task. The latter gives witness of the same availability that Marcellin showed to the action of divine Providence: if God wants it, He will give us the means. The mediation of the Superior, which so much marked the conduct of Father Champagnat, is now proposed to the new Master of novices.

<sup>91</sup> We know that the union with the Brothers of Saint Paul-Trois-Châteaux was already accomplished and that Mazelier wished to change from the novitiate a Brother from the Hermitage. In April of that year, Brother Jean-Marie was sent as Director of the novitiate of Saint Paul-Trois-Châteaux. Avit, No. 49-50.

<sup>92</sup> Life, p. 241, English edition 1989

François experienced difficulties during his long years at the Hermitage. Just like his teacher, and in spite of his own poor health, he had to face up to the strange dispositions of his novices, by often harmonising patience and strictness. This combination is possible only with a great spirit of faith.

For François, God is not someone who inspires us but who absents Himself when our hands are put to the work<sup>93</sup>. God unites Himself to the mission with which He has charged us, to our apostolic work. We are mediators among our Brothers before a God who accompanies us and who remains active at the heart of our daily actions.

The profound sense of obedience, which seems to us so extreme nowadays, is of vital importance in the spirituality of the Founder; indeed it gives us certitude, not only in accomplishing the will of God, but also of not being an impediment in the accomplishment of the will of God.<sup>94</sup>

Even if a new fashion of seeing things leads us today to make discernment, through mediation, into what measure co-responsibility and subsidiarity favour a fraternal research into what God wants of us<sup>95</sup>, the fact that God acts in us and with us as an efficacious means of reaching men remains an actuality. It is undeniable; it is also certain that, in as much as we are consecrated people, this matter engages us personally and as a community.

François transmits his experience of the action of Providence through the mediation of the superiors. He learnt it from Marcellin, who had had to discern what God was asking of him, taking account of the obedience which he owed to his own superiors and of his own perception of things as Founder. François knew that you cannot give what you have not got.

*A Master of novices must be a man of God, a man of prayer and of prayerfulness.*

When we see how Father Champagnat acted, how he gave his life at the end of only twenty-three years of indefatigable toil, and how, at the end of his days, he maintained a union with God so profound and so intimate, we are obliged to accept that he lived a deep mystical relationship with Jesus

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<sup>93</sup> Circular "Marist Apostolic Spirituality" p. 457.

<sup>94</sup> Spiritual Testament, paragraph 4

<sup>95</sup> Doc. XX<sup>o</sup> General Chapter, 38

Christ, founded on prayer and generous meditation. Today, we cannot make reference to correspondence of spiritual direction of the Founder through which he encouraged the Brothers who, often, were leaving for the schools, having scarcely finished their basic formation. Nevertheless, we can make it out through these documents of our patrimony.

To this Master of Novices François insists on a formula which, in spite of our activism, remains worthwhile today and which can help us understand new ways of living the religious life, in which personal response – mature, sure, contemporary, though now somewhat clouded because of a time of transition – may move towards a new expression of spirituality. This spirituality will have to come from the new generations, in the midst of which spirituality there must necessarily be found a formula of prayer and of meditation in a more personal setting, more anchored in experience, where a new community life can be perceived, not as a structure of support, but as a need to share the common mission facing the challenge of auto-sufficient individualism.

*Pray often, pray with fervour; ask that the good God will fill you with His spirit; that He will make you know your duties and will give you the strength to fulfil them; that He will give you wisdom, prudence, gentleness, charity, vigilance, firmness, patience, all of which are necessary for you to fulfil with care the honourable employment which has been confided to you. Lovingly present to Him your needs and the needs of those with whom you are charged. Expect everything from God. Do what you can. He will help you to do what you cannot do.*

This is indeed the experience of the young François, responsible for the novices of the Hermitage - the confident prayer to a God who provides for our needs.

Scarcely nineteen years of age, François received the mission of accompanying the novices in their formation. The good Father had prepared him for this task for some time. François would fill the position for the next twelve years. What could this young man have known, other than a lived experience close to the Founder? In regard to the seven gifts which he mentions, François strove to acquire them in close association with this priest who had grown so much in sanctity as to become a master in contemplation and in action. François had grown in **gentleness** and in **patience**, qual-

ities which so much attracted those who approached Father Champagnat. Then there were **prudence** and **firmness** - in making provision for, and always making visible, the values of the founding charism. Also, after the fashion of Solomon, there was the asking for **wisdom** - to know where the Spirit is breathing and what is the will of God. **Charity** and **vigilance** were not only for prevention, but also for keeping oneself close by in times of difficulty.

*To expect all from God, to do all that is in our power and, like Marcellin, to know that God is the one principally involved.*<sup>96</sup>

This paragraph shows the great power and a growing intensity of a love which surpasses that of simply the professional counsellor. François feels a deep affection for the Brother to whom he is writing. He knows that the task of the latter is vital, as much for the person who accompanies as for those who are beginning their journey in the following of Christ.<sup>97</sup>

*Begin by gaining the hearts of the novices by always showing them both interest and devotion; regard them as children of predilection whom the Holy Virgin has confided to you to raise them to the perfection of their state; exercise particular care, without fearing either work or difficulty, in order to provide for their spiritual and corporal needs with attentive and thoughtful charity.*

Conscious of his numerous limitations at the time of undertaking the formation of his Brothers, Marcellin always devoted himself to it with force and vigour.

Some concrete aspects of the formation of our first Brothers include force and vigour, marked by a spirit of detachment, of work and of generosity, like the peasants who have to earn their food from the earth. Then there are the making of nails, the community vegetable garden, the frugal food, the rustic clothing, the heroic mortification, the daily timetable, the rock-breaking, the snow, the long journeys on foot, the attention given to the most simple things.

Force and vigour, which were not marked by a suffering empty of meaning, were certainly there, but the Founder, being also a loving father, displayed other qualities: a sense of humour, family life, prayer, the ability to

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<sup>96</sup> Paul Sester, Letter 020.

<sup>97</sup> VC 65

guess the needs of others, the possession of few things but the sharing of them in love, care of the person who is sick or who suffers from sadness, true prayer, the presence of God, Mary as Ordinary Resource, greetings in his letters, spiritual direction, visits to the communities, the experience of snow, journeys, dangers, and the little gift - simple and touching. These are the expressions of an attentive and provident charity which has certainly been lived and has been transmitted in turn to his disciple.

Today, the religious life remains a prophetic force for new generations in search of meaning in their lives. They are numerous, those who choose a demanding and supportive life to the point of heroism, confronting the temptation of mediocrity and of engagement at short term, making a radical option in face of an uncertain future and rising above the fear of a definitive engagement.

The way of life proposed by Marcellin is still valid. It is an appeal to proceed according to his charism, a charism which transmits itself through community experience, with new contributions from the generations which approach him. This is a formation which gives advantages to a person, but it must also show evidence of strictness<sup>98</sup>. François understood it; he encourages his disciple to do the same.

It is necessary to present virtue under appearances which make it look pleasant. Gentleness is always necessary in encouraging others to put virtue into practice. You must never employ strong measures except in extreme cases when you cannot act otherwise. Warnings, tinged with gentleness, inspire thankfulness to the one who gives them and stimulates an efficacious desire to make amends. But gentleness alone does not suffice; it must be accompanied by a certain firmness. It is like loving a sick person; you do not hesitate to administer a remedy which is going to cause him some pain, for, by applying the remedy, you know that he is going to get well.

Let us imagine the Founder in the midst of his novices - moments of joy and of repose after hard labour. These young men frequently hear expressions from Saint Francis de Sales, the saint of gentleness who so much influenced the spirituality of the religious life of the period. His influence on the first rule of the Hermitage community is certain, especially his prayer to

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<sup>98</sup> Guidance on formation in religious Institutes, 26-28

the Virgin<sup>99</sup>. We can distinguish the pastoral action of Marcellin as curate, as founder, and as formator of our first Brothers, a task which often he had to take on because of the influence of Jansenism on the Church of that period. Let us recall the fear of the little group of Brothers discouraged because of the rigorous pressure of Courveille. We know that François was among them<sup>100</sup>. Let us recall the immense joy with which they welcomed Father Champagnat in the community room after his convalescence.

How wonderful they were - the love and devotion of the Founder for each Brother! But we also know that he had to send some away, all other options having been exhausted.<sup>101</sup>

The dilemma of initial formation, which so much preoccupies many of our Provinces, can in part be explained by the fact that postulants, who have an advanced process of personal growth, are increasingly numerous, which brings about the advantage of a very mature choice. But in view of their fundamental option for Christ, this advantage also brings about a difficult process, that of personal restructuring.<sup>102</sup> In the same way, integral formation does not find itself limited by this matter; it becomes a source of growth in the charism and allows for a better knowledge of the choice made.<sup>103</sup>

As in the time of Brother François, a great number of our aspirants come from family and socio-cultural backgrounds that are characterised by significant defects in the religious sphere, in such contrast to the milieu which little Rivat experienced from his infancy. The work is not easy and often it can sow doubt in the soul of the formator himself. The great number of departures in the time of the Founder bear witness to this.<sup>104</sup>

Let us also remind ourselves that this mixture of patience and strictness in formation calls for an equilibrium, sustained by a great spirit of Faith.

*God, the best of fathers, in order that those whom He loves and whom He wishes to save may regain their freedom, often employs the harshest of*

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<sup>99</sup> Talk by Brother Gabriel Michel, Pilar, 1994, p. 95

<sup>100</sup> Artc. Proceso 1910 p.15

<sup>101</sup> AA, 43...Origines Maristes,...IV. 294-295.

<sup>102</sup> Rulla, "Anthropology of the Christian vocation, I" p. 241-243.

<sup>103</sup> Formation Guide, 22-23

<sup>104</sup> 92 Brothers left the Institute, 49 went to heaven. There were 280 Brothers at the time of the Founder's death.

*chastisements. So, freely return to the task: request, urge, stir the slack and the refractory. Use, in their regard, reproaches threats, corrections, always animated by sorrow for their faults and by desire for their advancement; always acting with that prudence which works so that that you install yourself in the heart, and work in such a way that you diversify your conduct according to the variety of characters and temperaments. You must exercise a careful and continuous vigilance, but always in a peaceful and moderate way. It necessary to see all without giving the appearance of being a scrutiniser. It is better to prevent faults than to be obliged to punish them.*

François could not escape the concept, so much promoted in his time, of a God who punishes. In the past, we ourselves have not escaped such a concept. This idea is absent from the letters of the Founder, but it turns up rather often in the sermons of the curate of La Valla, as in those of his fellow disciple at Ars. Marcellin certainly experienced the presence of a provident God, a loving and merciful Father always ready to begin again a new personal alliance which permitted him to move along at more ease.<sup>105</sup> What devotion, what respect for each one of the postulants whom the Lord sent him! It suffices just to imagine these first disciples whom Brother Laurent describes with so much realism.<sup>106</sup> Coming from the villages of the countryside, many of them had to start from zero. Others, the more difficult ones, would make life difficult for him. It is not astonishing that obedience and the role of the Director are among the themes on which the Rule of 1837 insists the most. In spite of the rigidity indicated by these rules, Father Champagnat knew how to surround his Brothers with numerous examples of affection, of attention in difficulties and in trials occasioned by bad health. He showed compassion, adaptability in attitude and a healthy and holy joy. He transmitted all that to his Brothers by employing the pedagogy of the “little virtues”. François knew how to nourish himself on this charismatic attitude, being thus given a vision of an assembly of qualities with which, without neglecting what was important in formation, he fashioned liberated men who bore a strong family spirit.<sup>107</sup>

*It is desirable that you conform yourself to the rules and to the usages of the Mother House in regard to the novices. You can scarcely put them aside without disadvantages.*

<sup>105</sup> Brother Paul Sester, Letters, 006.

<sup>106</sup> Origines Maristes, 756

<sup>107</sup> Talk by Br Gabriel Michel, Pilar, 1994, pp. 287-297.

*Do not forget anything in the formation of good Brothers. Piety, humility, charity, and fraternal union are the virtues which you must specially recommend.*

*Be very regular, do your best to observe the Rule, especially that of silence, and you will labour with consolation in the work of Mary.*

After the General Chapter of 1854, the Constitutions and the Rules of Government<sup>108</sup> were composed. We can say that the spirit to which this letter gives witness is conserved in the two works just cited. The importance of maintaining unity and family spirit are clear, not only in the doctrinal aspects, but also in the sense which the expression “The Mother House” takes here. The Hermitage is not only the first house in which the authority resides, but also the place where the foundation spirit is engendered. It is the preferred place of Marcellin’s Brothers,<sup>109</sup> the cradle, the rock, the river, the location where spirituality is strengthened<sup>110</sup> and the last resting place of the father and founder. François lived there for practically the last twenty-five years of his life. He witnessed the spread of this work, which he had to pursue from that time onward without the support of his master. “Do not lose it.” He means, “Do not lose the gift of this great gift. Do not forget our Founder. Do not lose the founding charism.” Thanks to each new branch, the tree grows and becomes sturdier, but the branches that distance themselves from the roots which nourish them - as it is for growing stems, they must remain vigorous and fruitful, strongly united to the trunk and to the roots which provide the vital sap in the way of genetic heritage. Faced with new situations and the perpetual lures of individualism, we must not give way to the easy temptation of allowing ourselves to be assimilated by the “global village”, but must dedicate ourselves to the difficult task of firmly preserving our values of identity, as much the human and cultural values as the Christian values, and also the values of the vows and those values which relate to the founding charism. François did not call for a catalogue of rules to be kept, but for a manner of living our spirituality, strongly marked by the experience of the founding charism. We know the importance which he gave to the point of keeping alive the presence of Marcellin in the midst of his Brothers, a work to which he dedicated himself during the next eighteen years.

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<sup>108</sup> French Edition of 1889, pp 143-180.

<sup>109</sup> Brother Euthyme, SUMM 317.

<sup>110</sup> Brother Paul Sester, Letters 062, 24-08-1835.



What, for François, are the important elements of the charism? Piety, humility, charity, fraternal union; these are the pillars on which the Founder also insisted for the formation of the his Brothers. Piety is envisaged as an attitude of a life centred on Christ, Mary being the Ordinary Resource. Presence of a God who is provident in the events of everyday life is also important.<sup>111</sup> The Founder regarded this virtue as fundamental for the postulants<sup>112</sup> and as indispensable for religious life. In regard to constancy, he did not regard it as a virtue far removed from reality and activity. On the contrary, it reinforces and enriches all apostolic activity<sup>113</sup>. What happiness is expressed in the affirmation, “Everything is the work of Mary!”

Humility must be regarded as the normal expression of service, marked by attention to the needs of others. Our foundation came into existence in this spirit – “for the poor children of the countryside”, and “the Little Brothers of Mary” according to Brother Jean-Baptiste. Pride was the first fault to be combated among the postulants.<sup>114</sup>

Charity is intimately united to fraternal life. Marcellin worked ceaselessly at forming his Brothers in this; it was one of his greatest preoccupations at the time of his death. This point constitutes the principal part of his Spiritual Testament.<sup>115</sup> From the beginning of the foundation he himself chose to participate in the life of his Brothers in a concrete way.<sup>116</sup> He always regarded fraternal living as a fundamental element of a community; to think of the Brothers who compose it and to be vigilant to the attaining of a sure structure in order that fraternity, work and prayer were assured.<sup>117</sup>

Today more than ever, we feel called to this experience of simplicity, charity and fraternal life. We are conscious that we must share our charism with lay people. It would be a pity if we did it through necessity rather than through concern for their personal growth. We may ask ourselves as to how might we grow when we are becoming less and less numerous. Marcellin, who is a saint, calls us to this experience: that the entire Church lives today with a new openness to plurality of presence in the proclamation of the

<sup>111</sup> Constitutions, 3 and 7.

<sup>112</sup> Brother Bassus, SUMM99, Brother Camille, SUMM92, Brother Raphael, Summ 349.

<sup>113</sup> Life, 1989, pp. 102; Talk by Brother G. Michel, Pilar, 1994, p.268.

<sup>114</sup> Life, 1989, pp. 102ff; pp. 395ff

<sup>115</sup> Spiritual Testament, 4 and 5.

<sup>116</sup> Life, 1989, pp. 74-75

<sup>117</sup> Brother Paul Sester, Letters 005, 063, 168, 215, 266.

kingdom. The charism is offered to whoever would like to seize upon it. To live it is not a matter of sympathy, necessary or appropriate because of work or relationship, but, rather, an experience linked with vocation, with an appeal to live an engaged and growing spirituality. Today we can feel that we are less numerous and that we are acting through necessity or through regret, but each lay person who comes close to the Marist charism must himself or herself also respond to an appeal linked with vocation, a call which does not in any way prevent their remaining faithful to their own life-calling. This appeal will certainly bring about a special engagement for Christ and the Kingdom.

We cannot devote the Marist charism to special circumstances by means of a process purely intellectual, but rather through relationship, experiences and community. We therefore receive other people who live it and who, in their turn, have discovered it thanks to others. God, who is community, chose a people to walk with Him and made the people participate in His plan of salvation<sup>118</sup>. Jesus Christ, Word-of-God-made-man, revealed the Father to us. He formed a community of disciples, remained in the midst of them and spread this presence in the Church<sup>119</sup>. Marcellin also formed a community of Brothers and chose to live, in the midst of them, the experience of the foundation of the Institute<sup>120</sup>. It is this experience lived by François at the Hermitage which François wishes to preserve in the new community which he will direct as Master of Novices.

The Hermitage is place of silence and peace<sup>121</sup>. In the deep valley where Marcellin built the Mother House, you hear the twittering of the birds, the stirring of the wind among the oaks and bushes, and the water of the Gier which flows rapidly on its stony bed. Like Jesus, Marcellin and François enjoyed a milieu favourable to meditation and to elevating the soul towards God.<sup>122</sup> François insisted not only on physical silence but on interior silence, the bearer of profound spiritual fecundity and something necessary for encountering God. Silence - less and less accessible in this media-obsessed world of ours, where the strength of spirituality resides in the business of creating a space of silence and of repose in order that God may live

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<sup>118</sup> Exodus, 19

<sup>119</sup> Mt. 28, 18-20

<sup>120</sup> Life, 1989, chap. VII

<sup>121</sup> Brother Paul Sester, Letters. 062,06-13.

<sup>122</sup> Mark, 6, 31

in us - that is something of capital importance for our identity as consecrated people<sup>123</sup> and as Marists.

*Since the holidays the Hermitage novitiate has recruited about a dozen novices, all fine young men and full of good will. We very much need the Blessed Virgin to bring still more of them, for very few Brothers remain with us.*

*Receive the assurance of the very cordial affection with which I am*

This letter is probably after All Saints Day, a feast-day which marked the beginning of a new scholastic year - after the annual Retreat and the appointment of the Brothers to their new posts. The presence of candidates of a mature age produced in François a special satisfaction from the fact of being able to work with accomplished persons, being perhaps already exempted from military service. The emphasis is put on good will as a sure guarantee in regard to vocation. The term “grand” could refer to those who were more than twenty-one years of age<sup>124</sup> - perhaps because those who entered after passing this age were less numerous. Confidence in Mary is important - it is she who ceaselessly builds community, it is she who provides for the needs of the project, it is she who enriches, helps, intercedes with her Son. François learnt the lesson received from his master who, in 1822, had himself learnt by experience that activity and human will-power are not sufficient for the work of God to be accomplished. It is important to know how to accompany divine action and to know ourselves as humble servants, by thinking of the expression from the psalm, “Nisi Dominus edificaverit domum”.

I believe that, in this letter, François does not claim to give a lesson from experience; he wishes to maintain the traits of the charism, forcing himself to retain what he judges to be necessary for formation. He does not insist on intellectual aspects any more than he does on theological ideas. He puts the accent on human aspects and on a strong spirituality. You feel the presence of Marcellin as you advance through the reading of, and the meditation on, this letter. It is an appeal to remain faithful to the charism of the foundation, which must especially be built during the novitiate and which must be enriched towards permanence in the heart of community living.

<sup>123</sup> Anselm Grum, «How to live in harmony with yourself» ( the mystical way)

<sup>124</sup> 1838: of 61 entrants, 19 were 15 years of age or less, 28 were of 16 to 20 years, and 14 were of 21 years of age or more. 1839: of 67 entrants, 14, 29, and 24 respective.... 1840: of 29 entrants, 17 were less than 21 years of age. (CEPAM, with date of birth and of entry).

Today community life is called to be projected on a much wider and shared participation, especially for the collaborators of our different works. Following a special call, many of them feel that they are to live the spirituality of Saint Marcellin. It is a matter of a spiritual movement which pushes them to engage themselves more and more, not with the Institute, but in regard to the Marist charism. François knew it; he knew that, just as the congregation was developing, a certain distancing, proper to all inculturation processes, is inevitable. This aspect can become an enrichment, in so far as you do not lose contact with the source which is at the origin of it. The new novitiates will have to stand up to this challenge. We would almost be able to say that we are looking at the first “Formation Guide” of the Institute.<sup>125</sup>

A fresh reading of this letter helps us to come into contact with the essential elements of formation transmitted by Marcellin. The young who joined the work of the Little Brothers of Mary were taken up by the family spirit, the warm, fraternal relationships, the piety, the manual work, the rule of life, the maternal presence of Mary and the paternal spirit of this saintly priest - all of this having a significant influence on them as they faced the difficulties inherent in their fundamental option for Christ.

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<sup>125</sup> Brother Laurent, *Origines Maristes*, 756.



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