

Difficulties of Obtaining Recognition of the Institute by Rome

[Translated from the original French by Colin Chalmers FMS]

1. The root causes of Brother François' failure and his resignation (1858 - 1860)

On 18th July 1860, during the 3rd General Chapter of the Marist Brothers, Brother François proposed to the assembly that he be relieved of the burden of government on account of his health and that it be confided to a Vicar General: Brother Louis Marie. However, the health issues, quite genuine though they were, were not the real reason for the resignation. Essentially, it was due to the failure of his efforts in Rome between February and August, 1858, to obtain the Decree of Praise in favour of the Little Brothers of Mary, of which he had been Superior General since 1852.

It is true that, more than a year after this failure, a Decree of Praise was sent from Rome to the Archbishop of Lyon¹. That this is not known among the Brothers is a source of regret for the Institute. The praise for the Institute is not for the Little Brothers of Mary, but for the “Marist Brothers of the Schools” as indicated in the Latin draft of the decree, which talks of “Fratrum Maristarum a scholis”² which the English version below translates as “Marist Teaching Brothers”*

“His Eminence Cardinal De La Genga to His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Lyon

Rome, 9th December 1859”

Most Eminent and Very Reverend Archbishop,

Our Most Holy Father, Pope Pius IX has been presented with the prayers of the Marist Teaching Brothers, whose principal house lies within the diocese of Lyon. By these, they most humbly request the approbation of some articles of their Constitutions and His Holiness has charged us to communicate with you as follows:

His Holiness has great praise for this Institute in view of its expansion and the abundant fruits it has produced.

¹ Extract from the Register of schema for the Constitutions (AFM Doc 350.100.12) “On the Approbation of the Institute and the Constitutions of the Marist Brothers of the Schools. A copy of this same decree is found in the Life of Brother Louis Marie (1907), Ch 10 p 190, (French edition). However, it does not appear in volume 2 of the Circulars. The note added to the copy reads “Colectanea Sacrae Congregationis episcoporum et Regularum , p158.”

² Vatican Archives. Dossier consulted by Bro. A.M. Estáun.

*Translator's Note: The original French says “Frères Maristes instituteurs”.

With regard to the Constitutions, it is decreed that Your Eminence and the Superior General of the Society of Mary established in your city carefully review and correct them, keeping in mind the observations to be found in the accompanying document.³

That these corrections then be submitted to the General Chapter of these same Brothers, to be presided over on this occasion by the Superior General of the Marist Fathers. When everything is completed, they are to be sent to the Sacred Congregation along with Your Eminence's oath and the votes of the General Chapter.

Your Eminence will take care that these orders are executed.

I humbly kiss your hands and I am Your Eminence's most humble and obedient servant.

Signed. Cardinal della Guenga, Prefect, Archbishop of Philippi *[Translator's note: This line is an exact transcription from the French paper. Where the difference in spelling of the Cardinal's name arises is not known.]*

This text considers Cardinal de Bonald and Father Favre, Superior General of the Marist Fathers to be Superiors. The constitutions-schema of twenty fundamental articles is to all intents and purposes set aside and new constitutions formulated without the Brothers, who would only be able to give their opinions when meeting in Chapter at the end of the process. It is not, however, a complete return to the situation prior to 1852 since the Marist Fathers' Superior would only preside at the Brothers' Chapter on a single occasion.

To summarise, Brother François' scheme is considered so bad in Rome that it needs to be redrawn by those whom the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars considers to be the real Superiors. Completely logically, this act of mistrust will clearly set in motion, six months later, Brother François' resignation in order not to stir up trouble among the Brothers and allow for a smooth transition.

An emancipation of the Brothers at one and the same time desired and dreaded

In order to understand the reasons for such a failure, we must go back to an earlier period. We know that in 1836 Father Colin obtained a Decree of Praise for a Society of Mary

³ This is a critique of 20 fundamental articles presented by Brother François which envisage a government which is far too centralised and a direction of conscience which is far too intrusive.

reduced to Fathers only. Rome refused to recognise the Brothers and Sisters, but these are considered by the ecclesiastical authorities of Belley and Lyon - and by the Marist Fathers themselves - as adjuncts of the Society.⁴ In 1840 Father Champagnat bequeathed the work of the Brothers to Father Colin, but in 1845, with Rome having again refused to unite the Fathers and Brothers under a single superior, the Fathers' General Chapter advocated the separation of the two branches. However, in the absence of civil status and canonical recognition, the Brothers did not have the immediate means of independence, even if Father Colin did allow them a wide autonomy.

Their situation changed with the decree of civil recognition of the Little Brothers of Mary as a charitable association of public benefit on 20th June 1851 (Circulars vol 2 pp 450 - 452 French edition). Article 3 of the decree states that the association is governed "by a Brother who takes the title of Superior General" elected for life (Article 4) by a General Chapter composed of thirty members. He is helped in his governing by at least two Assistants, themselves elected for life. "Spiritual matters are submitted to the Ordinary of the place" (Article 3), that is, the Archbishop of Lyon. Not one of the 17 articles denotes any sort of dependence on the Marist Fathers, although they do take on the functions of chaplains in the various novitiate houses, while Father Colin remains in fact the ecclesiastical superior. Brother François, the Director General, and his two Assistants, Brothers Louis-Marie and Jean-Baptiste, had been formulating a rule and constitutions inspired by the teaching of Champagnat, since 1845 because Rome did not want Father Colin as Superior of the Brothers. Father Colin himself, moreover, was in no great hurry, even to finish the editing of the Marist Fathers' Rule.

The obtaining of the legal authorisation in 1851 opened up the possibility of a constituent assembly of Marist Brothers. The decision to hold a Chapter was announced in quite a paradoxical way in the Circular of 10th April 1852 (Circulars Vol 2 p 103 French edition). "Since the first edition of our Rule (of 1837) has been completely overtaken, we need to compile a new one [...] we propose to put into writing those things that have become custom in the Institute and, while not expressed in the Rule, have nevertheless taken on the force of law among us." There was clearly a desire to move from a largely oral tradition to a written rule while wisely emphasising the idea of continuity rather than rupture. Meeting with the authorisation of Cardinal de Bonald, the Chapter was held over three sessions, formulating the Common Rules of 1852, the School Guide of 1853 and the Rules of Government of 1854. My aim is not to go into detail about the progress of this incident-marked assembly with its legacy of long-lasting discontent which was one of the causes of Brother François' failure.

⁴ This is why the Brothers made public vows in 1836 to the SM Superior.

There are many reasons for the near-chaos of these proceedings. Firstly, the rules proposed to the Chapter had been drawn up in the very restricted circle of the “Three-in-One”, who perhaps had never so well-deserved this name. These three Superiors seem to have sought out a return to the original fervour by the reinstating or reinforcing of certain customs, such as the woollen stockings, the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary⁵ ... On the other hand, by setting up the Vow of Stability they gave the impression of introducing something new. Then, for the first time, the Chapter went to work without the mediation of an undisputed authority-figure. Father Colin, who had been happy to take on this role, was content to pay a visit to the Brothers to invite them to govern themselves.

Quite unsure of their new-found authority and little-used to managing a legislative assembly, the Superiors displayed a clumsiness which the Annals of the Institute give a better account than the too-succinct Acts of the Chapter.⁶ Moreover, the Chapter did not want a government by autonomous Provinces, something which had been advocated by Father Mazelier, former Superior of the Brothers of St Paul-trois-châteaux: a decision with which the Roman authorities were very unhappy. In the eyes of a number of older Brothers, the “Regime” gave quite a contradictory image of the identity of the Institute: too traditional on certain points and too worn-out to reinforce its authority and standing. Circumstances, moreover, lent themselves to these trends: the 1848 revolutions were still quite recent and they gave rise to a great fear, followed by a will to return to a sense of order, particularly in the religious world.

The Chapter closed on 20th May 1854 with a letter signed by all the capitulants affirming that “the Rules and Constitutions of the Institute, as far as the fundamentals and principles go, are not ours, but those of our well-beloved Father.” However, the old Brothers, whether capitulants or not, were not quite convinced of the fidelity of this Rule to Champagnat’s spirit⁷ even if, now having available a legislative body, the Marist Brothers could look forward to being approved by papal authority as a Congregation.

Connections between the Marist Fathers and Marist Brothers during the year 1854.

The Marist Fathers had experienced an even more radical change of circumstances since Father Colin, now sick and aged, had submitted his resignation at their own General Chapter of 1854. Also, on 10th May, the capitulants had elected Father Julien Favre, who was very conscious of the difficulty of succeeding a founder, even if it had been agreed

⁵ For this point, see the letter of protest of Brother Marie-Jubin.

⁶ See the years 1852 - 1854 in the Annals, which are particularly rich in accounts of the Chapter sessions.

⁷ Hence, in 1858, Brother Marie-Jubin’s letter of protest against the proceedings and decisions of the Chapter, which greatly hindered the progress of Brother François in Rome.

that Father Colin, freed from government, would finish the editing of the Rule.⁸ Since he was slow in fulfilling this promise, Father Favre and his Council grew impatient and themselves drew up provisional *Regulae Fundamentales* at the beginning of 1856. Father Colin had not been consulted and he disapproved of this project, but Favre went to Rome at the end of February and presented his Rule. Clearly in a hurry to get things moving, he returned to Rome in November 1856 and February 1857 and opened a Procure, with Father Nicolet in charge. The Marist Fathers' Chapter met between 9th and 12th August 1858 and approved the *Regulae Fundamentalis Societatis Mariae*. However, Father Colin refused to attend and the legitimacy of Favre's Rule would remain open to question, even although the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars (SCBR) approved it *ad experimentum* for six years on 15th June 1860. Finally, the alarm-call by supporters of a Rule of Father Colin led to the revocation of Favre's Rule around 1870⁹ after an internal quarrel which is not opportune to discuss here.

Father Favre and the Marist Brothers

A priori, the new Superior of the Marist Fathers had enough to preoccupy him with the organising of a rapidly expanding Society of Mary to bother about the Marist Brothers, of whom he knew very little. However, he will play a considerable role in their history, a role that we now know about thanks to the recent publication of his letters.¹⁰ Apart from a paternalistic attitude towards the Brothers, which was very common among the Fathers, these letters mention two grievances against them. The first is anecdotal: in a letter to Brother François, 17th September 1856 (doc 84), he protests against the publication of the Life of Champagnat by Brother Jean-Baptiste, who had not submitted the work for examination by ecclesiastical authority and had attacked the reputation of certain people, among whom was Father Courveille. These faults compromised the Marist Fathers, who were considered to be the mentors of the Brothers. However, the second grievance was much more fundamental and occurred on a highly significant date: on 21st February 1858 (Julien Favre doc 134) Favre notified Father Nicolet of a question from the Marist Fathers confessors of nuns or Brothers who had been asked if "one is obliged to make known *in specie* to Superiors grave faults *praesertim in materia luxuria* and did not know what to answer. [In the margin: Say nothing to the Brothers, who are highly susceptible in this regard.] He then invited Father Nicolet to consult the Major Penitentiary on this issue.

⁸ Alois Geiler SM *Jean-Claude Colin (1790 - 1875), founder of the Society of Mary: descriptive chronology of his life*. Rome 2014. P 225 English edition, p 224 French edition. The Society of Mary comprises 239 professed members, of whom 211 are priests.

⁹ This is the key theme of Volume 3 of *Origines Maristes* Rome 1965.

¹⁰ Bernard Bourtot SM. *Julien Favre. Documents for the Study of the Favre Generalate, Fontes Historici Societatis Mariae*. Volume 1, Rome 2012. All the citations of the letters come from this work.

This is a sign of the start of real competition between the Brothers' chaplains and the Superiors around confession and spiritual direction in the establishments provided with a Marist chaplain. At the same time, it poses, at least implicitly, the question: who has the supreme authority in the novitiate house? The basis of debate is theological and ecclesiological order, but with serious practical consequences. The Annals of the Institute report the tensions between chaplains and Directors of novitiates from 1855, notably in Beaucamps (Annals Vol 2 1855. Nos 51 - 53). The feud took a sharp turn in 1861 - 62 (Annales Vol 3 1862 Nos 77 - 78 and 1863 Nos 18 - 20), but the position of Father Favre on the direction of conscience explains his particularly severe attitude towards the Marist Brothers in 1858 - 1860.

The Roman Question and Father Favre's Ultramontanism

Politico-religious circumstances also gave rise to the problem of relations between Rome and the national Churches. The Roman Question had been raised ever since 1848 and the exile of Pius IX at Gaeta: the Italy of the *Risorgimento*, in particular, the aggressive politics of Cavour, the frenetic anti-catholicism of the revolutionary minorities and popular anticlericalism had implications for the temporal power of the Pope and even his spiritual power. Nor had the maladministration of the Papal States contributed to the prestige of the papacy.

This is in the same era, in the Catholic world, as the irresistible ascent of ultramontanism, systematically promoted by popes and apostolic nuncios: in particular by Cardinal Fornari in France where the gifted layman Louis Veuillot's newspaper *L'Univers* pushed a violently antimodern and ultramontane catholicism without any nuance. Very badly regarded by the French bishops, he had the support of Rome where it was considered that everything coming from France was tainted with gallicanism or liberalism, with no account being taken of the continual rebirth of the spirit of the French Revolution and that the *Risorgimento* followed from this.

In this environment of devotion to the pope bordering on adulation it became difficult for the bishops and all moderate Catholics to display reserve towards a Romanness which scarcely considered respecting national traditions, the rights of bishops and the autonomy of the temporal world. In short, Roman ultramontanism became not only a mystique of unity around the pope, but even more so a will towards the centralisation of administration around papal government.¹¹

¹¹ In writing these lines, I am particularly indebted to the classic work of R. Aubert, *Le Pontificat de Pie IX, (1846-1878) et de Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*, tome I, 1800-1880, Privat, 1985, p. 154...

The first Marists had adhered to a mystical ultramontanism, as witnessed by their formula of 1816. However, the generation of Father Favre was imbued with an ultramontanism more radically Roman. During his time in Rome from the end of February to the 12th April 1856, he himself had, on 4th April, sent to Archbishop Bizzarri*, the Secretary of Bishops and Regulars, his schema for *Regulae Fundamentales* (Julien Favre doc 61 p 108). Nothing could be more normal than this. However, his choice of Mgr Chaillot* “as his correspondent to pursue the Rule” is significant.

As is indicated by his surname, this prelate was French. However, there was no one more Roman than him. In 1850 - 1852 he had been the editor of *La Correspondance de Rome* which shamelessly exploited the files of the papal administration in order to denounce the gallicanism of the French bishops who “were horrified to find spread out in the press their supposedly secret negotiations and requests for decisions in matters of canon law, liturgy and ecclesiastical discipline”¹². The Pope had to suppress this journal under pressure from the French government. However, Chaillot would go on to create the *Analecta Juris pontificii*, which was imbued with the same spirit.¹³ The links between Chaillot and Louis Veillot’s paper *L’Univers* were routine.¹⁴ So, Father Favre had chosen an agent with a poisonous reputation in the French Church. Even if this choice had corresponded with the desire to employ an agent favoured at court and well able to have his file advanced, it puts Father Favre among the most ultramontane Superiors of Religious Orders. In the quarrel which was going to set Father Colin against Father Favre about the SM Rule, ultramontanism might have been an additional cause of the divergence.

Favre’s correspondence reveals a long and complex relationship with Chaillot, of whom he was wary, but from whom he could not separate himself. Chaillot’s influence on Father Nicolet, the Marist Fathers’ first Procurator, seems to have been limited. On the contrary, after 1860, Chaillot dominated the spirit of the second Procurator, Father Capouillet, in contrast to Father Favre, with whom he had become more and more reserved. As for the Marist Brothers, Mgr Chaillot took an interest in their file from 1858 to 1863 as a Consultor. The anonymous author of the biography of Brother Louis-Marie

*Translator’s Note: The original French gives his name as “Mgr Bizzarri”, However, his title cannot be translated into English as “Monsignor” as this denotes an ecclesiastical rank lower than a bishop. Bizzarri’s rank while Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was “Archbishop”. I cannot discover the correct rank of Chaillot and have left it as “Mgr” throughout.

¹² Brother André Lanfrey quotes these words from the French translation of an English-language book, *Paris and Rome. The Gallican and Ultramontane Campaign 1848 - 1853* by Austin Gough. OUP. 1986. I have translated the quotation from the French and not from the original work.

¹³ Mgr Chaillot remains fairly unknown. See, on him, *Souvenirs d’un prélat romain sur Rome et la cour pontificale au temps de Pie IX* (édition 1895). Allusions to Colin and Capouillet will be found there, but nothing on Fathers Favre and Nicolet. Publisher Hachette-Livres/BNF. The name of the author, Pierre Roefer is almost certainly a pseudonym.

¹⁴ The article in *L’Univers* of 15th March 1858 presenting the Marist Brothers as imitators of the De la Salle Brothers is from this source.

(ch 10 p 188 French edition) considered him hostile to the Institute as he dogmatically and zealously applied the principles of the SCBR. In any case, ultramontanism was a very important factor in the story of the authorisation of the Marist Brothers, as it was for the Marist Fathers, and one which, it seems to me, is not sufficiently emphasised.

The progress of Brother François and Brother Louis-Marie in Rome during 1858.

The departure of Brother François for the purposes of obtaining the Decree of Praise was delayed by Cardinal de Bonald¹⁵ who found the circumstances unfavourable to such a step. He left for Rome on 6th February 1858, accompanied by Brother Louis-Marie. I will not reproduce the various details of the trip which was marked by Brother Louis-Marie's return on 24th April, Brother François' failure to achieve the acceptance of his file until the middle of the month of August and his return to France on 21st of that same month. Father Nicolet had warned him that his project was in for a rough ride from the SCBR. However, he hoped to obtain a Decree of Praise at the end of 1858.¹⁶

The reasons for the delay on the Decree of Praise

From that time on, Brother François' file was linked to the progress of Father Favre who, on 2nd November 1858, (Doc 159 p 262) intended sending to Rome the revised Marist Fathers' Rule, without going there himself. He announced that Father Capouillet, an eccentric Marist Father¹⁷, would leave for Rome, where he would soon replace Father Nicolet. Moreover, he wrote from London that Father Chaillot had come to see him, perhaps in Lyon. He said nothing about the content of the visit, but declared that he was very happy. We can be sure that the Rules of the Fathers and Brothers had been discussed, as were relations between France where "a complete storm is forming against me (Mgr Chaillot) " and Rome¹⁸. It was necessary "to keep in with him without surrendering to him [...] We must be wise and stay away from all sides." On 18th November Favre again summarised his thinking on Chaillot: he held him in greater estimation but feared that his taking positions would harm the approval of the revised Rules sent to Rome in December (Doc 160 p 265).

In his presentation of the story of the origins of the Society of Mary (Doc 167 p 274 No 4) Father Favre devoted a short paragraph to the Marist Brothers, committing an apparently small error which perhaps showed the knowledge he had of the Brothers'

¹⁵ He could be classed as moderately ultramontane just as much as moderately gallican.

¹⁶ For the details of the trip, see the history of the Constitutions by Brother AM Estaún.

¹⁷ A late vocation. Of Belgian origin, he had been a soldier and was going to Rome as a military chaplain to the French troops protecting the Pope. His role as Procurator was secondary.

¹⁸ There was also controversy between Bouix and Chaillot. Favre considered that Father Nicolet's notes on Bouix were too influenced by Chaillot.

history: “one of them, Pierre (!) Champagnat had founded the Congregation of the little brothers of Mary which has grown to 2,000 Religious today, zealously forming, by means of Christian instruction, more than 50, 000 children.” On 4th December he notified Nicolet of his forthcoming departure and announced that Cardinal de Bonald would also be going to Rome to deliver his letter in favour of the Marist Fathers. He added, “I haven’t spoken at all to the Brothers about our Rules; I’ll speak to you about the reasons for this in Rome.”

Brother François, who counted on receiving a Decree of Praise at the end of the year, was certainly worried.¹⁹ On 11th December 1858 Father Nicolet (Doc 164 p 268 note no 4) wrote to Favre that, “it would be utterly useless for him to come to Rome at this particular time”. Departing at the end of December, Favre was going to stay in Rome until the 14th February, the eve of the Franco-Sardinian war against Austria. A letter to Bishop Langalerie of Belley, of 7th February 1859 (Doc 173 p 289), advises us of one of the key moments of decision concerning the Marist Brothers.

“I had the honour of dining yesterday with His Eminence Cardinal de Bonald. Cardinal de Villecourt was there, as was Louis Veuillot etc. The thoughts of the guests were completely centred on France. We wondered about the topic of the Emperor’s speech...”

This dinner of more or less moderate ultramontanes, perhaps including Father Chaillot, had been one of the occasions of debate around a number of affairs, notably that of the Rules of the Fathers and the Marist Brothers. And the letter of Cardinal de Bonald, written in Rome itself on 16th February to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, is the fruit of conversations of this period. The original is probably in Latin. It does not have a place in the file in the Vatican Archives recently consulted by Brother Antonio Martínez Estaún. However, the report of the consultor contained in the same file the date and part of the citation, as we will see further on. The archives of the Marist Brothers (RPC1 AFM 350.100.11) have available only the French version.

**“Archdiocese of Lyon
Your Grace*,**

Lyon, 16th February 1869

I am writing to Your Excellency about the Marist Brothers, founded for elementary schools.

These Religious are called to do much good among the people’s children. However, I fear that they may not always be able to render these same services to young people since there is a lack of a Novitiate and sound direction in the Society. The Superiors of this Congregation, being simple Brothers, do not have sufficient learning or

¹⁹ He undoubtedly knew that Mgr Chaillot had spent time at the Marist Fathers.

authority to direct novices, nor to make known the duties of Religious Life, the parameters of the vows, nor uphold everyone in obedience and submission.

In the gatherings of the Religious in the novitiate house, it is difficult for the one who is presiding to give specific instructions, solidly based on Religious Life. He could be putting forward false principles, which could set the novices off on the wrong road. And if the Brothers realise that the Superior is not giving them exact doctrine, they would lose all confidence in their Directors and not have the same level of esteem for them.

It therefore appears to me to be necessary that the Brothers be dependent, as in earlier times, on the Fathers. They will then receive sound direction. If, in serious circumstances, they need a decision, they will ask the Fathers and not take the risk of coming down on one side by taking counsel amongst themselves. Being better instructed in their duties, they will adhere to them more fully.

*See Translator's Note above for "Mgr" Bizzari

In placing the Brothers with the Fathers, the Sacred Congregation will be providing advice to the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary and organising for them the direction and instruction that they need.

I earnestly recommend this affair to Your Excellency and I dare to rely on your benevolent intervention.

Please accept, Your Grace, my most respectful devotedness

L.J.M. Card. de Bonald, Arch. of Lyon

Bonald the spokesman for Father Favre at the SCBR

In practical terms, this letter revisits the decision of Father Colin when, at the Brothers' Chapter of 1852, he invited them to fully govern themselves. The Cardinal, who had authorised the holding of the Brothers' Chapter and their trip to Rome, himself went back on his decision. Father Favre, who could not decently himself put forward the request for the re-establishment of the guardianship of the Fathers over the Brothers, knew he had to persuade the Cardinal to do it with all the authority of his position. In recalling the lack of learning and authority of the Brothers' Superiors for the direction of novices, the Cardinal was only taking up again the Marist Fathers' theory on spiritual direction. The Cardinal undoubtedly also had reason to be unhappy: the Marist Brothers had accomplished their work in Rome in spite of his reservations. Plus, Brother Marie-Jubin's letter of complaint

about the slow progress of the 1852 - 54 Chapter had generated a Roman inquiry, which was awkward for him. If the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars acceded to the request in this letter, and there would have to be serious reasons not to, the file left, after so much trouble, by Brother François, would lose any sense. He himself, marked out by the remark on the Superiors' lack of learning and authority, would have to resign if a Decree of Praise from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars did not recognise his legitimacy.

There was, however, no return to a previous point: would the body of Brothers easily agree to renouncing their independence and seeing their Superior General replaced? For his part, the Cardinal was not stuck on seeing the collapse or loss of dynamism of the large Congregation of Brothers in his diocese. Such a failure would attach itself to him. Finally, was it not a blunder on the part of the Marist Fathers to want to place once more under guardianship, however limited, the Brothers, who suspected certain chaplains of wanting to dominate them? In giving the impression of reverting to a previous situation, the Marist Fathers went against a decision of Rome of 1836 and of Father Colin, of 1845 - 52, who was already against the government of Julien Favre and, more particularly, against his Rule.

As was its custom, the SCBR was in no hurry. Political events were gathering pace: in May-June 1859, the franco-piedmontese armies defeated the Austrians (Magenta and Solferino), Italian unity was moving forward. In 1860, the whole of Italy would be conquered by the House of Savoy (Castelfidardo, September 1860) and the Pope, keeping only to Rome and Lazio, protected by a French army.

The Chaillot Report of 26th May 1859

Brother François had to wait one more year to find out the fate of his request for canonical recognition. Thanks to Brother Antonio Martínez Estación who consulted the Marist Brothers' file in the Vatican Archives, we have available the report of Mgr Chaillot²⁰, in Italian, which goes over the history of relations between the SCBR and the Society of Mary from 1834. It notes that Brother François presented the 20 fundamental articles of the Rule and a memoire begging for pontifical approval while pointing out that “non si vede che i fratelli della congregazione (nel numero de quasi 2000) abbiano presentato il loro consenso alle proposte regole” (I am aware that not all the Brothers of the Congregation (around 2,000 in number) have given their consent to the proposed Rules.). It notes the letter “del fratello Jubin segretario generale” which attacked the dispositions

²⁰ His name does not appear in the report, but we know that he was a Consultor on the file.

*Translator's Note: The translation into English is directly from the Italian, rather than from the French of Brother André's Paper.

of the General Chapter of 1852 - 54 and resulted in an inquiry by the Archbishop of Lyon. However, it adds:

Original Italian	English Translation*
<p>“ma recentemente, trovandosi di persona in Roma, ha diretto una lettera a Monsignor Segretario in data del 16 febrero p.p. nella quale informa “che i fratelli mancano di una buona direzione nel noviziato e fuori; non avendo laici sufficiente istruzione ed autorità per dirigere i novizi, insegnare esattamente i doveri dello stato religioso, i voti etc”. Perciò l’Emo; Porporato crede necessario che i fratelli siano rimessi sotto la direzione dei Sacerdoti Maristi come erano prima della risoluzione di 1834.”</p>	<p>“but recently, finding himself in Rome in person he sent a letter to His Grace the Secretary dated 16th February in which he informed him that “the Brothers lack sound direction both in the novitiate and outside; being laymen, they do not have sufficient learning and authority to direct the novices, to teach exactly the duties of the religious state, the vows etc. Thus, His Eminence the Cardinal believes it necessary for the brothers to remain under the direction of the Marist Priests, as they were prior to the decision of 1834.²¹”</p>

There followed some consideration of the steps to be taken, where Father Favre was taken as reference and guide. Before presenting the fundamental Constitutions of the Marist Fathers he had been assured of the support of the Chapter. So, in concert with him, a redrafting of the fundamental Constitutions²² would have to be undertaken, using as a model those presented by the Marist Fathers. Eventually, a letter addressed to Father Favre from SCBR, via Father Nicolet, would forewarn him of the decision of the Sacred Congregation.

The report does not subscribe to the Cardinal’s proposal to make the Marist Brothers dependent again on the Fathers’ Superior, contrary to previous decisions. Moreover, Chaillot considered, Cardinal de Bonald only wanted a supervision of the Brothers by the Marist Fathers. It would be sufficient, therefore, for the Ordinary to nominate a few pious priests of the Society of Mary for the instruction of the novices. If the Cardinal wanted something more, the Superior of the priests could preside at triennial Chapters or have the right of confirmation of the Superior General of the Brothers, after a report addressed to the Sacred Congregation and the reception of suitable instructions. But there was no hurry. The important thing was to draw up Constitutions so that a Chapter could then consider them under the presidency of Father Favre.

²¹ This date is Chaillot’s interpretation. Undoubtedly, the Cardinal was thinking of the situation prior to 1852.

²² Chaillot considered that “Il governo sembra troppo assoluto e potrebbe forse cambiarsi in despotismo” (The government seems too absolute and could become despotic - Translator)

The Decree of Praise of 7th December 1859 would be based largely on this report. However, there was no question of making the Brothers dependent again on the Fathers on a permanent basis. Favre was only president of a provisional commission charged with drawing up new Constitutions, for which Rome provided the blueprint. Poor consolation: at the price of the imposition of a name originating in Rome the Marist Brothers were recognised as a Congregation. Even if the Superior was sacrificed, the recognition of a Rule remained a possibility, on condition that it met Roman criteria. It is evident that it was the understanding between Father Favre, Mgr Chaillot and, incidentally, Cardinal de Bonald which led to the failure of Brother François' endeavour.

The vital resignation of Brother François

Totally repudiated, he could not remain at the head of the Marist Brothers. It was also necessary that his humiliating sacking did not become a cause for the break-up of the Congregation. Hence the negotiations which were going to take up the six months between the reception of the Decree of Praise and the hand-over to another of the government of the Brothers. In a speech on 18th July, he explained to the capitulants, in a way which was certainly very much watered down, how things had unfolded (Acts of 3rd General Chapter).

“It was necessary [...] to have at the head of the Regime a man who had all the physical and intellectual qualities to [...] replace the Superior General in everything that he could no longer do himself. What more was there about this case! The resignation of the Superior or the election of a Vicar? [...] This was debated for a long time in the Council [...] and we then took our decision by common accord. We then communicated this to the Reverend Father Favre, Superior General of the Marist Fathers. This good Father profited from a journey he made to Rome [sic] in May of this year to consult Archbishop Bizzari. This was his response: since the authorisation by the Holy See of their Institute is pending for the Little Brothers of Mary, it is fitting that no real change is made in the administration. However, if the Brother Superior General can no longer fulfil his functions, the Brother First Assistant must substitute for him. This is why I now propose to you that Reverend Brother Louis-Marie be invested with full and entire authority and all necessary powers for the administration and general government of the Institute as Vicar of the Superior General.”

In order to avoid complications with the government and administration since Brother François was Superior General of the civil association, he did not resign, the Chapter merely according him a Vicar, by reason of his poor health. This way of operating,

frequently practised in the Church and politics, scarcely deceived those in-the-know and had the advantage of retaining the title of Superior General.

A necessary exile

The exile of Brother François following the Chapter was not, in my view, principally due to his attraction to retirement and his desire to live in Father Champgnat's "great reliquary". In reality, judged responsible for the questionable unfolding of the General Chapter of 1852 - 54, for the editing of constitutions lacking an ultramontane spirit, for an encroaching of the Brothers on the prerogatives of the Marist chaplains, and undoubtedly badly viewed by Cardinal de Bonald and a certain number of old Brothers, Brother François had become a sort of scapegoat. If he withdrew into the desert of L'Hermitage, the decommissioned mother-house which was no more than an annexe of St Genis, it was because he needed to show that he was no longer in charge, either personally nor through an intermediary.

A man conscious of having suffered an injustice

Brother François made very few allusions to these trials in his notebooks. Three of those he did make appear to me to be highly significant. The first, at the beginning of his notes on the 1860 retreat, on the day after his resignation (Carnet 304), "Repair the past, use the present, prepare for an eternal future! Stand before Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the Saints in solitude." The second, at the 1861 retreat (Carnet 304 p 1568 French edition): "When St John of the Cross had suffered the most cruel treatment, the Saviour asked if he wanted compensation for so much labour> Lord, he replied, I ask you for nothing but to suffer and be misunderstood for your sake." The most explicit is the third one (Carnet 301)

"22nd July 1963. Resignation from the title of General put into the hands of the Chapter, at the feet of the elected Reverend Brother Superior General; and a resolution to consecrate all the time left to me to the good of the Institute in the ordinary state of the Brothers - St Magdalene in the desert.

There were three things that St John of the Cross habitually asked of God: the first, not to pass one day without suffering; the second, not to die as a Superior; the third, to end his life in humiliation. (24, November)"

So far, the full measure of the depth of the trial undergone by Brother François has scarcely been evaluated. Nevertheless, it is from this event that his reputation for sanctity was to be born among the Brothers.

After the very testing resignation he experienced, a second, very brief era began (1860 - 1863) of relations between Rome, the Marist Fathers and the Brothers, embodied in three key people: Mgr Chaillot, Father Favre, and Brother Louis-Marie. It will again be marked by much drama before Rome agrees, in 1863, to recognise a Superior General and grant trial Constitutions for five years. A trial which actually lasted until 1903. However, this phase did not revert to the dramatic character of the first, which broke the generalate of Brother François.

Brother André Lanfrey. February 2021.