

The Direction of Conscience

A Fundamental Problem at the Heart of the Society of Mary

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[Translator's Note: Quotations from works cited in the text are translated from the French of the original Paper and are not from published English translations of the works.]

While working on the steps taken by Brother François and then Louis-Marie in Rome between 1858 and 1863 towards the canonical recognition of the Marist Brothers¹ I became aware of the number of times two distinct, a priori questions were linked to the issue: the independence of the Brothers' branch in relation to that of the Fathers, and the direction of conscience, for which the Marist Fathers claimed a monopoly as chaplains and confessors. Although relationship-problems were not entirely absent from this case, the basis of the argument was one of principle.

The problem arose in 1858 in a letter of Father Favre, Superior General of the Marist Fathers since 1854, to Father Nicolet, the Procurator in Rome, noting the uneasiness of Marist confessors who were finding that the Superiors of communities of Sisters and Brothers were imposing the manifestation of conscience* "at least in some communities"². He added, "To say nothing of the Brothers (François and Louis-Marie recently in Rome) who are very sensitive about this topic". It was in a letter to Brother Louis-Marie on 6th October 1861³ that Father Favre set out, very clearly this time, the debate between the Marist branches by recalling the case of Beaucamps, where Father Ferry, one of the chaplains, was in open conflict with the Director of the Provincial House. After his enquiries, Father Favre estimated that "the cause of the unhappiness and division comes from the Brother Director's intruding on the functions of the chaplains." According to him, the Fathers who knew about the issue "all find that, beyond the question of personalities, there is a question of a principle that needs to be resolved urgently if peace in the Brothers' chaplaincies is desired."

[Translator's Note: The phrase "manifestation of conscience" is a technical term in the field of spirituality denoting the speaking (normally to a Religious Superior) of the deepest areas of*

¹ In [champagnat.org/Marist History](http://champagnat.org/Marist_History), Bro André Lanfrey *La difficile acquisition de la reconnaissance romaine de l'Institut* [English: Difficulties of Obtaining Recognition of the Institute by Rome]

² Bernard Bourtot SM: Julien Favre, second supérieur général de la S.M. (1854-1885), Rome 2012, Vol 1 doc. 134, p. 222-223 (French edition)...

³ Bernard Bourtot, Julien Favre, Vol.1, doc. 321 p. 480, French edition.

one's personal and spiritual life. As this Paper goes on to explore, the dividing line between this and sacramental Confession is very thin.]

Father Favre set out the Marist Fathers' position in eight points: "Whose task is it to decide questions of...

1. Liturgical ceremonies?
2. Presiding at and directing confraternities?
3. Admission to First Communion?
4. "Correctly so-called direction, which is an appendix of confession"?
5. "Making judgements in the *internal forum* on vocation and admission to vows, particularly that of chastity."?
6. "Making judgements in the internal forum on vocation in relation to chastity, even after the Vow of Obedience."?⁴
7. "Pronouncing whether a Brother is in secret proximate occasion of mortal sin *verbi gratia contra castitatem*"?
8. "Receiving and, in particular, demanding a manifestation of conscience with regard to secret faults, such as is equivalent to confession"?

Father Favre concluded each of these points with the question: "Is it the priest or a lay Brother?" (who makes the judgement). He then passes on from principles to accusations: many Brothers Director "and even Assistants"⁵ resolved these questions in their favour and refused to change "without a formal and express order" from the Holy See, "who should give way? Should the Fathers allow themselves to be taught by lay Brothers?" While waiting, Father Favre gave notice of his intention to withdraw the Marist Fathers from Beaucamp. Similar incidents having taken place in St Genis-Laval, by 1863 the rupture between the Fathers and Brothers was complete.

It is quite astonishing that Father Favre based his position on the "laity-priests" dichotomy while the contested issue concerned Religious priests and Religious laymen of the same Society. Yet, did he see the Brothers as true Religious? For this issue the heart of the controversy was point no 4: whether or not the direction of conscience was an extension of confession? For the Brothers, it was thought that granting to the priest alone the direction of consciences was denying to lay Religious all authority on the spiritual level and condemning the Brothers to forever live under the guardianship of the branch of the Fathers.

We have come up against a variation on the old debate of the lines between spiritual and temporal powers: between laity and clergy. In 1860 it was highly relevant on a number of levels, for example between the mayor and the parish priest in small communes. It also erupted in the

⁴ At the end of the novitiate the Brother made the temporary Vow of Obedience. For the chaplains, the question of his vocation continued, whereas for the Brothers, it had been settled during the novitiate.

⁵ He is pointing particularly at Brother Theophane, Assistant for the Province of the North.

politico-religious area when Pius IX was losing his temporal power but affirming, more than ever before, his spiritual authority, along with extreme Roman centralisation. This general atmosphere certainly played its part in the disagreement between the Marist Fathers and Brothers, but it was already implicit in Marcellin Champagnat's "We must have Brothers" of 1816.

From the start, two ideas of the Society of Mary

The first Marist aspirants envisaged the creation of a Society of Mary, at one and the same time eschatological and universal, comprising priests, lay people and nuns. However, in advocating the creation of a branch of Brothers, Champagnat did not evoke much understanding. It is in an 1839 letter of Father Colin addressed to him, that the most concise thinking since their origins of the Marist Fathers on the Brothers is found⁶.

"Remember that Mary, our Mother, [...] was completely taken up with the needs of the apostles and that this is one of the chief aims of the Congregation of Marist Brothers and Sisters with regard to the priests of the Society. [...] A Brother serving the priests of the Society does twenty times more good, in my opinion, than if he were working in a commune where, thank God, the means for educating young people are not lacking today. But you have never really been able to understand this structure and aim of the Society."

J.C. Colin was correct: from the start, Champagnat had never seen the Society of Mary from the same angle as the other Marist Fathers. Around 1860, that basic debate was still around. It is true that, in 1816, Champagnat definitely did not yet have a very precise view of what the body of Brothers would be. However, by coming to live with the Brothers at the end of 1819, he made a decisive choice: while asserting himself as Superior, he recognised his community as a lay association where the members chose their Director and constructed a rule of life. In Chapter 6 of the *Life of Champagnat*, Brother Jean Baptiste gave us an idealised view of the conduct of this Director, J. M. Granjon, who showed real charisma. It had nothing at all to do with the views of J.C. Colin, who dreamt only of pious domestics at the service of the Fathers. It had nothing to do with the numerous parish priests who dreamt only of Brothers as sacristans. This legitimising of the Brothers would be definitive in 1825, when they elected Champagnat as Superior of the Society of Mary of L'Hermitage and, in 1839, when Father Colin, after sounding out the Professed, nominated Brother François as Director General.

⁶ Gaston Lesard SM: *Colin Sup.* Vol 1. Rome 2007. Doc 60 P 105 -106 (French version). It is straightforward thinking, reflecting a period of conflict. Generally speaking, J.C. Colin and many of the Fathers came to be more moderate in their words and thinking when faced with a work, the success of which they recognised without really understanding its implications.

Champagnat and the parish priests: partnership and opposition

In offering Brothers to the parishes, the Founder took the risk of a collision with the parish priests, who wanted to have “their Brothers” under their sole authority. This had already been the basis of the quarrel in La Valla between the Parish Priest, Rebod, and Champagnat⁷. This was particularly the argument between Alliot, the Parish Priest of Marlhes and Brother Louis (*Life* Part 1 Ch VIII). In affirming that Champagnat was his Superior and it was to him that he owed obedience, Brother Louis was recognising a charismatic authority superior to the institutional authority of the Parish Priest. Brother François would express himself in a similar manner to the Parish Priest of Tarentaise. The strength of the nascent Institute, then, was that the Brothers committed themselves to a vocation that was, at one and the same time, collective and individual. They constituted an association of active lay educators, as expressed in their promise. However, their dedication was fragile, especially when the Brothers were far away from the Mother House. The influence of the parish priests and local confessors could counteract that of Champagnat and the community: Brother Jean Marie Granjon went off to La Trappe at Aiguebelle in 1822, seemingly after having taken the advice of either his Parish Priest, or some other priest. The case of Brother Jean-François (Etienne Roumésy) is even clearer⁸. Many other cases existed

The parish system played against the Brother’s vocation. With the multiplication of schools, the Brothers, although distanced from their central community, were held to their rule of going to confession every week. By all evidence, this frequency, at least in its purely formal sense, was accompanied by a spiritual direction which reinforced or put in danger the Brother’s vocation, according to whether or not the parish priest understood that Brothers had a vocation and were not just functionaries of the parish. This is why Champagnat could not allow face-to-face meetings between the parish priest and the community of Brothers in matters of confession or spiritual direction to embed themselves, and visited the Brothers as often as possible. His visits to the parish priests were no less necessary to teach them, and the Brothers themselves, what a Brother was.

Champagnat, the direction of conscience and vocation

It is particularly Chapters XVII and XVIII of the *Life of Champagnat* that present him in his role as Superior and his charism as a spiritual master. They remind us at length of his care in forming Directors and in keeping the Brothers in their vocation. His ideal is to have as Directors virtuous and highly experienced professed Brothers “because it is fitting that the Brothers be directed, led and formed by a perpetually professed member of the Institute and not by a stranger or a novice.”; also “because the direction of souls and the sanctification of children are the work of

⁷ For the attempts to hijack the Brothers of the community see the *Life* Part 1 Ch XI.

⁸ *Letters of Champagnat* Vol 2. Note on Brother Jean-François, who went to Larajasse in 1826, drawn there by Father Colomb de Gaste, with whom he had been in contact at St Sauveur-en Rue.

the cross, and this work can only be carried out by the cross”. Directors, then, must be “Religious of the cross” (from the profession cross). Their knowledge of the mystery of the cross will bring them success “in their employment as catechist of children and Director of the Brothers.”

The Founder also took great care of the subjects in formation. Chapter XVIII develops at length the story of Brother Jérôme, whom the Founder persuaded to remain. His strategy reached back to the time of La Valla, with Champagnat taking care of the spiritual direction of the subjects in formation and the Brother Director of the novitiate taking on the task of accompanying them. By 1828 the house was largely taken care of on the spiritual and temporal levels by Marist Fathers⁹. The Brother Master of Novices was more supervisor and model than a spiritual master, properly so-called. After 1830 Brother Bonaventure knew precisely how to give a frankly more spiritual character to this function, but it seems to me that the role of the chaplains continued to predominate.

The direction of conscience and vocation: no regretting the onions of Egypt *

*[*Translator’s note: This expression means something like “do not think that a new way of life will be better than your present way of life.”]*

The whole of Chapter XVIII on the care of Champagnat “to keep the Brothers in their vocation” is built on the idea that it is not for the subject to discern his vocation, but that this responsibility must be confided to his Director. It ends with a lesson developed around the four causes of the loss of vocation: “lack of docility” joined to “concealment” for the Religious assailed by temptations can only be overcome “by opening his heart and submitting to his Superior.” Champagnat had very harsh words for those who wanted to walk their own path or, worse, would not have any contact with their lawful superiors.

“The one who, rather than going to his Superior and following his advice, seeks counsel elsewhere, will get lost [...] Whoever seeks counsel in Egypt will become lost through the advice from Egypt.¹⁰ When you move away from the direction of the one whom God has given us as coachman and guide, you will find, through God’s just punishment, just the direction you want, for your own misfortune.¹¹ There is no one more capable of judging the vocation of a Religious than the Superior; on these occasions, preferring the opinion of everyone else to that of the Superior is to throw oneself into an illusion and the strangest blindness into which a Religious can fall.¹²”

⁹ Champagne Letter no 11 to Father Cattet: Father Séon was busy with the spiritual tasks in the house, with the making of ribbons. “Father Bourdin with the supervision of the novices’ classes.”...

¹⁰ *Manual of Piety. Maxims of the Founder 29.*

¹¹ *Manual of Piety. Maxims of the Founder 38.*

¹² *Manual of Piety. Maxims of the Founder 39.* See also *Avis, Leçons, Sentences ch V.* “The Brothers whom the Venerable Champagnat did not love”. Para VIII goes on to say, “I do not love the Brothers who are going to look for advice in Egypt” because, in the matter of vocation “the

To illustrate these very severe words, Brother Jean Baptiste cited the case of a professed Brother who wanted to leave. Knowing that Champagnat would object to his reasons, “he went to see another priest and, explaining his position as his lying spirit suggested to him, he obtained the decision that he wanted.” Having been warned, the Founder very strongly condemned this manoeuvre: “You sought counsel in Egypt, so you will get lost among the counsels of Egypt.” In fact, he did not claim that it was for the director of conscience alone to decide on a vocation: but he condemned the lack of openness of directees and their strategy of competition between directors of conscience: a problem as old as confession and spiritual direction.

The recurring allusion to the onions of Egypt suggests a deeper and more transparent motivation. As a new Moses, Champagnat had been elected as guide for a community liberated from a perverse world and forming a chosen people. Treating a vocation lightly is to be like the Hebrews in the desert. However, by the time Brother Jean Baptiste is writing the *Life* in 1850 - 1856, the teaching on superiors in matters of discernment of vocations had tightened, tending to establish that, once recognised by superiors as suitable, a Brother cannot envisage any other life, even the priesthood or monastic life.

There was a mutual suspicion between the Marist Fathers chaplain of the houses of formation and the Brothers Director of these same establishments, the former accusing the Brothers of preventing a true discernment of vocation, the latter suspicious that the chaplains were hijacking the Institute. If the chaplains were basing their position on a very hierarchical and clerical ecclesiology of the Council of Trent and scarcely viewed the Marist Brothers as Religious, the Brothers’ Superiors were arguing from ancient monasticism, the tradition coming down from Champagnat and their status as Religious, apart altogether from their hopes of recognition from Rome.

The Fathers of the Desert and the Jesuits

The basic source for the Brothers’ beliefs in the question of the direction of conscience lies in *The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection* by Rodriguez, in the treatise “On the fidelity necessary to fully reveal one’s conscience to one’s Superiors and Spiritual Fathers”¹³, which is a commentary of the Jesuit Constitutions. Chapter 1, “The necessity of allowing ourselves to be seen by our Superiors as we are” sets out a sort of time-line of this practice, from the Desert Fathers (Cassian, Anthony, John Climacus, Basil...) to Ignatius. Over the course of the ten following chapters, he strives to distinguish spiritual direction (which comes from the Superior) from sacramental confession, but it is more confusing than convincing. He is a bit more precise in chapter XI which concludes the treatise “The better is to render account of one’s conscience

Superior is the guide established by God.” [Translator’s note: “looking for advice in Egypt” means “looking for advice anywhere other than where you should be looking for it”.]

¹³ Rodriguez Vol 3, 7th Treatise.

outside of confession” but “it is not only necessary to declare one’s temptations and bad inclinations, but also one’s falls [...] without that, a good account of one’s conscience cannot be rendered.” However, if a Religious falls “into some serious and shameful fault” that must be reserved for confession. Finally, the admission of faults, without exception, is common to spiritual direction and confession and the distinction between the internal and external fora fades. However, it is true that, for Rodriguez, the Superior is a priest, and the Brothers would tend to forget that.

In any case, the manuscripts of Brothers François and Jean-Baptiste contain a great number of texts on the direction of conscience, many of them copied from whole passages of Rodriguez. Here, by way of example, is the beginning of an instruction kept by Brother François which takes up the first chapter of Rodriguez and gives the essence of his teaching, which, at the same time, is that of Champagnat.¹⁴

“1. Cassian says that the first thing that the ancient Fathers of the Desert advised those who were just making a start in the service of God was that they should take care to reveal to their Superiors whatever temptations or bad thoughts they had, even although they may be completely private; it was this that these men of God regarded among themselves as a type of first principle and as the base and foundation for the entire spiritual edifice. [...]

“This opening up of the heart to the Superiors must equally be practised in the Society¹⁵ so that each one works more efficaciously for his salvation and advancement and that he holds onto his spirit and character while reforming and destroying, with the help of the Superior, everything that opposes it. The one who does not want to submit to this would expose himself to great dangers and would be resisting an order from God who wants to guide us by means of an intermediary who represents him on earth.”

A study of the instructions on this topic, which comes directly or indirectly from the teaching of Champagnat would be beyond the scope of this article. I content myself with giving this list.¹⁶

Manuscript	Page	Title	Page
Writings 3	153	Opening of the heart to the Superior	2
	308	Instruction on the manifestation of conscience	2
Writings 4	61	On the opening of the heart	3
	70	On the opening of the heart	3

¹⁴ Brother François. Notebook 307 p 479 “Direction. Relationships with Superiors”.

¹⁵ The use of the word “Society” suggests an old origin: Society of Jesus, but also of Mary. The instruction could have come from Champagnat.

¹⁶ Writings 3 and 4 come from Brother Jean-Baptiste, Notebooks 307 and 309 are from Brother François.

	99	Opening of the heart to the Superior	3
Notebook 307	479	Direction. Relations with Superiors.	5
	491	Responses to some objections to direction	9
	491	Main items for the account to Brothers Director	9
Notebook 309/a	1342	The necessity of direction	10
Notebook 309/b	51	Direction (479)	12
	175	Question on direction	13

Spiritual Direction in the Rule of St. Sauveur

The teaching set out above was seemingly established very early on. The first version of the Marist Brothers' Rule which has come down to us is the handwritten Rule discovered at St. Sauveur-en-Rue.¹⁷ It does not concern itself with the Mother House at L'Hermitage, but with the small communities of parish or commune schools which depend spiritually on the parish priest and on the Mother House at L'Hermitage and have at their head a Brother "Rector".

Between the local and central authority lay an intermediary tier of the "Brother First Rector" of an "area" (later it would be called "district") comprising several schools. He received, from the local Rectors information on "everything happening in the establishment, either spiritual or temporal" and, every month, passed on the information to the Superior "in writing or personally". However, the most important items were these two articles:

"26. All the Brothers will render an account of their interior life to the Father Visitor and the Brother Rector will render an account of all those he has with him."

44. P 119 "When the Father Visitor, the Parish Priest or curate comes to visit the classes, the Brother or children will request his blessing."

In speaking of the "Visitor" and not "Superior" the two articles are not speaking only of Champagnat, but are reminding us that, around 1830, with the Fathers and Brothers of L'Hermitage constituting a single Society of Mary, visits from the priests of L'Hermitage were taken into account. A late addition to the Rule of St Sauveur (*La Regla...* article 10 p 121) again

¹⁷ It appears in *La Regla del Fundador* (doc 15, p 109 - 121), a collection of the first Marist legislative texts. The author, Brother Pedro Herreros dates it to the years 1827 - 1833.

presumes that the Rector will make the children kneel down “when a Father of the Society visits the establishment” and adds “the same will be done at the visit of a bishop or senior priest”. The Rule of 1837 continues to anticipate these visits¹⁸ but the order is reversed: the “Father of the Society” is now cited in only third position, after the bishop and senior priest. This is not a trivial detail: the possibility of a school-visit by a Marist Father is no longer considered likely. As for direction in writing, a reasonably clear passage (*La Regla* p 118) suggests that it already existed around 1830: “33. All letters written to the Superior will be kept to show during the holidays. Care will be taken to make a small cross on letters written to him.”¹⁹

From the Rule of St Sauveur to the Rule of 1837

With regard to the governing of Brothers in the establishments, Chapter III of 1837 envisages three tiers of authority: the local Director, who “represents J.C., the sovereign pastor of souls in the establishment to which he is sent” and the Brothers owe him the respect and obedience they owe to J.C. It is an audacious formula, which relativises the authority of the parish priest. And it is the Brother Visitor who inherits the function of spiritual director originally reserved to the Marist Fathers.

“Article 25. The Brothers will have a great openness towards the Brother Visitor and will confidently communicate to him the interior and exterior struggles and difficulties they are going through.”

Chapter VII on letters sets out clearly the use of correspondence with the Superior: every month for the First Director, every two months for local Directors. Furthermore, “secondly, the Brothers themselves will write every four months. The visit of the Superior will not dispense them from this.” Properly speaking, this correspondence is not letters of direction. Yet how does one distinguish, in these relationships, the external forum relevant to the Rule from the internal forum situated in the relationship between spiritual master and disciple?

To summarise, there are, for the active Brothers, three areas where direction takes place: talking with the Visitor, the letters to the Superior over the course of the year, the interview with him during the retreats. Since it is set out in an “instruction on the manifestation of conscience” in the Rule of 1837, we have a fairly clear idea of the content of the interview. Taking up Rodriguez, it clearly states, “this pious practice must not be confused with sacramental confession. In rendering an account of one’s conscience, less application is given to the exact statement of the number and circumstances of one’s faults than to looking, with the assistance of the Superior, at their source.” Like Rodriguez, there is mention of uncovering “the depths of one’s soul and its most intimate dispositions to the Superior”. There are then a number of questions, anticipated by

¹⁸ Chapter V. The manner in which Brothers will act towards ecclesiastics and civil authorities.

¹⁹ The first sentence perhaps concerns the Director, while the marked letters are confidential and may deal with problems of conscience.

the directory, which are relevant in practical terms to the internal forum. For example, still following Rodriguez: “Do you experience temptations? What are they? How do you resist them?” Finally, as can be seen in the treatise of Rodriguez, the two exercises converge profoundly on the fact that, in the two cases, there is the same painful struggle: the admitting of one’s vicious tendencies and faults. As for the letters to the Superior, they were destroyed for clear reasons of discretion, but we still have a large number of the replies made by Brothers François and Jean-Baptist, the contents of which allow us to guess at the topics tackled, which arose from the internal forum.

The Direction of Conscience and the Houses of Formation

During the years 1858 - 1863 the Marist Fathers, who would contest the right of Directors of the Brothers to direct consciences, involved themselves with the Brothers only as confessors and at retreats; this was not negligible, but scarcely allowed confessors to get to know their penitents. An anecdote cited by Brother Avit shows us that, around 1825, this practice was already causing minor inconvenience.

[1826/no 57] “This good Father (Terraillon) had a fad which often became irksome for his penitents. He stopped them after each confession to ask where they were living, if they were in class, if they were Directors, how many pupils they had, what was the name of the parish curate, if the Brother Director was bad etc...”

In the retreats which they preached, or where they took on the role of extraordinary confessors, the Marist Fathers acquired a general knowledge of the Brothers and their problems of conscience, but knew little enough about the reality of their lives in school. At the same time, the Superiors were receiving the same Brothers for direction and it might be presumed that many of these were giving, from themselves or from the state of their consciences, whether voluntarily or not, a quite different picture, but one which might create a certain amount of discomfort between the Fathers and Brothers in a number of areas, notably sensitive ones such as vocation and chastity.

Father Colin and the Temporary Vow of Obedience

On these topics, Father Colin, having become Superior on the death of Father Champagnat, went on to manifest a specifically pastoral attitude, as is noted by Father Bernard Bourtot in his work, *Frères et Pères de la S.M.* Colin upbraided the Brothers’ Superiors and Father Cholleton, who was responsible for the Brothers in the Province, with sending away too quickly Brothers who committed faults, particularly in the matter of chastity, without giving them either the time or the means for self-correction. However, scarcely had Champagnat died before he imposed an important change: the three temporary traditional vows were replaced by a single vow of

obedience. In acting in this way, he perhaps showed himself less rigorous than Champagnat had been. This decision could have caused deep division on the place of the branch of the Brothers in the Society of Mary since it weakened one of the pillars of Champagnat's work: namely that the Marist Brothers were totally separate Religious and had to act as such. The sending away of the inadequate and those who committed faults was a strong signal about the vocation of a Brother. Colin's self-indulgence, then, was quite ambiguous and would be badly received. The "obedient" Brothers, considered as "unprofessed" or as prolonged novices, would become the helpers of the professed Brothers.

Becoming a Religious Order under Roman Law

Although it had been understood since 1845 that the Society of Fathers and that of the Brothers were distinct, Father Colin exercised a moral guardianship over the Brothers and the Marist Fathers continued to take on the functions of chaplains, retreat preachers and confessors in the novitiate houses. This division of competencies probably appeared natural to the Marist Fathers, who had little inclination to imagine that the Brothers would become independent. With the Brothers, there was clearly a different view. This is why the Superiors again took up the steps to obtaining civil authorisation in 1851 and, particularly, held a General Chapter in 1852 - 1854 with a view to preparing for Roman recognition. The Common Rules of 1852 do not contain anything very new on the manifestation of conscience, but Father Colin's renunciation of all authority over the Brothers at the beginning of the 1852 - 1854 General Chapter could have been seen by the Marist Fathers as a rupture in the already-stretched equilibrium of the relations between the Fathers and Brothers. Father Favre's letter of 1858, which we spoke of above, echoes the complaints of the Fathers.²⁰ We are also going to see that the Rules of Government have what is worrying them.

Directors of Novitiate Houses and Spiritual Direction

The Rules of Government was the last legislative work of the Marist Brothers' General Chapter, in 1854. Nothing is said there about the spiritual and historical links of the Brothers with the Fathers, at the heart of the Society of Mary. The Rule speaks at length of the formation of novices, but without bringing up any role for the chaplains in the discernment of vocations. Thus, Chapter V on "The Choice of Subjects" foresees that the examination before the Taking of the Habit will be conducted by the "Sub-Director of Novices" (in reality, the Master of Novices), with the Brothers working in the novitiate giving their opinions. Also, the Brother "Director of the house" will see the postulant in private and ask him eight questions, no 6 of which is "Whether the manifestation of conscience and the opening of his heart are not too painful for him

²⁰ Brother Avit gives precise details of this conflict at St Genis-Laval in 1862-63 when he recalls that relations had been deteriorating over several years. *Annals of the Institute* Volume 3. P 54 nos 76 - 78, Pages 60 - 61 nos 18 - 25 (French edition).

and whether he has clearly decided to lay open his whole life and leave nothing hidden from his Superior?" At the examination before profession, after nine questions on the candidate's spirit and religious conduct: "10. Is he open? Does he allow himself to be known by his Superiors and does he follow their direction?" The 11th question "Has he been advised by his confessor?" is one of the rare passages alluding to an appointed confessor.

Moreover, the chapter on "Rules for the Brother Director of Novitiate Houses" makes this officer of the Institute a sort of substitute for chaplains. In reading this chapter, we can understand why the ire of Father Favre and the Marist Fathers was directed at these Directors, notably those of Beaucamps and St Genis-Laval. Section no 1 lists the numerous qualities needed for "the sound choice of subjects and the care required to bring them up well, that is to say, to form them in solid virtues and the spirit of their vocation during the novitiate." In the third section, article 2 imposes "great discretion about the questions posed as to what concerns the interior life during the manifestation of conscience [...] waiting while the novice who speaks to him goes into the fullest detail unless he expresses the desire to be helped with his revelations."... The article following prescribes "an inviolable secrecy on everything he learns by means of the manifestation of conscience." in order to retain the confidence of the novices and enable them to continue to profit "from such a holy practice". Section no 5 speaks of the religious instruction which has to be given to them: "what sin is", knowing Jesus Christ, the Mass, Communion, Penance. He will of course form them (Section no 6) "in the virtue and practices of Religious Life": prayer, regularity...but also chastity "the most beautiful ornament of the Religious". Every week, he will see the Postulants and the Brothers of the house and receive from them their manifestation of conscience (Section 9 article no 4) forming the young Brothers with care through direction (article no 6) and will frequently recommend to them that they keep nothing hidden from the Brother Superior (General). The theoretical understanding of the prerogatives of the Director of the Provincial House are such that scarcely anything is left for the chaplain other than Mass and Confession.

The Teaching of the Manual of Piety (1855)

One late work carries a fair degree of importance as it is a condensation of Marist teaching on the topic of Religious Life which the novices had to learn by heart. Its Chapter V (2nd Part) treats of "Sincerity and openness of heart with the Superior". Although mainly inspired by Rodriguez, it moves away somewhat from classic ascetical considerations and situates itself on the theological, and even politico-religious, plain. In effect, it bases the need for direction on "the spirit of Christianity" that is to say, "a spirit of dependence, of obedience, for it is God's Will that people are governed, taught and led, not by Himself or the angels, but by other people, and that there is no one, whatever their learning or virtue, who does not need someone to guide them."

Should we consider these issues as typical of a classical theology or as a refutation of the spirit of the Illuminists? In any case they had strong links with the traditionalist philosophy of Joseph de Maistre and the Vicomte de Bonald, the two great theoreticians of the Counter-Revolution. The considerations on original sin which followed were in the same vein: “the state where original sin has reduced humanity [...] to a state of ignorance, of blindness, of weakness which make it incapable of seeing the evils of the soul, of knowing the correct remedies to overcome them and of conducting oneself properly”.

*[*Translator’s Note: The “Illuminists” (in French: Lumières, Spanish: Alumbrados) were loose groupings of Catholics in seventeenth century France and Spain who saw themselves as so immersed in God through the practice of contemplative prayer that they had no need for a guide or for normal church structures. Some even went as far as believing that they were incapable of sin. It was in reaction to these groups that the Vatican restricted the practice of contemplative prayer to members of the “contemplative” Orders, with other Catholics allowed only vocal prayer and meditation.]*

If we follow such an argument, the direction of conscience becomes part of the traditional principle that each person needs a guide: God Himself or his representatives. However, the Manual attributes to the lay superior quasi-priestly prerogatives. Notably in a brief dialogue on the advantages of direction

“Q. With what sentiments and in what spirit should we render an account of our conscience?

A. We make ourselves known, with sentiments of humility and sincerity; with a great spirit of faith, we convince ourselves that it is to Our Lord in the person of the Superior that we lay bare our deepest self and that the advice he gives is, for us, the expression of the Will of God.”

Certainly, the lay superior did not claim to give absolution, but he tended to limit the role of the confessor to quite a formal rite and the direction of conscience was somewhat reduced to the preparation for the Vow of Obedience.

Conclusion:

It is possible to interpret this issue of the direction of conscience from many angles. For example, tentatively suggesting the hypothesis that Champagnat, because of family tradition and his own scholarly difficulties had, to a lesser extent than other Marists, a negative appreciation of the Revolution and a greater sensitivity for the education of the masses. He would have seen this epoch as a providential event from which he had to draw out ecclesiological consequences, notably alongside a militant laity who knew about resisting dechristianisation, in partnership with the clergy. Moreover, this is an attitude we find with Brothers Louis and François, right from our origins. In 1816 the circumstances were relatively favourable for allowing the creation

of a branch of Brothers, since the clergy, ageing and very few in number, were looking for helpers.

However, for the clergy, this was only a temporary solution, transforming itself, in certain cases, into associations of lay men and women keen on becoming recognised as Religious Orders. Also, in the middle of the 19th C. the congregation of teaching Brothers seen, up until then, in the brilliant exception of the De la Salles, became the partial model which opened up a breach in the very hierarchical and clerical Tridentine system. However, a congregation of “Brothers” (a highly significant name) must affirm its spiritual personality if it wants to be certain of its longevity and those who govern it will lay claim to their right to direct consciences, not just as laymen, but by becoming enrolled in the primitive monastic tradition passed on through the Jesuits.

Even if the Marist Brothers had not made a systematic theory of their point of view, their practices and legislative texts showed quite clearly that they were seeking emancipation from the Marist Fathers, who were on target in attacking them on the matter of direction of conscience.

It was a question, not just of two conceptions of the Society of Mary, but, at least partially, of two ecclesiologies. Congregations of Brothers and Sisters could be considered as primary forms of an organised, militant laity. However, if the congregation is to be seen as viable, it is at the price of incompleteness and ambiguity such that, in associations with priesthood and laity coming from the time of monasticism, lay militancy had been circumscribed to a point of a fairly unstable cohabitation, particularly among the Brothers. On this point, the relation between priesthood and lay male Religious Life has remained problematic. The great debate over admission to the priesthood in congregations of Brothers during the 1970s and 80s was the latest incarnation of this.

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