

The Long March towards Legal Recognition of the Little Brothers of Mary (1822 - 1851)

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Politico-Religious Reality and Mystical Project

Brother Gabriel Michel (1921 - 2008), a well-known historian of the Institute, devoted a lengthy research-project to the steps taken with a view to obtaining a decree from the French government recognising the Little Brothers of Mary as a charitable teaching association. This problem poisoned Father Champagnat's life and contributed to his premature death. It was his successor, Brother François who, not without difficulties, obtained the formal status in 1851.

An initial essay, entitled *Marcellin Champagnat et la reconnaissance légale des Frères Maristes*, was published in 1986 in the form of an A4 notebook of 301 pages¹. In the Introduction, Brother Gabriel Michel confirmed his intention to treat the question of legal recognition in its totality.

“Marist Brothers know that their Founder, Father Champagnat, made extraordinary efforts, time and time again, to have his Congregation legally recognised by the French government, and that he did not succeed. They sometimes wonder: does anyone know the real reason? [...] Another, later, volume could tell the story of the second stage (1840 - 1851), which ended on that occasion, as is well-known, very happily.”

I personally received the first essay, accompanied by a card dated 17th September 1986, which placed the editing well in advance of the date of publication, probably in the years 1970 - 1980.

“Brother Gabriel Michel (the name had been printed) requests that you kindly receive the accompanying Paper which was (this word was underlined) done quite some time ago, but which ended up coming out of the Carmelite Press with a run of two hundred copies.
Fraternally.”

Brother Gabriel Michel had his second volume, entitled *Frère François et la reconnaissance légale des Frères Maristes (1840 - 1851)*, printed². Less voluminous than the first (at 112 pages), it was compiled in the years 1987 - 1990. Perhaps because the two volumes printed in St

¹ In spite of its unusual format, it is classified as a book by the National Library of France.

² By “Imprimerie St Chamond” in the first quarter of 1991.

Chamond had a restricted circulation, the General House in Rome had them re-edited in the form of A4 notebooks³.

Focus and limitations of the two works

I was very much interested in Brother Gabriel Michel's problem as to why it took so long for the Institute to obtain civil status. However, it seemed to me that his very dense texts barely explained the failures of the Founder's time, nor Brother François' eventual success. On the other hand, the two works exhibited copies of around 140 documents, of which a large number came from the Archives of the Department of the Loire and of the Archdiocese of Lyons, also from the National Archives. Thus, we have a remarkable dossier which must not be lost, but which needs to be made more accessible. This is why I decided to re-organise these two books into a single volume, while permitting myself to re-interpret this complicated history, in particular in the light of the research of Brother Pierre Zind, author of the work, *Les nouvelles congrégations des Frères enseignants en France de 1800 à 1830* in 1969.

I have not worked totally in the same spirit as Brother Gabriel Michel, rather I was too concerned about my preference for foregrounding the person of Champagnat and considering the politico-religious environment as a relatively secondary background. For example, this biographical perspective, tainted as it is with hagiography, does not clearly evidence the fact that, up to 1830, it was Archbishop de Pins who was in charge of the work with the French government and was responsible for the initial problems. Champagnat did not directly intervene in this business until after the 1833 Guizot law on elementary education. Moreover, Gabriel Michel was too faithful to the Institute's tradition of doing history, where Bochart, the Vicar General, was exaggeratedly vilified and too much praise heaped on Archbishop de Pins, who was quite clumsy in this affair. He also underestimated the importance of the 1830 Revolution which brought about a liberal regime, initially hostile in its dealings with the Church, then more moderate, but retaining, until its collapse in 1848, a great mistrust of Congregations and Associations. Under this regime, it was practically impossible for a Congregation to get itself recognised, even as a simple charitable association. The support of Archbishop de Pins had scarcely any effect.

This under-estimation of the 1830 Revolution was influenced by a history of the Institute which regarded it as a challenge gloriously overcome, whereas it marked the blocking of an attempt at the re-christianisation of the country and the start of the State's complete stranglehold on education. It was with the Guizot law of 1833 that the work of marginalization of teaching Congregations began. It was from here that Champagnat's post-1830 problems arose, which should be seen as the first manifestations of the State's secularising monopoly, leading to the destruction of Congregations in 1903.

³ However, without Indices for Topics, Names or Places, nor a Chronology and not even a Table of Contents.

Two major politico-religious problems: association and education

Brother Pierre Zind (Louis Laurent), in his last work⁴, allows us to clearly situate the Marist problem within its long history. First of all, although the Monarchy was distrustful of Associations, it was authorising intermediate bodies such as Religious Orders and corporations. The Revolution of 1789 - 1799 broke up every network of co-operation so that it would only have individuals to cope with. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen was completely ambivalent. It was on this *tabula rasa* that the revolutionaries claimed to remodel a nation according to their point of view, notably in the matter of education.

Napoleon (1799 - 1814) then tried a sort of middle way. He restored the Church, but did not revoke the suppression of Religious Orders, judging them useless (monks) or dangerous (Jesuits). However, he accepted women's Congregations, which grew in abundance almost everywhere and were not a danger politically. In order to found a state system of education, he created, in 1808, the Imperial University, controlling all male education apart from the seminaries. As the De la Salle Brothers (FSC), a Religious Association, were favoured by society, which required good teachers, the regime integrated them into the new-born University, as it was cruelly lacking in capable personnel. This integration was so much easier because the FSCs were not perceived as a Religious Order, but as a simple lay Association, providing reassurance because it was religious, competent and had no political agenda. Dependent at the same time on Church and State, the FSCs constituted a mixed model of an association which later aroused some controversy.

The Restoration, which took over in 1814 - 1815, inherited the Napoleonic University. The episcopate wanted to recover its traditional educational monopoly, but the royal government, Gallican⁵ in spirit, agreed only to share education with the Church. One of the foundational acts of this collaboration is the Ordinance of 29th February 1816 which foresaw the authorisation by decree of charitable educational associations resembling the FSCs. After the 1820s, about ten decrees authorising Associations of Brothers arose from this. Brother Pierre Zind (Louis Laurent) has written the history of the births up to 1830. We will see why the Little Brothers of Mary were unable to profit from this favourable time.

Relations between Church and State very quickly became fragile: from 1822 to 1826 the episcopate managed to dominate the University, which was adopted by the Ministry of Education. Even although it comprised a number of priests, the personnel hoped to free itself from episcopal authority. Very quickly, the male religious teaching Associations aroused the distrust of the government and of liberals who saw them as allied to jesuitical plotting. After

⁴ Bx M. Champagnat. *Son œuvre scolaire dans son contexte historique*. Marist Brothers. Rome. 1991.

⁵ Anxious to defend its rights against the clergy and Rome.

1825 scarcely any further associations were authorised. After 1830, the episcopate lost its hold on education and the new regime was unwilling to authorise any new associations, in order that it could become the single master of education without having to deal with intermediary bodies. In fact, the really favourable time for obtaining a decree as a teaching association went from 1820 to 1825.

The main stages of this story for the Little Brothers of Mary

The title “legal recognition” given by Brother Gabriel Michel in his works is a bit narrow because it includes multiple modes of recognition (social, ecclesiastical, administrative...) which, in the local, departmental, diocesan and regional tiers, preceded and accompanied the ascent of the Little Brothers of Mary to the conquering of juridical personhood in 1851. It was like a play of several acts. While there was quite constant intrigue, there were also many actors, and no lack of striking effects.

Between 1817 and 1819, the question of recognition really only arose in the plans of the parish and commune. The Brothers were a very small community of pastoral assistants for catechetics and charity, “a little oratory⁶” as Father Champagnat would have told Father Bourdin (*Origines Maristes 2/754*). We know that the Parish Priest, Rebod and a group from the commune of La Valla had reservations about this work, but that it was sufficiently supported by donations to allow it to survive and pursue its objectives, which were not yet educational.

Between 1819 and 1822 the community underwent a profound transformation, focusing on education and taking on the appearance of a Congregation. On the level of the canton, it particularly came up against the local clergy, who, claiming the support of the Vicars General of the diocese, sought to shut down what they considered to be a clandestine college and a nascent Congregation. It was only in 1822 that the University, in the person of the inspector, Guillard, raised the issue of civil recognition. However, there was no pressure at this time, as the episcopate had its hold on the University and the diocese of Lyon did not have an archbishop. It was administered by the Vicars General of Cardinal Fesch, who, having been dispossessed of his right to govern the diocese, was living in Rome and refused to resign.

From 1822 to 1824, Champagnat’s work found itself, at one and the same time, protected and annexed by the Vicar General, Bochard, who was trying to establish a diocesan association of the Brothers of the Cross of Jesus from the different initiatives of Founders such as: Grizard, Rouchon, Coindre, and, of course, Champagnat. There was no way for him, however, to obtain a royal decree: his politico-religious position was too uncertain. There was certainly work going on at the Grande Aumônerie (which served the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs) to get rid of

⁶ According to the model founded by Philip Neri in Rome in the 16th C.

Fesch's Vicars General, Bochart being one who was trying to control the whole system of training in the diocese. Between 1822 and 1824 the Little Brothers of Mary became a politico-religious issue; they were, like it or not, on the side of a Vicar General in difficulty with the central government, which had become ultra-royalist.

The following phase extended from 1824 to around 1833. Archbishop de Pins, who arrived as Apostolic Administrator of the diocese, was clearly the man of the ecclesiastical ultra-royalists in the Grande Aumônerie and he chose for himself Vicars General of the same tendency, one of whom was Jean Cholleton. Champagnat knew enough to ally himself with the Administrator and obtain permission to pursue his work, even if de Pins and his Council had different ideas to his on the Little Brothers of Mary: they did not want the Society of Mary of Lyon, but just a diocesan Congregation of Brothers. At all events, the prospectus of the Little Brothers of Mary signed by the Vicar General, Cholleton, in the summer of 1824, was valuable diocesan recognition. It is a decisive moment in the foundation of the Little Brothers of Mary that the Brothers' tradition barely recognises. This success later went into reverse: the Little Brothers of Mary had become an element of the diocesan pastoral plan and Archbishop de Pins was, like Bochart previously, an ecclesiastical superior who had his own ideas on its organisation and objectives.

At the beginning of 1825 the Apostolic Administrator tried to obtain a royal decree for the Little Brothers of Mary, not just as an Association, but even as a Congregation. The statutes presented provided for vows and used the word "Congregation". Even although it was strongly supported by the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs and Education, Bishop Frayssinous, the project came up against the Council of State which, on this occasion, made a clear juridical distinction between Association (without vows) and Congregation (with vows). Only Congregations of women could obtain recognition by royal decree easily (law of 24th May 1825). Congregations of men, now considered to be Religious Orders, were banned. Authorisation by means of a law was impossible: the parliaments were Gallican and anti-Jesuit.

The de Pins project is all the more astonishing as, in 1825, the Little Brothers of Mary did not take vows and were therefore only an Association. What was it, therefore, that pushed the Administrator to present them as a Congregation? It was undoubtedly tempting to play on the ambiguity of the concepts of Association and Congregation, which up to then had been very badly defined and to do this in order to gain recognition for male Congregations through the expediency of the decree of 29th February 1816. His manoeuvre narrowly failed on the juridical level, but it is clear that de Pins wanted the Little Brothers of Mary to become a Congregation. It was at the very least with his encouragement that the Brothers began to take vows in 1826, something that would create several problems for them. The situation became delicate: they were still without legal status and were a Congregation not formally recognised by the diocese (private vows) since Fesch had banned the erection of new Congregations. They existed as a

Congregation only in 1836, but as an annex of the Marist Fathers, recognised by Rome under the title of the Society of Mary.

After the very politico-religious attempt of 1825, which just failed, Archbishop de Pins does not seem to have made a serious attempt before 1829 - 1830. The new ultra-royalist government presided over by Polignac was devoted to a king, Charles X, who had decided to establish his authority over a parliament which was afraid of a return to the Ancien-Regime. We know that, having gone through the Council of Education, the Marist dossier was being examined by the Council of State when the conflict between king and parliament became worse. In the Archdiocese of Lyon it was believed that the decree authorising the Little Brothers of Mary was simply awaiting the King's signature when the Paris Revolution of "three glorious days" (27 - 29th July 1830) broke out, overthrowing Charles X and proclaiming Louis-Philippe d'Orléans as King. Marist tradition has retained this idea of the imminent signature on the decree in its favour. It is more probable that the Marist dossier was still in the hands of the Council of State, in no hurry to support a decree on a sensitive topic at a time of political crisis. In any case, the second attempt, like the first, failed.

With the July Monarchy (1830 - 1848) being aggressively anti-clerical and so much against Congregations, there was virtually no hope of obtaining anything. Archbishop de Pins did not immediately take the measure of the hostility of the new regime. Still, in 1832, he attempted a few more steps in favour of the Little Brothers of Mary, needless to say without success. However, his Vicars General had understood before he had that the direct route towards recognition of the Little Brothers of Mary was barred. It was necessary to opt for affiliation to a Congregation enjoying a decree. Father Querbes' Clerks of St Viator, a Congregation from Lyon, seemed the best place for this operation. However, neither Champagnat nor Father Querbes were in agreement. Moreover, with the episcopate having lost all authority over education, the Archdiocese of Lyon was going to leave Champagnat to his own devices, with the support of the administration of the Loire, well-placed politicians, and of Bishop Devie of Belley who became a favoured adviser.

The period 1824 - 1833 was therefore quite ambivalent for the Little Brothers of Mary: diocesan recognition allowed them to root themselves very strongly in the region, essentially that of the Loire, but the politico-religious blunders of Archbishop de Pins had prevented their obtaining a decree. After July 1830 the issue was how to obtain a civil personality under a hostile regime, when the Guizot law, promulgated in 1833, became the framework for elementary education. The law allowed for authorised Associations, but did not envisage welcoming any new ones.

In order to reverse the refusal of the Minister of Education, Champagnat then wrote to the King. His effort resulted, in 1834, in an administrative recognition of the statutes of the Little Brothers

of Mary without anything further since the Ministry considered that the February decree had been rendered obsolete by the Guizot law. A letter to the Queen had no significant effect.

From 1835 Champagnat also explored the route of affiliation using as an intermediary, Bishop Devie of Belley, who had introduced to him Father Mazelier and his Brothers of St Paul-Trois-Châteaux. This also partly resolved the problem of Brothers threatened with military service, while furnishing personnel to a Congregation where it was lacking. Little by little the idea formed in his mind of a closer relationship, even of an amalgamation. However, Father Mazelier was hesitant and Champagnat did not want to casually abandon the name Little Brothers of Mary which he considered providential since the Marist aspirants of 1816 had foreseen a Society of Mary which would replace the Society of Jesus in post-revolutionary times.

When Guizot resigned from the Ministry, Champagnat believed that time had come for bold action directed at Salvandy, the new Minister of Education, with the support of the departmental authorities of the Loire, his political friends, of Archbishop de Pins and Bishop Devie. It would mean several stays in Paris, in 1836 and, in particular, in 1838.

We lack the documents which would enable us to know in detail the negotiations between Champagnat and the Minister, Salvandy. The first phase saw the Minister and his Council envisaging statutes which would limit the action of the Little Brothers of Mary to communes with fewer than 1200 inhabitants in order to make them auxiliaries of the De la Salle Brothers. A decree with this clause would have little opposition because the lay elementary school teachers coming out of the training colleges were not keen on going to poor communes. Thus the Little Brothers of Mary would not inconvenience anyone, would render service to the Administration, but would be marginalised. Champagnat rejected such civil status as it did not correspond to the primitive Marist project nor to the existing situation of his Congregation. However, in rejecting this solution, he ran the risk of not obtaining the decree.

Assisted by M. Delebecque, an important person in the Ministry and a politician from the Pas-de-Calais in the north of France, he proposed an alternative: to fill in for the De la Salles in important communes where the lack of manpower did not allow them to go. From this arose the foundation of a Marist establishment in the small town of St Pol-sur-Ternoise (Pas-de-Calais), with the blessing of the De la Salle Superior General. However, a decree without a restrictive clause would be very difficult to obtain, even if approved by the Minister and his Council, since the Council of State considered the Little Brothers of Mary to be competitors of the De la Salles. Plus, the liberal opposition would attack the attempt at the recognition of a Congregation in the guise of an Association. An unfortunate business had a greater effect on Champagnat's progress: the search for a compromise in a quarrel over the direction of the College at St Chamond which involved some Marist Fathers and the Archdiocese of Lyon.

There was little progress from the summer of 1838 on. Salvandy increased the consultation with the bishops of Lyon and Belley, with Prefects, with General Councils. However, he did not obtain any consensus. The Prefect of the Rhône and his Council were against the Little Brothers of Mary. With little support from his government, a mauling by the opposition press and dreading his Council of State, he refused to push the dossier any further. The years 1839 - 40, marked by great instability among ministers, were not favourable to a reactivation of the project. When Champagnat died in June 1840, the route to direct recognition of the Little Brothers of Mary had hardly progressed since 1830, but the prospect of affiliation to the Brothers of St Paul had been very much clarified.

Politics and mysticism at the Little Brothers of Mary

Before carrying on with the chronological framework, it seems to me to be necessary to present the Founder in his politico-religious character: this is an angle which we are not used to considering and which Brother Gabriel Michel put before us without really examining it.

Before 1830, his stature in his locale, confined essentially to the Department of the Loire, was modest, even if he is talked about in the important diocese of Lyon from 1822 and became, more by necessity than conviction, a member of the Bochart crowd knowing to quit it tactfully on the arrival of Archbishop de Pins who did not fail to receive him and approve of his work. However, the Administrator and his Council had only a limited esteem for someone who wanted to create a Society of Mary of Lyon since, in their eyes, they were Brothers, which the diocese needed. Also, there were some in the Council who did not have great confidence in his capacity to lead a Congregation and would have preferred Father Courveille. Moreover, Archbishop de Pins considered that the Little Brothers of Mary were HIS diocesan Congregation and that he alone had the right to take the steps towards legal authorisation. We know that the attempts of 1825 and 1830 failed before the jurists of the Council of State, but also because of the intransigence of the Diocesan Administrator who, instead of treating civil authorisation as an administrative problem, turned it into a politico-religious issue.

While Champagnat was being somewhat sidelined by the Archdiocese, his stature was growing in the Department of the Loire, where the number of Brothers' schools was increasing, as was that of the house of L'Hermitage, which, in deed if not in fact, acted as the Departmental teacher training college. At St Chamond itself, the about-turn of Father Dervieu, the influential Parish Priest of St Pierre's, encouraged the help of notables for a work which brought honour to the canton and even the Department. The Little Brothers of Mary were sufficiently well implanted there that the Prefect, however hostile he may be, could not seriously threaten them nor replace them with schools using pupil-teachers, except in the single case of Feurs. The arms-search at

L'Hermitage in 1830 was an indirect compliment to a work judged sufficiently important to attract the suspicions of the political and administrative authorities.

After 1830, the Archdiocese had lost much of its influence and, faced with a liberal government turned hostile, no longer had the means to obtain legal authorisation nor the possibility of putting pressure on a Champagnat considered to be an expert on the topic of educational policy and whose work did not cease to extend beyond the diocese. After the promulgation of the Guizot law (1833) it was Champagnat who had to take the initiative and move heaven and earth to obtain a decree. Even if he failed in his attempt in 1838, this would have given him some sort of national stature. He bartered with ministers, prefects, deputies, bishops and other Congregations. He also drafted what was to become the plan of action for his Congregation from the Méditerranée to the north of France with the foundation at St Pol-sur-Ternoise in the Department of Pas-de-Calais and relations with St Paul-Trois-Châteaux.

Elsewhere, his success was limited. If he had not succeeded on the national level, he benefited from the clear support of the administration of the Loire and his work was sufficiently extensive and honoured in other departments and dioceses for the clergy and Ministry of Education to recognise a *de facto* existence at a time when the recruitment of elementary school teachers was insufficient. In the short term, the only tricky point for Champagnat was the threat of military service for unqualified Brothers, a threat cushioned since 1835 by an arrangement with the Brothers of Christian Instruction of St Paul-Trois-Châteaux, thanks to the mediation of Bishop Devie of Belley.

A paradoxical consequence of the lack of official status for the Little Brothers of Mary was that the Congregation could not receive donations or legacies nor possess anything. All goods were therefore in Champagnat's name and he paid taxes which were not negligible, thus finding himself among the small number of voters at a time when the suffrage was limited to tax-payers, numbering at that time only a few hundred thousand. Also, when Champagnat was corresponding or meeting with notables, he had to muse on the fact that he was one of them himself. Without a doubt, he was esteemed more by thousands of lay people than by an ecclesiastical world so long astonished by a priest known to be without any great talent but who had succeeded so well. In any case, there were numerous clergy and notables of St Chamond at his funeral in June 1840. It was one of their own they were burying.

Another paradox: the absence of legal authorisation of the Little Brothers of Mary did not hinder their development, whereas the development of a number of other associations of Brothers did not succeed, in spite of their recognition by decree and despite important advantages in the areas of teaching qualifications and military service. On this topic, the contrast between the Brothers of St Paul-Trois-Châteaux and those of L'Hermitage is spectacular, to the point where the

arrangement concluded between Father Champagnat and Father Mazelier would come to a head in 1842 in a real Marist take-over. It was the same in 1844 with the Brothers of Viviers.

It must be admitted, therefore, that the advantages offered by a decree were not the determining factor for candidates for the role of Brother. For the majority of Founders, the idea of vocation did not enter into their thinking; they needed simple associations of lay school-masters, good Christians, but without deep spiritual motivation. Champagnat himself envisaged founding a branch of the Society of Mary. When he spoke of “Brothers” he understood that it was a question of an apostolic society conforming to the Marist project of 1816 whose members would be imbued with their personal and collective apostolic vocation under the aegis of Mary.

Legal recognition and amalgamations under Brother François

After Champagnat, the efforts at recognition directed at the Minister, Villemain, were marked by failure. In contrast, the road to amalgamation progressed at giant steps. Father Colin, Brother François and Father Mazelier carried out the joining of the Little Brothers of Mary with the Brothers of St Paul (1842). Two years later, there would be the joining with the Brothers of Viviers. This process was officially recognised in a number of departments and tolerated in the Loire and considerably eased the administrative position of the Little Brothers of Mary, albeit that the union was asymmetrical and more resembled a take-over, to their advantage. It was, nevertheless a precarious administrative situation, summed up by the title “Little Brothers of Mary of Christian Instruction”

To hit the target, another change of regime would be necessary. The 1830 Revolution and the Guizot law (1833) had blocked every attempt at gaining civil recognition; the Revolution of 1848 and the Falloux law (1850) would reverse that. Brothers François and Louis-Marie would profit from a republican, but conservative regime. Not without difficulty, they obtained the presidential decree recognising them under their original name of the Little Brothers of Mary, thanks to a favourable legal opinion based on the Falloux law. Finally, the two strategies put in place around 1835 were successful, permitting Champagnat to assume the stature of a Founder with Brother François being recognised as his worthy successor. Also, with the 1851 decree of legal recognition, the founding phase of the Little Brothers of Mary was complete; they were able to free themselves from the guardianship of the Marist Fathers and draw up their Constitutions during the 1852 - 54 Chapter. Although it had suffered since its origin from the complicated situation in the diocese of Lyon, then the more or less happy guardianship of the Archdiocese and chiefly of Archbishop de Pins, the Congregation benefitted from Marist mysticism which had conceived the Society of Mary, and, in particular, the branch of Brothers, as a community with a charism defined by a name with immense spiritual value and not by a function (Christian Instruction). It also had civil status. For Champagnat, as for his immediate successor, legal

recognition meant the realisation of the Formula of 1816 in which the first Marists foresaw the day when the Society of Mary would come into being. So, we need to understand the sense of what Father Champagnat says in his letter (no 197) to Brother François of 23rd June 1838 in which he announces the failure of his efforts.

“I am weary, but not unnerved; I have always placed great confidence in Jesus and Mary. We will complete our business, of this I have no doubt, although I don’t know when. What is hugely important [...] is that we do everything possible and then let Providence act. God knows better than we do what suits us [...] I am quite sure that a little delay will not harm us.” [*Translator’s Note: This translation was done from the French of the original Paper and is not from the official translation of the Letters.*]

For the Marist Fathers, this birth was arrived at through their Roman recognition as the Society of Mary, in 1836. In 1838, Champagnat recognised that the time for the public appearance of the Little Brothers of Mary had not yet been reached, but he did not doubt that it would be.

This charismatic conception of the Congregation in part explains how, under a July Monarchy very hostile to Religious Associations, recruitment did not only not dry up, but quite significantly increased. It is true that three factors contributed to giving the Little Brothers of Mary a high status: first of all, the official recognition of the diocese of Lyon; then the determined support of the departmental authorities of the Loire, who thought of the Marist Brothers as meriting their unwavering support; finally, the very close relationship between Father Mazelier, Superior of the Brothers of St Paul, and Father Champagnat. Paradoxically, it was the 1848 Revolution and a short-lived Republic (1848 - 51) which allowed the obtaining of what the theoretically liberal Monarchy was firmly against granting. Thanks to this delayed authorisation the Little Brothers of Mary no longer needed the previous authorisations and titles of Brothers of Christian Instruction since they were recognised for the whole of France and not just for a few departments. The Institute could henceforth carry its name as a standard throughout the whole national territory open before it.

However it was not yet the complete end of the foundation phase, since Roman recognition was still lacking. This is why the Superiors convened a Chapter without delay, in order to draw up Constitutions with a view to canonical authorisation. The business in Rome would, however, become more arduous than the civil authorisation. In 1860 it would force the resignation of Brother François, lead to the separation of the Marist Fathers and Brothers and a lengthy conflict with Rome ending only in 1903 with our being left with the canonical but disappointing name of “Marist Brothers of the Schools”, clearly copied from that of the “Brothers of Christian Schools”.

It would not be without interest to bring together these two histories of civil approbation and then the canonical recognition, which interfered with each other. Paradoxically, it was the civil decree which bestowed the mystical name of the Congregation (Little Brothers of Mary) while the canonical name was attached to a function. To sum up, the work of legal recognition could quite well bear the following subtitle, which is rather esoteric, but appropriate: research on civil status and the public revelation of a providential and mystical identity.

Conclusion

In this Paper, I have tried to summarise the major points of the work of around three hundred pages from the collection of two volumes of Brother Gabriel Michel and also, partially, from the works of Brother Pierre Zind, which I propose to publish in the next edition of the FMS/Studia collection. As I said before, it is Champagnat seen from the politico-religious angle, certainly less apolitical than previously thought of, but eminently pragmatic: capable of making astonishing compromises with all sorts of partners without losing sight of his mystical and apostolic objectives. Also, it was Brother François who successfully brought about the amalgamations with the Brothers of St Paul and of Viviers and who, supported by Brother Louis-Marie, took advantage of a brief favourable period to obtain the desired decree. Marist tradition has too long forgotten that, before becoming a retired saint in the “reliquary” of L’Hermitage, Brother François, in his capacity as Superior, knew resounding successes.

Brother André Lanfrey
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