

The Bourdin Document and Brother Jean-Baptiste

Agreement and Disagreement about the Attacks on Marcellin during 1819 - 1821

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21st October 2018

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It is in Chapter 11 of the *Life of Father Champagnat*¹ that Brother Jean-Baptiste recounts the opposition and persecution that Marcellin and his work suffered before the arrival of Archbishop De Pins. Concerned with summarising the issue, the author is somewhat preoccupied with precise timings. Without neglecting the attacks coming from Father Rebod, the Parish Priest, he presents Father Bochard, the Vicar General, as the head of a conspiracy. This interpretation undoubtedly corresponded with the oral tradition of the senior Brothers and, by putting it into writing, Brother Jean-Baptiste himself gave it an official character. However, there exist the “Bourdin Notes” (*Origines Maristes 2 no 748*) on this opposition and persecution. These were drawn up around 1830 with Marcellin as their principal informant and they give a very different interpretation of these events.

Two quite different chronologies of the events:-

<i>Life Part 1 Chapter 11</i>	Bourdin Notes
1. Marcellin is accused of ambition. He would be giving false hope to young people.	1. Father Bochard writes to Father Rebod about “unlawful meetings” (1819)
2. Summary of accusations about his community (a sect of Béguins ²)	2. Marcellin’s prayer about his work.
3. Father Bochard meets Marcellin	3. Accusation of turning away from his quest.
4. Marcellin’s explanations to Father Bochard	4. Marcellin decides to justify himself to Father Bochard.
5. Marcellin and Father Bochard exchange views on the nature of the	5. The letter received during the Easter season. (1819)

¹ [Translator’s Note] Hereinafter referred to as “*Life*”. Quotations from the *Life* are taken from the standard 1989 English translation.

² [Translator’s Note] A heretical sect quite numerous and active in the area. Brother André states that there was one close to La Valla.

society he is starting to found.	
6. End of the interview. Father Bochard does not want any further Congregations of Brothers.	6. A second attack, coming from the Cantonal Committee (Easter 1820)
7. Father Bochard proposes an amalgamation of the two projects. Marcellin has reservations.	7. An accusation of forming a clandestine college ³ . Much worry in the community.
8. A very favourable interview with Father Courbon	8. Marcellin threatened with being moved. Attacks from Father Dervieux and the Parish Priest, Rebod.
9. Encouragement and wise advice from Father Gardette.	9. Letter to Father Courbon about the sale of the house and the problems this could cause in the parish.
10. Threats from Father Bochard who wants an amalgamation with his Brothers.	10. Father Courbon responds by contacting Father Bochard.
11. Marcellin tries not to worry the Brothers about the gravity of the situation.	11. Marcellin writes to Father Bochard but does not see him.
12. Father Bochard's threats (another telling of the same topic as no 10.)	12. Journey to Lyon. Father Dervieux is astonished at the weak reaction of the Archdiocese.
13. Father Dervieu, an agent of Father Bochard, humiliates Marcellin.	13. Interview with Father Courbon. Marcellin will not be moved.
14. Increased malevolence of Father Rebod, the Parish Priest.	14. Interview with Father Bochard. Marcellin's work is linked to the Vicar General.
15. Marcellin's confessor abandons him.	15. Father Bochard supports Marcellin (a warm welcome at the retreat). A foundation made at Chavanay with his authorisation.
16. Marcellin and his community consider moving away.	16. Father Gardette advises prudence.
17. Father Dervieux threatens to close the	

³ [Translator's Note] A college was a secondary school in which Latin was taught. Such schools had to have authorisation from the government, but there were many unauthorised (clandestine) colleges in existence.

house.	
18. Extreme concern in La Valla.	
19. The arrival of Archbishop de Pins as liberation from persecution by Fathers Bochard and Dervieu.	19. The arrival of Archbishop de Pins blocks the plan to link up and Marcellin is connected to the Administrator with the help of Father Gardette.

Agreement and disagreement between the two versions

Despite clear differences, the two accounts are in agreement on a number of points. Firstly, the date on which the problem is resolved with the arrival of Archbishop de Pins, announced in December 1823 and effected in February 1824. About the start of the problem, the chronology is less clear: the Bourdin Notes seem to place Father Bochard's first interfering at Easter 1819, while Brother Jean-Baptiste gives no clear indication. There is agreement on Marcellin's main opponents: Father Rebod, the Parish Priest, Father Dervieux, the Parish Priest of St Peter's in Saint Chamond, and Father Bochard, the Vicar General. However, the two authors differ on the roles played by each of them: for Brother Jean-Baptiste it is Father Bochard who took the lead from start to finish in the attacks while Father Bourdin clearly suggests that Father Dervieu was the principal opponent. As for Father Rebod, Brother Jean-Baptiste emphasises his opposition while Father Bourdin is only interested in him at the start of the attacks and presents him as a secondary opponent. Father Cathelin, Rector of the College in Saint Chamond, is named only by Father Bourdin as being on the side-lines, but he was undoubtedly essentially the author of the accusation about running a clandestine college.

Father Bourdin and Brother Jean-Baptiste are also agreed on Marcellin's supporters: Father Courbon, the senior Vicar General, responsible for placing priests and Father Gardette, the Superior of the seminary. However, Father Bourdin presents us with a fairly uninvolved Father Courbon, insofar as the affair is not in his direct area of responsibility. Above all, the Bourdin Notes reveal for us the help brought by the two curates of Saint Chamond, Fathers Journoux and Durbise.

For Father Bourdin, everything began with a letter from Father Bochard around Easter 1819, followed by an accusation of "unlawful meetings" while Brother Jean-Baptiste records at length a Bochard-Marcellin interview that Father Bourdin only places much later and in very different terms., as if the two authors had followed two different oral traditions about the same event⁴.

⁴ In this conversation Marcellin recounts the state of the community at the end of 1819. There are only eight Brothers. They have elected a Director. Marcellin is their formator and spiritual counsellor but not their Superior. They are not Religious since they wear only secular clothes and do not make vows.

Summary of the events

In my opinion, Father Bourdin's story of this attack on Marcellin and his work is much more reliable than Brother Jean-Baptiste's. He allows for a three-stage chronology: first of all, the rumours (1819), which bring about Father Bochard's intervention; this does not prevent Marcellin from carrying on, but restricts him, probably in order to have greater control over his work. During the year 1820, undoubtedly around Easter, the affair of the clandestine college erupts, brought on by Father Cathelin and relayed by Father Dervieux. As this attack followed on closely from the first with scarcely any alteration in form, the oral tradition of the Brothers made it a single affair. Father Dervieux showed that he was stubborn, but the position of the Cantonal Committee was weaker than it appeared. It could not forcefully intervene without the agreement of the Vicars General. The decisive moment was the meeting with Father Bochard, probably in 1821. Things then moved onto a very different phase: desperately needing the protection of an authority-figure, Marcellin accepted the oversight of Father Bochard, which indirectly freed him from the threats of the Cantonal Committee. He also counted on Providence that this oversight would not become a pure and simple annexation. The arrival of Archbishop de Pins would then have been seen as a sign from heaven.

From 1821 to the end of 1823 - for more or less two years - the work at La Valla would function with Father Bochard as Diocesan Superior, not only of the Brothers of Mary, but also of all the communities of Brothers in the Diocese. Brother Jean-Baptiste rather obscures this fact and Father Bourdin, who mentions the foundation at Chavanay in this context, is more credible. Having said that, the authority of Father Bochard over these nascent Congregations was more theoretical than real.

When Archbishop de Pins arrived, the principle of a diocesan Congregation of Brothers came into being and the Apostolic Administrator considered the Brothers of La Valla to belong to the Diocese to the exclusion of all others. The newly-born Brothers of the Cross of Jesus joined Father Bochard in exile in the Diocese of Belley where they developed to a certain extent; the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, born in Lyon, would go off to Haute-Loire, and the Brothers of Father Rouchon would disperse.

There are many testimonies affirming that Father Bochard was someone with a difficult character and whose authority was invasive, which helps us understand Marcellin's worries and those of his community during 1819 - 1820. The Bourdin Notes give a completely different picture of him: certainly an imperious Superior, but also someone who is revealed as a useful protector for Marcellin. Archbishop de Pins knew how to develop, in a less abrupt way, a policy similar to his.

In fact, Marcellin's work suffered more from the opposition of the clergy of the area than from Father Bochart's authoritarianism. It was from this that the difficulties of recruitment of new aspirants prior to 1822 arose and the creation of schools far from the local area (St. Sauveur, Bourg-Argental, St. Symphorien-le-Château), or even in the neighbouring Diocese of Viviers (Vanosc and Boulieu), almost always sponsored by the local authorities rather than the parish priests.
