

# Father Champagnat's Ideas on Formation of the Brothers

His opposition to a plan for a boarding school - novitiate in St Didier-sur-Chalaronne in 1839

Brother André Lanfrey - January 2024

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In the course of my research, I was intrigued by a debate between the Superiors of the Marist Brothers around boarding schools. In 1852 Brother François, the Superior General, stated that he was little inclined to follow the advice of the parish priest of Neuville-sur-Saône, to the north of Lyon, who was supporting a plan to purchase land for the setting up of a small boarding school near commune's school run by the Brothers (*Annales des Maisons* 1852)

“[76] today we are less keen than ever on having boarding schools. The further we progress, the more we see that it is better for our Brothers to have only simple schools and to be able to then quietly go about their exercises of piety and live in recollection and the exact observance of their Rules. I have to confess to you, Father, that it is this consideration which weighs most heavily in the plan for acquisition which has been suggested to us. Etc.”

This statement was in line with the spirit of Brother François, who was very much imbued with a semi-monastic concept of the Congregation. However, it appeared to me to be very far removed from reality since, in many schools, including Neuville, there existed *caméristats*<sup>1</sup> and some boarding facilities.

Also, Brother Avit added a personal comment which seemed to indicate some disagreement between the Superiors:

“[77] The thinking expressed by the Reverend Brother was fully shared by Brother Jean-Baptiste, who had closed the boarding school at St Paul and would soon close that of Notre Dame de la Blachère<sup>2</sup> and not accept any new ones.

[78] Brother Louis-Marie was less in agreement with this idea. He even appeared to accept well-organised boarding schools with sufficient staff as these could create financial resources for the Institute.”

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<sup>1</sup> This is boarding schools accepting during weekdays pupils who came from a distance. They functioned mainly during winter. [Translator's note: should the word appear again, I will use the English term “half-boarding”.]

<sup>2</sup> In Ardèche.

Brother Avit perhaps exaggerated Brother Jean-Baptiste's opposition to boarding schools as the two cases he names were in fact boarding schools - teacher-training colleges which generated the recruitment of novices. It is, however, true that, in the Provinces in the south of France which were in his charge, boarding schools would be very few. He had something to do with this, 'tho, as he referred to the boarding units improvised in small schools in order to create resources as "Brother-killers"<sup>3</sup> There were certainly other reasons for this semi-absence of boarding schools. At any rate, the Neuville boarding school would become one of the Institute's largest in France and Brother Louis-Marie would go on to create others. However, he saw the boarding school as a sort of specialised establishment resembling neither a teacher-training college nor a day primary school with attached accommodation.\*

In fact, around 1850, the difference between boarding school, college, teacher-training college and even primary school tended to be reduced to whichever produced the highest form of educational specialisation. Brothers François and Jean-Baptiste condemned the boarding schools of the past while Brother Louis-Marie foresaw the boarding schools of the future.

It would certainly be difficult to fully implement such a programme, but we will see that, when it came to boarding schools, the thinking and actions of the Superiors matched those of Marcellin: they had to be differentiated as far as possible from day schools and novitiates.

## **Father Champagnat, Bishop Devie of Belley+ and the boarding school in St Didier-sur-Chalaronne**

While studying the major issues in the history of the systematic establishment of novitiates and teacher-training colleges at the start of the 19th Century, I became aware that Marcellin himself had considered the question of boarding schools, but with the particular angle of the relation between boarding school and teacher-training college. It was in his Letter no 305 that he developed his thinking on the formation of Marist Brothers while setting out a brief history of it.

The context of the letter is as follows: the Marist Brothers had successfully run the day school at St Didier-sur-Chalaronne since 1836. Bishop Devie of Belley had just had a boarding school built and wanted it to serve equally as a novitiate. In a letter of 3rd December 1839, six months before his death,

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<sup>3</sup> That is to say, the work was exhausting.

\*[Translator's Note: The French actually says "with boarding school attached". However, in English this gives the impression of there being two separate schools, so I have used the term "accommodation" to convey the author's intention.]

+ [Translator's Note: ie. the Diocese of Belley, of which St Didier was a part.]

Marcellin argued against this plan and tried to convince the Bishop to forget it by using his own past experiences, taking the opportunity to set out the history of formation in the Institute since its origins.

“My Lord,

I very much regret my inability, at the time of the retreat, to find an opportunity to present you my respects and to share with you in person my observations about the novitiate in St Didier. In conformity with the wish Your Grandeur expressed, whether through Father Superior<sup>4</sup>, or in my various contacts with you, I increased the personnel of St Didier so that the Brother Director could devote himself more fully to the care of the novices<sup>5</sup>. He wrote me that he had received several and I was very pleased to hear it, but I very much fear that the novitiate will not be able to get solidly established amid the routine of the classes and the boarding school.

**\*We have learned from experience that these different works cannot be combined in the same house. In the beginning we started off at the Hermitage by accepting some outside students and some boarders. We found ourselves obliged to give it up, since they caused the loss of a good number of novices and did evident harm to everyone. We were even obliged to separate the postulants totally from the brothers. This was the only way we could put order into our house and preserve our subjects.**

An outstanding priest from the diocese of Grenoble, having begun an establishment in La Côte-St-André on exactly the same basis as the one in St Didier, also wanted to add a novitiate to it. We gave in at his insistence, but he was the first to recognise from experience that it could not work, and he wrote us that he would limit himself to preparing subjects for the society, on condition that we give some to the diocese in proportion to those we receive from it.

My Lord, it is not that we refused to begin the novitiate which Your Grandeur wants, but after much reflection and careful study, we do not believe it will succeed on the basis on which this establishment now stands. However, we will try it if Your Grandeur is still of a mind to do so, but it would be a pity if we were afterwards obliged to watch this work collapse or at least fade away.

Would it not be better to put the establishment of St Didier provisionally on a footing similar to the one we have in La Côte-St-André, until we can find a suitable location reserved exclusively for the novitiate, something like the one His Lordship, the bishop of Autun gave us in Vauban? I would be afraid I would literally be endangering the vocation of our postulants by removing them from the Hermitage to send them to St Didier. Besides, we would have to buy or transfer furnishings, which would be very expensive, something our present resources will not permit, since our expenses have almost doubled this year.

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<sup>4</sup> Father Colin.

<sup>5</sup> The word “novices” has certainly to be taken in the general sense of young people in formation. More or less a pre-novitiate.

\*[Translator’s Note: In the standard English translation of the Letters, from which this text is taken, this is not a new paragraph, but continues straight on from the previous sentence. The bold emphasis is from Brother André and not the original.]

I beg you, My Lord, to please examine my reasons carefully. I submit them entirely to Your Grandeur's disposition. The Society of Mary is too obligated to you for us not to be ready to undertake everything and to risk everything to show you with what respect, what gratitude and what devotedness I have the honour to be etc...

Champagnat.”

We see, therefore, two concepts of Brothers' formation in opposition. As a good administrator, Bishop Devie wanted to have a work he created render the greatest amount of service. He did not see the inconvenience caused by joining together, a day school, a boarding school and even a novitiate destined to furnish teaching Brothers for his diocese. According to the letter, the Bishop asked Marcellin to send from L'Hermitage to St Didier the postulants from his diocese so that they would constitute the core of this novitiate. Thus the diocese of Belley would have its formation-house for schoolmasters while it got rid of its junior seminaries. In this spirit, the distinction between college, teacher-training college and novitiate was weak. At most, the boarding school would include a special section for the training of teachers.

This was not how Marcellin thought of a novitiate. If a class for teacher-training were to be established in St Didier under the authority of the Brother Director, it would only be as a concession to Bishop Devie's will. The fact that there was no Master of Novices is a sign that it was really a question of a pre-novitiate, like the boarding school in La Côte-St-André. He justified his alternative by using his experience, describing in a sketchy, but highly instructive way for us, the history of the formation of Marist Brothers from 1817 to 1839.

**“In the beginning we started off at the Hermitage by accepting some outside students and some boarders. We found ourselves obliged to give it up, since they caused the loss of a good number of novices and did evident harm to everyone. We were even obliged to separate the postulants totally from the brothers. This was the only way we could put order into our house and preserve our subjects.”**

By formation “In the beginning” we need to understand that this was at the time of La Valla. As this precision of detail was of no interest to his correspondent, he simplified it by recalling that not only were novices received, but also boarders and day pupils, something confirmed by the entry registers for La Valla as well as many passages in the *Life* of the Founder. It even took in groups of poor homeless youngsters.

It was therefore a composite work. The opening of Chapter 11 of the *Life* (Part 1 Page 132\*) sets out the hesitant opinions about La Valla: was it a foundation of a college, of peasant Brothers, of hermits..? As it was also a foundation of “teaching Brothers” this work could also pass as a teacher-training college furnishing primary teachers to the parish priests and mayors who wanted good schoolmasters. Knowing whether their place of formation was called a novitiate or a teacher-training college mattered little to them. Nevertheless, they wanted the schoolmasters in their parish to be

entirely dependent on them. Father Alliot, the Parish Priest of Marlhes, considered that the Brothers were his and that Marcellin was merely their formator.<sup>6</sup> Father Courbon, the Vicar General, encouraged Marcellin by telling him simply, “It is a fine work to train worthy teachers.” (*Life* Part 1 Ch 11 P 134). Let us also see the conversation reported by Brother Jean-Baptiste between M. Colomb de Gaste, Mayor of St Sauveur-en-Rue, and Father Alliot, Parish Priest of Marlhes (*Life* Part 1 Ch 8 Page 107) “ ‘Who are these teachers of yours? ... Where did you get them?’

The parish priest informed him that they were a group of Brothers under the care of Father Champagnat.”<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Brother Jean-Baptiste tells us that the success of the school was not attributed to “the particular spirit of the Congregation” but “to the personal competence of the individual in charge of the school”. (Pages 108 - 109)

Marcellin was therefore seen as someone who simply trained schoolmasters and La Valla as a teacher-training college.

## **A Congregation’s novitiate troubling the clergy and important people**

Nevertheless, neither Marcellin nor the Brothers thought of La Valla simply as a place to train primary teachers. The conversation between Father Alliot who considered Brother Louis to be *his* primary school teacher while the latter declared that he wanted to obey his Superior is very significant on this topic. The school inspector Guillard himself stated in 1822 that the Brothers were a bit like the De La Salles and they referred to Marcellin as their Superior General. In his visit to La Valla, he reported that the Parish Priest, Father Rebod, accused Marcellin of wanting to create a Congregation. Marcellin did not deny the accusation, even confirming that the work had only just started, something which, at the time, was both true and false. So, the inspector was not mistaken: it was a teaching Congregation in germ.

[\*All references are to the standard English translation of the *Life of Marcellin Champagnat*]

It is therefore clear that, in 1822, at the time the young people from Haute-Loire arrived, the La Valla community had already taken on two fundamental traits: it was inspired by the De la Salles in its educational practices and it functioned as a Congregation since the Superior retained his authority

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<sup>6</sup> Brother Jean-Baptiste recalled that he [Father Alliot] sent postulants to the De la Salle Brothers (*Life* Part 1 Ch 8 P.109)

<sup>7</sup> In the same spirit, the Bourdin Memoir (*Origines Maristes* Vol 2 doc 754 “M Collon de Caste (sic) of St Sauveur went to find Father Champagnat...give me two subjects like the Parish Priest of Marlhes, the Parish Priest... asked them: is he still producing them?”

after assignment to the parishes. However, this authority was fragile: at Le Bessat, Brother Laurent was rather independent and Brother Jean-Marie Granjon would leave Bourg-Argental for the Trappist Abbey of Aiguebelle without seeking authorisation. The relation of Marcellin's work to the De la Salles was also ambiguous: it was their methods that he imitated, but not their religious habit.

In summary, the Marist Brothers, like other Congregations of Brothers, defined themselves by their adhesion to the simultaneous teaching-method, also known as "the Brothers' method". However, spiritually it took its inspiration from the Marist project (the blue habit) and, without doubt, under the direction of Brother Jean-Marie Granjon, from Trappist austerity.<sup>8</sup> The arrival of the postulants from Haute-Loire in March 1822 just before the visit of Guillard, the school inspector, was a sign that Marcellin's work was seen, and presented itself, as a place for training in the methods of the De la Salles.

Moreover, the De la Salle novitiates and schools were also teacher-training courses. The gentleman, M. Brole, whom the Little Brothers of Mary replaced at Bourg-Argental, was sent by Inspector Guillard to Condrieux or Annonay in order to "learn the method of the Brothers" (*Origines Maristes* Vol 1 doc 75). Even the novitiate in Lyon initiated laymen into the simultaneous method. There was an interpenetration between novitiate and teacher-training college, with the simultaneous method being the common denominator for both. Furthermore, the admission of the postulants from Haute-Loire was the occasion for Marcellin to bend his work in a less austere direction, a direction closer to that of a centre for the training of future teachers, and this would find its full development in L'Hermitage.

If I were to set this out in schematic form, I would say that there were three stages in the lives of Marcellin's Brothers: between 1817 and 1819 they were not, properly speaking, teachers, but dynamic parish catechists. Brother Laurent at Le Bessat was a slightly later example of this. From 1819 onwards the community was highly structured: the Brothers became teachers and were initiated into the simultaneous method, constituting a Marist association with a style of life which included Trappist influences. This was the time of Brother Jean-Marie Granjon. From 1822, the arrival of the postulants from elsewhere determined a more moderate, more Marist, and therefore more attractive, style of life; undoubtedly this was closer to a De la Salle novitiate than a monastery. This was the time of Brother Louis<sup>9</sup>, enabling better recruitment and a large house at L'Hermitage.

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<sup>8</sup> The Trappists, who had valiantly resisted the French Revolution and Napoleon, enjoyed immense prestige. With the extreme austerity of their way of life, they attracted exalted spirits.

<sup>9</sup> Who had initially thought of entering the De la Salles.

## Marcellin's hesitant vision during the La Valla period

I have drawn out the major elements of this era that the tradition of the Brothers thinks of as fervent and almost ideal; Marcellin gives us a more ambiguous image. For him the boarding school - novitiate - day school grouping presented serious inconvenience for the community, in particular for the novitiate. It is not difficult to understand what the phrase "evident damage" covers. Occasional moral problems, such as those mentioned in the *Life*, at the time of the building of L'Hermitage; yet, more generally, the mixing together of Brothers, postulants, novices, boarders, day pupils, homeless youngsters, which occasioned temptation for the novices and even the Brothers to regress, saying nothing of the quasi-impossibility of imposing a highly structured way of life.

This was, therefore, for Marcellin a composite work and it was perceived as such by public opinion which wondered how it would end up.<sup>10</sup> Although Brother Jean-Baptiste's biography of the Founder had a tendency to idealise the early years, if one reads between the lines, his analysis is not so different from the succinct recollection of the Founder in the 1839 Letter.

## The witnesses at the process for canonisation<sup>11</sup>

A few witnesses in part vindicated Marcellin's reservations. Thus, Marie-Françoise Baché (Carazo document: Witness no 30. Page 190) spoke of how her mother had "on several occasions deloused the poor children he had gathered, whom he taught and that some of them had become Brothers." Jean-Marie Boiron, a parish priest, (Witness no 54 Page 210) recalled "the humiliations that he had suffered at the hands of his first novices, rough and uncouth individuals." However, the most interesting statement is that of Joseph Violet, on the 19th September 1888:

*"Note on Father Champagnat, given by M. Joseph Violet, of Doizieux, born 24th April 1807:*  
I am happy to give some information to serve the Cause of Father Champagnat. I was born in Malval. When my mother became a widow she placed me in Lavalla [*sic*] as a boarder. I remained there two whole years under the direction of Brothers Etienne (Roumesy) and François, the first being the Headmaster and the second my teacher, for I was very backward. At that time there were two of us boarders and we slept alongside the Brothers.

...

While I was in the house, a group of 10 young people arrived. Faced with the meagre food we had, all but two of them skipped off the following day. Of those who held on, one was lame. Our standard fare was fairly plentiful soup and a small portion of fried-up food with under-

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<sup>10</sup> It might even have been taken for a college as there were small colleges dotted around which gave an elementary education with an initiation into Latin. The blue habit might have been seen as a college-boy's uniform since the "Brothers" were often the age of boys attending college.

<sup>11</sup> Witness-statements on Marcellin Champagnat. Diocesan Enquiry, Rome 1991, presented by Brother Agustin Carazo.

baked bread; to drink we had water. At four o'clock in the morning, Father Champagnat called out from his room, "Benedicamus Domino" and we replied "Deo Gratias" then we got ready as quickly as possible for prayers. Between 6 and 7 o'clock we were present at his Mass, which he said with great devotion."

## L'Hermitage: partial continuity with La Valla

By criticising the La Valla phase, Marcellin was implicitly boosting L'Hermitage, a spacious house, strictly for Religious, with no boarders or day pupils. Nevertheless, the separation of the postulants reported in the letter is an allusion to the installation of the youngest aspirants in La Grange Payre, a property bequeathed to Marcellin by Mlle Fournas in 1833 which became the pre-novitiate from 1834.<sup>12</sup> So, for about ten years, L'Hermitage was still receiving very young aspirants such as Brother Sylvestre, whose Marist story is part of our heritage.<sup>13</sup> The divergence from a boarding school still had to be firmly maintained and it was certainly during this period of 1825 - 1833 that the scandal took place, mentioned in the *Life*, resulting in the Founder's sending away at night of the individual guilty of abuse. To sum everything up, if, in 1839, Marcellin's thinking on the formation of the Brothers had taken place over the course of about ten years<sup>14</sup>, the achievement in practice of the programme of formation was very recent.

## L'Hermitage as a teacher-training college

As for the practical training given to the Brothers, an enquiry into the spiritual and intellectual level of the Brothers (1828) (*Origines des Frères Maristes* no 104) clearly shows the mixed character of the group.<sup>15</sup> In the Table below giving an evaluation by letter of the religious qualities and catechetical knowledge of 61 Brothers, I myself have established the ranking and matched the evaluation by letter with an equivalent number. In the Table I have retained the names of only the better-known Brothers.

	Name	Piety	Catechism	Character	Submission	Regularity	Total /100
1	François	A/20	A/20	A/20	A/20	A/20	100

<sup>12</sup> *Annales of the Institute* Vol 1 1833. Section 227. *Life*: Footnote in Ch 21.

<sup>13</sup> *Annales of the Institute* Vol 1 1832. Section 168.

<sup>14</sup> The affair of the cloth stockings, the soutane and the method of reading in 1829

<sup>15</sup> [Translator's Note] Brother André refers readers to his untranslated Paper on the Institute website: "Une enquête sur le niveau spirituel et intellectuel des Frères en 1828".

<b>2</b>	Antoine	A/20	B/19	A/20	A/20	A/20	<b>99</b>
<b>3</b>	Etienne	A/20	B/19	B/19	A/20	A/20	<b>98</b>
<b>4</b>	Jean Marie	A/20	C/18	A/20	A/20	A/20	<b>98</b>
<b>5</b>	Damien	A/20	B/19	B/19	B/19	A/20	<b>97</b>
<b>6</b>	Arsène	A/20	D/17	A/20	B/19	B/19	<b>95</b>
<b>7</b>	Jean-Pierre	B/19	B/19	D/17	B/19	A/20	<b>94</b>
<b>8</b>	Antoine	A/20	D/17	A/20	B/19	C/18	<b>94</b>
<b>9</b>	Barthélemy	B/19	B/19	D/17	B/19	B/19	<b>93</b>
<b>10</b>	Laurent	A/20	B/19	B/19	A/20	F/15	<b>93</b>
<b>11</b>	Paul	A/20	B/19	D/17	A/20	D/17	<b>93</b>
<b>12</b>	Charles	B/19	D/17	B/19	A/20	D/17	<b>92</b>
<b>13</b>	Mathieu	CF/18-15	CF/18-15	B/19	C/18	CF/18-15	<b>91-82</b>
<b>14</b>	Sylvestre	C/18	E/16	B/19	B/19	B/19	<b>91</b>
<b>15</b>	Cyprien	B/19	E/16	B/19	D/17	B/19	<b>90</b>
<b>16</b>	Louis (Audras)	A/20	A/20	A/20	A/20	L/10	<b>90</b>
<b>17</b>	Anselme	B/19	D/17	D/17	C/18	C/18	<b>89</b>

<b>18</b>	Jean-Baptiste (Furet)	F/15	B/19	B/19	B/19	D/17	<b>89</b>
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We thus have the Institute’s spiritual elite, of whom Brother François would be the model. We are surprised to see Brothers Louis Audras and Jean-Baptiste Furet with fairly mediocre results.<sup>16</sup>

The ranking of intellectual results is slightly different. In the Table below we need to understand by “Science”, the intellectual knowledge necessary to acquire the 3rd class teaching certificate: reading, writing, counting. Knowledge of arithmetic and writing would be necessary for the 2nd class teaching certificate: the 4 operations of calculation (addition, subtraction...) and, for writing: handwriting and calligraphy.

	<b>Brother</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Arithmetic</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Total/60</b>
<b>1</b>	Louis	A/20	A/20	B/19	<b>59</b>
<b>2</b>	François	A/20	B/19	B/19	<b>58</b>
<b>3</b>	Michel	B/19	B/19	CF/18-15	<b>56-53</b>
<b>4</b>	Barthélemy	C/18	B/19	B/19	<b>56</b>
<b>5</b>	Lucien	A/20	D/17	B/19	<b>56</b>
<b>6</b>	Damien	C/18	A/20	D/17	<b>55</b>
<b>7</b>	Bernard	CF/18-15	E/16	A/20	<b>54/51</b>
<b>8</b>	Jean-Baptiste	D/17	B/19	C/18	<b>54</b>

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<sup>16</sup> This mediocre rank comes from the fact that they made vows only in 1828.

<b>9</b>	Etienne	A/20	C/18	F/15	<b>53</b>
<b>10</b>	Arsène	D/17	A/20	E/16	<b>53</b>
<b>11</b>	Augustin	C/18	D/17	CF/18-15	<b>53-50</b>
<b>12</b>	Antoine	C/18	D/17	D/17	<b>52</b>
<b>13</b>	Jean-Pierre	C/18	D/17	D/17	<b>52</b>
<b>14</b>	Jean-Marie	D/17	D/17	D/17	<b>51</b>
<b>15</b>	Gabriel	D/17	D/17	F/15	<b>49</b>
<b>16</b>	Jean	F/15	D/17	EF/16-15	<b>48-47</b>
<b>17</b>	Cyprien	E/16	D/17	F/15	<b>48</b>
<b>18</b>	Laurent	F/15	F/15	F/15	<b>45</b>

It was, without doubt, at the beginning of the year 1828<sup>17</sup> that Marcellin had attempted to evaluate his disciples, the total number of whom had risen to something over 70. By following-up the complete Table I can count, on the religious and moral level, 43 Brothers who could be classed as quite satisfactory or excellent.

When it comes to secular knowledge, 18 are at the excellent - satisfactory level<sup>18</sup> and 10 fairly satisfactory - passable. Almost  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the Brothers, therefore, would be considered well-formed on the religious level and  $\frac{1}{3}$  intellectually capable. The criteria for evaluation were arranged carefully in a hierarchy (piety, catechism...) and this reveals Marcellin's ideas on formation and therefore on the type of man, at once pious and educated, that he wanted to form. The novitiate at L'Hermitage was, therefore, typical of a novitiate of a teaching Congregation, in which religious and moral qualities

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<sup>17</sup> Marcellin's assessment could have relied on meetings with the Brothers during the 1827 holidays and the retreat.

<sup>18</sup> Here we find Brothers Louis and François at the head of the list and, lower down, Jean-Baptiste (no 8) and Jean-Marie (no 14).

were prioritised, but where an apprenticeship in secular disciplines was important. At this time, the function of a teacher-training college was hardly any different and this is why the Departmental authorities suggested that Marcellin host the Department's teacher training college.

Basically, it was not specifically by the style of life and the education given that L'Hermitage novitiate distinguished itself from a teacher-training college or a small college.<sup>19</sup> Effectively, the Marist Brothers were not defined by a function as were the numerous Congregations of Brothers of Instruction or of Christian Doctrine, but by a spiritual and missionary project at a universal level: the Society of Mary. They were able to absorb this identity, not in a boarding school, nor even in a teacher-training college, but in an establishment providentially set up for that: L'Hermitage. Certainly, all the L'Hermitage novices would be far from understanding this project and many Brothers would depart after a time. However, Marcellin would have known how to form and look after a significant proportion of candidates, unlike many other Founders.

### **The allusion to Father Douillet's teacher-training college**

When he wrote in 1839, Marcellin was already able to appreciate how many works similar to his, where Brothers had been formed in novitiate-boarding schools, had little solidity. He gave Bishop Devie two examples of that, knowing, moreover, that he was up-to-date with Father Mazelier's problems at St Paul-Trois-Châteaux, where he was no longer able to expand his foundation. He referred to Father Douillet at La Côte-Saint-André and his correspondence with him.<sup>20</sup> From that time on, the Brothers' boarding school at La Côte-Saint-André served as a pre-novitiate for L'Hermitage. The other model, Vauban, given by the Bishop of Autun "specifically as a novitiate", had just begun to function,<sup>21</sup> and was therefore not entirely credible. However, this was a way of inviting Bishop Devie to imitate the Bishop of Autun.

This foundation was, at the same time, a sign of Marcellin's evolution, since Vauban was the first novitiate created outside L'Hermitage; it was as if he understood that the expansion of his Congregation obliged him to decentralise its places of formation. Yet he did not want to experience again "**the loss of a good number of novices**" in the time of La Valla, with a novitiate attached to a boarding school: "I would be afraid I would literally be endangering the vocation of our postulants by removing them from the Hermitage to send them to St Didier."

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<sup>19</sup> Most often, a basic training in primary education with a little Latin was offered in these places.

<sup>20</sup> Marcellin could even have referred to the Abbey of Saint Antoine where Father Courveille had completely failed in his foundation of a teacher-training college for the Department of Isère. Father Douillet took up the project again on his own account, without much more success.

<sup>21</sup> A boarding school would be linked to it which, according to Brother Avit, killed the novitiate.

I imagine that Bishop Devie would scarcely be sensitive to the plea about the Brothers' vocation. Even for a holy man such as him, the idea of schoolmasters having a vocation would be strange. In his thinking, they were simply helpers carrying out special work: "Coadjutor Brothers", but not really Religious. Father Colin thought the same. There was, therefore, between Marcellin and Bishop Devie a fundamental disagreement as to the identity of the Marist Brothers and the apostolate of education. For the former, this was at the heart of the missionary re-conquest; for the latter it was an ancillary task to the pastoral and missionary plan. This is why St Didier would never have a Marist Brothers' novitiate.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

At the end of his life Marcellin detected three particular episodes in the formation he had given to the Brothers: the composite work of boarding school-novitiate-school (La Valla); the novitiate separated as far as possible from any other educational project (L'Hermitage); the attempt at decentralisation (Vauban). Behind his choices: the notion of a Religious Order (the vows) and then an educational vocation. At the same time, the idea of Marist missionary, eschatological, spirituality; finally, the conviction of the importance of education of the people to the missionary apostolate.

In his regret for the vocations lost at the time of La Valla, Marcellin highlights for us a key to the reading of this period which barely appears in the tale of his *Life*. He invites us to consider that insufficient recruiting was not the sole reason for the poverty of vocations during the years 1819 - 1822; the system of formation lacked solidity and did not allow for the perseverance of candidates.<sup>23</sup> Many Founders of Brothers in this period suffered the same setbacks, but rarely knew how to remedy them. On the contrary, with the construction of L'Hermitage, a house apparently far too big for the needs of his work, Marcellin envisaged an orderly place enabling a life similar to the conventual model. Between La Valla and L'Hermitage the tradition of the Brothers sees rather a continuity (the cradle); Marcellin thought of it as more of a rupture.

If La Valla, in any of its aspects, could pass for a teacher-training college rather than a Congregation, the inauguration of vows in 1826 made L'Hermitage a religious novitiate and not, as with Father Douillet at La Côte-Saint-André, with Father Mazellier at St Paul-Trois-Châteaux and Father Vernet in the Diocese of Viviers, a sort of hybrid between novitiate and teacher-training college. In 1839 Marcellin did not want to repeat the experience of La Valla at St Didier. Among the Founders of Congregations of Brothers in the 19th Century, he was one of the most radical.

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<sup>22</sup> Bishop Devie turned to the Brothers of the Holy Family of Belley to make them his diocesan Congregation of Brothers.

<sup>23</sup> The scarcity of documents for this period makes any precise verification difficult, but this key to the reading can help us re-read from another aspect.