Record of the printed version (original in English)

Editor / Organizer: Casa Generalizia dei Fratelli Maristi delle Scuole, Paul Sester, FMS

Marist Notebooks:

The Marist Notebooks aim to disseminate documents and research on the origins, spirituality, development and expansion of the Marist Institute in the world. It addresses studies on the Society of Mary, historical personalities and themes that characterize the apostolic mission of the Marist Brothers. The production of the content is a collaborative work made by several authors. It is printed in four languages: Spanish, French, English and Portuguese.

Contact:
Casa Generalizia dei Fratelli Maristi delle Scuole
Piazzale Marcelino Champagnat, 2 – 00144, Roma – Italia
Tel. (+39) 06 54 5171 / E-mail: comunica@fms.it / www.champagnat.org

Layout and printing:
Tipografia Città Nuova della P.A.M.O.M.
Largo Cristina di Svezia, 17 – 00165, Roma – Italia

Record of the digital version
Coordination: Communications Department of the General Administration / Marist Spiritual Heritage Commission / Marist Memorial. The digital version is a facsimile of the original printed work, which was scanned, processed and cataloged by Maria Palicz (CRB9 PR-202207/P), at the Memorial Marista, in Curitiba – Brazil. E-mail: memorial@marista.org.br / www.memorialmarista.org.br

Cataloging in Publication data (CIP)

110 p. : il. ; 24 cm

Yearly.
Editor: Casa Generalizia dei Fratelli Maristi delle Scuole / Paul Sester
Digital version in Portuguese: https://champagnat.org/pt/biblioteca/cadernos-maristas/
ISSN 1122-7125

1. Marist Brothers – History. 2. Spirituality. 3. Cultural heritage. 4. Fratelli Maristi delle Scuole

CDD 200
CONTENTS

I - NEWS

- To our Readers                      pag.  1

II - STUDIES

- Additional Matter to «Origines Maristes»    »  5
- Marcellin Champagnat and Sulpician Spirituality »  34
- Courveille disciple of Rance and of Jean Climaque   »  50

III - DOCUMENTS

- Introduction                           »  75
- The retreat                             »  77
- Grace                                    »  99
MARIST NOTEBOOKS

To our readers!

Having got over the hurdle of the tenth publication of our Marist notebooks, in the space of six years, which is no great achievement, allow me to cast a backward glance on the situation and to consider the future.

INFORMATION, relatively well provided in the days of our first fervour, has gradually become exhausted, through lack of material, of course, but also through not having someone specially appointed for that function, for I concentrate especially on the DOCUMENTS. But you are certainly sufficiently well informed from other sources to ensure that our negligence has not been prejudicial to you. Consequently we can feel at ease with regard to that aspect of our programme.

As to STUDIES, there has been no lack of them, neither with regard to their volume, their variety, their depth or their serious nature. On occasion, in order to maintain a balance, the publication of certain articles has been held back; I hope the authors will excuse us! In view of the fact that we have a researcher no less active than efficient, in the person of Brother ANDRÉ LANFREY, he is the one who has most often been given the floor; fortunately it is not insipid food he serves up to us, as you have been able to gather. Let not that hinder or dispense other thinkers from sharing the results of their reflections!

The DOCUMENTS have followed each other at a fairly regular rate, such that in these ten publications we have been able to provide you with all the Writings of the Founder apart from the Letters already published. I remind
you that some offprints, to the number of 300 for each language, have been made from these documents. Thus we can have them bound together as books like those of the Letters, of which they are the continuation. As soon as they are available we shall let you know.

Subsequently, we shall publish the "Writings of Brother François". This is, in a way, a new departure for a second stage. On this occasion we are thinking of modifying the plan of our itinerary. The list of the writings or the "Notebooks of Brother François", which you will find further on, will give you an idea of their volume. Besides the Letters already published, and the last six notebooks containing all kinds of material mathematical, scientific, medical etc., there are some 3,500 handwritten pages that we shall have to share with you. On the basis of less than two pages of the manuscript for one printed page, we shall have about 2,000 pages to pass on to you in instalments of varying length. That is why we intend to compose our "Notebooks" under two different, alternating forms: numbers containing only "Documents" and others containing only "Studies". In this way we think that, to begin with, we shall be able to keep more faithfully to the regular sequence of at least two numbers per year. We hope also to be able to clear our stock of these 2,000 pages more quickly. Moreover, these pages of documents will be able to be put together more easily to make up books. Finally, we shall have greater liberty to publish the "Studies" as soon as they are ready and to publish them in their entirety in the same publication, however great their content. That will not prevent us from adding any items of information in whatever publication as necessity demands.

With an eye to the publication of the Writings of Brother François we have sped up their transcription on to the computer, for these days one has to go through this process before sending them to the printer. In this regard I give my warm thanks, in the name of all our readers and of the whole Institute to Brothers JEAN MARIE GIRARD of Saint Paul Trois Châteaux, LOUIS RICHARD of Marseille and JEAN ROUSSON of Lagny who are pleased to use their free time in rendering us this service. If others wish to share their happiness all they have to do is let us know.

In another domain, that of Brother Avit's Annals of the houses, we have been able up to the present to count on the valiant and unremitting efforts of Brother JEAN FRANÇOIS ESCALLIER. The Lord has decided to pay him his retirement pension before he had finished the work. Perhaps he has made provision by breathing into the ear of someone or other to take over from him.
Our publications

I am taking advantage of this announcement to remind you of the works published under the patronage of the Commission for the Heritage of the Institute and which are still available.

Fr AVIT, Annales de l'Institut, in three volumes. Annales des maisons: de la Province de Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, 2 vol.; de la Province d'Aubenas, 1 vol. (la Province du Bourbonnais, in preparation)

Fr FRANÇOIS, Lettres personnelles, in 2 volumes
Fr G MICHEL, Frère François, Gabriel Rivat. 60 ans d'histoire mariste.
Fr A DELORME, Frère Henri Vergès, Frère Yves Thénoz
Fr JOS. RONZON, Vie de Frère Marie Nizier Delorme, Lettres de Frère Marie Nizier
Fr P ZIND, Miscellanées.
Fr A LANFREY, Une congrégation enseignante, les Frères Maristes de 1850 à 1904. Martires Maristas, (in Spanish) Every Brother Provincial should have received a promotional copy of each of these works.

WRITINGS of Brother FRANÇOIS.

5101 Frère FRANÇOIS
5101 .1 Personal correspondence
   .2 Administrative correspondence
   .3 Notebooks
   .301 Miscellaneous: Personal reflections, curriculum vitae, Remarks and observations, etc... 223 pages, format 13.5 x 9.5
   .302 Religious notes: Retreats from 1819 to 1831; pages 1 to 310, format 13.5 x 9.5
   .303 Retreat thoughts: Retreats from 1832 to 1849; pages 167 to 786, format id.
   .304 Retreat thoughts: Retreats from 1850 to 1869; pages 785 to 1684, format id.
   .305 Religious notes: Journey to Rome; pages 1 to 232, format id. Journey to Rome, pp. 1-173; Different items of information, pp. 174-197; Retreats from 1872 to 1880, pp. 198-232.
   .306 Plans for instructions: from Sunday 26 August 1860 to Sunday 27 September 1875; 262 pages; format 19 x 14.5.
   .307 Instructions 1; pages 1 to 534, format 17 x 12.5
.308 Instructions 2; pages 537 to 1275, format id.
.309 Instructions 3; pages 1279 to 1418; Summaries of instructions: pp. 1 to 200; format id.
.310 Notes 1: Notes of spiritual reading; pp. 1 to 594, format 16 x 11.
.311 Notes 2: pages 463 to 606; + 68 pages not paginated, on different topics; format 17 x 13.
.312 Quotations: relating to very different topics; pp. 1 to 304, format 20 x 14.5.
.313 Circulars, Politeness, Reports etc... format 23 x 17.
.314 Mathematics: different topics; 240 pages, format 19 x 14.5.
.315 Anatomy, Chemistry, Etymology, Grammar; 288 written pages, format 18 x 13.5.
.316 Illnesses, Remedies; 330 pages, format 19 x 15.
.317 Medical botany; 290 pages, format 16 x 11.5.
.318 Collection of remedies Pharmacy etc...; 860 pages, format 17 x 11.
.319 Medicinal plants; not paginated, 482 pages, format 18 x 13.
.320 Alphabetical tables of medicinal plants, illnesses, etc... 244 pages, format 19 x 14.
.321 Procedures for meeting all kinds of inconvenient situations; 292 pages, format 20 x 14.5.
.322 Alphabetical tables of remedies; on two columns per page; 292 pages, format 18.8 x 13
ADDITIONAL MATTER TO “ORIGINES MARISTES”

At the end of July 1996, Brother André LANFREY and I went prospecting in the archives of the bishopric of Pinerolo, Piedmont, Italy, to see if, in fact, as the archivist had said in a reply to Fr Eugène Weber, S.M., there was nothing in the archives of Mgr. Bigex concerning the Society of Mary. Br André Lanfrey got in touch again with the archivist of Pinerolo and we were able to go through the archives of Mgr. Bigex and those of Mgr. Rey, his successor. We found there two letters: one signed, “Colin, curé de Cerdon” and the other from “Besson, curé de SaintNizier”, a parish in Lyons.

The first one is of considerable interest for the history of the Society of Mary. Our joy at seeing our efforts rewarded was mingled with regret that the deceased Father Coste did not have the good fortune of knowing about them.

In memory of him, and in agreement with the Marist Fathers, we are happy to make known this document just as we found it. Br André Lanfrey, who is a Doctor of History, adds a long commentary which clarifies it and brings out its historical value.

Br Paul Sester
1819.10.09  Letter from COLIN, parish priest of Cerdon, Ain
to Mgr. BIGEX, bishop of Pignerol, Piedmont, Italy

1819 from Puy en Velay, project of the Congregation of Marists, Cerdon

Monseigneur,

It is your ardent zeal for the glory of God, your solicitude for the salvation of souls, your paternal kindness, your outstanding virtues and the high esteem they inspire in everyone which encourage us to take the liberty of addressing Your Lordship in order to lay before him some projects which can only be of interest to religion, if they come from God and if they are approved by their Lordships, the Bishops. We submit them to you with confidence, in the conviction that you will be kind enough to tell us what you think of them, if you deem them worthy of your attention.

Twelve years ago, a young man, who is now 35 years old and has been a priest for three years, after receiving a special grace at Notre Dame du Puy en Velay, felt himself urged to establish a Society of religious under the name of “Society of Mary”. Being afraid that he might be mistaken, he kept it quiet for two years, but being inwardly ever more strongly urged to start this work, he thought he ought to talk it over with his confessor and several other wise and learned persons. Finally in 1816, in the last year of his theological studies in the seminary of St. Irénée in Lyons, with the permission of his directors, he chose twelve subjects to whom he communicated his aim and the plan for the Society. They all undertook to support him and to use the rest of their lives for the glory of God, for the help of the Catholic Church and for the salvation of souls in the Society of Mary, provided that it was approved by the Sovereign Pontiff and by their Lordships, the Bishops. Before separating to go and occupy the posts which Providence decreed for each one of them in their ministry, for they are almost all priests, they put their signatures, as a body, to the following which contains, in abbreviated form, the aim and the plan of the Society:

_in nomine Patris et Fili et Spiritus Sti._

_Omnia ad majorem Dei Gloriam et Mariae Genitricis Domini Jesu concurrere satagentes, asserimus et notum facimus, nos sinceram intentionem firmanque voluntatem habere nosmetipso consecrandi, quamprimum opportunus erit, piissime Mariistarum instituendae congregationi. Qua propter presenti actu et subscriptione nos omniaque nostra, in quantum possimus irrevocabiliter dedicamus Beatae Mariae Virginis Societati, illudque non pueriliter, non leviter, non ex aliquo humani fine aut spe temporalis emolumenti, sed serio mature, as
sumpto concilio, omnibus coram Deo perpensis, propter solam majorem Dei gloriam et Mariae Genetricis Domini Jesu honorem, devovemus nos omnibus poenis, laboribus, incommodes et si aliquando necessarium est, cruciatibus, cum possumus omnia in eo qui nos confortat Christo Jesu, cui ipso fidelitate promittimus, in gremio Sanctissimae Matris Ecclesiae catholicae Romanae, ejusdem summo Capiti Pontifici Romano totis viribus adhaerentes; neconon reverendissi- mo Episcopo ordinarium nostro ut simus boni ministri Christi Jesu, enutriti verbis fidei et bonae doctrinae quam ipsius gratia assecuti sumus, confidentes quod, sub amico pacis ac religionis Christianissimi Regis nostri regimine, brevi in lucem prodigit eximia illa institutio, solemniter pollicemur nos omniaque nostra impensuros esse ad salvandas modis omnibus animas sub augustissimo nomine Virginis Mariae ejusdemque auspiciis. Omnia tamen salvo meliori Superiorum judicio.

Since then, although dispersed, they have all remained intimately united, still persisting in their resolution and awaiting only the moment marked by divine Providence and the permission of their ecclesiastical Superiors to put it into execution. It is our intention to present ourselves to His Holiness as soon as possible. With no hope of doing so immediately, considering the difficulty of the times, we have already taken the liberty of sending him a letter dated last February. We would also like to write to a cardinal from whom we could perhaps receive a reply. If Your Lordship deigns to appreciate the steps we are taking, we beg him earnestly to indicate the cardinal to whom it would be in order to address ourselves. It is in the name of all my companions that I have the honour of communicating to you our desires and our intentions, convinced that your paternal kindness will be able to direct our procedures by your advice.

I have the honour to be with deepest respect for Your Lordship,

Monseigneur, the most humble and obedient servant,

Colin, parish priest of Cerdon

Cerdon en Bugey, diocese of Lyons, department of Ain 9 October 1819

English translation of the PROMISE

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All for the greater glory of God and the honour of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We, the undersigned, wishing to labour for the greater glory of God, and of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, affirm and publicly declare that it is our sincere intention and firm purpose to dedicate ourselves, as soon as is opportune, to the foundation of the pious Congregation of the Marists.

So it is, that by this document bearing our signatures, we irrevocably conse-
create ourselves and all that we have, as far as is possible, to the Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We do not take on this commitment lightly or irresponsibly, for human motives or swayed by temporal gain; instead we take it in all seriousness, after mature reflection, having taken wise counsel and weighed the matter before God, seeking only his glory and the honour of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, we commit ourselves, for that purpose, to difficulties, work, suffering and, if necessary, every kind of torture.

We can do everything in him who strengthens us, Jesus Christ, to whom, for that very reason, we promise fidelity in the bosom of our Mother, the Holy, Roman and Catholic Church; we adhere with all our strength, to the most holy head of that same Church, the Roman Pontiff, as also to our most reverend Bishop, in order that we may be good ministers of Jesus Christ, nourished with the words of faith and of sound doctrine which we have received by his grace; we are confident that under the peaceful and religious rule of our very Christian king, this excellent foundation will see the light of day; considering all this, we solemnly promise to give ourselves and all that we possess, for the salvation of souls in every possible way, working in the name of the Virgin Mary and under her auspices. In this whole matter, however, we remain submissive to the judgement of our Superiors.

(From the Life of Marcellin J. B. Champagnat edition 1989 p. 32)

***

CRITICAL COMMENTARY OF THE LETTER
OF 9 OCTOBER 1819

When you read it quickly, this letter may appear, to anyone who knows Marist history, true to the usual doctrine which is inculcated into subjects during their formation: in Le Puy, M. Courveille has the inspiration of founding a society of Mary. He gets together twelve disciples in the seminary of St Irénée in 1816. Together they sign a promise, then go to the places where their superiors have appointed them, waiting for providence to bring them together. To hasten this moment, which is slow in coming, they try to make contact with Rome, first of all directly, then through the intermediary of a bishop whom they ask to give them the name of a cardinal who might accept their request, with a view to preparing for a journey to the Holy Father.

The commentary which follows aims to show, on the contrary, that the apparent banality of this letter conceals in fact a considerable wealth of
history on the origins of the Society of Mary.

1 THE DOCUMENT

It belongs to the archives of the bishopric of Pinerolo (Italy), in the papers of Mgr. Rey, who succeeded Mgr. Bigex in the episcopal see in that town, in the file “Miscellaneous Correspondence”. It takes the form of a page folded in the middle, which allows one to write on four pages of format 19 x 23.5 cm and this shows the mark of a vertical fold down the middle. The first page bears only the name of the addressee and four lines. The essential part of the text is on pages two and three. The letter ends with: the signature of “Colin curé de Cerdon”; the address: “Cerdon en Bugey diocèse de Lyon département de l’Ain”; the date: “9 October 1819”. On the 4th page, probably in the hand of Mgr. Bigex, these few words: “du Puy en Velay… projet de congrégation Mariiste (sic) Cerdon”. Another hand, probably that of the archivist, has written the date of “1819”. There is no address.

The authenticity of the document and of its author do not seem to be in doubt: it is the same person who wrote out and signed the text. The fact that the signature “Colin” is accompanied by the title “curé de Cerdon” lets us know that the author is not Jean Claude Colin, founder of the Marists, but his brother, Pierre. Moreover, a comparison of the signature on this letter with the photograph of the one we find in figure 115 in “Origines Maristes” (OM 3 p 416) leaves scarcely any doubt as to the author, even if the two Colin brothers’ writing and signatures are very much alike.

2 HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT

This document, unknown till then, brings us important details on the least known phase of Marist origins: the period 1816 - 1822. For all that, its discovery is not a surprise since several documents in “Origines Maristes” allude not only to one letter but to a regular correspondence between the bishop of Pignerol and the first Marists. Thus, in a letter of 11 May 1833, (OM1, doc. 271/3) Jean Claude Colin, explaining Marist origins to Mgr. Bigex, mentions this correspondence:

“It was in 1816 that we pledged ourselves to work for the success of the

---

1. That probably explains why the research undertaken by Don Mario Tardivo, the diocesan archivist, at the request of Fr Nicolas Weber, predecessor of Frs Coste and Lessard, came up with nothing. See OM1 p 44. Moreover, these latter had no knowledge of the presence, in the Departmental Archives of Chambery, of the first prospectus (1824) concerning the Marist Brothers for, having been extracted from the papers of Mgr Bigex, it was classified in the religious communities listed in 41 F 136.

2. The writing seems to correspond with the letters of Mgr Bigex preserved in the Departmental Archives of Chambery.
Society; [...] For three years we applied ourselves to letting our sentiments mature at the foot of the crucifix and recommending the enterprise to God and to the Blessed Virgin/ then in 1819 Providence inspired us to submit our plan in detail to Mgr Bigex, bishop of Pignerol, who died as archbishop of Chambéry. This prelate welcomed us, encouraged us by his letters and was very willing to guide us with his advice over four years. It is he who advised us to explain our aim first of all to the cardinal president of the Congregation of Regulars in Rome, and later, in 1822, to our Holy Father Pius VII of happy memory."

This text shows us, therefore, that the Marists corresponded on at least two occasions with Mgr Bigex: in 1819 and in 1822 and, speaking of the correspondence of 1819, Jean Claude Colin seems to allude to the above letter. Moreover, he gives the essential point of Mgr Bigex's reply: write to Cardinal Pacca.

Moreover, OM(doc. 76) contains the copy of a letter from Mgr Bigex, dated 12 June 1822. In it the prelate encourages the Colin brothers to go to Paris and see the Nuncio, in spite of their being refused authorisation by the Vicars General of Lyons.

Much later, on 6 May 1870, (OM3, doc. 827/7) Fr Colin, addressing the Fathers and Brothers of the Society, was to come back on this topic:

"The draft of my work (drawing up the rule at Cerdon) was more or less finished towards the end of 1819 or the beginning of 1820.

At this time, Monseigneur Bigex, archbishop of Chambéry, to whom we had in all humility submitted our project, and who was our guide and counsellor for some years, urged us to submit our project directly to His Holiness Pius VII, which we ventured to do through two letters in succession written and dated from Cerdon."

Although this is less precise than the preceding one, this text is nonetheless a confirmation of the fact that Mgr Bigex allowed the Marists, in 1819, to make contact with Rome in an effective manner, allowing them thereby to free themselves from the excessively cumbersome influence of the Lyonese ecclesiastical authorities. Nevertheless, Pierre Colin's letter says not a word about the rule that Jean Claude has written out. Thus, when the former speaks of "our project", it must not be understood in the restricted sense of a formulated rule, but in the general sense of a Marist project such as the one drawn up since 1816.

This letter to Mgr Bigex is therefore in the context of a strategy of perseverance in their appeal to Rome: after a first letter to Rome in February 1819 which was unanswered, and certainly following the advice of Mgr Bigex, the Maristes, in November of the same year, wrote to Cardinal Pacca, prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Rome certainly re-
ceived that letter: its archives show this but the document itself has never been found. Rome's decision then was to stay its hand, for the administrative situation in the diocese of Lyons was far too confused: since 1817, Cardinal Fesch was forbidden to exercise any jurisdiction but obstinately refused to resign. Mgr de Bernis, who had been appointed administrator, could not exercise his functions for the project for the 1817 concordat which implied the creation of new dioceses and therefore the appointment of new bishops, notably in Lyons, had fallen through, for the Chambers, steeped as they were in Gallicanism, refused to ratify it. Since Mgr de Bernis had relinquished his title of administrator of Lyons when he became archbishop of Rouen in July 1819, the diocese was still administered by Vicars General, the legitimacy of whose powers was disputable and was constantly being disputed. It would be necessary to wait for the appointment of Mgr de Pins, on 22 December 1823, as apostolic administrator to clarify the situation. When the Marists, again encouraged by Mgr Bigex, would write their third letter, in January 1822, the Roman authorities would send a prudent reply in a letter, written in Latin, taking into account the reluctance of the Vicars General who did not want to see themselves lose their clergy to missionary orders. For the Marists, it means at least that they had crossed the desert even if they had still to wait a long time for their definitive approval.

3 CONTENTS OF THE LETTER

This starts with a laboured compliment to Mgr Bigex praising five of his qualities: his ardent zeal for the glory of God; his solicitude for the salvation of souls; his paternal kindness; his outstanding virtues; the high esteem they inspire in everyone.

We must obviously allow for the rhetoric in this effusion of compliments which, moreover, shows two things: that Pierre Colin, perhaps helped by someone, has carefully composed his text; that he is addressing for the first time a man whom he does not know personally but only by reputation.

A. MGR BIGEX

The fact remains that these compliments were well deserved by Mgr Bigex. He was born in 1751, died in 1827 and figured largely in Catholic resistance to the Revolution. Born in Savoy, he finished his studies in Saint Sulpice, became

3 See OM1. doc. 69/1 and OM3 p 1016, the very important "Notes annexed to the correspondence of Marist aspirants with Rome".

' OM1. doc. 72/1 "I vicari generali di Lione dove sembra voglia formarsi questo stabilimento hanno insinuato ai capi di pazientare, e di distenere alcun poco." (The Vicars General of Lyons, where this establishment is to be made, have suggested to their leaders that they should be patient and put it off for a while.)
a priest in 1776 and qualified as a Doctor in the Sorbonne in 1782. From 1783 he was Vicar General in the diocese of Geneva Annecy. In 1793 he refused to take the oath and emigrated to Lausanne in Switzerland where he organised the missions. Thus, from 1893 to 1801 he was the soul of pastoral resistance in the dioceses of Savoy. He published books on resistance: "Le missionnaire catholique" in 1798, a breviary of spiritual resistance for the use of layfolk; in 1798 he devised "...trennes religieuses" (religious gifts), a small manual of Catholic doctrine re-edited every year and distributed among the people. This was to be suppressed by the imperial government in 1810. At the beginning of the Empire he became the Vicar General of Mgr de Mérimville, provisional administrator of the diocese of Lyons, pending the nomination of Napoleon's uncle, Cardinal Fesch, then he organised religious life in the department of Mont Blanc, that is Savoy, while all the same time taking an active part in secret resistance to the Empire. In fact, as a member of "l'Amitié chrétienne" (Christian Friendship) which was supported by Bruno Lanteri in Turin, he belonged to one of the secret networks which supported the Pope and clandestinely passed on Bulls of excommunication at the time of the conflict between Napoleon and the Pope. At the time of the Restoration, the French government would have liked to appoint him bishop of Aire, but the Sardinian government insisted on keeping such a good servant. It appointed him bishop of Pinerolo (1817-24) then archbishop of Chambéry (1824-27). He was, therefore, one of the great servants of the church in the 19th century.¹

OM supposes that "the reputation for wisdom that he had left in the diocese of Lyons during his stay in 1802 and the fame he had acquired as the compiler of the "...trennes religieuses" make the Colin brothers' choice of this distant counsellor less extraordinary", but they add "it must be acknowledged that the immediate reasons have still to be discovered". The preamble to the letter, therefore, confirms an intuition that the composers of OM had and its critical assessment will bring me to put forward a hypothesis on "the immediate reasons" for the choice of the Colin brothers.

B. The history of the S.M.

The fact that Mgr Bigex does not know the SM obliges Pierre Colin to give a succinct account of its origins, and this allows us to have at our disposal the first historical account of the Society of Mary which throws light on a question which was fiercely debated among the Marist Fathers in the 19th century: who was the founder of the Society of Mary and how was it set up?

The OM of Fathers Coste and Lessard has done a great deal to sort out that question but its authors were not acquainted with this document which, as I shall try to show, adds new and more precise details concerning our origins.

¹ OM contains a biography of Mgr Bigex in OM4, p 197-198; the recently published "Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine, t. 8 La Savoie", Beauchesne, 1996, contains an article on him accompanied by an abundant bibliography.
Of course OM is extremely helpful in showing us the ins and outs of the question. Volume 3 develops this affair at great length but, while it serves no purpose to give a long account of it, I nevertheless think it important to give its broad lines.

Thus, according to OM3 p 45, up to 1854 the Marist project is attributed not to an individual but to a group. The petitions to the Holy See in 1822 (OM1, doc. 69/1), 1833 (OM1, doc. 269/1) and 1834 (doc. 294/1) take that line. Only the petition of 1836, formalised by Don Crociati, separates from the group its spokesman: JeanClaude Colin (doc. 373/1). Under the generalship of Fr Colin, this wish to attribute the birth of the idea of the Society of Mary to a group and not to a person continued to dominate, for it keeps quiet about Courveille and satisfies the modesty of Colin. But the longest standing Marists have no scruples about attributing the foundation to a fixed person: Courveille. Thus, in 1842, Fr Déclas (doc. 551) asserts:

"The one to whom the idea of the Society of Mary was given first was M. Courveille of the diocese of Le Puy, during his seminary training in Lyons about 1815".

In 1844 he was to renew his assertion (doc. 591). In 1846, Fr Séon (doc. 625) confirms this:

"It is [...] M. Courveille who first set in motion this affair of the Society of Mary in the Great Seminary in Lyons. There was talk of a revelation...".

Finally, M. Terraillon, in 1840-42 (doc. 750), tells the story of Courveille at Le Puy: his cure and his intention of founding a Society of Mary, but without pointing out that it was the result of a revelation. Then he tells of all the efforts of Courveille to find disciples in the seminary of St Irénée. Finally, Fr Mayet received from Dom Courveille in 1851 and 1852 (OM2, docs. 714; 718) at least three letters telling of the origins, and in particular his revelation at Le Puy. Therefore, in the years 1840-1870 there was a contradiction on the question of the origins, which the quarrels centred around the Constitutions of the S.M. bring out into the open in the years 6070, with Fr Colin attributing to Courveille only the role of the one who suggested the Society, while those who oppose this view stress the role of Courville and do not stop far short of saying that Fr Colin has usurped the title of founder. Finally, the Chapter of 1870 (doc. 845) provides an official version of the origins which affirms the role of Courveille while refusing to name him:

"Following these traditions (gathered from the mouths of the older members, Fathers Déclas, Terraillon and Courveille) it is Father X... who would have had the first idea of a Society of Mary: this would have come to him at Le Puy, at the feet of the statue of the Blessed Virgin which is venerated there, on an occasion when he had gone there on pilgrimage to thank this good Mother for a grace he

---

* See the historical synopsis of OM, volume 4 p 532-533.
had received from her. He brought this idea to the Great Seminary in Lyons in 1815 and began to spread it among his more pious fellow students...”

I think that this reminder was necessary to allow for an evaluation of the wealth of the historical account composed by Pierre Colin which precedes by more than twenty years the oldest testimonies we possess up till then on the origins. We see how nearly this text matches the version furnished by Fathers Déclas, Terraillon and even Courveille. Since Pierre Colin is its source we can be sure that it was also the version accepted at that moment in Cerdon, and therefore by Jean Claude Colin, and which was finally to be retained in 1870 after a long period of occultation.

C. The Chronology

However, we are struck by some gross errors of chronology. Thus, Courveille’s inspiration is placed twelve years before, that is to say towards 1807, while Courveille asserts that he received it in 1812. Pierre Colin also adds a few years on to Courveille’s age who, since he was born in 1787, is 32 and not 34 or 35. Nevertheless he gives a correct interpretation of two other chronological elements: Courveille, in 1819, had certainly been ordained for three years, and he certainly kept quiet for about two years before talking of his project to his superiors. Further on in the text we shall try to provide some explanation for these approximations which are not very serious.

D. Courveille’s confusion

Moreover, when he asserts that “being afraid that he might be mistaken he kept it quiet for two years, but being inwardly ever more strongly urged to start this work, he thought he ought to talk it over with his confessor”, Pierre Colin is astonishingly close to the accounts of Déclas:

“It (the idea of the Society of Mary) had so strong a hold on him that he heard Mass six times to be delivered from it, without being able to succeed. Then he spoke of it to M. Cholleton” (doc. 551/1). And a little later (doc. 591/5) “He looked upon it as an illusion of the devil and tried to turn away from it, but in vain; the more efforts he made, the more this thought pursued him.

But it is also taken up again by Courveille in 1852 (doc. 718/8):

“I was astonished, frightened ... I did not speak about it to anyone, not even to my directors. I thought it was a great illusion ... the matter kept coming back very often and I kept on spurning it”.

Thus, the topic of Courveille’s confusion, which was reported belatedly by both the interested party and by Déclas, was well known in 1819.

E. Affirmation of the revelation at Le Puy

But the most important thing is the revelation at Le Puy, since Pierre Co-
lin speaks about it as being a “special grace received at Notre Dame du Puy en Velay” and he indicates its drift: the foundation of the Society of Mary. There again the text confirms the latest documents then known: Terraillon was particularly struck by that, since according to him the gist of the revelation consisted in these words:

“Jesus has his society, therefore Mary also must have hers (doc. 750/1).

Courveille is more verbose, but his words mean the same (doc. 718)

“I wish, and it is the wish of my adorable Son, that in these latter days of impiety and incredulity, there should also be a society consecrated to me, bearing my name and calling itself the Society of Mary, and that those who are its members be also called Marists in order to fight against hell”.

Déclas is the least clearcut on this point: he is content to have Courveille say, in his conversation with Bochard, “that it was because of the work of the Blessed Virgin which he had in view and which he was hoping to establish in Le Puy” (doc. 591/6).

F. The year 1816

Finally, Pierre Colin confirms the importance of the year 1816, (which essentially, stating precisely whether it refers to the school year, which began on the feast of All Saints, or the civil year) in the structuring of the society. But you will notice that, while giving primordial importance to the composition of the promise, he says nothing about the ceremony in Fourvière on 23 July 1816. Thus, for the Marists of 1819, the real act of foundation of the SM was the signing of the promise and not the Mass at Fourvière at which Courveille officiated.

G. The importance of the Vicars General of Le Puy

The interest of this rapid historical account of Pierre Colin, which essentially was to serve as an introduction to the promise which follows, is therefore, to show us how much the memories of the principal witnesses, more than twenty years later, are at one with what they knew only a few years after the event of the foundation.

But some elements of the text can pose questions. Thus, Pierre Colin says that “he (Courveille) thought be ought to talk it over with his confessor and several other wise and learned persons”. Now, we know (doc. 718/1011) that at Le Puy Courveille spoke to two directors one of whom was his confessor. Although he does not exactly say so, Pierre Colin seems to situate these confidences at Le Puy for, when he speaks of Courveille at St Irénée, he indicates that the latter is acting with the permission of his directors, that is to say Cholleton, for sure and, probably, Bochard. One gets the impression, then, that at Le Puy more than two persons were taken into his confidence, a fact which would confirm the opinion held by Déclas when he said (doc. 591/6)
that "the Vicars General of Le Puy were very insistent on keeping him". It is therefore probable that at least some of the "wise and learned persons" to whom Pierre Colin alludes were the Vicars General of Le Puy.

H. A triumvirate: Bochard Cholleton Courveille

But also this account concerning the year 1816 when the foundation of the Society of Mary is related as a recruiting drive concerted by Courveille and his directors, with the twelve chosen ones seeming to have no initiative, has some intriguing facets. We know that, in fact, the group was largely built up by reciprocal relationships. Pierre Colin, for his part, insists on the fact that it was sponsored by Cholleton, Bochard and Courveille who exercised a dominating influence which Déclas and Terraillon also note. Thus an important characteristic of the Society of Mary is stressed: as long as it was in the St Irénée seminary, the SM was firmly held together by the triumvirate Courveille Cholleton Bochard. Besides, the text of the promise is presented by Pierre Colin as coming from Courveille since he says that "he communicated his aim and the plan of the society" of which the promise is only a résumé. This somewhat excessive insistence on the obedience of the Marists is justified also by the concern of the author of the letter to show that the Marists are in all things submissive to the authorities, and in particular to the bishops, but that was only a tactical ploy since there are numerous texts of Fr Colin which also insist on this obedience to authority, and the testimonies of Fathers Déclas and Terraillon stress the willing obedience of Marists to their superiors even when they hamper the progress of the work.

I. From the project of an individual to that of a group

But Pierre Colin's text displays, by its very form, a significant break: the beginning of the historical account of the SM shows the action of a single man by multiplying the "he"s. On the contrary, the second part differentiates itself completely from this vision. Henceforth it is the "they"s which dominate: "they undertook", "they are almost all priests", "they put their signatures". And the event which causes this break with the form is the promise. As if this fact had changed the nature of the Society of Mary and reduced the one who had the original inspiration to the role of a simple companion. Moreover, after the text of the promise the "they"s continue. This change of personal pronoun makes two phases of the foundation of the Marist project stand out clearly: the revelation which was first brought by an individual has later been taken over by a group.

Moreover, there is another indication of this wish to show that thence-

1. Doc. 551/3: "M. Bochard often saw M. Courveille and together they agreed on the choice of subjects; he even went as far as saying to him: "No, don't take such and such; they are not very bright".
forth the idea of the action of a single man helped by some counsellors is a thing of the past; this is the fact that the name of the person to whom the revelation was made is never mentioned. Thus, this document seems to reveal that, from 1819, the Colin brothers, and probably the whole Marist group, consider Courveille, not as the founder, but as the one who revealed a divine inspiration which he successfully passed on. When that was done, his particular role was ended. The divine revelation received at Le Puy was therefore not personal but collective. It came through one man but it was destined for a group whose function it was to carry it to the world. Courveille doesn’t seem to have accepted, this second phase, and he seems to have kept the conviction that he was the permanent depository of the revelation: the group could not break with him without taking the wrong road. His letter from Aiguebelle, in 1826 (doc. 152), in which he accepts, feeling the wrench, that he no longer belongs to the Society of Mary, seems an excellent manifestation of this ambiguous attitude which was to end in his exclusion. This letter, therefore, shows clearly, already in 1819, the terms of the conflict which would be crystallised some years later round the person of Courveille, to whom will finally be denied the role of founder that he was claiming in a vague way. A second conflict, with a result that was diametrically opposed, would take place in 1860-70 concerning the founder and the original rule, and Jean Claude Colin would emerge the winner since his role as founder would no longer be contested. In simple terms, he would have to concede that his spiritual vision of a congregation founded by Mary does not insist on hiding the role of the players, unworthy though they may be, who made possible the success of the work. Nonetheless, the fact remains that, while asserting that Mary is the real foundress and that Courveille did nothing more than reveal the project, Jean Claude placed himself in remarkable agreement with the letter of 1819, and in contradiction with what he himself became: a founder who claimed that his rule was divinely inspired. In a word, the two founders of the Society of Mary had two attitudes very much alike. But the second one managed to take his disciples along with him, the first one failed.

J. A “BAND” seeking to become an “ORDER”

But in 1819 we are not there yet: the Marists are not yet an “order” but a “band”, that is a group characterised by “equal status of members, freedom of associates, charity pushed to the limit”. But the letter shows us that the band had already started on the following phase since it was looking for the support of authority in order to exist as an order. In doing so it agreed to give up its first state inorder, eventually, to elect a superior and live under a rule. This is a difficult transition:

“If the members remain level-headed in the midst of this intense joy that they (these bands) exude, they start making human contacts at a deep level. If they are inclined to immoderation or are gluttons for marvels, they almost inevitably lapse into extravagance and fanaticism. The band becomes a sect: one of the more fanatical of its members takes over the others for his own advantage by keeping them under his thumb and making them his servants”.

Would you not say that such is a description of the Marists in the years 1820-30? Although scattered, they maintained close contacts and go ahead in spite of difficulties. But the personality of Courville continued to weigh menacingly and in 1819 this threat had not yet broken out into the light of day. That is why the “band” passed on to a third phase of its transformation which is shown by the form the text takes.

Indeed, after the use of the “he”, then of the “they”, the use of the “we” and of the possessive adjective “our” attract our attention:

“Our intention is to present ourselves to His Holiness [...] we have already taken the liberty of sending him a letter dated last February”...

Apart from the fact that this text confirms a first letter to Rome mentioned in the letter of 25 January 1822 (doc. 69/1), it indicates a new phase in the structuring of the society: it is no longer enough, as in the second phase, to wait for “the moment marked by divine Providence and the permission of the ecclesiastical superiors”, but it is the moment to enter into contact with the supreme authority: the Pope. Who was behind this “we”? Obviously the Colin brothers. But the text states clearly that it is “in the name of all my companions that I have the honour of communicating to you our desires and our intentions”. Should we take this assertion literally?

Obviously yes, taking into account what I have said above, but also of what the letter asserts:

“Although scattered, they have all remained intimately united”.

The testimony of Fr Terraillon takes the same tone when recalling the period 1816-1824:

“Always united with one another, we acted in perfect harmony. Our small gatherings were uninterrupted. They took place sometimes at Belley, sometimes at Lyons, but more often at Lyons. We usually took advantage of the pastoral retreats to consult each other and become more and more fervent” (OM2, doc. 750/8).

One phrase in the letter enlightens us, moreover, on the number of Marists in 1819:

“Before separating and going to occupy the posts which Providence decreed

10. Ibid. p 293.
for each one of them in their ministry, for they are almost all priests, they put their signatures, as a body, to the following promise which contains, in abbreviated form, the aim and the plan of the Society”.

In that phrase, Pierre Colin evokes a past event: (“they put their signatures”) and a situation contemporary with his letter: (“they are almost all priests”). Such a statement suggests that the group, in 1819, is still just as numerous. We know from another source that among the dozen names that we know of the first group, two of them would join Bochard’s “Pères de la Croix”: these were Pousset and Verrier. But they made their vows in that society only in 1820. Moreover the “almost” seems to indicate that Orsel, who would finally give up the ecclesiastical career, and Perrault Maynard, who would become a priest only in 1822, were still members of the group.  

But let us return to the topic of unity among the Marists, for the authors of OM find the above assertion of Terraillon somewhat idyllic and mention quite correctly that we do not know who this “we” includes. For my part, I think Pierre Colin and Terraillon give a correct description of the reality of the twenties, for how can we explain otherwise that this project of seminarists who were enthusiastic and full of dreams should have been able to be proof against long years of stalemate? Moreover, I showed above how much the Marists were psycho-sociologically typical of the origins of religious orders. I think too that this unity can also be explained by the fact that the Marists have been nourished with the spirituality of the Aas, those secret societies of clerics, formed in the 17th century whose device was “Cor unum, anima una”. Besides, does not Fr Terraillon evoke this device when he recalls “Always united with one another, we acted in perfect harmony”?  

Moreover, this perfect harmony allows us to understand in what conditions the Marists probably wrote their letters. It is in fact probable that, at the beginning of 1819, a meeting ended with the decision to write to Rome. The first attempt having failed, it is probable that a second meeting ended with the appeal to Mgr Bigex, thus justifying the assertion of Pierre Colin who is acting as the mouthpiece of a group in which no one, not even Courveille, saw himself as founder, since it was Mary who presided over the birth of this group. If you read it carefully, that is what Fr Déclas is stating:

“The one to whom the first idea of the society was given was M. Courveille” (doc. 551).

Father Terraillon is clearer still:

---

11. See in OM4 biographical notices.
"The first idea of the Society of Mary is due to Notre Dame du Puy" (doc. 750).

And Father Colin would often continue on that line (See OM4 p 532, historical synopsis).

All three of them, by asserting that the idea of the Society of Mary was given, deny anyone the right to declare himself the founder.

Moreover, the letter to the Pope of 25 January 1822, signed by Courveille and the Colin brothers, presents the foundation as being collective, even if Courveille does seem to have the title of superior in it. He himself bears witness that the letter was collective and that it drew down on him some ironical reflections from M. Bochard who, however, implicitly recognises the title of superior (doc. 718/23):

"The superiors, learning that we had written to the Pope, made fun of us. M. Bochard, the Vicar General, said to me: "Do you think that the Pope is going to answer a small, insignificant priest, when I, the Vicar General of the biggest diocese in France, wrote to him almost two years ago without getting an answer?"

We must take into account the fact that at about 1820 the Marists were functioning on a fraternal arrangement which meant that, once a decision had been taken collectively, its execution was confided to those who had proposed it or were considered best placed to realise it (Pierre Colin was a parish priest), unless, if they functioned as the Aa did, the elected officers were given the responsibility of executing what had been decided, which would explain the fact that it was Pierre Colin and not his brother or a Marist of the original group who composed the letter to Mgr Bigex  

K. Courveille more exposed than the others

But the quotation from Courveille given above also throws light on the ambiguity in which the group was functioning, for M. Bochard’s proposals show that he does consider him as the superior of the Marists “a small, insignificant priest”. Moreover, we know that, as such, he was at first pampered by Bochard who appointed him to the seminary of Verrières in the autumn of 1816, but not having been able to win him over to his own project of the Pères de la Croix de Jésus, on 20 August 1817 sent him in disgrace to Rive du

---

1. Mgr Bigex certainly understood that since in his letter of 12 June 1822 (OM1, doc. 76) the address bears only the name of Pierre Colin while the text begins and ends with “Messieurs”.  
2. This hypothesis that the Marists functioned like an Aa seems to me to be strengthened by the observation that the first three letters making overtures to Rome were written either at the beginning of the year (January, February) or in October or November. This gives one to understand that the meetings were held shortly before these periods: in the first days of January or in AugustSeptember. Now, the Aas had the custom of renewing their consecration in January, at the moment when they had the time to recruit and initiate new members, and before the holidays, during the month of August. Once they were out of the seminary the Marists could have kept up the January practice and replaced the meeting at the end of the school year by the ecclesiastical retreat.
Gier as curate, then, on 1 October 1819 (at the time when Pierre Colin was writing his letter), as priest in charge at Epercieux. The other Marist aspirants did not suffer such harassment. The Colin brothers were able to live peacefully at Cerdon (thanks to the protection of Cholleton\textsuperscript{16}) while Courveille was tossed hither and thither. Courveille, then, has some merit for remaining faithful to the Marist project. But he was in a most ambiguous situation, since his colleagues saw in him only a \textit{primus inter pares} while the authorities recognised him officially as superior. In a certain fashion, he was taking stick from both sides and had not the time he needed to work at the project, whilst Jean Claude Colin had ample time and inspiration to draw up a rule.

L. \textit{A source of future conflicts: difference between the address of the addressee and his actual place of residence}

The letter written to Rome on 25 January 1822 (doc. 69) is a brilliant example of this ambiguity, since it is signed by the one who is considered by the ecclesiastical authorities to be the superior, but is accompanied by the signatures of two members of the Marist project: one is an original member (Jean Claude Colin), and a more recent participant: Pierre Colin. In a certain fashion, these three signatures sum up the history of the project and assure everyone, since in Rome they have an interlocutor who is clearly identified and who is known as such in Lyons, while the signatures that follow, although they reveal the two strata of disciples (those of 1816 and the more recent aspirants), show who are the most dynamic actors in the project: the Colin brothers in Cerdon. Does not the letter of 1819 which we are studying express, in own its way, the same thing, showing the three actors succeeding each other: \textquote{he}; \textquote{they}; \textquote{we}?

But by dissociating the person of the superior and the place of residence (Cerdon) the authors of the letter of 1922 laid a trap for themselves: the reply from Rome would be addressed to M. Courveille in Cerdon. Thus, the Colin brothers could consider that the letter was addressed to them, while M. Courveille had the right to claim that he is the addressee and that, furthermore, Rome recognised him as superior. For the time being this was not a serious problem for the unity among the members allowed difficulties to be resolved, but if there were a conflict it would be difficult to exclude a man recognised by the supreme authority and who could rightfully consider himself as being confirmed in a position of at least moral leadership. So the letter of 1819 is interesting in that it shows us how a process began which ended three years later in a first official recognition and at the same time in a trial of strength. For

\textsuperscript{16} OM3, doc. 819/12; \textquote{Fr Colin was appointed as curate to Cerdon where his elder brother was parish priest. This appointment alarmed his conscience; [...] Consulted on this difficulty, M. Cholleton said to the young curate: \textquote{Go on, your brother will be your first companion}. The good father understood later the views of divine providence. If he had been a curate elsewhere he would not have had sufficient freedom for working at the realisation of his project, especially as regards the travelling and periods of absence it needed.
who should take on the responsibility for the project? The one who was designated by a first revelation and by the authorities of the Church, or those who had effectively promoted it *hic et nunc*? One can understand, therefore, how at the end of his life Fr Colin should have to face up to persistent suspicions of manipulations that it was difficult for him to justify completely as lawful and that he should need to claim his own inspiration at the same time as it was his duty to play down as much as possible the role of Courveille. Paradoxically, his only recourse against this suspicion was to take on the role as founder.\(^6\)

**M. An unfavourable political conjuncture**

But another phrase deserves an explanation: "It is our intention to present ourselves to His Holiness as soon as possible. **With no hope of doing so immediately, (going to Rome) considering the difficulty of the times...**."  

First of all there were religious difficulties, of which we spoke above and whose effect was that the Marists had just lost hope of getting rid of the touchy tutelage of the Vicars General and especially of Bochart.

On the other hand, political events brought little joy: since December 1818 the liberal minister, Dessolles Decazes had been governing France. In May 1819 he had passed liberal laws on the press, allowing those who opposed the régime to declare themselves vociferously and to win the partial elections of 11 September 1819. Fr Grégoire, an outstanding figure in the Constitutional Church and a declared regicide\(^7\) was elected in Grenoble, 100 km away from Lyons and this caused a scandal which was insupportable in the ultra and Catholic circles. Secret societies, Bonapartist and Republican, multiplied and gave cause for an abiding fear of attempts to overthrow the régime. For staunch royalists, as the Marists were, there was reason for unease, without taking into account that such a government was not much inclined to resolve ecclesiastical problems. The future, therefore, seemed blocked on the side of both the diocese and the government. The only recourse was Rome, but even then it was necessary to knock on the right door, without deluding oneself on the chances of a rapid outcome. Thus the letter of 1819 shows that the Marists have no longer the illusions of 1816 about the rapid execution of their project.

**4. THE PROMISE**

But we must now insist on what constitutes the centre piece of the let-

\(^6\) This is what Fr Colin asserts (doc. 804/9): "If his name sometimes appeared in our letters, prudence seemed to demand it, because at that time the work seemed to be known under his name".

\(^7\) See in the historical synopsis (OM4 p 532) "snippets about the origin".

\(^8\) He did not vote for the death of the king for he was absent, but he declared that he opted for that decision.
ter and is for us the most important contribution of this document: the promise, written in Latin by Pierre Colin in the middle of the letter.

A. The text

OM (t. 1 p 219220) tells us that this text, fundamental for the history of the Society of Mary, is preserved in three handwritten copies, all written in the hand of Pierre Colin, with no date or signature, no indication of any kind. **We therefore have before us a fourth version by the same author, but one which has the advantage of being dated and whose author is identified without any possible doubt. Besides, the contents of the letter allow us to assert with certainty that this is indeed the promise which the Marist aspirants signed in 1816 in the St Irénée seminary and probably pronounced in Fourvière on 23 July 1816. Up to now, the lack of a date, author, and place where written had allowed us to reach only a relative certainty.**

But the comparison between this newly discovered version and the versions already known, allows us to note two variations in relation to the texts published in OM and which Fathers Coste and Lessard established by comparing the three versions known to them. Thus, at the end of the text, doc. 50 of OM declares:

"confidentes quod, sub amico pacis et religionis Christianissimi Regis nostrae regimen, brevi in lucem prodibit illa institutio, solemniter pollicemur nos omniamque nostra impensuros esse ad salvandas modis omnibus animas sub augéssimos nomine Virginis Mariae ejusdemque auspiciis".

Two words are different. The second variant ("omnia" replacing "omnia") is already interesting for "omniaque" is grammatically more correct than "omnia". And Fr Coste (note 6 of OM 1 p 223) indicated that one should read not "omnia" but "omniaque".

But the addition of the word "eximia" has quite another significance. It means "privileged, apart, out of the ordinary". That means we have to translate it not as "this institution will see the light of day" but "this out of the ordinary institution will see the light of day", which appears much more in keeping with the state of mind of the Marist aspirants who saw the Society of Mary as destined to regenerate the universe.

The French translation of this passage, done for the first time by Fr Jcantin in 1895 in T.1 of the "Vie du P. Colin" pp 4143 and taken up in the "Vie du P. Champagnat" starting in 1897, takes this word "exi-
"mia" into account, translating it by "excellent", thus weakening its meaning:

"...confident that, under the peaceful and religious government of our most Christian king, this excellent institution will see the light of day. We promise that we will give ourselves, ourselves and all that we have, for the salvation of souls in every possible way and working in the name of the Virgin Mary and under her auspices."

Fathers Coste and Lessard, in their critical study comparing the three texts, have established the official text of the words of the promise, indicating the variations in the three copies. But, strangely, they have omitted any mention of the word "eximia". That is a memory lapse on their part. The Latin text established by them in OM (doc. 50) is therefore inaccurate on this point.

On the other hand, the text of A.F.M. is incorrect in the expression "piissimae Maristarum instituendae congregationi" (to the foundation of the pious Congregation of the Marists) for Pierre Colin's letter speaks of "piissimae Maristarum instituendae congregationi" and Mgr Bigex, certainly influenced by this text, has written on the back of this letter "project of the congregation of the Marists". Fathers Coste and Lessard were right to keep the term "Mariistarum" in the official Latin version, considering it, rightly, the earlier version.

Thus one may conclude that the foundation text of the S.M. which is most faithful to the original one, which has not been found, is contained in the letter of Pierre Colin.

B. The Aim and Plan of the Society

But Pierre Colin's letter, by asserting that M. Courveille "chose twelve subjects to whom he communicated his aim and the plan for the Society" and that the promise "contains in abbreviated form the aim and plan for the Society" obliges us to admit that the promise is not the first text of the SM but that it is a summary of the initial text whose author or vehicle was Courveille.

Must we then revive the polemic of the eighteen-seventies when, in Marist Fathers' circles, Fr Colin was accused of having stolen a rule of Courveille's contained in an exercise book which the former refused to give back to its owner?

---

1. "Illustrated Latin-French Dictionary", F. Gaffiot. He quotes, among others, an extract from Cicero: "te illi unum eximium, cui consuleret, fuisse": "it would be improbable that you should have this unique privilege of being the object of his solicitude"...
3. Fr Lessard, to whom this letter was communicated, has verified that the word "eximia" was certainly in the three versions already known.
4. Ibid. p 14
Certainly not, for Fr Colin formally denies it and his contradictors never brought forward any proof that on this point he was mistaken\(^{1}\). Nevertheless, the letter of 1819 asserts that there had been a document written by Courville, or in his possession, and that therefore this is in substance his work. This project is not a rule, but a “plan” of which the letter gives a first summary saying that “they all undertook to support him and to use the rest of their lives for the glory of God, for the help of the Catholic Church and the salvation of souls in the Society of Mary, provided that it was approved by the Sovereign Pontiff and by their Lordships, the Bishops”.

With regard to the complete text of the promise which follows and which dates from 1816, you will have noticed two variations: the mention of the most Christian king does not figure there; it is no longer a question of fidelity “to our reverend ordinary bishop” but to “their Lordships the Bishops”. In 1819 the enthusiastic royalism of the first Marists seems to have been dulled, for the most Christian king had disappointed their hopes\(^{2}\); and fidelity to the ordinary bishop (Fesch) has disappeared, a sign that his authority was no longer recognised by them and therefore no longer was that of the Vicars General. The Marists therefore are in the opponents’ camp, playing Rome against the administration of the diocese. What follows will allow us better to shore up that hypothesis.

5. HOW DID RELATIONS WITH MGR BIGEX START?

It remains for us to look for the persons who introduced the Marists to Mgr Bigex. We have seen, in fact, that internal criticism of the document allows us to conclude that they did not know that prelate and had never corresponded with him. And it is hard to see that Mgr Bigex, a wise and prudent prelate, should have ventured to correspond with a group of young students who were unknown to him, being formed in a diocese where ecclesiastical affairs were more than somewhat confused. He would at least have taken the precaution of finding some information about them. Now, his reply was ex-

---

\(^{1}\) See especially his declarations in OM3, doc. 820/3 and 837/1.

\(^{2}\) It is well to stress that the sanctuary of Fourvière in 1815–1816 seems to have been a place for Catholic and Royalist manifestations. Thus a letter of M. Besson, parish priest of St Nizier (archives Besson 19/1751, deposited in the A.D. of Metz) contains a letter from him to the police lieutenant, dated 20 August 1815 and stating: “I am disposed to do all that is acceptable to the magistrates of the town and to the society of royalists assembled to keep a vow in Fourvière”, but he cannot subscribe to that because of the opposition of the Vicars General. A letter from Canon Bossu, dated the following day, expects that the procession, on its return from Fourvière, will go directly to Place Bellecour where there will be a Mass in presence of the Austrian garrison (the allies are still occupying France) and of the National Guard to celebrate the feast of St Louis. Finally, a letter from the three Vicars General, 6 August 1816, declares that “His Excellency the governor and the other civil authorities have expressed, through the organ of the mayor, the desire to have a general procession to Fourvière, on the feast of St Louis, Sunday 25th inst.”. It therefore seems quite likely that there exists among the royalists a tendency to make of the Marian sanctuary a place for expressing devotion to the king, and the Marists seem to bask in these sympathies.
tremely rapid, since we know that, in November already, the Marists were sending a letter to Cardinal Pacca, Prefect of the congregation of Bishops and Regulars, certainly following his advice. Some person who was well known to Mgr Bigex, and having his confidence, intervened therefore to guarantee their earnestness.

**A. M. Besson, parish priest of St Nizier**

Now, in the same file as the Marists’ letter, in the bishopric of Pinerolo, is a letter from Besson, parish priest of St Nizier in Lyons, writing from Mieugy, near Seyssel in the Ain, on the border between Savoy and France, on 1 October 1819, that is 9 days before the Marists. Unlike that of Pierre Colin, his letter bears the address on the back: “to Monseigneur the bishop of Pinerolo, in Pinerolo (Piedmont)”. And the post office in Seyssel stamped its postmark. The paper then bears marks of the folding at the time of dispatch, but another vertical one in the middle, quite similar to the one on Pierre Colin’s letter suggests that the two letters could have been kept together, their closeness of date being sufficient to justify this hypothesis.

Historians of the diocese of Lyons and of Savoy are well acquainted with this personage whose activities covered both territories. Born in 1756 in Seyssel (in Savoy), he did his ecclesiastical studies in the senior seminary in Lyons. Ordained priest in 1799, he studied law in Dijon and obtained his doctorate in 1786. In 1788, his uncle, Mgr Paget, bishop of Annecy, called him to the office of Vicar General in the diocese of Geneva. During the Revolution, as an active draft evader, he was arrested then escaped, lived in Switzerland, in Munich and in northern Italy, acting as a link with all the exiled priests. He still played an important role in Paris in 1800, obtaining the creation of a large diocese in Savoy, whose seat he wanted to be in Annecy and not in Chambéry. Later he turned aside from Savoyard affairs and thenceforth his career was spent in Lyons where Cardinal Fesch first of all named him titular canon of the primatial church of Saint Jean, then parish priest of the parish of Saint Nizier, the principal parish in the centre of Lyons. Under the Empire he remained prudent, but under the Restoration, Saint Nizier was an ardent centre of legitimism at the same time as being the centre of the involvement of the Vicars General of Lyons in the name of Cardinal Fesch. After 1819, his activity became tougher: in 1821 he was behind the secret printing, in Geneva, of a “*Mémoire sur l’exercice actuel de la juridiction ordinaire dans le diocèse de Lyon*” (*Dissertation on the present exercise of ordinary jurisdiction in the diocese of Lyons*) in which he contests the legitimacy of the powers of the Vicars General. Although he did not succeed in obtaining a canonical judgement on this point, he nevertheless obtained the appointment of an apostolic administrator: Mgr de Pins. He would end his ecclesiastical career as bishop of Metz in 1842. By his persevering action in his relations with the government and in ecclesiastical circles (he had friends in the famous congregation, a very influential politico-religious society, and became director of the offices of the Grande Aumônerie), he would obtain the elimination of Bochard.
His letter, on which it does not serve our purpose to make a long commentary, treats only of ecclesiastical politics: namely the return of Pius VII to the concordat of 1801 after the failure of a proposed concordat which would have created new dioceses. Belley being one of them, and allowed Mgr de Pins to assume power as provisional administrator of the archbishopric of Lyons. In the letter Besson shows a strong ultramontanism and a concern to reconstitute a tight network of bishoprics. In a word, his mentality is typical of the ultra spirit, anxious to rechristianise France by reconstituting solid ecclesiastical structures, and Mgr Bigex shared this spirit.

The tone of the letter shows that a longstanding intimacy between these two men who certainly met each other frequently since both worked at the same time on the same territory: Savoy and Lyons. The form of address he uses to Bigex, moreover, is significant: “My dear lordship and also my dear friend”5. And the rest of the letter is in keeping with this friendly preamble: in it Besson gives the substance of his thought on matters ecclesiastical. He also names another of their common acquaintances: M. Russand, a printer in Lyons, a great publisher of religious books, a member of the same resistance network under the Empire, a future benefactor of Fr Champagnat, to whom M. Besson passed on orders for books in the name of Mgr Bigex, which means that there was frequent correspondence among the three men. “Besson, therefore, appears to have been one of the favourite correspondents of Mgr Bigex in France, providing him with books and confidential items of information.

B. M. Besson’s guests

After showing how this personnage fits in, I think it would be useful to quote the last paragraph of the letter which could be of interest to our subject:

“Next morning I am expecting our friend from Geneva: at the same time I am expecting three of my friends from Lyons, among them Fr Linsolas, a former Vicar General. I expect to keep them here for a whole week; and I shall prolong my holidays till some time before All Saints”.

We can easily identify two of these personages. The “friend from Geneva” can only be Vuarin, parish priest of that town.6 He too was a Savoyard but

---

5. See biographical notices and the bibliography concerning him in the “Dictionnaire du monde religieux contemporain”, N°6 (Lyon) and N°8 (Savoie), Beuchesne, 1994 and 1996.
6. Fr Lessard pointed out to me that Fr Colin reported this undermining work of Besson whom he saw in Paris in 1822. See OM3, doc. 821/29; OM2, doc. 63m 466/6.

We should probably take the word “friend” according to the meaning the members of the Au gave this title or that of “confrère” in their correspondence. Two indications lead us to believe this: first the allusion to “our confrère, Fr Varicourt; then the final greeting which strongly insists on the authority and the confraternity: “Receive, my dear Lordship, the homage of my unchanging sentiments, the expression of respect and friendship of your old confrère”.

The file “corrispondenza varia” of Pinerolo, where we found the letters of Colin and Besson, contains also a letter from Rusand.
clearly younger than Besson and Bigex (he was born in 1769). He would be ordained priest only in 1797, in Fribourg, after having fiercely taken part in Catholic resistance in Savoy by the side of Besson. After being installed in Calvin’s city he fought tooth and nail with the Protestants to have the rights of Catholics recognised. In one of his letters he thought that “Mgr of Pinero-lo, whom he considered one of the bright lights of the episcopate, could offer useful advice” on the question of the Vicars General.51

Fr Linsolas, born in the parish of Saint Nizier in Lyons, was the organiser of the clandestine Church in the diocese under the Revolution. Having escaped capture by the police throughout the Revolution, he was arrested under the Consulate on 8 September 1801 and kept in arbitrary detention in Paris, then in Turin before being sent to the Pontifical States. As a stubborn defender of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in opposition to the temporal power, he was a nuisance, not only to the civil authorities but also to Fesch and his Vicars General. He was able to come back to Lyons only at the Restoration. He was to regain his canonry only under Mgr de Pins in 1823. He was living, therefore, at Besson’s house in the curacy of Saint Nizier. Being about the same age as Besson (he was born in 1784), having studied at the same major seminary in Lyons at the same period, having been ordained in the same year as the latter (1879), and sharing the same ideas as Besson, he was certainly one of his old friends, and he was known to Bigex, who took inspiration from his clandestine Church under the Revolution and succeeded him as Vicar General in Lyons in 1802-3. Nevertheless, the fact that Besson should have needed to give the precise title of Linsolas shows that there were not any regular relations between Bigex and Linsolas.

C. Cholleton: was he one of the “two friends” from Lyons?

But who were the other friends from Lyons whose names were not mentioned? We can be sure that they were not known to Bigex since Besson does not take the trouble to give their names. But I think that one of them could well have been M. Cholleton, and that for reasons which I shall give below.

First of all, a material reason: M. Cholleton, the director of the Saint Irénéé seminary, was on holiday at that time: since studies did not start again till All Saints he therefore had time to go on his travels and stay at some distance from Lyons. Besides, in Lyons, he was an ecclesiastic of some standing: on top of his important post, provided by Mgr Dubourg with the powers of a

---

51 Besson’s papers, kept in the A.D. of Metz contain many letters from Vuarin to Besson.
52 Biographical notice and bibliography in “Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine, N7 8, “La Savoie”.
53 See André LATREILLE, “La question de l’administration du diocèse de Lyon (1814-1839)” in “Revue d’histoire de l’eglise de France”. T/XXX. 1944. pp 7172, the basic article on this question.
54 Ibid.
Vicar General, he made it his task to collect funds for America (an enterprise which would lead to the foundation of the Propagation of the Faith). You can see that for Besson he would be a valuable ally, worthy to be counted among his connections, although he was rather young, since he was born in 1788. Finally, and especially, when Mgr de Pins arrived, he took part in the archiepiscopal council from the first session on the 1 February 1824 and, on 1 April in the same year he was appointed third Vicar General. On 25 December 1824, he moved up to be second Vicar General. Such a promotion was not due to chance: since the arrival of Mgr de Pins was due to the efforts of Besson's party, it is clear that he is one of its outstanding elements and that he is reaping the fruits of his commitment. Moreover, in the negotiations with Besson to accept the difficult post of provisional administrator, Besson offered to be under his orders and at his side. And De Pins declared his intention of appointing the latter Vicar General, and to choose the other two. In the end, Besson, having been appointed bishop of Metz, would not become principal Vicar, but it is almost certain that these were the men who were in the entourage of Mgr De Pins. Marist documents bear witness to this in their own way: Fr Déclas (OM2, doc. 551/7) records that after the dispatch of the first letters to Rome “M. Cholleton himself was annoyed, and it would seem that he rather shared the views of his superiors (the Vicars General).” Mieussy, the family residence of Besson, situated at a good distance from Lyons, but quite near Geneva and on the border with Savoy, near Chambery where there was no scarcity of friends, was suitable for the discreet discussion of underground ecclesiastical politics with men who were picked and reliable.

This is probably how the link of Mgr Bigex with the Marists came about. We know, in fact, that Fr Cholleton remained the counsellor of the Marists after 1816 (see the historical synopsis in OM4 p 555) which is summarised by Jean Claude as follows:

“Since we have been working at the project of the Society of Mary we have always made it a point of duty to communicate our ideas and activities to M. Cholleton, your Vicar General” (letter to Mgr De Pins, 7 February 1833, OM1, doc. 264/2).

It is even possible to say that relations between Cholleton and Jean Claude Colin were particularly close, while Cholleton's attitude towards Courveille seems quite quickly to have become one of reserve. Moreover, Jean Claude Colin would have the surprise, in 1836, of finding himself superior of the Marists, whilst he was convinced that it would be Cholleton, who got only one vote: that of Jean Claude Colin.

It is certain, then, that the decision to write to Rome could not have been
taken without the consent of Cholleton. It is equally probable that the indirect strategy of writing to a cardinal had his consent and that it was he who, thanks to his good relations with Besson, was able to put the Marists in contact with Bigex. So, between Mgr Bigex and the Marists there would be two intermediaries: Cholleton, who was well acquainted with their project, and could guarantee their seriousness; Besson, who knew Cholleton well and would have no fear in recommending the Marists to Bigex. And we can presume that the matter was arranged at the time of the holiday spent by Besson and Cholleton at Mieugy, near Seyssel.

The second personage invited by Besson could well have been M. Gardette, the superior of the seminary of Saint-Irénée, who had been informed of the Marist project by Déclas since 1816 and who was to be the supporter of Fr Champagnat at critical moments in his relations with Bochard. Several other indications support this: first of all his difficult relations with Bochard, his direct superior, since he was the Vicar General in charge of seminaries; then the fact that, starting with the arrival of Mgr De Pins, he took part in the meetings of the archiepiscopal council (OM4, p 287); finally, his close relations with M. Cholleton, since the latter was the director of the seminary, while Gardette was the superior. Moreover, these relations seem to have been ones of real friendship since, in 1820, a letter from M. Gardette to M. Royer, director of the seminary at Clermont-Ferrand, indicates that together they were contemplating a journey to that town, probably during the holidays. 38 Besides, it is most probable that Mgr Bigex did not know him, for Gardette was quite a bit younger than he was (he was born in 1765); the start of his ecclesiastical career was spent at Clermont-Ferrand and during the Revolution Gardette’s activity was confined to Auvergne and in the western periphery of the diocese of Lyons where he was a teacher, then superior in the seminary of SaintJodard. He began to play an important role in the diocese only after 1812, the year in which he was appointed superior of Saint-Irénée.

This, then, would have been the redoubtable team of opponents to the Vicars General, on which the Marists seem to have decided to rely for support in future.

It could even be that Pierre Colin himself might have gone to Mieugy (Cerdon is 60 kilometres away). His biography tells us, moreover, that in 1821 he probably went to Grenoble and in 1823 to the bishop’s house in Le Puy (OM4 pp 242243) and that on the arrival of Mgr Devie at the see of Bellcy (1823) “he is, as parish priest, the official spokesman of the presbytery of Cer-

38. See in OM docs. 264/2, 271/8, 328/3, 358/1, 480, 519, 819/12, 821/18, 839/911. . . 852/10.
39. OMJ, doc. 839/9. “I would not give absolution to a person who wished to follow him”
don with the bishopric, including what concerns the Society”.

The fact that the letter bore no address and contained some rather important chronological mistakes concerning Courville could be better explained in that case. For it can be supposed that if Pierre Colin had details of a project concerning the SM, and had in particular a copy of the promise of 1816, which he himself may have been called upon to make, he was not well acquainted with Courville whereas his brother was certainly better informed. He would then have written the letter at Mieugy itself, taking advantage of Cholleton’s advice, even of Besson’s, but without having his brother to give exact dates. The advantage was that this letter would be able to reach its addressee quickly and discreetly, since the Savoyard post office at Seyssel was quite near and Besson had acquaintances capable of seeing to it. When he had been unable, at Seyssel, to have a mailed parcel of printed matter delivered to the address of Mgr Bigex, he had explained:

“I shall take advantage of some occasion to have it reach Chambéry and you will receive it (the missive) later”.

In this way the fact that Pierre Colin’s letter has no address can be explained: he could possibly have taken advantage of an “occasion”. It is also true that, in order to be accepted by Mgr Bigex it had to be accompanied by a letter of introduction from Besson and so been able to take advantage of a dispatch of two missives in one envelope.

Finally, it is not very surprising that Mgr Bigex advised writing to Cardinal Pacca. for, according to André Latreille,41 the latter, “had interested himself in the question of Lyons and had, it appears, asserted that Rome possessed ‘more bits of evidence than were needed to bring about a definite vacancy’. Mgr Bigex was certainly well-informed of the attitude of this prelate and therefore pointed the Marists towards the man they needed, because he was not in favour of Fesch.

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this commentary, we can therefore make a list of the most important points we have acquired from our criticism.

In the first place, we see that, for the Marists of 1819, their origin is certainly due to the revelation at Le Puy which consisted in the creation of a new order: “the Society of Mary”, which fact JeanClaude Colin would later strive to mask until, in 1870, a controversy on the origins established the primordial role of Courville. The letter insists on the fact that, after the signing of the promise in 1816, which summarises the plan for the Society, this revelation

was assumed, no longer by a man but by a group, which did not prevent a veritable triumvirate taking on its direction: Courveille (the chief charismatic), Cholleton (the spiritual director) and Bochard (the ecclesiastical superior).

But in 1819 the situation seems to have evolved a great deal: poorly rewarded for their submission, the members of the Marist group defied the authority of Bochard, deciding to appeal to Rome. At the same time, Courveille’s authority had weakened since he it was who had built his strategy upon an alliance with Bochard in 1816, and the Group had rejected it. That is why Courveille’s name is not uttered, why his title of superior is not mentioned, and why Pierre Colin presents himself as the spokesman of a group which has no leader. Probably for the same reason he makes no allusion to plans for a meeting at Le Puy, although this is vouched for by the witness of Décas (Doc. 551/8 and 591/10) and by a letter from the Vicar General of Le Puy in 1821 (doc. 68).

It is very probable that, in order to bring into effect this dangerous withdrawal of their obedience, the Marists obtained the support of the party opposed to Fesch and to the Vicars General, which was supported by Besson, parish priest of Saint Nizier, and had Cholleton among its adherents. It is probably through them that they were able to make contact with Mgr Bigex.

The letter shows us, therefore, that a second triumvirate, consisting of Cholleton, Jean Claude Colin and Pierre Colin, was taking the place of the first; the first-named, continuing in his role of spiritual adviser, but taking on also the function of mediator with the ecclesiastical authorities; the second tending to become (because of his drawing up of the rule) the new charismatic leader; the third, because of his position of parish priest and his close union with his brother, taking on the function of spokesman for the group. Mgr Bigex, the bishop, covered the initiatives of this triumvirate by reason of his episcopal and moral authority.

In a word, in 1819 the Marist group was still functioning in that ambiguity which is typical of the early days of religious orders: a group of equals imbued with a strong spirit of fraternity. That does not exclude the fact that at the same time it was governed by a moral authority, in this case the triumvirate, which took upon itself to promote the project. Nevertheless, in 1819 the situation was complicated by the fact that, although Bochard was put out of the game by the appeal to Rome, and Cholleton was increasingly installed as being at the orders of the group, Courveille was still there with his title of superior, recognised by the group and by the diocesan authorities. This did not hinder the fact that the process for substituting one charismatic leader with another seems to have been well under way. Pierre Colin’s letter shows signs of that tension in the Society of Mary which, although it was probably still not sensed by the group, would become stronger only in the following years. We know, in fact, that in 1820 two of its members, Verrier and Pousset, opted for Bochard by distancing themselves to his diocesan missionaries and that others, at unspecified times, distanced themselves.
ADDITIONAL MATTER TO « ORIGINES MARISTES »

The height of the ambiguity would be reached with the letter to Rome on 25 January 1822 which was signed by Courveille, as superior, and by the Colin brothers, but giving Cerdon as the place of residence. Also, is it not astonishing that Courveille should for some time hold on to the reply addressed to him from Rome and that the Colin brothers should spirit it away from him (OM4 p 255) since they considered that the document was the fruit of their work. By doing so, they continued the process of taking away from Courveille his position of charismatic leader, a process already evident in the letter of 1819 and to whose achievement the annoying conduct and misdeeds of the latter at l’Hermitage would contribute.

This letter, then, gives evidence of a decisive transformation in the SM in its early years and helps to throw light on the later documents with which we are already acquainted.

But it also brings us a fourth version of the Marist Promise of 1916, the only one which is dated, whose author is known, which is by far the earliest and is most probably most in conformity with the original.

Finally and especially, the letter confirms that this Promise is only a summary of the aim and the plan of the Society which were communicated by Courveille to his disciples. The Promise, therefore, would not be the original text of the Society of Mary. If there had not been, as certain Marists would claim later, a rule of Courveille, it seems that there did exist a plan whose author, or at least whose discloser, was Courveille. There is, then, still much research to be done on Marist origins. The discovery of this letter in archives which had already been explored, shows that it is still possible to find something.

André Lanfrey

42. See in OM4 p 532 the legend of the Jesuit of Le Puy.
Spirituality for me means my life as understood, felt, imagined, and decided upon in my relationship to my God, Jesus Christ, His Blessed Mother and the saints. My spirituality is strengthened, sustained, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The discipline required of me to live out my spirituality is contained in the Constitutions of the Marist Brothers, which helps me to experience and relate to my Brothers in Community, to the Church in my ministry, and to the wider community of people whom I call my friends.

"You know that the spirituality of a saint is the way unique to him of visualising God, of speaking with Him, of relating to Him."

Marcellin Champagnat, the Founder of the Marist Brothers, had a rather unique way of visualising God, of speaking to God in prayer and he certainly had a very special relationship with God - all developed over a life time through the early influences of family life, seminary training and finally in the work place. Champagnat left us, his Brothers, his own unique way of visualising God, Christ and Mary. He left us His own awareness of the Divine Presence

---

3 Pope Pius XI speaking to the Italian Third Order of St. Francis, 1956.
that was to influence our own relationship to every person, event and thing that we encountered. His spirituality became our Marist way of imitating Jesus and Mary and of relating to the students we teach, and the people we minister to. There is a Marist way of following the Lord. This is Champagnat's Spirituality. There is a Marist way of imitating Jesus. It is a spirituality expressed through the CRIB, the CROSS, and the ALTAR. This spirituality gives expression through the poverty in our simple living, and the obedience we profess. Champagnat has left us a Marist way that encourages us to go to Jesus through His good mother, Mary. Time and again he tells us in his conferences and letters that we, his Brothers, would find Jesus with Mary, our good Mother.

However I do not intend to look at and discuss the spirituality of Champagnat. This has been researched so well by Brother Romuald Gibson l.m.s. from New Zealand in his thesis called: "Father Champagnat: The Man and his Spirituality", Rome, 1971, and the documents "Marist Spirituality" by Brother Charles Howard, former Superior General. The question I want to research in some small way is: Where did Marcellin Champagnat receive his spirituality in the first place and what influenced him to develop this gift that he passed on to his Brothers. To do this I will reflect on

- the influences in his early life.
- the influences of the French Revolution.
- the influences of his early family life.
- the influences of his short schooling.
- the influence of his training for priesthood.

I believe that our Marist Spirituality that leads us to Jesus through Mary had its foundations in the Sulpician spirituality, which strongly influenced and shaped not only Marcellin Champagnat, but the whole Marist group, Fathers, Brothers and Sisters. It was there at the very core of Marist development. I would go so far as to suggest the pledge of Fourviere was an expression of this spirituality expressed through the culture of a post Napoleonic time and a Christology to meet the needs of the Church at that time.

While the French Revolution witnessed the decimation of the Church, it could also be said that the Revolution gave birth to many new Religious congregations. It was the dream of Jean-Claude Courveille to found a congregation dedicated to the "Good Mother" of Le Puy. Bringing this dream to fruition was the work of a group of keen, dedicated friends of Jean-Claude Courveille who were fired by the thoughts of founding a society dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. It seems to me to be of no small importance that this future Society of Mary, and what is often referred to as "The Marist Family", was

NOT the concept of one person, but of many. "The Society of Mary has this very special feature: It is not the work of one founder. Each of its different branches had its own collaborator:-

- Jeanne Marie Chavoin, the village woman.
- Marcellin Champagnat, the leader of men.
- Jean-Claude Colin, the enterprising visionary.
- Francoise Perroton, the lone missionary.
- and finally, the ten pioneers who assured the continuation of her work.'.

Yet the insights, inspiration and development of the four principal founders came quite independently with Courville attaching himself to Champagnat, the leader. Father Antoine Forisster, S.M. in his book "For a Marian Church" has this to say about the four Founders:

- Jean-Marie Chavoin's insights are connected with her village and the life she lives there.
- Marcellin Champagnat's insights were Marian and linked with his village life. He was determined to help children in rural and small towns from experiencing the difficulties he had himself through an inadequate teacher and catechism taught by a mocking priest.
- Jean-Claude Colin's main thrust is spiritual. His insights seem to develop from the early church and in particular "Mary in the Midst of the Apostles".
- Francoise Perroton's insight was missionary. She got to know certain elements of the Marist Spirituality and she developed these into what was soon to be called her "pastoral ministry".4

So from the idea of a Society of the Blessed Virgin envisaged by the Le Puy curate, it was Colin, Chavoin, Perroton and CHAMPAGNAT who gave the concept a practical birth. The twelve seminarians who gathered at the shrine of Our Lady of Fourviere on 23rd July 1816 were Marcellin Champagnat, Jean-Claude Colin, J.C. Courville, Etienne Declas, Philippe Janvier, J.A. Gillbirt, J.B. Seyve, Etienne Terraillon and four other seminarians. Jean-Claude Colin regarded this day as the foundation of the Society that was to develop from this humble beginning.5 Eight of the twelve were graduates of the Seminary of St. Irenaeus. Brother Stephen Farrell in his very scholarly thesis "Achievement from the Depths" points out that there were fifteen original Marist enthusiasts in 1815.6 By July 1816 only twelve made the pledge. After ordination they were appointed to various places as far flung as the mis-

---

1 For a Marian Church, Fr. Antoine Forisster, S.M., back cover.
2 For a Marian Church, Fr. Antoine Forisster, S.M., pages 229 - 234.
3 For a Marian Church, Fr. Antoine Forisster, S.M., page
4 Achievement from the Depths, Br. Stephen Farrell, f.m.s., page 47.
sions in North America. By the time Father Colin had the priests officially rec

ognised by the Church, Champagnat, Colin, Courville, Terraillon and Declas remained of the original fifteen and the Fourviere twelve.

In his early years at St. Irenaeus, Marcellin Champagnat was an active member of the Marian group that had formed around Jean-Claude Courville. While keen on the idea of a society dedicated to Mary, he brought another dimension to the discussions and meetings that probably grew out of his own lack of education. "We must have Brothers" he would repeat, "We must have Brothers!" Marcellin seemed to identify the unhappy experiences of his adolescent years with the new ideas that were been put forward by the group he had just joined. Father Antoine Forisster in his book "For a Marian Church" quotes a report drawn up in 1834 by Champagnat. "Born in the township of .........I learnt to read and write only thanks to much suffering due to incompetent teachers." I reflect another saint who at this time was also coming to terms with her learning and adolescent years. Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes spoke a dialect of her native district, as did Marcellin Champagnat. Bernadette was a sickly youngster, whereas Marcellin was a strapping, robust young man with farmer's blood running through his veins. Both had learning difficulties. Bernadette was refused first Holy Communion because she couldn't learn, nor remember. Marcellin was told not to apply for the seminary because he did not show much capacity for serious study. It is interesting that both these "uneducated" saints were wonderful instruments in the Lord's hands for spreading devotion to the Mother of God! Both came from large families and both related well within their families and with their peers. Bernadette withdrew to a life of prayer in an enclosed convent. Marcellin's influence was also to be world wide in making Jesus known through Mary. The other members of the Courville group were not particularly interested nor impressed by Marcellin's call for teaching Brothers and so he was left to see it through. Later on he would refer to "the branch of Marist Brothers which had been confided to him in 1816!"

Now the original fifteen, the Fourviere twelve and the final five Marists were all educated and graduates from both the minor seminary at Verrières and the seminary of St. Irenaeus ..... Sulpician in both prayer and attitude to church and theology. The Sulpician Fathers had been expelled from the seminaries by Napoleon, but those who replaced them were taught, trained and influenced by the Sulpician Fathers.
THE PRIESTS OF ST. SUPLICE AND THEIR SPIRITUALITY

Founded by Jean Jacques Olier, this group of priests bear the name SULPICIAN, a symbol of the predominance of Saint Sulpice, the place. Saint Sulpice was simply the original locus of a dynamic reform movement in the religious formation of priests. It is the story of the foundation of a seminary community called St. Sulpice. It involves a personal conversion experience of Jean Jacques Olier "that led to his creation of a method for religious formation of priests". His reforms were in accord with the general aceticism infused into French counter-Reformation spirituality. He spoke out strongly against Jansenism and

- He defended the practice of frequent Communion.9 Const. 25, 27, 69
- He spoke out in favour of the Sacrament of Reconciliation being frequently received 10 Const. 25, 72, 88.
- He supported and introduced regular and annual Retreats11 Const. 15.1, 73.2, 55.6).
- Olier's aceticism did not strongly stress physical mortification for his followers12 Const. 26, 30, 59, 72, 166.

The daily program introduced by Olier to St. Sulpice included.

a) Daily attendance at Eucharist.
   b) Meditation.
   c) Spiritual Reading and particular reading.
   d) Daily recitation of the Rosary.
   e) Several hours of Divine Office.

All of these are to be found in the Constitutions of the Marist Brothers and in Canon Law No. 66313.

f) Olier centralised all authority in the Superior and his counsellors14 Const. 118, 154.

g) Olier's way of life was
   - one of simplicity
   - mental prayer
   - particular devotion to the Real Presence

---

in the Blessed Sacrament.
devotion to Our Blessed Lady
Saint Joseph
Saint John the Baptist

h) Support for all ecclesiastical authority in Rome Const. 10, 40
i) The need for Spiritual Direction Const. 115

By the time Champagnat was born, 1789, Jacques-Andre Emery had been elected to be Superior General and Superior of the seminary of Saint Sulpice (1782). This was the Grande Seminaire. Emery was highly regarded and is "so identified with the revival of the Society of Saint Sulpice that he may be viewed as embodying the original charism of Olier." During the Reign of Terror (1793-1794) Emery was twice imprisoned and due to the massacres of eight Sulpicians he dispersed many of the remaining priests, many of whom emigrated. Remaining in Paris, Emery continued to defend the oath to liberty, equality and fraternity. On release from prison, he became the leading French ecclesiastic residing in France and extraordinarily loyal to Rome. It was during these years (1790-1801) that the seminaries attended by Marcellin Champagnat were restaffed with priests from, or who had been educated at the seminary of St. Sulpice.

THE INFLUENCES IN MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT'S EARLY LIFE

Once when his aunt was speaking to the child's mother about the events of the time and the evils of the Revolution, little Marcellin said to her: "Aunt, what is the Revolution, is it a man or a beast?" "Poor child", replied the nun weeping, "may God keep you from knowing from experience what the Revolution is. It is more cruel than any beast."

It would seem that Marcellin, aged seven years, had been taken to Le Puy by his mother and some relatives to celebrate the "Jubilee". This particular festival occurred when the 25th March feast of the Annunciation fell on the Good Friday of that year, 1796. The incident is recorded by Brother Jean Baptist in his Life of the Founder (L.p.5 and V.p.26).

Born just prior to the outbreak of the French Revolution, Marcellin's early years and adolescence were without a doubt influenced by the turmoil. Because his family was fairly stable and the fact they lived in a rural area

\footnotesize{Tradition and Transformation in Catholic Culture. C. Kauffman, page 23.}
\footnotesize{Tradition and Transformation in Catholic Culture. C. Kauffman, page 20.}
\footnotesize{Tradition and Transformation in Catholic Culture. C. Kauffman, page 33.}
\footnotesize{Tradition and Transformation in Catholic Culture. C. Kauffman, pages 37, 38.}
\footnotesize{Tradition and Transformation in Catholic Culture. C. Kauffman, pages 38.}
seemed to project a positive family attitude and influence rather than one that was fairly traumatic. Marcellin’s dad seemed to have been an outgoing, well educated and a pretty caring type of man. He was certainly involved in the Revolution within his district and no doubt young Marcellin would have been well aware of that because his dad was away "on business" a lot. That his family exercised a big influence, a wonderfully positive influence in fact, could be gauged on his own insistence that the community of Brothers should be modelled on that of the family.20 This concept of Marist life is very strongly promoted in Marist schools in Australia ..... the Marist Family. "We are drawn into unity around Mary, Our Good Mother as members of her family".21 Family is mentioned in the Constitutions no less than twenty-five times!

The Champagnat family was quite self sufficient. They were farmers, not in any big way, but they were able to produce most of what they needed. Marcellin’s dad was "jack-of-all trades": a farmer dealing mainly in grain, a miller, a carpenter, a mason and a blacksmith. Marcellin was to use some of these skills later in his building projects. It could be said that Marcellin’s dad was a good father model and "a man of the house".

There were also two women of the house. They had enormous influence on Marcellin’s up-bringing, particularly his faith development and the extraordinary reverence he showed to anything attached to God, be it in prayer, liturgy or behaviour in his relationships with family members and his friends. This was to be translated later in his care and concern for his brothers. It has been said that he was the "Benjamin" of the Champagnat tribe, and "although Marie Champagnat tenderly loved all her children, she had a special affection for young Marcellin, not so much because he was the youngest, as for a conviction she had that he would one day do great things for God".22

No doubt he got plenty of catechism and good example from both his mother and his aunt. His religious knowledge and understanding would have come from his aunt who was a refugee nun from the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Le Puy. No doubt it was this good aunt who prepared Marcellin for First Holy Communion. Probably it was this same aunt who taught Marcellin how to read and write and I would suspect she would have confronted him about his drop-out from school at the tender age of eight!23

Needless to say, Marcellin had all the attention of three older girls in the family as well. I can certainly identify with that. He apparently related to his other brothers well because there is reference that at the age of fifteen he formed a plan to extend his little sheep trading business, to take one of his brothers into partnership.24

---

21 Constitutions, No.9.
22 An expression used by the Poet Joyce Kilmer in his poem Joseph.
24 Life, page 5.

40
The influence of his family on Marcellin was tremendous. By the time he decided to go and study for the priesthood, he had acquired discipline, great confidence in decision making, a strong faith and a great devotion of Mary, the Mother of God. This was apparent to members of his family for the story relates that it was Marcellin's brothers who "dubbed" him in to the priest who came to the Champagnat homestead seeking a vocation to the priesthood. Marcellin's mother is to play an important role of support for her young son in the early days at the minor Seminary of Verrieres.

We know little about the life of Marcellin between the age of eight and fifteen. In some ways there seems to be a parallel between Marcellin and the New Testament story of Jesus in his adolescent years. Jesus is called to public life after a hidden life. Marcellin is called to ministry at the age of sixteen when he begins preparation for the priesthood. There are those hidden years in both their lives. Matthew's Gospel 2:13-22 tells us about Jesus, a refugee from his homeland, totally dependent on Joseph and Mary for his human survival. Marcellin is totally dependent on his mother and a refugee aunt for his human survival against the tyranny of the French Revolution. The Holy Family depended so totally on God for protection against the evil of Herod. It was to God that the Champagnat family turned for help and protection in their time of trouble. Jesus finds himself in the temple. There is a youthful zest about this visit or as the Gospel refers to it as "the loss in the temple". Marcellin has but a few short hours in the classroom. Both return home to begin the immediate preparation for the will of the Father. And in Matthew 2:23 and Luke 2:39-40, we are left wondering about such things as: when did Mary tell Jesus the story of his birth? How did she teach about God, His heavenly Father? How did the thought of His future mission take place? Why did He spend most of his early childhood and adolescent years in obscurity? Could not the same or certainly similar questions apply to Marcellin? Both faced pain and suffering and eventually death in order to achieve their life long mission for the sake of the Kingdom.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION ON YOUNG MARCELLIN

The fact that Marcellin asked what the Revolution was, indicates that he was aware even at a tender age that it was happening and that it was affecting not only his own family but those around about him. Marcellin's first ten years coincided with the first ten years of the French Revolution.² Several things stand out that must have had at least some influence on Marcellin:

² Achievement from the Depths, Br. Stephen Farrell, f.m.s., page 10.
the total involvement of his father. He was away for much of the time.

- Shelter in his own home for two religious sisters closely related to him.27

- Secret Masses in homes and not in the local church.

- Attendance at the local civic ceremony, most likely monthly.

- Shortage of food generally.

- Desecration of the church and the sacred vessels.

- Fear that existed among the local community

As Marcellin grew up he would have become aware of the problems of poverty, "with vices, abuses and disorders existing in the parish, drunkenness (the taverns were crowded every night), dances, nocturnal gatherings, cursing, blaspheming, and the reading of bad books, the greater part of the people rarely attending the Church ceremonies, there was no schoolmaster".28

In spite of all this Marcellin’s father was a pretty strong man. We know that he was prudent and skilful in handling affairs both at home and in the district29 and Marcellin learnt from him how to be diplomatic with people, something that was to stand him in good stead later on.

It would appear that Marcellin came through the era of the French Revolution very well balanced and prepared for the future. His home life was his Moses experience and the Champagnat farm the sacred place where he approached the Lord ... a preparation, away from the struggle of the ordinary people in public life, for greater things to come. "Marcellin Champagnat will always have this sign about him of finding the right tool or stone for the building and putting it in its own particular place in that building. This will be seen in his spirituality. Of all the Marist Founders, he will be the one with the best Christological approach." 30

THE INFLUENCE OF HIS TRAINING AT THE SEMINARIES 31

Father Champagnat's power for good was largely determined by his training in the Seminaries of Verrieres and St. Irenaeus, Lyons. One would suspect that it was from St. Irenaeus that he derived his principles of life and action. It can be said that Marcellin Champagnat was the fruit, both in the spiritual and apostolic sense, of Sulpician formation given at Lyons, in spite of the expulsion of the Fathers by Napoleon.

28 Achievement from the Depths, Br. Stephen Farrell, f.m.s., page 21.
29 Father Jean Coste, S.M., Lecture given at Hunters Hill N.S.W., December 1972.
30 Notes compiled by Brother Owen Kavanagh, f.m.s. and kindly made available by Brother Frederick McMahon, f.m.s.
"In the year 1811, as a punishment for their devotedness to the Holy See, the Sulpicians were again driven out and could not return till 1816." However, at Lyons, under the protection of Cardinal Fesch himself, the spirit of St. Sulpice would be maintained by Fathers Gardette, Cholleton, Cattet and Mioland. "The major seminary, known both from the number and quality of its students, was at the same time the meeting place of all the trendy ideas of the times, and the rallying point for all those men who were working for a religious renaissance. It is in this atmosphere, exceptional for several reasons, that must be placed the two projects of new foundation that came to birth then at St. Irenaeus." (O.M.1,167) It is in this light that we must watch and judge Marcellin Champagnat.

Champagnat mixed with too extraordinary a group of young people not to have been affected and motivated. Men of the calibre of Colin, Peter Julian Eymard, Peter Chanel, John Mary Vianney, and of course the four who survived the Fourvierre pledge were but some who influenced him. Looking at the men coming out of St. Irenaeus, we find that they possessed the main ideas of Sulpicians:

- the ideas of God highly developed.
- a very lively reverence for God.
- a hatred of sin as an offence against God.
- self denial carried to the limit, but with the purpose of sharing in the mystery of Christ.
- love of the three first places at the Crib, the Cross and the Altar.
- deep devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.
- total consecration to Jesus and Mary.
- devotion to the Angels and Saints.
- zeal for the apostolate in the very heart of the people by the same means of Catechism and charitable works.
- devotion to the Blessed Sacrament
- devotion to the Most Holy Virgin as mediatrix.
- the same love for humility.

All this is SULPICIAN, and all this is found in Marcellin Champagnat and his companions in the seminary. This likewise is found as the normal and logical result in the formation of our first Brothers.

Marcellin gave his Brothers the method of prayer of St. Sulpice, and their method of Catechism. Brother Sylvester who lived many years with Marcellin and had personal contact with him wrote in his souvenirs: "He had in Father Gardette, his Superior, a model in regularity that had become proverbial, for several times I heard Father say that he was the rule incarnate".
Likewise, Marcellin was admired for the scrupulous manner in which he observed it. He found this rule so wise that he took it as a model for the one he gave to his Brothers. Several candidates, who before they entered the Novitiate at the Hermitage had spent some time at the seminary, said the Brothers rule was very similar in devotion, the same exercises of piety as at the major seminary and they saw in Marcellin the regularity of their former superior, Father Gardette.

So Marcellin came from the seminary with this rather tight formation, but as curate he was known to be sympathetic and very compassionate in the confessional. A witness, Brother Theodose says: "Father Champagnat disapproved of rigorism which destroys charity in the communities". In the Informative Process we find evidence like this: "Father Champagnat heard many confessions at Lavalla. People sought him by preference. There were always more for him to hear than for any other priest with whom he lived. In this direction he was very paternal." Elsewhere, "Father Champagnat heard a great number of confessions. At Lavalla almost everybody; at the Hermitage, three quarters of the Brothers. During my novitiate days I followed his eminently paternal advice. In confession he was kind, full of sympathy, and so encouraging that this exercise, usually so painful to human nature, was, with him as confessor, pleasant and even attractive. One of his parishioners, a Francis Courbon, made the point: "He knew how to restore everyone's courage by his words so full of faith and of confidence in God". Apparently, similar stories and testimonies are plentiful. Reading the Informative Process one is struck by the many depositions on the great goodness of Marcellin Champagnat in the confessional. It seems pretty certain that Marcellin, while maintaining his spirit of humility, of charity and devotedness to the poor, and living an intense Marial life, knew also how to avoid rigorism. I must say that this differs a lot from the impression I took from the lectures we were given as novices and young Brothers!

It is interesting to note that Father Champagnat was already dead when Father Colin directive was sent out: "St Thomas for dogma, St. Liguori for Morality, St. Francis De Sales for asceticism." These were the three masters Father Colin wished his priests to follow. Brother Sylvester says that Father Champagnat already knew these authors: "...he often quoted them in his conferences."

In November of 1813 Marcellin entered the major seminary. His life is beginning to take final shape. The Cure of Ars, Jean Claude Colin, Peter Julian Eymard, Cardinal Donnet and many others; a Father Duplay who was a friend of Marcellin's, who played an important role at Lyons as superior of the major seminary, all these men were formed in the same mould and had the same values in their life, the same principles, the same spiritual and apostolic outlook, the same striking virtues, and even at times the same phrases. All were formed by Father Gardette, superior and educator. His authority would
appear to have come from his title of Confessor of the Faith. There was the “martyr” about the man since he was one of the few to survive the convict ships at Rochefort. He was a man who knew how to inspire respect by his uprightness, piety, devotedness and his fidelity to the ideals he proposed to others. Helped by the four other priests on the staff, Father Gardette who was Sulpician at heart, drummed into the seminarians the Sulpician spirit and a zeal for the work of the kingdom. Of course, there were many complaints from Father Bochard who did not like the Sulpicians and particularly their loyalty to Rome. (OM 1 177-8) Bochard of course was a Gallican and he was anything but friendly to friends of the Sulpicians and of Rome. This was to the advantage of Father Champagnat. Champagnat knew where he was going and Bochard knew precisely where Father Champagnat stood.

Father Champagnat esteemed and venerated his former superior and he had great confidence in him. It is recorded that Father Gardette stood behind Father Champagnat in very difficult times. Hence Champagnat acquired his spirit. Father Gardette was a wonderful benefactor of the Marist Brothers because he supported the Brothers in times of crises and it was he who formed and gave us Father Champagnat as the raw zealous inexperienced curate of Lavalla. Father Champagnat was without a doubt, “a true son of St. Sulpice”.

FATHER CHOLLETON

The Marist group at the seminary had Father Cholleton as their confidant and spiritual director. His influence was at least as great as Father Gardette. These were difficult times for the fledgling group and it was to Father Cholleton that they turned for counsel, protection against attacks and for support. It is recorded that he refused the honour of a bishopric on four occasions and finally joined the Marist group. Later he became a Novice Master capable of forming true Marists.

As for Father Champagnat, he did nothing without disclosing his plans to Father Cholleton, who knew from the beginning all the projects of our Founder. He certainly didn’t hide his sympathy from others and he openly supported Champagnat. In 1824, it was Father Cholleton who came to bless the first stone of the Hermitage when other priests were saying that Champagnat was quite mad!

Father Cholleton was the Professor of Moral Theology at the seminary. He was a very competent teacher apparently and practised what he preached. No doubt one could trace Father Champagnat’s moral stance to dancing and immorality to the teachings in his Moral Theology classes as well as the reaction to the immorality encouraged by the Revolution.
Father Cholleton was Gallican before he became a Marist and it says a lot about the man that he did not influence the early Marists in any way. He must have been a very open person, broad minded and a good listener. Brother Sylvester says of Father Champagnat: "Not only did he believe in the infallibility of the Pope - and this was long before the definition - but he wished the Brothers to teach it to the children." Father Champagnat had a kind of natural aversion for Gallicanism which was the "in thing" around the Diocese of Lyons. In his relationship with the Vicar-General, Father Bochard, there was much suffering as a result of his stance. Probably this could explain why Champagnat wrote to two Bishops and said: "All the dioceses of the world enter into our views." It certainly shows the foresight and magnanimity of the man, Champagnat.

I suggest that Marcellin Champagnat was well ahead of his time - certainly forward thinking as far as the Church of his time. I mention just a few points:

a) His loyalty to the Papacy, well before the document on Infallibility was promulgated.

b) Encouraging and recommending the early Brothers to attend daily Eucharist.

c) Encouraging and recommending the early Brothers to receive Holy Communion regularly, even daily. Pope Pius X's statement on this subject came much later.

d) Devotion to Our Blessed Lady and the Saints, was the basis of his prayer life. The extraordinary relationship between Jesus, Mary and himself.

e) Devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

f) Wishing his Brothers should have first place at the Crib, the Cross and the Altar.

g) Devotion to the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

h) Humility and Simplicity should be seen as characteristics of his Brothers.

All these are Sulpician in essence and Father Champagnat engendered these and many other ideas in his early Brothers, and they were later written into our first Constitutions.

Br Kostka Chute, f.m.s.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

1) For a Marian Church: Marist Founders and Foundresses, by Father Antoine Forisster, S.M., 1992
2) Tradition and Transformation in Catholic Culture, 1988
   The Priests of St. Sulpice in the United States from 1791 to the present day.
4) Achievement from the Depths: Brother Stephen Farrell, f.m.s.
5) Travellers in Hope, Brother Frederick McMahon, f.m.s.
6) Constitutions and Statutes of the Marist Brothers of the Schools, Rome 1986.
7) Life of Marcellin Champagnat, Brother Jean Baptiste, f.m.s.
8) Notes from Brother Own Kavanagh, f.m.s.

APPENDIX

A NOTE ON THE SULPICIANS

The Sulpician is a diocesan priest dedicated to the spiritual direction of those called to Holy Orders. It is a support group for priests, NOT a religious order or congregation.

St. Sulpice is a place. It is the original place of a dynamic reform movement in religious formation of priests in France. Jean-Jacques Olier de Verneuil was of an aristocratic family, founder and prime mover in this movement. He was educated in the classics at the Jesuit College, Lyons and graduated in philosophy at Harcourt College, Paris. He subsequently completed his theological studies at the Sorbonne. In 1631, Olier placed himself under the spiritual direction of St. Vincent de Paul. At the age of twenty-five, he was ordained. In his work he came under the influence of Oratorians founded by St. John Eudes. These priests were committed to the poor of the district. Having worked on the evangelising of the poor people, he decided to live in community with several other diocesan priests. This was in 1640. The group embodied the spirituality of the Oratorians
and their prayer form. This was the humble beginning of the Society of Saint Sulpice. After some difficulties a retreat house was set up at Chartres, but this failed. Eventually in the spring of 1642, Olier was installed as pastor in the parish of Saint Suplice, a parish located in the district of Saint Germain. Saint Sulpice became synonymous with the reform of the French clergy. It was from this place that a new Sulpician way of life developed - a Sulpician spirituality that affected the lives of our early Marist founders and foundresses, especially Marcellin Champagnat. Constitutions and Statutes spell out for us how we are to live out this commitment in community life and in the apostolic ministry entrusted to us by the Church through our General Chapter. Our Marist Spirituality guides us and directs us towards God, for "unless you become perfect, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven".

The Constitutions of the Marist Brothers were ratified by Rome before the Code of Canon Law, promulgated by Pope Benedict XV in 1917. Religious Orders prayed the Breviary, did manual work and developed their scholarship. Lay Institutes such as the Marist Brothers, pray part of the Breviary, have adopted various devotions as part of their prayer style, do manual work and are involved in apostolic ministries that take them outside their communities. The Sulpicians had developed and incorporated a spirituality that was collectic. Because Father Champagnat had been so influenced by the Sulpicians he incorporated much of their prayer style into our early Brothers. Father Champagnat was collectic! It is interesting to note that the recent Code of Canon Law, 1983, brought in line with the changes of Vatican 2, has included many of the religious practices common to most lay institutes and already included in our first draft of the Marist Constitutions. It shows that Father Champagnat was on safe ground, forward thinking and certainly supportive of Roman authority.

I include Cannon 662, 663 and 664 for your perusal.

**THE OBLIGATIONS AND RIGHTS OF INSTITUTES AND OF THEIR MEMBERS**

Can. 662 Religious are to find their supreme rule of life in the following of Christ as proposed in the Gospel and as expressed in the constitutions of their own institute.

Can. 663 §1 The first and principal duty of all religious is to be the contemplation of things divine and constant union with God in prayer.

§2 Each day the members are to make every effort to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice, receive the most holy Body of Christ and adore the Lord himself present in the Sacrament.

§3 They are to devote themselves to reading the sacred Scriptures and to mental prayer. In accordance with the provisions of their own law, they are to
celebrate the liturgy of the hours worthily, without prejudice to the obligation of clerics mentioned in Can. 276, 2, n.3. They are also to perform other exercises of piety.

§4 They are to have a special devotion to the Virgin Mother of God, the example and protectress of all consecrated life, including by way of the rosary.

§5. They are faithfully to observe the period of annual retreat.

Can. 664 Religious are earnestly to strive for the conversion of soul to God. They are to examine their consciences daily, and to approach the sacrament of penance frequently.
In a previous issue of Marist Notebooks (N° 7) I developed the idea that the first Society of Mary, constituted at La Valla and the Hermitage before 1826, was probably influenced by the Trappist model. I based this argument on the letter which Father Courveille wrote from the Trappist Monastery of Aiguebelle on 4th June 1826, in which he described at length this monastery where he had found refuge before offering to separate himself from the Society of Mary.

Having pursued this research further, I am now in a position to provide proof of this Trappist influence. Courveille was unquestionably influenced by Abbot Rancé, the celebrated 17th century reformer of La Trappe. However, I have not been able to make further progress on verifying the influence of de Lestrange, its 18th century reformer. In my previous article I probably attached too much importance to this hero of the resistance to the Revolution and the Empire.
Life and works of Rancé

Born in 1626 into one of the great aristocratic families of France, Armand-Jean le Bouthillier de Rancé was ordained priest in 1651. He led the life of a worldly ecclesiastic, ardently devoted to fencing and hunting while at the same time maintaining a rather suspect relationship with a young and dissolute widow, Mme de Montbazon. The death of this lady and that of the Duke of Orleans, to whom he was chaplain, set off a slow process of conversion. In 1663 he entered the novitiate of the strict observance. Having completed his novitiate he became Abbot Regular of the Abbey of Notre Dame de la Trappe in Normandy which he set about reforming. He died in 1700 having resigned his charge several years before.

Abbot Rancé left about fifteen published works and thousands of letters. He was one of the great writers of the 17th century. Among his most important works are: «On the Holiness and the Duties of the Monastic Life» (1683); «Elucidation of Some Difficulties Raised Concerning the Book ‘On the Holiness and the Duties of the Monastic Life’» (1685), in which he answers some objections raised to his first work, which many had found too rigid; «The Rule of Saint Benedict Newly Translated and Explained According to its True Spirit» (1689); «Accounts of the Life and Death of Some Religious of the Abbey of La Trappe» (1696). These works, particularly the last, went through several editions in the 18th century, helping to give birth to a veritable Trappist myth. Supplanting the Carthusian, the Trappist came to be regarded by several of the spiritual elite as the perfect Christian, while others persisted in maintaining that these penitent and farming monks were too lacking in humanity and, consequently, in spirituality.

Biographies of Rancé were published very soon after his death in 1700. During the course of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, they succeeded in giving to this remarkable man an exceptional stature in French Catholicism. The first was the work of Father de Maupeou in 1702; the second was «The Life of Dom Armand Bouthillier de Rancé» by Abbot Marsollier, published in 1703; the third «Life of Reverend Father Dom Armand Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé, abbot and reformer of the House of God, Notre Dame de la Trappe of the Strict Observance of the Order of Citeaux», is the work of Dom Pierre Le Nain, former assistant prior of the said abbey, published in 1715'. To these biographies we must add the two volumes of «Letters of Piety written to various people by the Rev. Fr. Dom Armand Jean Bouthillier de Rancé»², published in 1701 and 1702, which Courveille had certainly read.

---

¹ In 1844, Chateaubriand, one of the great French writers of the century, published a life of Rancé largely inspired by those of the 18th century.
² Paris, Muguet 1701 and 1702.
Courveille and the letters of Rancé

It is in these letters that I found the most evident signs of Rancé’s influence on the letter written by Courveille on 4th June 1826 at Aiguebelle, which is, in fact, largely a collage of quotations from Rancé. For example in Letter LXXI addressed to an anonymous brother, (Lettres de piété, Vol. 1 p 330) Rancé expresses himself thus:

"Our separation has caused me more distress than I am able to convey to you, and there is scarcely anything in this world which would be less hard and more bearable (sic). However, we must acquiesce to the guiding hand of God, allow ourselves to be led to the upward path and place ourselves at the disposition of his Providence. I assure you that wherever It sends you, you will be just as much present to us, and your well-being as dear to us as it has always been. Nothing will break the bonds of charity by which God has willed that we be united. We will be praying incessantly for you as for the rest of our brothers, but among them you will always have a special place in my heart."

Father Courveille seems to borrow from this letter on two occasions:

"I believe that it would be more useful to the dear Society and to the august Mary if I were not there; and though it would be for me a very painful thing to see myself excluded from it, nevertheless, for its greater good and for its greater service, I am ready to do everything that is within the will of God. Whatever the outcome, I dare to assure you that I will never lose sight of it, and that it will always be infinitely dear to me; that I will recommend it incessantly to the Lord and pray continually and in a very particular way for all its present members and all those who may join it in the future [...]\"

"I can assure you, and the august Mary is my witness, that I am sincerely attached to you, that you all have a special place in my heart and it will be one of my greatest trials to see myself separated from you; however, my belief that the greater good and service of the dear, the very dear Society of Mary is involved leads me accept everything." [...]

But the letters of Rancé also inspired the first paragraph of Courveille’s:

"I am unable to tell you how happy I am with my pilgrimage to the holy house of Notre Dame de la Trappe. I have found here a holy peace of soul. I have fulfilled the promise I made to God and I am now resolved."

Courveille seems to have drawn inspiration from the XVIIith of the Letters of Piety in which Rancé announces to one of his friends that he has just made profession:

"I know well that I have knocked at the only door which was open to me. It was for me the only way of entering into the peace of Christ. [...] I will try to practise that constant fidelity which my heart promised him a thousand times before my mouth made any public protestations [...]

52
In "the letter to Br.**" already quoted, Rancé evoked the same themes:

"I have asked the Rev. Fr. Abbot N... to give you some place in which you can render to God, in peace and repose, what you have promised him."

In letter LX, to a nun in a lax monastery who intended to change observance and monastery, Rancé recommends:

"My feeling is that you must search for some other place where you can acquit yourself of the duties of your profession and render to God what you have promised him."

Twice again in the same letter he refers to promises made to God.

It seems, then, that in the light of Rancé’s letters we can interpret the words of Courveille as expressing the feelings of a person consecrated to God who, up until that time, had not lived in a way befitting this consecration and who, in consequence, had not known peace. He had come to La Trappe to lead at last a life consistent with his consecrated state and to gain the peace that God gives to faithful souls.

Courveille clearly draws inspiration once more from letter LXXIV of Rancé:

"The union (at La Trappe) is so close between all the brothers and the one whom God has given them as superior, however unworthy he may be, that one can say that there is only Cor Unum et Anima Una" [...] 

It finds its echo (§8) in these terms:

"I have not been any less struck by this perfect union which reigns between them, by this charity worthy of the early Church which united all the Christians in Cor Unum et Anima Una" [...] 

Finally, another clear allusion to a letter of Rancé is found in two passages of Courveille - §13 and §16:

"I will not conceal from you, my dearly loved brothers, that for some time I have been greatly distressed on seeing how little regularity there is among us, and how many different opinions we hold on the purpose, the form, the intentions and the spirit of the true Society of Mary. [...] I carry you all very dearly in my heart."

Now, in August 1665, Rancé, who was in Rome at the time, writes to his brothers at La Trappe who, in his absence, were in revolt against the prior, accusing him of making them return to the mitigated rule:

"I will not speak to you at all about the distress I suffered in reading the letters which informed me that your house was not completely in that state of peace, union and concord which is so necessary, and which I had hoped it would preserve during my absence. You will easily imagine my distress if you are convinced that I carry all of you deep in my heart."

---

1 Vie Rancé by Marsollier, Book 3, Chap. 1, p. 231.
But Courveille seems to have been also influenced by the biographies of Rancé. In his life, Marsollier relates:

"His religious finally arrived at a perfect humility, and the love of humiliations was so deeply engraved on their hearts that they were, so to speak, insatiable for them. [...] The abbot for his part [...] was continually occupied in combating [pride] in himself and in his brothers. On every occasion, in every encounter, in every place, and in the smallest matters, he would humiliate them, reprove them and impose a penance."  

Courveille simply transposed this to paragraph 7 of his letter:

"The Superior seems to devote himself to mortifying and humiliating his subjects on every occasion, and his subjects appear to receive these humiliations with such respect, such humility, one would almost say, such holy avidity, that one is convinced that they love to be treated thus, and that they are quite content to allow the Superior entire liberty over their conduct.[...]

The influence of Jean Climaque

When Rancé reformed La Trappe his sole purpose was to restore the rule of Saint Benedict in its original purity. In his treatise, "On the Sanctity and the Duties of the Monastic Life", he claims that monasticism was instituted by Jesus Christ, that the apostles were the first solitaries before being the first martyrs. So, monastic rules were not human inventions but "laws written by the finger of God" and "religious have the happiness of fulfilling in the Church of God the place of the martyrs, and of imitating the perfection of the apostles". Rancé refers then to primitive monasticism, that of Saint Paul and Saint Anthony. He attaches a particular importance to Saint Jean Climaque, an eastern monk who lived between 575 and 650 in the Sinai Desert, and who was the author of "The Holy Ladder" whose thirty rungs were destined to lead the monk to perfection. Translated into Latin in the Middle Ages, this treatise went through several editions in French during the 17th and 18th centuries.

In paragraph 2 of his letter from Aiguebelle, Father Courveille shows that he had read "The Holy Ladder":

"It is true that you do not find in these good religious that great knowledge which, as the Apostle says, puffs up the heart, but on the other hand I can assure you that you do find among them the true knowledge of the saints, which is the only thing necessary for salvation, and of which I have not acquired even the first elements, although I am very much of an idiot in everything."  

---

1 ibid. Book 3, Ch. 12, p 307.
2 See Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, article on: Jean Climaque.
3 Rancé, in a letter (Life by Dom Pierre Le Nain, p 96) make a similar statement: «I am a doctor, but I do not know the alphabet of Christianity: the ignorant carry away the Kingdom of Heaven, while I perish with all my doctrine and knowledge.»
He is merely lifting a sentence that occurs in the 26th rung of the Ladder:

"Ah! Let us take care that after having studied long we are not still found at a rudimentary level of spiritual and religious knowledge [...] For this is the real alphabet of those who want to acquire religious science: A - obedience, B - fasting [...]."

But there is another term that Rancé and Courville have borrowed from Jean Climaque, namely, the expression "peace of soul". The 29th rung of Jean Climaque is devoted to this and defines it as follows:

"This is really impassible and can be recognised as such; it renders his flesh incorruptible, raises his intellect above creatures and brings his senses under perfect control; it keeps his soul in the presence of the Lord, drawing it incessantly toward Him with a fervour that goes beyond its own powers."

The letter of Father Courville betrays then, even in its form, the double influence of Rancé and Jean Climaque. But it is above all the spirit of his letter which bears the influence of these two writers, and this is what I would like to demonstrate now.

**How to discern the will of God according to Jean Climaque and Rancé**

After having described with admiration La Trappe of Aiguebelle, Father Courville then comes to the main purpose of his letter:

"Now, my very dear and respected Brothers, I am going to open up my heart to you and let you share my feelings, in order to consult you and beg you to address fervent prayers to the divine Jesus and the divine Mary, so that they may let you know what would be to their greater glory, and that I may not act on my own will but according to their holy will."

This proposition is addressed not only to the Fathers at the Hermitage but also the "very dear and respected Brothers" and he is careful to add as postscript: "I wish my letter to be read to the whole community", which seems to have been done. The inspiration of such a manner of proceeding seems to me to come from the 26th rung of "The Ladder" of Jean Climaque which treats "of discernment". Paragraph 96, in particular, recommends a line of conduct that Courville seems to have followed:.

"Those who wish to know the will of God must first mortify themselves. Then, after having prayed to God with faith and a simplicity devoid of mal-

---

1 This text comes from the translation (into French, Tr.) of Peyronnet in 1859. There is a difficulty in that «l'Echelle» (The Ladder) was translated from the Italian in 1603, 1621, 1622, 1623. Arnaud d'Andilly made a new translation from the Greek in 1652 which was often republished up until 1711. The Ladder reappeared in «Les vies des saints Pères» in 1736. But these translations do not employ the term "rudimentary level": they replace it with "grammar". Courville seems then, to have drawn his inspiration from another translation, unless he was translating directly from a Latin edition.
vice, they should consult the fathers, and even the brothers, with humility of heart, without any trace of doubt, and receive their counsels as from the mouth of God, even if these opinions are contrary to their own aspirations and even if those they consult are not very spiritual. For God is not unjust; he would not lead into error souls who with faith and simplicity submit themselves humbly to the counsel and judgement of their neighbour. Even if those they consulted were beasts without the gift of reason, the one who speaks is the Immaterial, the Invisible. Those who consent to be guided by this rule, without admitting the least doubt, are filled with a great humility."

In a letter to an enclosed nun (Lettres de piété, Letter LXVIII, vol. 1, pp 303-321) who was wondering whether she must accept the position of abbess, Rancé gives similar advice:

"It seems to me that the only means you have of resolving your problem is not to be guided by your own views but by the opinions and feelings of those you know to be pious and disinterested and enlightened, among whose number I would not claim to be. The peace and security of a soul, who has once surrendered her liberty by consecrating herself to the service of Jesus Christ, depends on her never using again what is no longer hers, and by allowing herself to be guided by the will of others, since she no longer has any of her own; provided that what they desire of her is not evidently contrary to the law of God nor to the fidelity that she owes to her rule."

Another letter to a superior (Lettres de piété, vol. 2, letter LVII) who feels an attraction toward solitude, and who is disturbed by the distracted life that she has been obliged to lead for some time, recommends:

"that after having asked God for five or six months to make his will known to you, and having put before him your needs and the fear you have of being lost, whether you remain in government or abandon it by your own will, if the feeling that you ought to withdraw into solitude persists, and grows stronger rather than weaker, you could go to your superiors and try to obtain some time to think about yourself, having spent a great deal of your life thinking about others. If God places another in your position and she acquits herself of her new charge with success and blessing, you could remain in peace and security while distancing yourself from exterior concerns. But if, on the contrary, you are recalled and considered useful or necessary for the maintenance of the common good, you will take up the task once more and resume the concerns of which you had been relieved; and in this case you will need to devote yourself to the task, and not set it aside again except by the providence of God made very clear and evident to you".

But the conduct of Courveille was also dictated by letter LXIV of the second volume:

"When it is evident that the superior is neglecting the interior life of his religious, that is to say, their salvation, and that he has neither the enlighten-
ment nor the will necessary for his guidance to be of any use to them; if one cannot on one’s own, by reading or by knowledge of one’s obligations, stand on one’s own feet with regard to the practice of good that one has embraced, it is certain that guidance must be sought elsewhere. And if it is thought that the superior would grant his permission in such a case, one can assume it; if not, one can dispense oneself from it."

Courveille found in "The Ladder" of Jean Climaque, in all these letters and the example of Rancé a treasury of clear advice. But perhaps he had difficulty knowing where he fitted into the picture because, like Rancé, he felt himself a sinner and had come to the monastery to do penance*. He also seemed to see himself as an abbot worn out by governing and wondering whether, for the sake of his salvation, he ought not leave someone to govern in his place. At the same time, he seems to regard himself as a fervent monk who refuses to stay any longer in a house which is too lax, and who asks no one’s authorisation to retire to a more regular place, finding his justification in the counsels of Rancé.

However, such an approach poses one question: were those at the Hermitage able to grasp the deeper meaning of it all? And if so, were they also influenced by the same Trappist and Rancéen inspiration?

**Trappist influence at La Valla and the Hermitage?**

In a previous article I stressed at some length how, in the 19th century, La Trappe appeared as a champion of resistance to the empire of evil, thanks to Dom de Lestrangé its new reformer who claimed to be acting in the spirit of Rancé. On the other hand, the works of Rancé, and, to an even greater extent, his biographies, formed part of the basis of Catholic culture at the dawn of the 19th century and the Marists would certainly have been aware of them even if they had not read them.

The choice of the location and the very name of the Hermitage seem to indicate such a Trappist influence. In the Life of Rancé by Dom Le Nain (p 66) we are told that Rancé, before he entered La Trappe, sought to establish a "hermitage" in the Pyrenees. The bishop of Comminges dissuaded him from it: it is necessary, rather, to render service to the Church. In fact Rancé was able to resolve this dilemma of a life withdrawn from the world yet apostolic because, from La Trappe, he continued to exercise an apostolic action by his correspondence; he relieved thousands of the poor, and he maintained

---

* Had Courveille read in the life of Rancé by Father De Maupeou, written in 1702 (Vol. 1, p 245), the story of the second successor of Rancé whom he resembled in many ways?

** For example, «La Règle de Saint Benoît» (1689), consulted in the municipal library of Lyons, bears on its first page the ex-libris: «Ex bibliotheca seminarii sancti Irenaei Lugdunensis».
schools. The Marists had the same ambition. When they wanted to found their Mother House, they chose a place similar in every respect to that described by Rancé in a letter to the bishop of Pamiers, who wanted to found a monastery:

"One of the main tasks will be choosing a site for the establishment. It must be in a deserted place. Our ancient statutes order us to build our monasteries in places apart from all the dealings of men [...] There may be some place like this in the depth of your mountains: all that is needed is a valley through which a little water passes, and where there are three or four acres of flat land for the garden which will provide life and subsistence for the religious, together with a little forest."[1]

But the Hermitage seems to have had, besides, another characteristic of La Trappe: the will to welcome everyone. The Life of Rancé by Marsollier (Book IV, Chap. V) insists on this:

"He (Rancé) had no regard [...] of the birth of those who presented themselves, nor of their riches, nor of the donations they might be able to make to the house, if he should choose to accept them. He paid no attention to their learning, talents, power, health, pleasant voice, nor to any other qualities of mind or body that the world might deem advantageous, but which often prove a hindrance when it is a question of making saints of them. [...] No level of society was excluded (from La Trappe); it was for this reason that he established in the house, as it were, three different orders: the choir religious, the lay brothers and the oblats. All kinds of people could be accommodated within one of these three states. [...] The old and the infirm were still excluded from almost all other religious orders which were very careful not to accept subjects who were likely to become a burden. The charity of the Abbot of La Trappe did not allow him to take these considerations into account [...] so he received the aged and the infirm [...]"[2]

Did not the Hermitage also practise the same policy of openness to everyone, welcoming orphans, the elderly, the infirm, and Brothers of all levels of instruction and fortune?

A parallel might also be drawn between the life of Father Champagnat in Paris, where he was trying to obtain authorisation for his Institute, and that of Rancé in Rome where he was fighting for the Benedictine reform.

"I can tell you nothing of the curiosities of Rome, I haven't seen them and I feel no desire to see them", said Rancé. And his biographer (Dom Le Nain, p. 171, 177) adds: "He made of his house in Rome a hermitage, often not leaving it for several days on end, except to go to the churches."

In the Life of Father Champagnat[3] Brother Jean Baptiste places these words on the lips of Father Champagnat:

---
"While I was staying in the capital, I did my business and then retired to my room. No one in Paris knew that I was in the city and I took as little notice of Paris and its curiosities, as if I had been five hundred kilometres away."12

The very frugal diet of the Brothers at La Valla was certainly due to their great poverty. But Brother Jean Baptiste adds: "All these dishes were served unseasoned. This was for two reasons: a spirit of mortification and poverty..." (Life Part 2, p 362). Then follows the episode of the parish priest passing through the refectory and noticing that each table had nothing but a salad for supper. Do not these practices put one in mind of La Trappe?

"They would be content with only two dishes for dinner during the whole year; a soup, and a serving of roots (carrots), of beans or something similar. And for supper a single dish either cooked or raw, like salad, or some milk with a little cheese, or a few nuts."13

Brother Jean Baptiste (Life Chap., p 75) relates that when Father Champagnat came to live with the Brothers at La Valla he was considered by them as "pretty much an equal" and that Father Champagnat lived with them four years before any of them thought of offering to make his bed or look after his room. He did both, without complaining, despite his many commitments."

In his biography of Rancé, Marsollier (Book III, p 267) reminds us:

"The practice had been established for a long time that most of the superiors had a few domestics, and often even some religious who served them. He considered it his duty to avoid both these options as something unworthy of a man who professed to imitate Jesus Christ, particularly in his saying that he came not to be served but to serve others; so he swept his own cell and did for himself all the things that a valet would have done for him. [...] This same spirit of modesty, humility and simplicity caused him to deny himself the use of things that could be seen as creating any distinction."

So we find between Rancé and Champagnat a similarity of sensitivities and actions which may suggest an influence.

However, I think it useful to draw a parallel between Rancé and Courveille as far as the organisation of their respective monasteries is concerned. Mar-

---

12 I wonder, besides, if in the Introduction to the Life of Father Champagnat, Br Jean Baptiste did not draw inspiration from Rancé who, in the foreword to «De la sainteté et des devoirs de la vie monastique», declares: «Je (Rancé) said simply what he found in the writings of the holy monks and those of the Fathers of the Church: and if there were any of his own reflections, these were always so much in line with their spirit and their doctrine that they must be regarded more as their thoughts than his.»

Br Jean Baptiste says practically the same thing (Preface p XIX): «We lay no claim to a verbatim reproduction of his words when reporting his teachings and exhortations [...] but we have been able to capture faithfully his views and attitudes... We are therefore thoroughly convinced, and our conscience supports this conviction, that we have conveyed the spirit of Father Champagnat; we have managed to outline his teachings, to quote his important sayings, and to portray his attitude to virtue, to the Rules and the way of observing them. These things are all in our work, and only these.»

13 Dom Le Nain, op. cit p 265.
sollier (Life, Book III, chap. 8, p274) reports: "the abbot of La Trappe began taking some measures designed to lead his brothers to that high perfection he had proposed to them". He began by example, hoping that his monks would follow him. "Thus he reintroduced some former usages and some primitive observances" but "he soon noticed that he was not supported. Most of the monks seemed to lack the strength or the courage". So Rancé chose

"to make allowances and await the time that God had determined for the complete re-establishment of a spirit of penitence in the monastery. He had been convinced for some time that it would be better to start with any novices who might arrive. He would form them to piety himself, and it would be easier to inspire them with the original spirit of the order of Citeaux".

But those who expressed a desire to enter were being discouraged from doing so and diverted to other monasteries. So Rancé petitioned the abbot of Prières, a monastery of the strict observance, to send him some monks to help, but he had no one to send. Thus it was that Rancé carried out his reform with religious of other orders:

"Religious of all orders could be seen arriving at La Trappe, all excellent subjects seeking nothing but penance. These became, as it were, the founders of this edifying reform which has ever since brought such honour to the Church."

It seems to me that Brother Jean Baptiste reports a similar strategy on the part of Courveille: "Before undertaking anything he strove to gain the confidence of the Brothers, and to win them to himself; and for this he employed all kinds of expedients". But when he wanted to have himself elected, he noticed that the Brothers were not following him. So he awaited the favourable moment: the sickness of Father Champagnat.

"Convinced that most of the subjects lacked the qualities requisite for becoming Religious, he wasn't the least disturbed to see them abandon a vocation for which he believed them unsuited. Besides, taking an extreme view of the excellence and duties of the religious state, he expected of mere novices, a degree of perfection that one would be happy to see gracing men grown old in religious observance."

Thus he followed exactly the same strategy as Rancé who realised that it is practically impossible to reform lax monks and so he allowed them to leave without regret. On the other hand, he formed the novices right from the start to the full austerity of the rule, thus reckoning on establishing a nucleus of reform.

Courveille possibly saw himself as a new Rancé called to establish the strict observance in a house he considered to be not sufficiently regular. But he does not have at his disposal an external supply of volunteers or novices. And, above all, his conduct differs markedly from that of Rancé:  

"The directing of his monastery required a discipline exact and severe; but he knew so well how to temper this with a sweet charity that never was a superior more generally revered nor more tenderly loved by all his religious."

He invited his brothers to imitate the Fathers of the desert but "he wanted them to make trial of it for a long time and test their strength before any rule that he proposed was finally adopted".

Courveille seems then to have been, at the least, a poor imitator of Rancé. The latter's blend of firmness, patience and moderation seems to have been better practised by Father Champagnat. This state of affairs was due in part to the unbalanced temperament of Courveille but also to the influence of Jean Climaque.

Influence of the letter to the Pastor

All the editions of "The Ladder" have as an appendix the "Letter to the Pastor", a compilation of 101 sentences describing the ideal abbot. Courveille, taken up with the idea of his revelation, was able to find in this collection sources of inspiration like the following:

"The true master is the one who carries within himself the spiritual book of knowledge written by the finger of God, that is to say, by the illumination that comes to him, so that he no longer has need of any other book."  

Many of the counsels invite the abbot to be severe and Courveille seems to have adopted such a policy:

"The superior ought to observe and note those who contradict him and resist him and impose on them very heavy penances in the presence of a few elders. By making an example of them he will inspire fear in the others, even if they are sored by these humiliations. Because the advantage to the majority outweighs the resentment felt by an individual." (N° 59)

"It is better to drive someone from the monastery than to allow him to do his own will. In fact, driving someone from the monastery often renders him more humble and leads him henceforth to renounce his own will. On the contrary, if we display complacency with regard to brothers of this kind, under the appearance of showing mercy or making allowances, they will curse us with lamentations at the hour of death, for having led them astray rather than aided them." (N°94)

Some sentences of excommunication must also have given Courveille food for thought:

"Let us listen to what Sacred Scripture has to say about certain individuals: 'Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?' (Lk 13,11); and 'You must drive out this evil-doer from among you.' (1Cor. 5,13); and 'Do not pray for this people' (Jer. 7,16); and what was said of Saul (cf 1Kings 16,1). It is
necessary that the pastor know how and when to apply all that; for no one is more truthful than God." (N°33)

"Certain individuals who, not giving a thought to the burden that having responsibility for others can be, have unwisely undertaken to guide souls; and even though previously they may have possessed great riches, they come out empty handed after having distributed everything to those of whom they had charge."

Courveille wanted to govern after the example of Rancé and Climaque

One of the indications that Courveille wanted to imitate Rancé is his conception of the role of abbot. His letter from Aiguebelle reminds us that "the only ones who speak are the Superior and the Father Guestmaster [...] the Superior seems to devote all his care to humiliating his inferiors on every occasion". The religious comply "with the will and judgement of the Superior, which is that of God"; they give proof "of blind and perfect obedience to the Superior, giving him entire liberty to order and command what he believes to be most useful to the community and for the spiritual good of each individual".

So Courveille wishes that at the Hermitage:

"everyone, without any exception will give him (the new superior) full and entire liberty to guide them, that everyone holds him in great respect, looking on him as Our Lord and as holding the place of Our Lady, [...] that they give him entire submission and perfect obedience, not only of the will and exteriorly but also interiorly and of the judgement, leaving him full and entire liberty to order and command according to what he believes before God is best, most useful for the good of the community and most advantageous to each. Without this, no religious society can be truly regular nor continue to exist for long."

So it is clear in the mind of Courveille that it is the abbot who is the key to the sanctity and the perpetuity of a religious order. We will see that he keeps to the same language as Rancé, who is adamant on this point of the rule of Saint Benedict, referring constantly to the Fathers of the Desert.

The role of the Abbot according to Rancé

"It is necessary [...] that, in a regulated community, everything is done on the orders of the superior and that everything is dependent on him; in order that he may dispose everything for the good of the community and in the best interests of the individual members; that he may keep his subjects occupied, arranging their tasks and exercises; that he may direct their consciences; that he may regulate their piety, and may there be nothing outside his view
and his direction. It is of this that Saint Benedict was thinking when he declared that the Superior must hold the place and carry out the role of Jesus Christ in the monastery."

In this passage Courveille would have seen his own notions confirmed, but Rancé goes further, foreseeing risks in such a situation:

"This type of government, so entire and absolute, demands, on the part of the superior, a perfect knowledge of the persons under his charge; without this, the authority, which is given him for the sole purpose of preserving good order, would cause nothing but trouble and confusion."

A little further on Rancé explains that "if his incapacity, his negligence, his lack of feeling for his profession, and the disordered state of his morals give rise to just suspicions and legitimate cause to oppose his orders, it is necessary to proceed with caution and reserve". (De la saintété... p 158)

Nevertheless Rancé considers with extreme reserve the appeal to another religious other than the superior:

"As he has established monastic superiors for the guidance of the Brothers, and as, in consequence, the Brothers must place all their confidence in them, this guidance and this confidence cannot be transferred to other persons without the congregation suffering and being weakened by it. And this other guidance, not being precisely what God has instituted will not be so clear, so charitable, so useful [...] We must still bear in mind that a community is a body which can survive only while the members are joined to one another and intimately connected to the head. Now it is practically impossible that this union be preserved in its integrity if the Brothers abandon the guidance of the superior to take that of another; and it is difficult to see how hearts and minds will not be divided by this diversity of direction."

So,

"Must we believe that those who give direction in religious communities in place of the Superiors may not be in the plan of God? [...] there are those who exercise these functions only because of the indocility of the Brothers, who, not having for him (the Superior) the esteem they ought to, are not able to submit to his direction; we cannot consider these directors being anything but second rank; they owe their existence to the allowances that are being made for the weak and the imperfect; they are granted them because of the hardness of their hearts. [...]"

"What must a religious do when he desires to lead a life more exact and more perfect than the rest of his brothers and he is prevented from doing so by the superior? He may separate himself from his brethren and enter a more regular community for fear of putting his salvation at risk by leading a sin-

---

15 Rancé, «De la saintété et des devoirs», op. cit. chap. VIII.
regular and unusual life, or perish like them by following their bad example; and if this change is not in his power, he must be persuaded that singularity is preferable to laxity."

I have permitted myself this long quotation because it seems to me to shed a particular light on these words of Courveille:

"I shall not conceal from you, my very dear Brothers, that for some time I have been ill at ease observing the lack of regularity among us, the differing opinions on the aim, the form, the intentions and the spirit of the true Society of Mary, our independence and lack of submission, our own private ideas... All that plunged me into deep anxieties and led me to believe that, since the demon of pride, of independence, of insubordination and especially of division was finding a place among us, we could not continue to exist for long. I am accusing no one but myself and I look upon myself as the real cause of all that; I am very much convinced that it was I alone who prevented the blessings of heaven falling on the Society of Mary, and that my lack of regularity, my lukewarm conduct and religious failings were a source of scandal for all. I sincerely ask your pardon for this as well as for my other shortcomings in relation to certain people."

This paragraph stands as an real indictment against the brothers who chose a superior other than the legitimate abbot, and against Father Champagnat who refused to accept the aim, the form and the spirit of the "true Society of Mary". But Courveille, as a true disciple of Rancé, knows that if unity is threatened it is due to the abbot's shirking of his responsibilities. So it is logical that he take upon himself responsibility for the set-back and withdraw to expiate his infidelity to his divine election, thus permitting a return to unity under a new superior to whom God will grant the charism he had failed to use, and, at the same time, to withdraw his support from a situation he considered an infidelity. He had been a "stumbling block", may he be "anathema", unless a judgement of God should manifest itself. Rancé and Climaque are at the same time his guides and his judges.

Courveille's stay at Aiguebelle

Let us now turn to Courveille's stay at Aiguebelle and the problems that it poses.

The rule of Valsainte provides for three types of visitors: "outsiders who come to spend a few days" (three or four), "those who come simply to see the house", "the postulants". Courveille seems to have belonged to the first cate-

---

"Règlements de la Maison-Dieu de N. D. de la Trappe, by Father Rancé, its worthy reformer, arranged in a new order and augmented with the particular usages of the Maison-Dieu de la Valsainte de N. D. de la Trappe in the Canton of Fribourg, in Switzerland 1794, Vol. 1 chap. XVIII, p 228.
gory: "outsiders are given all sorts of consideration"; by which we may take it that he had not come with the intention of entering.

Those who came as postulants were placed in a room apart and invited to keep silence with regard to the other outsiders. The Father Guestmaster then instructed them in the customs of the house for four days. On the fifth day the postulant would make his official request to enter. He would then be admitted to the interior of the monastery and, after three weeks, take the habit as a novice.17

Obviously, Courveille had not applied to enter, since he did not have the authorisation of the Archbishop, (it seems that he didn’t even have permission to leave the diocese), but was merely contemplating the possibility. Therefore, he had not actually lived with the monks in the monastery. At the very most, he had been allowed to participate in the office with them on one occasion before the meal and then to dine with them, as the rule permitted. He would have also been able to visit the house and assist at Compline once. In short, he was a visitor spending a few days at La Trappe and had only gained a superficial knowledge of the life of the monks.

That was enough to experience and atmosphere: the silence, the regularity. And it was not difficult for a visitor to notice two monks "greeting one another with a deep inclination of the head". But when Courveille affirms that "the Superior seemed to make it his chief business to mortify and humiliate his inferiors on every occasion, and the inferiors seemed to accept this with a respect, a humility [...] which shows clearly that they love it", he gives us the impression that he had witnessed more intimate scenes of monastic life. One cannot help but wonder whether his whole description of Aiguebelle, rather conventional when all is said and done, did not owe more of its inspiration to his reading (the rule allowed the Guestmaster to supply books of piety to those who asked for them) and his desire to draw parallels with the Hermitage, than to any direct experience of Trappist life.

However, one is struck by the length of his stay since Father Courveille left the Hermitage between 18th and 25th May. When he wrote, 4th June, he evaluates the gains of his retreat: he had found peace, reflected on the destiny of the Society of Mary, discussed with the abbot the possibility of his entering the monastery, saw the monastery functioning. That already implies a rather long stay. And he stayed another six days at least, since the response from the Hermitage could not have reached him before 10th June, and on 11th June the abbot granted him a letter of spiritual association (OM 1, doc. 153) which would have marked his departure.

---

17 Archives of Aiguebelle, catalogue of the postulants and choir novices.
Questions raised by these facts

The argument of the commentators of the *Origines Maristes* for the presence of Courville in the Lyons region, and hence his departure from Aiguebelle on 11th June, rests on two documents: the *celebret* issued on 17th June (doc. 154) and the account book of the Hermitage (OM 1, doc. 144) which shows an entry on 12th June: "given to Father Courville: 80 F". It is possible. But is seems more believable to me that the letter accepting the resignation of Courville would have been either accompanied or followed by a remittance of money to allow him to deal with the new situation, without his having necessarily already left Aiguebelle.

As for the letter of association granted by the abbot of Aiguebelle, it poses a difficulty as far as its dating is concerned because the date of the original was over-written making it impossible to decide whether it is 1825 or 1826 (see note OM 1 p 396). The authors of the note in pointing out this problem opt for 1826 because this date coincides with the stay of Courville at Aiguebelle. But I don't think we can exclude the possibility that this letter of association was of the previous year. Several arguments urge this dating: the first is the installation of the La Valla community at the Hermitage in May 1825. In this place which conforms to the Trappist ideal, in a building which has the appearance of a monastery, Father Courville can consider that he is going to model his foundation according to the Trappist ideal and hence, a spiritual association between himself and Aiguebelle would be very suitable. Besides, this would have the advantage of explaining why, when he goes on retreat, he chooses Aiguebelle rather than another place, such as Le Puy or the seminary of St Irenaeus. Furthermore, the length of his stay, and the mention of his title of "superior general of the venerable Marist Brothers" contained in the letter of association, are thus more easily explained if we assume that Courville was already known to the Trappists at Aiguebelle. The word "pilgrimage" employed by Courville to describe his retreat at La Trappe is also clarified. One goes on a pilgrimage to a place one already venerates.

Relations with the Archbishop

Moreover, it is probable that Courville would have left Aiguebelle in order to obtain from the diocesan authorities permission to enter La Trappe, since the Hermitage had accepted his resignation. The granting of a celebret on 17th June proves that, a short time after announcing his decision to enter La Trappe, Courville had been in contact with the Archbishop, apparently without having taken steps to enter this monastery.

But we must not jump to the conclusion that Courville had changed his mind because relations between the Archbishop and La Trappe were not
good and the authorities could quite easily have refused Courville's request. Already in 1817 the Vicars General had reproached Lestrange about "institutions [...] that you want to establish and that you have started without consulting us in the diocese". And again, in Rome in 1826 the trial of Dom Augustin Lestrange was taking place in which he was reproached, among other things, with wanting to free himself from Episcopal authority. But, above all, Archbishop De Pins was in conflict with the Trappists concerning the jurisdiction of the Trappist nuns of Vaise, established in an outlying district of Lyons. On 19th October 1833, he wrote to a cardinal of the curia:

"For seven years I have been gravely concerned about the interior regime of the nuns of La Trappe of Lyons, about their relations with the chaplains, about their jurisdiction and about my rights, until now unrecognised by the said abbot."

And, in fact, the letter of the chaplain, Father Augustin Pignard, monk of Aiguebelle but resident of Vaise, dated 15th May 1826, (the time that Courville left the Hermitage) mentions that Mgr De Pins had just written to him to clear up the matter of his powers regarding the Trappist nuns and on the statute of this monastery. Father Pignard replied in substance that the nuns had made a vow of obedience to Abbot de Lestrange and claimed that the monastery was directly dependent on the Holy See. This seems to have given rise to a long conflict between the Archbishopric and La Trappe which was still continuing seven years later. So, if Courville made his request at this time, it was, to say the least, an unfavourable moment.

It is easy to understand that Father Courville, finding himself without an assignment in the diocese of Lyons and blocked in his desire to enter La Trappe, would have been looking around for a new project to launch, first of all in the diocese of Chambéry" and then in the diocese of Grenoble where the bishop welcomed him (doc. 164).

Courveille is not excluded from the Society of Mary

Father Terraillon, who succeeded in persuading Fathers Champagnat and Colin to recommend to Courville that he remain at Aiguebelle, points out one consequence of this situation within the Society of Mary: "From that moment on we recognised the younger Father Colin as the Superior." (OM 2, doc. 750). He certainly does not say that Courville had been excluded from the Society. In any case, no one had the authority to do this.

---

18 Archives of Archbishopric of Lyons: 2 II 24, letter of 30.06.1817.
19 He obtained a benefice from Bishop Bigex on 19th July 1826 (OM 1, doc. 156).
Besides, Father Champagnat did not find the idea of his returning to the Hermitage repugnant: in a draft of a letter he made at the end of September 1826 we find these words:

"I would be very happy for you to come and for you to name a place for our meeting." (Then follows a passage crossed out) "Since Father Terraillon is not at the Hermitage and if the Vicars General have not forbidden it, I do not..."

In October Father Courveille ceded to Father Champagnat his rights on the Hermitage "apart from the right to live there, when he should see fit, in a rent-free apartment dependent on the house, in recognition of the goods ceded".

On the other hand, Origines Maristes indicates that Father Courveille paid a visit or two to Belley in 1826 or 1829 but that he was politely got rid of. This difference in attitude towards Courveille: indulgent at the Hermitage, intransigent at Belley, seems also to indicate two different conceptions of the Society of Mary. Showing Courveille the door is not only a rejection of him personally, but also of what he represents: a plan for the Society of Mary which is too utopian and too dependant on an private revelation to be solidly based.

The decisive and ambiguous role of Father Terraillon

It seems that it was not Father Colin but Father Terraillon who had first perceived the problem from this angle. His version of the origins (OM 2 doc. 750) and his letter of 1824 (OM 1 doc. 115) show that he went to the Hermitage against his will:

"I asked permission of my superiors to go to Belley and rejoin Fathers Colin [...]. Instead of the permission requested, I received a letter in reply sending me to the Hermitage to join Father Courveille and Father Champagnat."

He is, then, present at the Hermitage at the time of the crisis of 1825-26 but seems curiously absent from the serious events which took place there, unless he had sided with Courveille. He even refused to become Father Champagnat's sole heir. On the other hand, he is the one who succeeded in effectively excluding Courveille, and not on moral grounds since Fathers Colin and Champagnat were not aware at that time of Courveille's lapses of conduct:

"Father Courveille has in this region the reputation of a saint. If we are

20 See OM 4, SH 349.31, p 586.
21 See the draft of a letter of Father Champagnat (OM 1, doc. 286) in which he writes: «Father Terrail- lon refused to be my heir saying that I have nothing, which he, along with Father Courveille, repeat continually to the Brothers.»
22 the gravity of which had still to be established.
obliged to get rid of him later on, as could happen, all the odium will descend upon us. By taking advantage of this opportunity, he will be excluding himself. [...] they were impressed by my words and decided to sign the letter accepting his resignation, which I had been careful to prepare in advance."

It is, then, clear that the decision to accept Courville's resignation was made on one fundamental question: Courville's ability to direct the Society of Mary of Lyons.

But it seems that the opposition of Terraillon to the Lyons project was more fundamental since, on All Saints Day 1826 he departed from the Hermitage, leaving only Father Champagnat, who considered this departure a "desertion" (OM 1, doc. 286/1). For ten years he remained on the margin of the Society of Mary, not attaching himself to the Society at the time of its official foundation in 1836. He was supported before his conferees by Jean Claude Colin who seems to have had a particular esteem for him.

From this it seems to me that the crisis at the Hermitage was not a two-way affair (Courville versus Champagnat) but three-way. Thus, the almost complete silence on the part of the Marist Brothers on the subject of Terraillon could be explained by a reluctance to criticise too heavily a Marist Father of whom there was not much good to be said. Besides, I would be tempted to think that Brother Jean Baptiste attributed to Courville a sentence that is more likely to have come from Terraillon: "He announced that he was going to sever connections and ask the Archbishop to appoint him to a parish." In the same way, a little further on, another utterance of Father Courville sounds more like Father Terraillon: "I wasn't the one who ran up the debts; if things go wrong, too bad; I shall not answer for the future." This is exactly how Father Terraillon acted shortly afterwards, whereas Father Courville agreed to be Champagnat's heir (OM 1, doc. 148). Besides, Father Courville, who had arrived earlier on the scene, had engaged himself financially with Father Champagnat, whereas Father Terraillon arrived later, after the debts had been incurred and would have nothing to do with them. We might also remark that in his letter from Aiguebelle, Courville makes no allusion to the material problems and that, after the refusal of the Hermitage to receive him back, he makes no difficulty about settling the outstanding financial problems between himself and Father Champagnat. It seems that relations between Champagnat and Courville remained fairly good while the same does not seem to have been the case with Terraillon. Moreover, the later career of the latter seems to reveal a man who is anxious about his material

---

21 See his biographical notice in OM 4, p. 355.
22 See in «Annales de l'Institut» (1826, §57) the curious episode about Fr Terraillon's lethargy (which passed for death) and his mania, in confession, for interrogating the Brothers on their appointments, their directors, the number of pupils they had, etc.
23 In this, the judgements of Father Champagnat are harsher than those of the Brothers.
and administrative security since, though he made his vows with the Marists in 1836, he did not resign his position as parish priest until 1839. His biographical notice adds:

"His plain speaking and his definite ideas, stemming from his being so long among the secular clergy, gave rise to difficulties between him and Father Colin, who treated him rather severely. On 9th September 1845, he is the only older member of the Society of Mary who does not beseech the Superior General to drop his intention of resigning his position." (OM 4, p 356)

We are, then, dealing with a strong and complex personality who seems to have had some very individual ideas on the Society of Mary and who perhaps wanted to get rid not only of Courveille but of Champagnat as well. His departure from the Hermitage could also have been motivated by his complete failure to win the Brothers over, unless he had hoped by leaving the Hermitage to ruin the Lyons branch of the Society of Mary; this would have permitted him to join the Belley group. Besides, he would be helping to eliminate a branch of the Society (the Brothers) which may have seemed to him a deviation from the original plan. This is in substance what Brother Jean Baptiste says at the beginning of Chapter 19 of the Life: "Father Terrail, who was not happy at the Hermitage, and who doubted the viability of the Brothers' work, asked to withdraw."27 Brother Jean Baptiste, is using here the art of understatement, because he leaves us to understand that Father Terrail had other views than Father Champagnat on the strategy of the constitution of the Society. His departure, then, was caused by a fundamental disagreement and perhaps a personal rivalry which could only be resolved by the departure of one of the two. And as the Brothers wanted only Father Champagnat ...

Such a hypothesis does not seem unbelievable when one observes with what inexorable mastery Terrail organises the exclusion of Courveille: he first proceeds to convince Fathers Colin and Champagnat, then he presents them with a letter to sign which he had prepared in advance, and which he offers to post the following day when he goes to Lyons. While there, he informs Father Barou, the Vicar General, of the bad conduct of Courveille. Note that in warning the authorities of the fault of a confrere, Terrailon did not sin by excess of charity since he ruined Courveille in the eyes of the authorities, without this being necessary, since Courveille had already left. By the same token, by this denunciation he effectively prevented his return to the diocese, and, with even greater reason, to the Hermitage; a more moderate strategy would have permitted Courveille to see if the Aigubelle experience came to anything first. But Terrailon had very fixed and just ideas on the instability of Courveille. "He will soon revert", he tells the Vicar General (OM 3, doc. 798/8). In two or three days Courveille is irreversibly eliminated and the

---

27 See also OM 3 doc. 819/13, 821/13, and OM 4 SH 34/7, p 576.
position of Father Champagnat considerably weakened. Terraillon's departure on All Saints Day 1826 renders the situation desperate, as the letters of Father Champagnat about this time clearly indicate.

It seems necessary, then, to re-evaluate seriously the causes of the crisis at the Hermitage, avoiding attributing to Courveille problems that did not stem from him (or from him alone) and giving to Terraillon the role that is strongly suggested by the letters of Father Champagnat, but that his Life, for reasons I have already touched on, glosses over.

Banishment

The last contact between the Marists and Courveille seems to have taken place in 1832 (OM 2, doc. 746/17), at the time of a priestly retreat which the Marists attended.

"Father ***, who was also there, began once again to adopt his prophetic attitude and threatened them with the judgements of God if they persisted in not listening to him. Whereupon, Father Founder, arming himself with holy zeal, went to see him in his room and told him frankly that they were aware of his conduct. Father *** on hearing these words remained silent and Father Colin did not see him again." (OM 3, doc. 840)

This means that the Marists took advantage of the occasion of the ecclesiastical retreats to come together, and that Courveille was perhaps still admitted to these gatherings. The cause of Father Colin's intervention does not seem to have been Courveille's past conduct but his (Courveille's) desire to regain the position of superior which he had renounced in 1826, and which had been officially bestowed on Father Colin in 1830. By his intervening directly, Father Colin was acting in his role as Superior. He pointed out to him that any credibility his claimed revelations may have had, had been forfeited by his actions. It is also possible that the older Marists feared Courveille's influence on the younger members, recalling how easily they themselves had been swayed by his words. Thus the process of Courveille's exclusion was accomplished when his peers were no longer able to give credence to his divine election, based on the revelation at Le Puy. The letter from Aiguebelle, by separating the revelation from the role of superior, and by suggesting the exclusion of the man elected, had prepared the way to such a solution. But, moreover, the times had changed and, by attempting to return to the strategy of inspiration, Courveille mistook the mood of the times; as far as the Society of Mary was concerned, it was then much more in need of sound structuring than of inspiration; and as for the Church, it had just endured a revolution, that of 1830, which had outdated many of the political and religious hopes of the Restoration.

28 Unless he only sought to influence the younger Marists in private conversations.
Marist Brothers and Little Brothers of Mary

It remains for us to dwell for a moment on the initials with which Father Courveille ends his letter from Aiguebelle: f. d. and S. p. g. l. m. If we ignore for the moment the meaning of the last five letters, we can be fairly certain that the first two mean f(ratum) d(irector). Father Courveille began using these two letters in January 1826 (doc. 147). Now, the abbot of Aiguebelle gives him the title of "Superiori generali ordinis Sanctae Mariae" (doc. 156). So Courveille seems to have considered himself to be the Superior of the order of the Marist Brothers. Apparently this name must not be confused with that of "little brothers of Mary" which referred only to the branch of the teaching brothers. But the failure of his project for an order of Marist brothers which would group together fathers and brothers led to the two terms being confused. It is, nevertheless, important to note that Courveille was probably the creator of the present name of the congregation. In envisaging this title even for the priests, Courveille places himself firmly in the tradition of Rancé, who lived in equality with his monks:

"He never called his religious by any other name than his brothers; and his humility would not tolerate their being called either his religious or his children." (Book 6, Chap. 7)

Finally, Courveille follows these initials with the abbreviation "prêtre Ind." (prêtre indigne - unworthy priest). He imitates thus a religious usage (notably among the Ursulines") and particularly Trappist. Abbot de Lestrange uses the formula "abbot however unworthy". But this is not the place to dwell on this formula which shows that Courveille is already adopting certain usages of an order which he would like to join.

CONCLUSION

I hope my readers will understand why I have devoted two articles to a commentary on a single document, the letter of Father Courveille, which reveals at length not only his person but also his conception of the Society of Mary and the situation at the Hermitage in 1826.

In these few pages I have attempted to prove the influence of the writings of Rancé and Jean Climaque on Courveille. And this influence did not manifest itself accidentally in 1826 but seems to have been at the basis of the project of Courveille and Champagnat. To some extent, it would be necessary to analyse, at greater length than I have done here, La Valla and the Hermitage

29 See le Coutumier des Ursulines.
30 For example in «Lettre du R.P. Abbé de la Trappe à un ecclésiastique d'Orléans» 1797, Bibliothèque Nationale, L 17/D 220.
as foundations in the spirit of Rancé. One might wonder whether the aim of Courveille and Champagnat was not based on a Utopia: to found brothers who were both teachers and farmers, capable thus of instructing the poorest section of the population and providing largely for their own needs by manual and agricultural labour. In short, manufacturing nails at La Valla and maintaining a large garden at the Hermitage and at the schools were not only economic necessities but also practices of asceticism.

The crisis between Courveille and Champagnat at the Hermitage was not over a question of aim but of strategy. The one wanted the Marist aspirants to be formed immediately in the most austere life, while the other, more faithful to the actual spirit of Rancé, knew how to combine patience with firmness. From this project of the order, the name Marist Brothers, which Courveille had probably adapted from the term Trappist Brothers, would remain, along with a spirit of abnegation which seems to me to have been one of the secrets of the astonishing success of the congregation during the 19th century.

The intransigence and the instability of Courveille provoked the crisis. But the principal artisan of the set-back was Father Terraillon who would not adhere to this original project. By working towards the definite exclusion of Courveille and by withdrawing himself from a scheme in which he did not believe, Terraillon forced Father Champagnat to accept the role of founder, while at the same time being obliged to conform to the views of the Archbishop who wanted a standard congregation of brothers, and not an order. He also had to accept that the Society of Mary would be founded, not on a mixed ideal (monastic and missionary) but would be simply missionary, and that the Brothers would be only superficially attached to this Society. Thus, thanks to a keen sense of reality and a remarkable capacity for decision without worrying too much about the consequences, Father Terraillon had brutally cleared the air in a situation which was in danger of reaching an impasse.

By refusing the yoke of Courveille and not being prepared to follow a Terraillon, who perhaps would also like to have played a role in their direction, the Brothers chose their founder, who, like Rancé, was both strict and kind. And for the most part they would accept the consequences of this mutation of 1826: the spirituality of the "Nisi Dominus", the cloth stockings and the method of teaching reading. As for Courveille, he did not change: in 1832 he was harking back to his ideas of the seminary.

For the whole Society of Mary the consequences were no less considerable. The three key characters in the 1826 crisis symbolise three different visions of the Society, perceptible even from the Seminary of St Irenacus. Courveille wanted an order submissive to his visionary charism; Champagnat was interested essential in teaching brothers; Terraillon remained faithful to "the tree with three branches". The solution to the crisis both announces and prepares the future: the charismatic project, without a troop and with its leader in disgrace, is eliminated; Marcellin Champagnat managed to save his
Brothers and to maintain the link with the Society of Mary at the price of an important change of direction for his project; the "tree with three branches", which took the longest to implement but, when all is said and done, was the most realistic, carried the day. The Lyons Society of Mary was reborn on foundations which had been progressively cleared of a too heavily monastic structure.

André Lanfrey, f.m.s. 18 March 1996
Introduction

In the ten previous issues of “Marist Notebooks”, we have published, apart from the “Letters”, all the “Writings of the Founder” that we possess. But when we consult the “Carnets” (Notebooks) of Brother François and of Brother Jean Baptiste, Andrée Lanfrey points out two texts of “Conferences” offered as an “analysis of two talks of Rev. Father Champagnat for the opening of a retreat”. This specific description confirms the conclusion already reached that lots of passages in these “Carnets” are found in works published by Brother Jean Baptiste on the Founder, especially his “Life of M.J.B. Champagnat” and the “Avis, Leçons, Sentences”. Among those passages there are some which are clearly pointed out as being the exact words or ideas of the Founder.

The logical conclusion suggested by these coincidences is that these two Brothers drew from the same source which certainly seems to be the instructions of Father Champagnat judging by the notes they took on these occasions, each one on his own account.

This supposition reveals, as far as Brother François is concerned, the fact that at least some of those writings are directly related to the Founder. In fact, three of the notebooks he left us contain instructions on very varied subjects. If we have come to believe that he himself is the one who composed them, we would then have to change our opinion and admit that these instruction notebooks probably contained notes on the instructions of the Founder. In that case they would present us with a supplementary value if it turns out that they transmit to us the personality of the latter as much as that of the author himself.

Of course, just now we are at the stage of this hypothesis where we have to look closely at it to back it up with more proof. This work is going on at
present and Brother Lanfrey will give a fuller account of it in future articles.

Meanwhile, to whet the curiosity of future researchers, we are publishing some of these texts which very probably translate the thought of the Founder. Some of these texts are of Brother Jean Baptiste, others of Brother François, each dealing with the same subject under different forms, often using, however, the same words, the same expressions, as one can see without difficulty.

We have selected two topics treated in parallel by Brother Jean Baptiste and Brother François. the topics are THE RETREAT and GRACE. This choice is quite arbitrary, we could have chosen other topics. The two examples appear to be sufficient to begin with to posit the hypothesis and submit it to the reflection of our readers. By continuing hereafter with the publication of “The Writings of Brother François”, especially the three notebooks of “instructions”, we know that we are probably still within the ideas of Father Champagnat.
Conferences

from a handwritten copy of writings
attributed to Brother Jean-Baptiste
Furet in AFM, Writings, pp. 238253.

Because, not of the subject dealt with, but of the source indicated below, in this case the very words of Father Champagnat, we give these two texts first. Although we have only one copy of it which is certainly not in the hand of the author and that he is never mentioned, we can have no doubt that he is Brother Jean Baptiste according to the tradition confirmed by cross-checking with works he has published elsewhere. As to the copyist, whose name we do not know, we have no reason to doubt his trustworthiness. Other notes of the same author transcribed by him, of which we have both the original and the transcription, show how careful he is to transcribe the texts as exactly as possible.

Consequently, we find here, even if it were only one aspect, the authentic thought of our Founder. Of course it can be judged rigoristic, but we must place it in the more or less Jansenistic ambience of that period in which, at least as much as Father Champagnat, Brother Jean Baptist was steeped, and he could not avoid leaving his personal imprint on the notes he copied down.

As regards the date, some indications that we shall make clear further on, incline us to think that it refers to the retreat of 1828, but we are not absolutely certain about that.
Who are those who profit from the retreat?  
Who are those who do not profit from it?  
Analysis of two introductory retreat talks 
of Rev. Father Champagnat

1° Who are those who profit from a retreat?

1 Those who have prepared themselves for it, or at least know what they are going to do there.

A general intention to become better is not enough, you must be specific. To go into a retreat, to make a retreat without any particular or predetermined aim, is to lay yourself open to doing nothing good, nothing solid, it is to waste your time, to show a sad indifference for your salvation, for your perfection. In a real sense, it is an act of folly.

Indeed, in temporal matters, what man is there who undertakes anything at all without an aim, without knowing beforehand what he wants? Have you ever seen a king raising an army or engaging an army in a campaign without knowing why, without having some conquest or some enemy in view? Have you ever seen a traveller start on a journey without knowing where he wants to go? A trader going into business without knowing which industry he wants to go into? Go to a market without knowing which he wants to sell or buy from the farmer? Any workman at all working without a fixed aim, without knowing what he wants to get out of his work?

To profit from the retreat, therefore, you must know what you want to do there, to know the illness for which you are coming to seek the cure, the defect you wish to correct, the breach you want to fill, the virtue you wish to ask for, acquire and carry off by force.

This point is essential.

2 Those who have time for nothing but the retreat and who put everything else aside.

The retreat is something big, difficult, important. It demands the complete man. To make it a success, then, we must attend to it seriously, continually, exclusively.
3. Those who are docile to grace, to their confessor, to the superior, and who are determined to make all the sacrifices that God asks of them, whether for the correction of their defects, or for adopting all the means towards perfection which they recognise that they need in order to correspond with the designs that God has on them, or to acquire the virtues that God asks of them.

This article, then, takes in two main points:

1° A childlike docility which allows one to be led without resistance, a heart of wax which takes all the shapes one wishes to give it, a confidence, or better still, complete faith in God, in one's confessor, in the superior, putting oneself at their disposition in and for everything;

2° A strong, firm, frank and constant determination to belong to God completely, to attain one's salvation, to acquire that degree of perfection to which one is called and consequently to take for that purpose all the means we think necessary and to be resolute in accepting all the sacrifices required, even demanded.

4. Those who keep their hearts pure.

This is why: purity is the eye of the soul; "Blessed are the pure in heart", says Jesus Christ, "for they shall see God". Therefore, the more you keep yourselves pure, the more you will see God, that is to say, the more you will know his will, the more you will understand his plans, his designs on us, the better will you know the perfection of God, the reasons for loving God, his kindnesses, the need for virtue, the evil that sin does, and the more you will be fit for dealing with God, for being united with God, for receiving the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and following them, for knowing and discerning the movements, the secret inspirations of grace, and cooperating with them, following them, being faithful to them.

To have this purity we must:

1. Unburden our conscience, go to confession as soon as possible;
2. Keep careful watch over ourselves in order to avoid the least faults throughout the retreat;
3. Keep our hearts in a constant state of contrition, of sorrow for our sins.
4. Those who pray very, very, very much.

Goodwill is an outstanding grace; God hardly ever grants it except to those who keep on asking him for it.

The great means for being successful in the matter of our salvation, for correcting our faults and acquiring virtue, is prayer; all others would even be useless without it. We need powerful graces of strength, great graces of light, for both knowing the will of God for us and doing it. Now these graces are obtained only through prayer. We can do more through prayer than by our own efforts and all our hard work. Therefore:
1. Great union with God, a great spirit of prayer during this week;
2. Strive to perform your spiritual exercises perfectly during this retreat;
3. Lift up your heart to God often during the day, frequently invoke the Blessed Virgin, your guardian angel, your patron saints;
4. Make some short visits to the Blessed Sacrament;
5. Be exact in following the timetable, maintaining a modest demeanour, offering all your actions to God and doing so with the purest of intentions in such a way that they will be a continuous prayer.

2nd part Who are those who do not profit from the retreat?

1. Those who come on retreat with no purpose or with only human ones; such are:

1° those who come because the others are coming, because they cannot do otherwise, because they are not at liberty to dispense themselves from it, those who make their retreat perfunctorily, as a chore, like something which has to be done every year;

2° those who come without any desire to, without any keenness to gain anything from it, without any special aim, without knowing what they are going to do there, who have no particular purpose;

3° those who do not value the retreat, who look upon it as a tiresome time, as days that are unhappy, difficult, painful, who impatiently long for the end and avoid anything that is painful to nature or could cause it to suffer, being less concerned with mastering it than with getting through these few days with as little suffering as possible.

2. Those who become discouraged when they see the difficulties they imagine they will meet with; those who, instead of making efforts to overcome these difficulties, allow themselves to fall into despondency and think only about the end of the retreat or about distracting themselves in whatever way possible.

The retreat is a time of temptation, of fight, of trial, of sacrifice, of penance. Jesus was led into the desert, there he prayed, fasted, was with the animals, was tempted by the devil, was hungry. The retreat is therefore a time of trial and sacrifice, whence it follows:

1° that those who look upon this time as one of rest, peace and contentment, those who expect to experience there only consolations, a devotion they can feel and greater fervour, become discouraged;

2° that those who are too fond of themselves, who are not mortified, who do not want to trouble themselves, become discouraged;

3° that those who are not resolved to make all the sacrifices God is asking of them, become discouraged;
4° that those who are discontented, of weak character, or who count too much on themselves, become discouraged.

The cure for all that is to have the right idea of a retreat and of what real virtue is.

3 - Those who do not observe the manner in which the day should be used and who do everything the way they want to and in a perfunctory manner. To understand this you must know that each day of the retreat has a particular aim, that all the meditations and exercises of the day are so arranged as to attain this aim. Thus, in an ordinary retreat, the first day is used to get to know our goal, its importance, the need we all have to attain it and to save our souls. The second day is used to look for obstacles to that aim, to know what sin is, to detest it, to avoid it and to have a great horror of it.

Now, those do not get any profit from the retreat:

1° who are not familiar with how the day should be used, who do not know what fruits they should draw from it and do not direct all their activity that day towards that aim;

2° who read or keep themselves busy with anything that comes into their mind, provided it is something good, but which has no relation with the strict use of the day and the fruit one should draw from it;

3° who do things in a perfunctory manner, the way they want to, and with no aim.

4 - Those who cover themselves up and are hidden to their director or to their superior, and are afraid to let them know the present state of their interior life. A complete opening of the heart to the confessor or superior is so necessary for making a good retreat, that a person who has not made known to his confessor all his serious sins since his last confession, all that troubles him in his conscience and makes him uneasy, all the proximate occasions he may be in of offending God, his greatest temptations, his evil inclinations as well as his good dispositions, the attraction of the grace by which he is led on, and what God is asking of him, such a person may be sure that he has not made a good retreat. Whoever has not divulged to his superior his temptations, his evil inclinations, especially his dominating passion, the difficulties he is experiencing in practising virtue, his defects, the means he is taking to correct them, whoever has not given an account of the way in which he performs his spiritual exercises, the way in which he does his duties, who is his own guide in doing all these things, in a word whoever hides some essential thing from his superior, who is secretive and does not play straight with him, will never profit perfectly from a retreat and will never have solid virtue.

5 - Those who count too much on themselves, on their efforts, their reasonings, their hard work, and do not sufficiently understand that the work of salvation and of perfection is more the work of God than our own.
This fault is the cause of many others:

1. It is the mortal enemy of confidence in God;

2. It engenders and nurses presumption and independence of mind;

3. It is an invincible obstacle to self-knowledge which is the mother of those virtues that are absolutely necessary for making progress in the life of perfection and for interior reformation;

4. It inclines a person to prefer his own judgment to that of his confessor and of his superior and to be led by his own mind;

5. It blinds the soul, prevents it from knowing the ways of God and the movements of grace, it goes against the direction of the Holy Spirit, hinders one from following his inspirations and makes the heart insensible to the promptings of grace.

6. Those who, after a good start, become bored, relax after their confession, thinking that everything is over when they have purified their conscience. The aim of the retreat is not only to come back to God’s grace and to have one’s conscience at peace, but also:

   1° to look for means of avoiding a relapse;
   2° to reform your interior life, your character, by correcting your defects;
   3° to become established in the practice of solid virtue;
   4° to regulate the manner in which you conduct yourself in your spiritual exercises, in the way you do your work;
   5° to take the means necessary to do as much good as possible in your state and in your vocation.

7. Finally, those who after the retreat do not take the means of preserving its fruits: such are those who become too dissipated, who do not read their resolutions, who do not apply themselves wholeheartedly and resolutely to following the rule of conduct they traced out for themselves, who do not avoid the dangerous occasions which have made them fall either into sin or into lukewarmness, who, in a word, once the retreat is over, live just as before.
Starting a retreat - Definition - Explanation

In the manuscript from which we are taking these texts, this second "CONFERENCE" directly follows the preceding one on the pages indicated above, without any other indication. Although one could consider them complementary, nothing proves that they were not given at the same retreat.

However, we can notice that this second one is more structured than the first. It is not possible to determine to what extent it takes Father Champagnat's method into account, for one would have to know how Jean Baptiste took his notes. What matters to us is that the ideas expressed in the notes are certainly those of the speaker and at present we have no reason to doubt that. It is with this presupposition that we present this text.

What is the retreat?

1- It is a complete separation from the world.

Jesus was led into the desert (Matth. 4,1).
He went off to a solitary place to pray (Mark, 1,35).
I was living alone and separated from the world (Jeremiah, 15,17).
Come apart (Matth.).

To be perfect and to produce fruit, this separation demands:
1° the cessation of all exchanges with men;

2° the cessation of all dealing with secular matters, even with affairs that are pious and religious but have no direct connection with the aim of the retreat; the cessation of all study;

3° exterior silence, silence, that is, of the tongue, of the eyes, of the ears, of any sound; interior silence, that is putting creatures entirely out of your mind, forgetting them all, keeping watch over your mind to banish every remembrance, every representation, every affection for them, over your thoughts, over your heart in order not to allow any commerce with earthly things;

4° forgetfulness of self, of your health, of your comforts, of excessive care of your body, bearing with joy, or at least resignation everything that is painful to nature during a retreat.
Silence is a necessary disposition to hear what God is saying, to let the truth sink in. Pythagoras, pagan though he was, was so convinced of this that, before admitting any disciples who applied to enter his school, he demanded five years of rigorous silence.

2. The retreat is a time for prayer and penance.

*Jesus Christ was led by the Spirit into the desert; there he prayed and fasted (Matt., 4,2).*

The success of the retreat depends in great part on prayer:

1. because prayer is the key to all graces; consequently it is through it that we receive the grace of making a good retreat (St Augustine). Prayer is the gate through which God sends his graces. If we leave this door shut what will become of us? We are lost, we shall not succeed, we shall not make a retreat (St Teresa).

Do you want to uncover the wiles of the devil and see clearly what is inside you? Do you want to uproot vices from your soul and plant virtues there? Pray! Do you want to climb to the summit of perfection? Pray! Do you want to receive from God any grace at all? Pray! yes pray, for prayer is everything in the plan of salvation;

2. because it is the infallible remedy for every evil;

3. because it is the easiest means for working at our salvation. Not everyone can fast, do penance, follow the community either at spiritual exercises or doing the work our state requires, but everyone can pray.

During this retreat, then, we must:

1° remain in a spirit of continuous prayer;

2° make a special effort to do the ordinary spiritual exercises;

3° raise our hearts to God often during the day, invoke the Blessed Virgin, our guardian angel, our patron saints;

4° make several short visits to the Blessed Sacrament, short, but full of faith and fervour;

5° behave in everything you do in such a way that our actions may be a continuous prayer, taking care, however, not to torture our minds but to maintain them in a state of joy, contentment and holy liberty.

The retreat is a time of penance. Acts of penance during he retreat should consist:

1° in great modesty and vigilance over your senses;

2° in some acts of mortification in what you eat and drink;

3° in strict, punctual observance of the timetable;

4° in accepting all the inconveniences of the retreat whatever they might be;
5° in humble and respectful acceptance of all the advice, reprimands and corrections given by the confessor or the superior;

6° in some acts of expiation, of humility, or by speaking more clearly when performing public penances.

3 - The retreat is a time of struggle, of temptations.

*Jesus Christ was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit; there he was tempted by the devil; there he lived among the wild animals.*

We must not expect, then, that the devil or temptation will leave us in peace during these few days. It is usually during the retreat that one is most tormented. The most ordinary temptations are:

1. distractions, remembering worldly things, one's work, etc... etc...;

2. dangerous thoughts, most shameful pictures. It is often enough to want to apply yourself to God and to the work of your salvation to stir up all the rage of hell and to have the devil inflame all our passions;

3. laziness, distaste for spiritual exercises; great sluggishness of mind and body which causes you to go reluctantly to the exercises where you suffer terribly;

4. dissipation and, when you have purified your conscience, excessive joy;

5. discouragement at the sight of all the difficulties you experience in doing your retreat well, in correcting yourself, in cultivating virtue; at the sight of your failures, of the justice of God, etc... etc...;

6. scruples, exaggerated fears of being damned, of not persevering.

*Jesus lived in the desert among wild animals. We too are on retreat among animals. These animals are: the demons against whom we must fight and whose wiles and snares we must study in order not to be caught; our passions which we must study and get to know in order to tame them and submit them to reason and grace; our defects which we must correct, our sins which we must confess, weep over, expiate. These are the beasts who are our companions during the retreat.*

4 - It is a refuge against the persecution of men, against the dangers of the world, against the fury of demons, the violence of temptations and of the passions. Elijah, when he learned that Jezebel wanted to have him killed, was afraid, ran away, walked for a day, sat down, wished to die, fell asleep. An angel woke him up, made him eat and drink twice, saying to him: "You have still a long way to go". That food so strengthened the prophet that he walked for forty days and forty nights, right up to the mountain of God. Elijah was walking without knowing where he was going; this is the picture of a religious who is too much concerned with external things, who has given himself up to dissipation, who acts without purity of intention, to please men; who prays badly, who has become weak in practising virtue, who is not sufficiently
watchful over himself, who no longer looks at what is going on inside him. His passions are reawakened, become more active; the devil redoubles his attacks, the devil displays his charms. This poor religious is attacked on all sides; he does fight back, but feebly. Finally he perceives that things are going badly for him; he no longer knows where he is going, for whom he is working, for whom he is acting. Oh! how he needs a retreat! When he has spent some days on retreat we shall hear him say: “If the retreat had not come along I would have been lost”. Another will say: I was at the end of my tether.

5 - It is a time of rest.

When the disciples came back from their mission, Jesus said to them: “Come apart into a desert place and rest a little” (Matth., 6,31).

Prayer and the retreat are to the soul what sleep is to the body. Just as the body is relaxed in sleep, so the soul finds rest in the retreat and in prayer. Philosophers tell us that every agent suffers when acting. Thus, however holy our occupations may be, still, in the same way as a knife becomes blunt when it is used every day and has to be sharpened from time to time, so we become blunt and lax in attending to our own salvation while working for that of our neighbour. It is therefore necessary to withdraw into ourselves, to take some days to see where we stand in the matter of our salvation in order to count our gains and our losses. Grace, like nature, must not always be in autumn, it must have a winter, that is a time of rest. Trees do not bear fruit every year. We sometimes let the fields lie fallow for a year so that they will produce more. The Jews were ordered to let them lie fallow every seven years. In the same way is it necessary to let our soul take a rest and give it time to regain the strength it has lost. That is why the Sabbath, Jewish feasts, Sunday and Christian feasts were established.

Prudence and the knowledge of the saints (Pro. 9,10). Now, this virtue requires of someone who is concerned with his neighbour’s salvation that he does not forget his own, but that he should always put it before that of others. It would not be wise to save others and be lost oneself, to do someone else’s business and ruin your own, to drown while pulling someone out of the water, to throw yourself into flames to save someone from being burned. What use is it to gain the whole world if you lose your soul? That is what Our Lord wanted to make the apostles understand when he called them into retreat. In fact, the apostles were coming back from their mission, telling the good they had done, how devils were subject to them, and... Jesus Christ, after having listened to them, replied: Do not rejoice that devils are subject to you, but that your names are written in heaven. Come into the wilderness to withdraw into yourselves, to busy yourselves earnestly and exclusively with the matter of your own salvation and of your perfection, after having worked for that of others, for of what use would it be to convert the whole world while being lost yourselves?
6. It is a time for conversation, for communication and intimate union with God.

“I will lead her into the wilderness, into a retreat, and there I will speak to her heart.”

God speaks to the heart only in solitude. “I would very much like,” said Our Lord to Saint Teresa, “I would very much like to speak to men and tell them my secrets, but the world makes so much noise in their ears that they do not hear me. They are so busy that I have not a moment to talk with them.” Now, as the sun, daylight enters into a room as soon as the shutters are opened, as fire heats all those who draw near to it, in the same way, as soon as Our Lord finds a soul on retreat, he visits it, as soon as it is in silence he speaks to it, as soon as it opens its heart he enters into it. But, what does that mean, “speaking to the heart”? Speaking to the heart is speaking to a friend, it is revealing all one’s secrets, it is communicating all the goods one possesses.

Our Lord will speak to the heart of a religious:

1° when he enlightens him on the need to save his soul, on the nothingness of this world’s goods, on the excellence of his vocation and of his perfection, on the value of souls and the happiness of working to save them;

2° when he uncovers his faults to him, when he makes him understand the evil his pride is causing him, his desire to please men, his attachment to his own will, his lukewarmness in the service of God, his excessive love for the study of secular things, and when he says to him gently, but firmly: “My son, you must correct that; I am asking you to break your will, that you purify your intentions and that henceforth you work only for me, that you be fervent, that you apply yourself wholly to piety, that you reform your character, that you make such and such a sacrifice, and...”

3° when he reveals his mysteries to him and makes meditation on them attractive to him, when he moves his heart, when he gives him the tenderness of devotion, the taste for spiritual things and a great desire to belong completely to God;

4° finally, when he not only makes known his will, but when he gives him a special grace to do it and to devote himself entirely to the practice of virtue and reach perfection.

Listen carefully to Our Lord, we shall hear him say gently at the bottom of our heart: “My son, what is spoiling you, what is hindering you from making any progress in virtue, is your pride; in your class you are looking for only human success, you are studying through vanity, you want to lord it over your Brothers, you cannot suffer contempt or humiliation. If you do not conquer your pride, if you do not get down to acquiring humility, you will be lost. My son, what is ruining you is your own will: you are not allowing yourself to be led by your superiors, etc...” To another: “What is ruining you is excessive
love for yourself, for your health, your comforts, your wellbeing.” To another: “It is your relations with people outside, with such and such a person, etc... My son, if you were more open with your superior, more regular, more faithful to performing your spiritual exercises well, you would make great strides on the way to perfection; without that you will do nothing.” To another: “You must avoid that occasion, keep away from that company, break that connection, correct that private affection, that bad habit, if you wish to save your soul.” To another: “I am asking you for such and such a sacrifice, giving up that object, your parents, your possessions, that study, that job; you will never be acceptable to my heart and will even be lost if you do not do so.” Let us then listen to that voice and be docile.

7 - It is a time of preparation for divine graces, for the enlightenment and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Stay in the retreat until you have been clothed with strength from on high, do not leave it until you have received the promise of the Father.

_They therefore retired to an upper room and persevered in prayer (Luke, 24,45; id 1, Acts)._ 

It was in a retreat that the apostles prepared for the conversion of the world. It was in a retreat that Jesus Christ had prepared for his preaching, Saint John the Baptist for his sublime mission, etc... It is also in a retreat that we should prepare to work for the salvation of souls and prepare ourselves to receive God’s graces.

The principal graces we should ask of God during this retreat are:

1° the spirit of prayer;
2° the spirit of our state, attachment and devotedness to our vocation;
3° knowledge of our predominant fault, of our dominating passion;
4° the spirit of fervour;
5° love for Our Lord;
6° love of the cross, of humiliations;
7° zeal for the salvation of souls;
8° grace to overcome in such and such (manner) circumstances, to make such and such a sacrifice; etc...

Let us pray with confidence, with assiduity, with fervour. Let us speak to God like Jacob did: “I shall not leave you, I shall not go away from you until you have blessed me”. Like Saint Vincent de Paul: “I shall not leave this retreat until you have given me such and such a grace.” Say to Our Lord: “I shall stay there as long as the strength and the gift from on high have not come down on me, as long as you have not heard my request, as long as you have not changed my heart, etc... etc...
8 - It is a time for renewing our zeal.

"Elijah, what are you doing there?" "I am burning with jealous zeal for Yahweh Sahaoth, because the sons of Israel have deserted you, broken down your altars and put your prophets to the sword." (Kings, 19,910)

Fear, weakness, discouragement and the flight of Elijah came;

1° from the persecution of Jezebel;

2° from the Israelites becoming hardened in their sins and their bad lives;

3° from the little success the prophet thought he had had and from the poor result he expected from his efforts;

4° from his own weakness.

Now a few days of retreat were enough to cure the prophet, to remove his fear of men and of persecution, to revive his courage, to reanimate his charity for his brothers and to make him understand that he could still be useful to them and rekindle their zeal for the worship and the glory of God.

"I am burning," he said.

Perhaps that was a bit strong, but at least that is what leads us to understand what God said to him. The Lord said to him: "Go out." There came a mighty wind, but the Lord was not there; then an earthquake, but there. Finally, after the fire came the sound of a gentle breeze. The Lord was there.

Here God teaches us;

1° that zeal must be tempered by gentleness;

2° that it is not by severity, threats, impatience, spite and rigour figured by the fire, the earthquake and the wind that we shall win our neighbour over to God but by charity and kindly ways.

3° that bitter zeal overstates the faults of our neighbour and prevents us from seeing the good he is doing. In this state one exaggerates everything, both the fault and the cure. That is what God gave the prophet to understand when he said: "Seven thousand men have not bent the knee before Baal; you are mistaken then if you think that all is lost.

In this retreat let us see:

1° what we have done in the past for the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbour. Let us bewail the fact if we have not worked hard enough;

2° what we wish to do in the future and the means we must take to succeed;

3° what we have to correct in our conduct, our character, our procedures to make our zeal more profitable.
We transcribe again the following notes of the same author on the same topic. They are taken from another collection of copies and have apparently no connection with the above instructions, but are quite like a text of Brother François which probably comes from the same source. It is like it too in the stress it places on the personal effort to be made during the retreat, which is the main concern of Brother François. Therefore, if we give this text, it is in the supposition that it is the echo of the words of the Founder, it is also in order to discover the difference in the personalities of those who have preserved for us the synthesis of these words.

---

**What is the retreat?**

Of all the means that God offers men for reforming their life, it is the one which produces the most amazing, the most far-reaching, the most marvellous effects (St Vincent de Paul).

It is a grace of the first order, a shower, a deluge of graces.

It is a siege, an assault that God makes on our soul.

To follow the exercises of a mission or of a retreat without being converted is a miracle of reprobation, which made this great saint say that it is only miracles that can convert those who have not returned to the paths of virtue by the help of the retreat exercises.

**Aim of the retreat**

1 To withdraw into yourself, take a lamp and go down into your conscience to see:

   1° if there is no mortal sin or bad habits often leading to mortal sin;
   2° if your conscience is good, sound, enlightened, if it fears sin;
   3° if there is anything in your conscience which causes you trouble, any fear, any well-founded doubt; if we might have some essential things to put right if we were to appear before God.
2- To convince ourselves of, to be more and more permeated with, the importance of salvation, of the indispensable necessity for us to work at it without respite, of the infinite misfortune of failing to save ourselves.

3- To understand the obligation we have to work at our perfection and the dangers our salvation runs if we neglect our perfection.

4- To go deep into ourselves and learn how to get to know:

1° our passions, our evil inclinations, our ill-controlled propensities, our temptations and their source, that part of our soul which is weak, what is most painful to us in our spiritual life;

2° our good inclinations, our character, how grace attracts us either to the practice of virtue or to a love of prayer, and by which gifts of the Holy Spirit we are drawn towards God.

5 - To become acquainted with the obligations of our state, the faults we commit there, some means for fulfilling these obligations.

6 - To draw up our plans for the good we are called to do in order to save souls and spread the knowledge of the reign of Jesus Christ.

Dispositions for the retreat

1 - Go into it with fervour, with courage, with a great desire to benefit from it; shake up any cowardice, any distaste, any constraint, any languor, any laziness.

2 - Look upon the retreat as an infinitely precious time; do not waste a moment of it, avoid any action, any task, any occupation, even any thought which may be alien to it.

3 - Maintain great purity, avoid the least sins, the least faults; that is the great means for seeing God, for understanding him, for enjoying him, for purity is the eye of the soul.

4 - Follow the daily timetable exactly as it is laid down and be completely intent on reaping the fruit of what is prescribed for each day.

5 - Pray, pray a great deal, for without God’s help all our efforts are useless.
I What is the retreat?

1° It is a time of prayer, of penance, of separation from the world. Jesus, in the desert, prayed and fasted (Matth. 4).

2° It is a time of struggle, of temptations. There he was tempted by the devil, he lived among the animals. The devils, our sins, our defects, are these beasts we have to fight against, to weep over, to correct (ibid).

3° It is a time to prepare for the graces of God. Remain there till you have been clothed with strength from above (Luke 24). The apostles in the upper room persevered in prayer (Acts 1).

4° It is a time of prayerful silence, of reflection, of conversing, of communication, of union with God. I will lead her into the wilderness and there I will speak to her heart (Hos- sea 2).

5° It is a time for renewal, of restoration, of nourishment. You have given your people the food of angels. You have given them bread from heaven containing every delight, satisfying every taste. And the substance you gave demonstrated your sweetness towards your children ... it transformed itself into what each one who ate wished (Wisdom 16).

6° these are days of graces and of salvation which God arranges for us in his infinite mercy and for which he will ask us a rigorous account (2 Cor. 6). Yahweh Sabaoth will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines. On this mountain he will remove the mourning veil covering all peoples, and the shroud enwrapping all nations (Isaiah 25, 67).

II Do we need the retreat?

Yes, in no matter what state we are:

92
1° As sinners, to get to know, to detest, to expiate, to make up for our sins and regain the grace of God, peace of mind, our merits, our rights. The Prodigal Son (Luke 16).

2° As being in a state of tepidity, in order to get out of that unfortunate state of weakness, of detestable languor which leads imperceptibly to death, leaves one open to be rejected by God (Apoc. 3).

A sick person, goes on a diet, stays in his room, goes to bed, takes the remedies prescribed by the doctor (Isaiah 38).

3° The just man, regains his strength, finds out how to know and fulfil his duties more perfectly, how to achieve that perfection which God asks of us.

It is in a retreat that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are especially favoured by God, that Moses and the Jewish people have the happiness of hearing his voice, of being fed with heavenly bread and a mysterious drink, that the apostles, hermits and all the saints have gained the strength, the virtues and the treasures of knowledge and merits that we admire in them.

Every day we need food, rest, relaxation, etc... We wash our hands, our face, we brush our clothes, we clean up, we distemper the walls, we wash the rooms, we scour the dishes, the utensils, etc... at certain times.
AIM OF THE RETREAT

From a notebook written in the hand of Brother François, in AFM, 5101.307, pp. 255260

The text which follows comes from the first of the three “Carnets d’Instructions” of Brother François. Its present position cannot in any way serve to indicate its date in relation to the preceding one since it has not yet been possible to know exactly if the order of the notebooks corresponds to the chronological order. However, it is probable that these two texts are not contemporary, for if they are both notes from Father Champagnat’s instructions, which is not impossible, it is hard to see how he could have used the same theme twice in the same retreat, or why Brother François should write down the same conference twice in different places. We are therefore obliged for the moment to confront two questions to which there are no answers. However that may be, it does not yet constitute a proof that the two texts did not come from a single source.

I What is the retreat?

These are days of grace and of salvation which God grants us in his infinite mercy and of which he will ask from us a rigorous account.

This is a time of prayer, of reflection, of self examination.

This is a separation, a withdrawal, a distancing of ourselves from the world, a place of security, of refuge from our enemies, from all that can make us lose grace and innocence. A flight into Egypt to escape Herod’s cruelty.

It is a time of rest, a cessation from all work, from anything which has not salvation for its object, for its immediate aim.

It is a time for penance, privation, mortification, abnegation.

The retreat and fast of Jesus Christ in the desert.

II The aim, the end of the retreat is not to enjoy a rest, a period of calm and solitude, to do penances, to practice austerities or extraordinary privations, to use more time for prayer, for reading, for reflection: these are means for the retreat but not its aim.
The aim of my retreat is to reform my life, to get to know myself better, to find out God’s plans for me, to discover once for all what my dispositions, my imperfections, my bad habits really are; to regulate my whole conduct, all my actions, all my desires; to be renewed in the spirit of my vocation; in a word, to change myself into another man, to make myself into a perfect man (Ephes. 4,13), a new creature in Jesus Christ (2 cor. 6,5). For if this retreat does not end like that and if I come out of it without having corrected my ordinary faults, it is nothing but a pure illusion. It will be useless.

The aim of this retreat, then, is to reform myself, to see where I stand in the matter of my salvation, what is the state of my conscience, if I am ready to render my account to the Sovereign Judge. Is there nothing in my conscience which troubles me? Am I in a state of grace? What would I fear, for what would I have to make reparation if I had to appear just now before God?

I am going, then, during this retreat, to put my conscience in that state in which I would like it to be at the hour of my death.

III The aim of the retreat is to learn to know oneself:

1° What is the thing that prevents me from belonging completely to God? from being fervent? from being a good religious?

Is it because I listen to myself too much? because I am too fond of looking after number one? because I do not want to use strong tactics on myself? because I like my comforts? my convenience? and that I do not practice poverty, deprivation, etc...?

Is it not because I have some attachment, that I foster some uncontrolled affection?

Is it not because I give too much time to study, perhaps to studies forbidden by my rule, to dangerous studies?

Is it not because I try too hard to please men and am too fond of praise, flattery, etc...?

Is it not because I do not spend enough time at prayer, that I do not perform my spiritual exercises well, that I insist on doing what I want and that I do not know how to obey?

2° What are the temptations which torment me most? What do they spring from? Did I not expose myself to them? Have I done anything to add to them, to make them more insistent?

How do I fight against them? Have I told my confessor about them, my superior? Do I make a point of following their advice?

I must find out all about myself during this retreat; I must make out a line of conduct to fight them. If I did not my salvation would be in danger; if
I did not I would never be content, life for me would be slavery.

3° What is my dominating passion? That passion which is the source, the cause, the thing that most usually triggers off my faults, which gives me most matter for my confessions, which most troubles the peace of my soul, which causes me most remorse.

My dominating passion, that is to say the one I have to fight most, the one which gives me most trouble and most repugnance to fight, the one which usually comes into everything I do, into all my projects, the one which is most importunate, most intractable, most deeply rooted, the most imperious, the one which is dearest to my heart.

I shall get to know my dominating passion by sounding my dispositions, by examining the motives for my actions, what in me comes most naturally.

If I am dominated by the strong desire to please men, to be praised, esteemed; if I look for praise, for the approbation of men; if I always want to dominate, to be the first everywhere; if I often surprise myself having thoughts of self-esteem; if I boast; if I try to appear more virtuous, more learned, more clever than I am; if I hold fast to my opinion, if I like disputing, if I have difficulty obeying, in receiving a reprimand from my superiors, there is no doubt that pride is my dominating passion.

4° If I am afraid of work, of pain, if I am cowardly, negligent in my work, if I do it badly, if I put off everything that is confided to me, if my person and everything I am given to use is in disorder and untidy, if I cannot force myself to react, then laziness, hideous laziness is my dominating passion.

I recognised that dominating passion last year, I had even resolved to fight against it, have I done so, and how did I do it?

IV What is the aim of this retreat?

It is to know what my duties are, the obligations of my state as religious:
1° Duties towards God: I must be a man of prayer and meditation;
2° Towards myself: I must be humble, modest, chaste;
3° Towards my Brothers: I must be for them a model of virtue and not a scandal. I must love them, be charitable towards them, make myself and regard myself as the servant of all;
4° Towards the community: Regularity, fidelity to all the points of the rule;
5° Duties as a teacher: Zeal, devotedness for the class; form the class to religious virtues, supervise them in order to preserve their innocence, etc...;

6° Duties as director: Give example to everyone, see that the rule is observed, direct the Brothers, administer the temporal affairs of the establishment as a good father of a family would; maintain a religious spirit in the house, that is to say, humility, modesty, charity, peace, union, silence, prayerful atmosphere, love of work, etc...

V What is the aim of my retreat?

It is to review my daily, weekly, monthly actions to see how I perform them and what the motives are which prompt me. If I am careful to offer them to God, if I do them for his glory and not to please men and attract their esteem, if I do them in a composed manner, in the presence of God, or if a spirit of dissipation, of light-headedness or laziness does not take away from me all its fruit.

What is the thing I do worst? Might it be my spiritual exercises, my studies, my teaching, the direction of my Brothers, the administration of the temporal goods of the house, the supervision of the children, etc... etc...

I must examine myself on this and take the means to correct myself; that is why I have come to the retreat.

VI What is the aim of the retreat?

It is to renew myself in the spirit of my state, that is, to reawaken, to increase as much as I am able the desire for my salvation and for my perfection; that means avoiding, running away from, not only mortal sin but also every kind of deliberate venial sin, not to insist on what I want, to practise poverty, detachment from the things of earth, etc...

How do I stand at present with regard to all that? Is the way I behave in harmony with the intention I had in entering religion and with the promises I made to God?

VII As I begin this retreat, then, I must plan ahead what I must do, the fruit I want to draw from it:

What is the vice which is doing most damage to my soul, so that I can fight against it and take means to correct myself?

What virtue is most necessary for me so that I can strive to acquire it?
Which one of my actions do I perform worst, so that I can take means to perform it well henceforth?

I must examine what plan I have to draw up, what means I have to take to do good among the children confided to me to win them for God, to lead them wisely.

That is the aim of my retreat.

When I have found out for sure what my weak points are, what I am lacking or what I must correct, I shall direct all my efforts, all my prayers, all the spiritual exercises of my retreat towards that.

(Bourdoloue, Retreat, Exhortation, Meditation on the eve)
From a copy of the notes of Brother Jean Baptiste in AFM, Writings 4, p. 62

This short text takes up hardly a page in the volume “Writings 4” of the notes of Brother Jean Baptiste.

We know that we are dealing here with a burning question which was at the centre of the Jansenist quarrel whose echo was propagated well into the nineteenth century. In fact, these texts were written in an ambience that was more or less tainted with Jansenism and consequently they reveal to which camp our first superiors belonged, even our Founder. Therefore we must not be surprised by the rigorism that is evident in these texts.

1 - The abuse of grace is one of the greatest dangers in the religious life.
2 - It is a crime that is extremely displeasing to God, because it is a sin of ingratitude, of contempt for the gifts of God. Light-headed people and those whose hearts are wicked easily become guilty of this fault.

3 - It is a crime that God punishes severely:
   1° by withdrawing his grace, a terrible and frightening chastisement;
   2° by blindness, that is the loss of natural light, the light of grace and, later, the light of glory;
   3° by hardening our attitude: the heart no longer feels anything, the will is paralysed and is unable to function;
   4° by substitution: The kingdom of God will be taken away from you. Another man who is more pleasing to me will be put in your place. I shall give to your brother, who is better than you, the graces you have despised;
   5° In such a state, this soul is no more than a discarded stone. Salvation is one hundred times more difficult for him than for people who live in the world.
6° Principles concerning graces
INSTRUCTIONS ON GRACE

From the copy of a text of Brother JeanBaptiste,
in AFM, Writings 4, pp. 228236

In the same volume, “Writings 4”, of Brother Jean Baptiste, this text comes immediately before the instructions on the retreat given above, a fact which presumes nothing with regard to its date, since the copyist could have copied the original in any order at all.

One could question, in the same collection, these texts where part of one repeats almost the whole of the other. One’s first thought might be that the preceding text is a conference heard, from Father Champagnat, for example, and that the one which follows here is a conference prepared by Brother Jean Baptiste. The only way we can support such a hypothesis is by admitting that the text of Brother François which we shall see further on reproduces an instruction of Father Champagnat. The one which is nearest to it is the preceding text of Brother Jean Baptiste rather than the one which follows. That would not prevent our thinking that the latter can be considered as coming from the same inspiration, whence its presence here.

[Grace] 1 Its necessity 2 Its measure 3 Abuse of grace and its sad result.

1 - Grace is necessary:

1° To escape from sin To withdraw a soul from sin is something so great, so difficult, that only God can do it. The creation of the world, the resurrection of the dead are nothing in comparison with the miracle of the sanctification of a soul, of its passage from a state of sin to the state of grace. It is impossible for a man, not only to give that grace, but even to merit it: it is a gift that is quite free. Sin is like a deep ditch which a man cannot come out of unless you send a rope down or give him some other help.

2° To avoid sin, to run away from it, “No man can tame his tongue,” says Saint James, no man can avoid sin without the help of God. Our enemies, the
devils, are stronger, more cunning, more hardened than we are; moreover, the world and our flesh are on their side and fight against our mind. Now the weakest cannot resist the strongest if he is not helped, so God can say to man whenever he is tempted what he said to king Abimelech: “I have prevented you from sinning against me”. “If God had not come to my help,” said David, “my soul would have gone to hell (Psalm 93). Lead us not into temptation!

Comparisons: The ship founders if the pilot leaves it. The chariot capsize if there is no driver. The city falls if the magistrates do not see to its protection. The stone falls into the abyss if the thing holding it back is taken away. The body is lost if it has no soul, the soul if it has no reason, reason if it has no virtue (Plato); to that let us add, virtue if there is no grace of God.

3° To do good, to practise virtue. It is impossible for us to perform any virtuous action, to acquire any merit without grace. “Without me,” says Jesus Christ, “you can do nothing.” “Jesus Christ,” says Saint Augustine, “does not say ‘without me you cannot finish anything,’ he says, ‘without me you can do nothing at all’, neither begin, nor continue, nor end.” The Apostle had already taught us that earlier with these words: “Of ourselves we cannot have even a good thought, a good desire, if God does not make us able to do so. It is God who gives us the possibility of wishing or doing, according to what is pleasing to him (2Cor. 3,5). When we are deprived of grace we can neither pray to obtain it nor be disposed to receive it, so great and absolute is our need for God’s help (Saint Augustine). Human nature, no doubt, has the power to love God, but it is a power that is hindered by original corruption and by a million obstacles. It is no use having eyes to see with if there is no sun or other light shining; no use having wings to fly with if you cannot spread them or if there is no air to support them; no use having feet to walk with if they are tied together, etc...

2 - The measure of graces.

Holy Scripture tells us that God does everything with weight, number and measure. He knows how many stars there are, he counts the drops of water he makes fall on the earth. But if he does everything in natural and terrestrial matters with good order, with greater reason does he act like this in what concerns the salvation of man. For each one he has fixed the number of his days, of the hours he will spend on earth, the degree of health, of knowledge, the talents he will be granted, the amount of grace he will give him to work out his salvation. If man cooperates with these graces, God predestines him for his glory; if man refuses and resists, he damns him for ever. “Jeru- salem, Jerusalem, how often have I wanted...” How many times, there is the number, there are the graces which have been given you to save yourself,
you did not want to, there is man's refusal; you will be abandoned, that is reprobation.

God ordered Josuah to tell the priests to go around the town of Jericho seven times blowing trumpets, carrying the Ark which contained the Law, the manna, Aaron's rod, which means that God turns around the heart of man a certain number of times, makes his voice ring out, remorse, places the Law before his eyes, the consolations of which the manna is the figure, the rod figure of chastisement. If man does not surrender he is abandoned to justice.

This measure is not the same for everyone. As there are many dwellings in the home of the heavenly Father and since all men are not called to the same degree of perfection and holiness, all do not receive the same measure of grace. To one is given five talents, to another ten, to another one only. There is, therefore, a certain relation between the state of sanctity and glory to which one is called and the degree of grace which one is granted. Grace is given by Our Lord as he pleases (Eph. 4,7), because, since it is a grace and not something deserved, he grants it to whom he pleases and how he pleases. This measure of grace, smaller for some, bigger for others, is, however, sufficient for everyone, if we correspond to it, and any man who is lost, is damned not because he lacked grace but because he resisted and abused it.

2 Graces are of two kinds: ordinary and outstanding or extraordinary. Ordinary ones are those which are usually granted to all Christians. Extraordinary ones are: a vocation to the religious life, some special protection, some powerful inspirations, some insight or dazzling enlightenment, powerful movements, intense moments of grace, a retreat, an illness.

3 - Abuse of grade; its sad effects.

We exhort you not to receive the grace of God in vain (1Cor. 6).
If God calls you today, harden not your hearts (Ps.)

Abuse of grace is the greatest evil that can happen to a soul. It has forced tears out of the Son of God: Seeing the town, he wept over it although it was a day of triumph and glory.

1 - The first chastisement arising from the abuse of grace is the removal of that grace, at least of those that are abundant and efficacious. Now, since all kinds of graces are necessary to bring about our salvation and without them we cannot be saved, or avoid sin and hell, the removal of these graces is the most terrifying, the most frightening thing that God inflicts in this world.

102
When God abandons us to the desires of our heart, to our passions, says Saint Augustine, then fury is unchained against us; he strikes us with an incurable wound, a hostile blow, a cruel chastisement, terrible, but just. God knocks at the door of our heart, we refuse to open to him, he goes away. Grace is a brilliant light, we close our eyes so as not to see it, it withdraws. Grace is a precious pearl, an outstanding gift which God offers us to purchase heaven, we spurn it, we refuse it, this gift is given to others.

2 - The second chastisement is blindness. Those who rebel against the light no longer recognise the way of the Lord nor follow his paths (Job, 24,13) and the greatest evil is that they think they are on the right road. They are walking in darkness as if they were in the light (Job, id, 17). The Lord, says Moses, strikes them with frenzy, with blindness, with fury, so that they walk feeling their way like blind men, in full daylight. He blinds their eyes and hardens their hearts so that seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear (John 12,40). Such is the state of blindness into which a man falls who has abused grace. St Augustine says that in punishment for his sin he deserves to lose what he did not wish to use to do good. He will have little fear of sin, will look upon as venial sins those that are mortal, will excuse his faults, will wallow in his bad habits and will not see the sad state he is in. He will no longer understand the word of God, the clearest things will be hidden from him. God punishes the way he has abused grace by a humiliating blindness (Saint Augustine).

3 - The third chastisement is the hardening of the heart. The soul becomes deaf, insensitive and as it were stupid; nothing touches it, neither a reading, nor a sermon, neither remonstrances nor prayers; much more than that, it is not moved by the gifts of God nor by his chastisements, nor by his special signs of affection; illness, afflictions, nothing makes an impression on him, he is like a dead man, a blind man. Stick a dagger into the heart of a dead man, pierce him with a sword, cut his limbs off, he feels nothing because he is dead and insensitive to everything. Put a lit candle in front of the eyes of a blind man, a torch, a sun, even ten thousand suns, he will see nothing, because he is blind. This is the picture of the soul who has abused grace. It ends up being aware of nothing. When the wicked man, says Solomon, has gone down into the depths of evil, he scorns, laughs at everything, he becomes shameless, does evil without a blush, with no remorse; he even rejoices in his iniquity, says Jeremiah, and drinks this iniquity like water.

This deplorable state comes from God and from the soul itself.

From God, who is offering it the necessary graces of which it has made itself unworthy. It is in this sense that Scripture says that God hardens the soul, not by instilling wickedness into it, but by refusing it the grace which could touch it (Saint Augustine). In the same way wax becomes hard again when you remove it from the flame, iron becomes cold when you take it out of the furnace. The fire is not the cause of this hardness nor of this cold, it simply
does not of itself cause its heat to be felt, for this soul, by its many faults, by its resistance to grace, has put its mind and will into such a state that these faculties are no longer able to feel the impression that grace makes. And so it happens that a man cannot read today what he was reading yesterday, not that the letters have changed, but because his sight has become weak; because he cannot hear what he used to hear, not because people are speaking in a lower voice but because his ears have become swollen; because today he cannot carry the load which yesterday did not tire him at all, not that this load is heavier but because this man has lost his strength. Thus, grace is given to him, it acts as it did before, but it has no effect because of the bad dispositions of that soul.

But if the abuse of ordinary graces is such a great evil, contempt for and abuse of extraordinary graces produce sadder and more disastrous results. Thus, to abuse the grace of a retreat is to expose yourself to the most awful punishments. Not to take advantage of a retreat is to draw down on yourself the curse which Our Lord put on Chorazin and Bethsaida. “Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” A “vac” in the mouth of God is a frightful thing: how can one not fear it? An infinite number of souls would become holy if they had the grace on a retreat, and this religious is still the same, or rather he is worse. Woe to him, then, for several souls would have profited from this grace which he allows to pass uselessly. He is more guilty than the idolaters of Tyre and Sidon, more hardened in evil than the inhabitants of Ninive. Yes, his state is worse than theirs, it is Jesus Christ who tells us that.

For three years I have come to look for fruit on this tree and I do not find any; cut it down, why should it be taking up the ground? That religious who has been in a state of sin or of lukewarmness for several years, who has not made use of all the advantages, all the cares of his vocation, will be cut down, that is he will lose his vocation, another will take his place both in religion and in heaven.

Jesus, having come to look for fruit on a fig tree and having found none, curses it and says: “Let no one ever eat fruit that comes from you.” During this retreat Jesus comes to that religious, he gives him abundant graces. If that religious abuses them he will be cursed and shall become hardened, perhaps forever. If the grace of the retreat produces no fruit in him, no other grace will produce any and no more fruit will come from him. That is a frightful punishment, but it is not all, listen:

Earth that is watered by the rain from the sky which often falls on it and which produces grass and vegetables for the use of those who cultivate it, is blessed by the Lord. But earth which produces thorns and thistles is useless ground, it is cursed and its lot is to be burned. That is the figure of the bad religious, of the tepid religious who has had God’s graces heaped on him, has
been cultivated, watered and has made no progress in virtue, who produces only thorns, that is to say who commits only faults and whose actions are for the world only, whose life is full of sin, etc. Alas! says the Apostle, it is not possible that those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the gift of heaven, who have understood the excellence of virtue and of heavenly things and have allowed themselves to fall, it is not possible, I say, that those persons should ever be renewed by penance (Heb. 6,48). Terrifying words! Words capable of turning tepid souls into ice if they still have any feelings. Saint Paul says that it is not possible for them to renew their fervour, that is to say it is very difficult. What shall become of them then? We have told you. They are useless ground. They will be rejected. The kingdom of heaven will be taken from you and given to another who will produce fruits from it (Matt. 21,45). Vocation, grace, retreat, all will be taken away and given to another who will take advantage of them. You have rejected my word, I, in my turn, reject you (I Kings 15,23). I have found a man after my own heart (id. 13,14), he will take your place. I have given to your neighbour who is better than you the graces you have spurned (id. 13,28). But that is not all: what will become of that rejected soul? The land which produces only thorns, says Saint Paul, is cursed. That religious will be cursed. Unhappy and cursed in this world wherever he goes, he will never have success anywhere in all he does. He is a being who is debased, a fugitive like Cain, like the Jews. His unhappiness and the curse of heaven follow him everywhere. His enemies, the world, the devil, his passions will use pressure on him, will torment him everywhere and will not leave him a moment's rest. But that is only the beginning of his punishment, or rather only its shadow. The land, Saint Paul continues, which in spite of being cultivated produces only thorns, is destined for the flames. The destiny of the religious who has abused God's graces is eternal damnation. Every tree that does not produce fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. Gather up the cockle, bind it into bundles to burn. Pick up that scandalous religious who does not observe his rule, who does not keep his vows, who abuses the gifts of God, who profanes the sacraments, does not fulfil the aim of his vocation and is only good for burning. Oh! how right Saint Paul was when he said: It is only a miracle of the first order which can convert a person who abuses the grace of a retreat. There is no more fearsome a crime or one more to be feared than the abuse of grace; to let us understand how enormous it is, it made Jesus Christ weep. The divine ... often speaks about it and always in the most frightening terms: Woe, he says, to anyone who is guilty of that, he will be harassed by every spiritual and temporal calamity; he will be cursed, cut down, cast on the rubbish heap, thrown out ...
Brother François

Abuse of grace

From the second notebook of instructions of Brother François in AFM, 5101.308, pp. 607-615

The following text is presented in such a carefully arranged manner that we cannot consider it as simply notes taken down during a conference: the sentences are correct and there is a well structured plan. But that is not a valid argument for rejecting all possibility that it translates the thought of Father Champagnat, for the similarity with the texts of Brother Jean Baptiste is evident as to the ideas, even as to the expressions. This, it seems to us, is sufficient reason for transcribing this text here.

I - Excellence of grace and our need for it.

1° Grace is much to be preferred to all the treasures in the world, it is something which, after the beatific vision, beats anything which is not God. Grace is the price of the work, the sufferings and the death of Jesus Christ. It starts, increases, crowns our merits, indeed it is the seed of eternal glory since the just man, by cooperating with docile heart in these holy inspirations, by accomplishing with its help those acts of supernatural virtue, acquires each time a new degree of sanctifying grace and at the same time the right to a happiness which cannot be lost. Each ray of that heavenly light, when it penetrates into our hearts, leaves there the seed and the pledge of a happiness we cannot understand. Let us compare it with all the grandeurs here below: the crown of kings, the majesty of the greatest monarchs, add to that the price of all the rich metals and of all the treasures which the earth and the sea hold in their bosom, let us also bring together all the wonders of nature, the beauty of the dawn, the brilliance of the sun and the splendour of the stars, and we shall find that one single illumination of grace, one single movement of the Holy Spirit is a thousand times more excellent, more worthy of our admiration and our desire. Oh! what a deplorable misfortune it is, then, to reject rashly this perfect gift, this fruit of the love of God, this precious seed of glory; to feel more hurt at losing some trifle than for losing that pearl which is grace; in a word, to sacrifice this help which divine goodness gives, without any reason, without remorse, as if you scorned it.

106
GRACE

2° We who need grace so much. Indeed, it is a truth of faith that without the help of grace it is impossible for us to gain any merit towards our salvation. Without me, says Jesus Christ, you can do nothing (John 15). We are not able of ourselves of forming a single good thought, it is God who makes us capable of it (2Cor. 3). It is he who governs our will and our action as it pleases him (Phil.). Saint Augustine adds that, if we are deprived of grace we cannot of ourselves either pray to obtain it or have the dispositions for receiving it, so great and so absolute is the need we have of God's help. To refuse it when he offers it is, therefore, to reject with deplorable rashness a means which is indispensable for making us act in a way that is useful for our salvation. It is therefore true that when we resist the promptings of grace we are refusing the key to heaven which is being offered to us, we are frittering away a talent which by itself is precious enough to be worth an immortal crown, we are losing the only diamond, the incomparable treasure which can procure for us the possession of God himself. Grace is the food of the soul as bread is the food of the body, and just as we expose ourselves to certain death when we obstinately refuse to take any food, so do we expose our virtue to inevitable shipwreck when we neglect the only support for our weakness, when we scorn the help by which God deigns to warn us, and we dare to withstand the pressing and loving attempts of his goodness. Ah! woe to us if we begin to see the value of grace only when we no longer have it.

II The abundance and the effectiveness of the graces we receive.

God gives us great and numerous graces, such as the call to faith and to the religious life, long retreats, frequentation of the sacraments and the fruits they are able to produce in our souls. That is one part of the graces that divine goodness lavishes on us, and how many other means does he not lavish on us in his love! Every morning the Holy Sacrifice is offered for us and we are able to be present; pious exhortations, good example, meditation, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, lifting up our hearts to God every hour and almost every moment, interior prompting to goodness, etc... all these are so many daily and continuous graces. These graces are effective in themselves and in the way they meet our needs. If they were given with the same generosity to others who would have been more faithful than we were, they would have made them become great saints; they would even have been sufficient to lead back hardened sinners to the path of goodness. But alas! they are often unfruitful in us because, in our ingratitude, we reject them freely, negligently. Yet, when we resist these graces that are so great, so effective, so continuous, for no reason, through a whim, for a trifle, when we value as less than glass this precious stone, this treasure from heaven, are we not adding to our abuse of it a most culpable malice? Woe, then, to you, Chorazin! woe to you Bethsaida! woe to you, religious! for if the miracles which have been done for you had
been done for others they would have attained a high degree of perfection. At
the day of judgment, infidels, heretics, Christians even, those who were your
compatriots, your fellow disciples, your pupils, those whom you have urged
on to goodness, to the right use of graces, etc... will also arise and will accuse
you of yourself rejecting them so scornfully. Even the blood of Jesus Christ
will cry vengeance on you, because you have wasted so much interior light
and so many good inspirations that he merited for you. Dweller in the hea-
venly Jerusalem, the sovereign judge will say, in front of the whole universe:
judge now between me and my vine, between me and this soul. Tell me, what
ought I to have done to my vine which I have not done? After so much at-
tention that I have lavished on it, had I not the right to expect excellent fruits
from it, and it has produced nothing but sour grapes (Isaiah 5). This ungrate-
ful vine produces for me brambles and thorns in exchange for so much work,
so much labour and trouble I have endured for it. What reply is there to such
reproaches? What a terrible reflection! What overpowering remorse! What
bitter regrets! I could so easily have become a saint! I ought to have done as
my Rule obliged me to, as my vocation required, and yet ... Ah! horror, de-
spair, frightening future ... Let us throw ourselves at the feet of the Lord like
the servant in the Gospel who could not pay and ask him to grant us some re-
spite (Matt. 16). O Lord, enter not into judgment with your servant. I admit
it, my soul is a piece of useless ground, bad, arid, covered with brambles and
thorns, full of stones and weeds. You have sown the holy seed of your grace
but some has been trampled underfoot and has been lost, some sprang up but
withered or was choked by thorns (Luke 8). I am the barren fig tree, cultiva-
ted with such care, watered with heavenly dew, always exposed to the rays of
the sun of justice and nevertheless always found to have no fruit (Matt. 21;
Luke 13)). But there's an end to my straying; at last, my God, I shall cease to
resist you ... You, O Lord, do not start again to punish me ... Give me a heart
that is docile so that I may no longer receive your grace in vain (Cor. 6). May
my soul be so disposed that the divine seed may bear fruit one hundredfold,
so that the praise and glory for that may be given to your grace (Eph. 1).

III Withdrawal of grace, usual punishment for those who abuse it.

God often punishes us for abusing the graces we need by withdrawing
those graces and this punishment is the most terrible, the most just and the
most usual vengeance that he may inflict on us.

1° The most terrible. There is nothing more to be feared for our soul than
whatever distances it from God, the sovereign good, and enslaves it to the
sovereign evil, sin and hell. Now, such is the deplorable consequence of the
withdrawal of the graces we need. Indeed, by the absolute disposition of the
divine decree, those graces are the necessary means for working out our sal-
vation, so that without them we shall never possess God, never avoid hell. It
GRACE

is true that, with graces that are barely sufficient we could be saved, but we certainly shall not be. It still remains true, then, that nothing distances us from the sovereign good, God and heaven, as much as the withdrawal of the graces we need, and also that nothing enslaves us and dedicates us more to the sovereign evil, sin and hell. The withdrawal of the grace we need is, then, the most rigorous vengeance for our abuse of it for, in the judgment of most wise men, there is no greater punishment in this world than that which tends to harden the sinner in his evil ways; which blinds his intelligence to such a degree that he no longer sees what state his soul is in; which shackles his will so strongly that he no longer even has the will to break his bonds; which takes from him the best means for doing salutary penance and makes smoother and shorter for him the path to all vices. When the Lord permits that we have to suffer disgrace, humiliations, persecutions, illnesses, that is a punishment, it is true, but then he is acting, not like a judge or an avenger, but as a father and a friend who is seeking, by these trials, to turn us away from evil and draw us to him and who has in mind to correct the sinner by punishing the sin. But when he blinds our intelligence, when he sets our will in its own malice and when he withdraws those lights which enlighten us as to the ugliness of vice and the good inclinations which would lead us to detest it, it is then that the fury of an all powerful God strikes the sinner with an incurable wound, a hostile blow, a harsh punishment (Jer. 30), one so great and terrible that it exhausts the rigours that divine justice can inflict in this world.

2° The most just. Grace is an inestimable gift, a pearl from the crown of Jesus Christ, the pledge of eternal glory. God offers it to us with love, he begs, he presses us to accept it. He still presents it to us after repeated refusals. We scorn this gift, we refuse this pearl, we show disdain for this pledge of immortality. God, so often repelled, finally tires of offering it to us and stops insisting. What could be more just? Grace is a burning, shining light; God wants to enlighten our mind with this torch and sets our hearts aglow with the ardour of that flame, we close the eyes of our soul, we flee from the light and the heat; the sun of justice, finding us still rebellious to his saving influence, finally withdraws his rays and shines no more for us. What could be fairer? Grace is the voice of God knocking at the door of our hearts and begging entry, kindly, tenderly and lovingly; we do not listen, we shut our ears to his voice, we refuse to welcome him; weary of knocking, the Lord stops insisting and, seeing himself scorned, he withdraws; who will dare complain? It is true, then, that the withdrawal of grace after we have so often scorned and lost it, which is so terrible, so disastrous, is a most just punishment.

3° The most usual. We are often astonished that a God to whom nothing is hidden puts up so patiently with so many tepid religious who, surrounded as they are with such powerful means of salvation, yet perform the duties of their state so imperfectly and negligently, especially that obligation imposed on them of tending to perfection. Ah! says Saint Augustine, God punishes them with a secret punishment, all the more rigorous in that it is more con-
sealed by withdrawing his grace and allowing them to go calmly to sleep in their lukewarmness. As a consequence of this abandonment, those who formerly feared even the appearance of sin, now treat as trifles those dangerous thoughts, looks and other liberties; they count as trivial faults those aversions, familiarities, hatreds, calumnies, grumblings, anger, although there are grounds to fear that these are so many grievous sins: they label as empty scruples the remorse caused by the violation of their vows or guilty acts of negligence in their work; they adopt liberal principles by the help of which they try to deceive themselves, to fall asleep and to stifle the cries of their conscience. Their hearts, which were docile before to the attraction of truth and sensitive to the impressions of piety and are now dried up and have become harder than stone, are touched neither by the remembrance of their last end and of God's judgment nor by the holy practices of religion. Would to God that sad experience did not teach us every day that such a punishment is quite usual, even in religious societies. Let us cast a glance at what is around us and we shall see a hundred frightening examples of that truth. Those great falls, those frightful shipwrecks in virtue, the unfaithful abandonment of a vocation, of a holy vocation, followed often by an absolute loss of faith and morals, are they not so many monuments witnessing to the truth of the withdrawal of grace and which God lets us see to fill us with salutary fear? Let us take a sounding in our heart and see if, on different occasions we have not ourselves experienced this withdrawal of divine grace. Let us recall the time of our holy retreat exercises, the time of our novitiate and of other salutary days we have been given; are we not obliged to admit that many graces of enlightenment and many good inspirations have been withdrawn from us because we have neglected to take advantage of those we had received, for God is not mocked with impunity (Gal. 6), and he abandons those who abandoned him first. Let us be on our guard that it should not happen to us, as it did to others; perhaps the moment is not far away when the continuing flow of graces God destined for us will be interrupted and when they will be given to others who will prove more worthy than us (Matth. 21). Let us be afraid, because the judgments of God are a deep abyss (Ps. 95), and although the withdrawal of grace is the most terrible of all, yet it is usual and most just at the same time (Bellecitus, "Solide Vertu"; Bourdaloue, "Retraite, III° jour"; Judde, "Grande Retraite, T. 1, Châtiments, p. 277; "Retraite religieuse , 3° jour, 1er méditation, T. 3")