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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

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A MAN WHO LET HIMSELF BE MOULDED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

by Br. Aureliano Brambila de la Mora

I was asked to write an article on Father Champagnat and the Holy Spirit, a theme made almost obligatory by this liturgical year dedicated to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, one of the three years of preparation for the celebration of the year 2000. The last issue of this publication addressed the theme of Champagnat and Jesus Christ. At that time we were in the midst of the year dedicated to the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human.

So what can we say in this present article? How can we connect Marcellin to the Holy Spirit, or vice versa?

The first thing that occurred to me was to go looking for pertinent statements by Father Champagnat (in his letters, his rules, etc.) In other words, investigate what Marcellin himself had to say about this divine person. Here are a few of my findings:

"May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communication of the Holy Spirit be always with you. I am, most affectionately in Jesus and Mary, your most loving father." (Letter 318, Circular to all the Brothers, February 1840)

"I was in Lavalla when I heard from Fr. Bedoin, the parish priest, that Fr. Champagnat was very ill, and I went with him to visit the dying man. The Brother did not want to let me in, but by Fr. Champagnat's express order, I did enter the room and went to embrace him. "Poor child", he told me, "you're embracing a corpse." I heard what he told Fr. Bedoin: "I would have been pleased if God had called me home to him on the feast of the Ascension, but it appears that I was not yet sufficiently purified. I'm still hoping that I'll be up there on Pentecost, to watch the Holy Spirit descend on my good Brothers." (Testimony of Fr. Pierre Jomard, Summarium, 508)

"Of course, I have no intention of abandoning you; but you can see that temporal affairs absorb much of my time, and that, despite my good will, I can't do for you everything that I would like. Someone else, then, should be given the task of instructing you and of training you in piety. So, ask again for the light of the Holy Spirit and for the protection of Mary. Give the matter more thought: rid yourself of all emotional attachment and of every human

perspective; then proceed to a fresh election." (Life, ed. 1989, p. 135)

"Father Champagnat was extremely gratified by the fine dispositions of those Brothers and by their approach to him. He expressed his satisfaction with them, praising their good spirit and submission, and after a moment's reflection, he said to them: 'Leave me by myself for a few hours to examine before God what I should do. You pray, too, so that the Holy Spirit may enlighten me and inspire me with the advice I ought to give you. I shall send for you after my reflection.'" (Life, ed. 1989, p. 166)

"Lastly, the Brothers were encouraged to call on the help of the Holy Spirit and the protection of Mary. They were to pray fervently to know God's will in the important choice they were making, to divest themselves of any human consideration, of any self-interest and of any trace of ambition or intrigue." (Life, ed. 1989, p. 219)

"The election ceremony began with the singing of the *Veni Creator* and the Mass of the Holy Spirit, attended by the whole community. Then Father Colin, in a short but moving speech, urged the Brothers once more to make a wise choice.

He concluded with the prayer of the apostles: 'You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show us which of these you have chosen' (Acts 1,24)." (Life, ed. 1989, p. 220)

"On Thursdays and Sundays, after the examen, the *Veni Creator* is recited, the religious commandments and means of perfection are read, the chapter of faults is held, and the prayer is then concluded." (Rule of 1837, ch. 2, art. 41)

"The *Veni Creator* will be recited after night prayer on the evening before the retreat begins." (Rule of 1837, ch. 4, art. 5)

"At the beginning of class, the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, the *Ave Maria* and the offering to God of the day's activities, are recited." (Rule of 1837, ch. 6, art. 4)

"The *Veni Creator* is recited after evening prayer on the eve of the retreat." (House rules of N.D. de l'Hermitage, n. 10,4)

"At ten minutes before noon, whoever is presiding recites the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* and the *Ave Maria*; five minutes are then devoted to the particular examen, and five more to the reading of the booklet on the examination of conscience." (House rules of N.D. de l'Hermitage, n. 18,40)

"At the second bell, everyone will recollect himself briefly; the prayer will

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then begin with the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*." (House rules of N.D. de l'Hermitage, n. 27, 2)

"They will undress rapidly and with all possible modesty, out of respect for the presence of God and of the holy angels and for our bodies which should be seen as members of Jesus Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit." (House rules of N.D. de l'Hermitage, n. 28, 3)

After that, following the deductive method, one must look for the cultural and religious context. Here we must reflect on the dimensions of the French school of spirituality. All of that, in turn, leads us to examine at least the thinking of Cardinal de Bérulle, Fr. Olier and St. John Eudes. There can be no doubt whatever that Marcellin, with the Sulpician formation he received in the seminaries of both Verrières and Lyons, would have picked up many traits of that school of spirituality relating to the Holy Spirit. There are many elements we could consider, but I prefer not to go into them here and now. The various prayers Marcellin recited, which are found in the "Manual of Prayers" used by the first Brothers, contain all the techniques of interiorization and contemplation which are so typical of Eudism. I will mention in passing only the prayer, "O Jesus, living in Mary...", and the opening formula of the promise of the newly-ordained Marist aspirants, in which they committed themselves to do all in their power to bring about the foundation of the Society of Mary with its four branches (Fathers, Sisters, Third Order, and Teaching Brothers):

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. All for the greater glory of God and the honor of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ." (Fourvière Act of Consecration, 23 July 1816)

However, there is another vein we can mine, which is neither documentary nor contextual, but rather existential. I am referring to the fact that Marcellin was a person in whom the Holy Spirit dwelled as in any other Christian. This was the result of his baptism, his confirmation, and in a special way, his ordination. As baptized persons we are inhabited by that same Holy Spirit who makes us children of God. All of this was true of our Marcellin. His personal holiness was the result, in the first place, of the action of the divine Spirit.

"The Spirit (breath) of God, which creates and gives life, lays hold on men to endow them with superhuman power, particularly the prophets. The characteristic of the messianic age is to be an extraordinary outpouring of the Spirit on all men, endowing them with special graces. But more mysteriously, for each receiver the Spirit will be the principle of an inward renewal, mak-

ing possible a faithful observance of the law of God; thus the Spirit will be the principle inspiring the new covenant; like life-giving water It will nourish fruits of integrity and holiness, which in turn will guarantee the favor and protection of God for man. This effusion of the Spirit will be effected through the Messiah who will be the first recipient of It, to be able to accomplish His saving work." (Jerusalem Bible, note on Ez 36,27)

Our Marcellin was a man who allowed himself to be remade by the Spirit, and who therefore went on growing in holiness and goodness. Our Founder is one of those persons whose life is one of the best books that could be written. I am more interested in knowing how Marcellin journeyed through life rather than exactly where his footsteps fell along the way.

"He often spoke to us about the care that Divine Providence takes of those who confide in It, and of us in particular. And when he spoke to us about God's goodness and His love for us, he imparted to us that divine fire which filled him, and he did so abundantly, so strongly that all the difficulties and labors of our life, with all its wretchedness, could no longer upset us." (Testimony of Br. Laurence, Origines Maristes, 756)

However, the most outstanding thing about this man is that he was a charismatic Christian, in the theological sense of the word. He was at the service of the Holy Spirit in a special way, for the foundation of a new family in the Church and creation of a specific spirituality, as a way to God.

"I still firmly believe that God wants this work, in this age when unbelief is making such frightful progress; but perhaps He wants other men to start it." (Letters, n. 4, May 1827, to one of the vicars general of Lyons)

We have to give up our mistaken ideas about our Founder. We sometimes lay too much stress on his wealth of human qualities, and we make everything flow from his will power, his constancy, his firmness and his joy. Unless we go a bit deeper, all of that will still leave us on the surface. We are not an outgrowth of some gut-level exuberance, or the belching of a man who enjoyed good digestion. Some ideologues of "total quality" would like us to believe that everything depends on the greatness of my dreams and my ability to realize them. Marcellin is a totally different category.

The Lord took him from nothingness and created him to the measure of the mission he had to carry out. The Servant of Yahweh even goes against his personal preferences, and endures everything in order to move God's plans forward. So it was with Marcellin. And his great capacity for love came from the Holy Spirit.

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How many times I have said that God is pleased to make use of things that are of little account, and thus the work of God is made more manifest. I ask myself if we are not deforming our Marcellin. There are many quotations that set forth his limitations. With little things the Lord accomplishes....

"Many novices are also coming, but nearly all of them are very poor and very young. Still, three of them have reached the age of reason, since they are over thirty. One is a businessman, one is a shoemaker, and the third is a nobody. Still, God does great things with nothing." (Letters, n. 1, 1st December 1823, to Br. Jean-Marie Granjon)

Champagnat was docile to the action of the Spirit, whose presence filled him completely and overflowed from him. Consequently, we Brothers, as his followers, are not at the service of some human idea, no matter how brilliant it may be, but at the service of that same action of the Holy Spirit.

Marcellin's life followed the path traced out by the Servant of Yahweh. Jesus started out with great enthusiasm and ended up feeling that he had been totally abandoned. In Marcellin's case, we need only think of his physical condition, the search for legal recognition, the crises among the Brothers (Sylvestre), his problems with several priests (Chanut, Terrailon...), difficulties arising from the apostolate....

God was gradually preparing Marcellin to empty himself of himself. When the moment preordained by Providence arrived, Champagnat devoted himself very naturally and with great simplicity as well as with great determination and energy, to the foundation of the Institute. Externally, there is little difference between someone who is inspired and someone who is egocentric. But interiorly, what a distance between them! Everything depends on one's motivation and one's self-emptying. In other words, in an exclusive pursuit of the Father's business.

When Marcellin was still a boy, he became aware of the loving glance that Jesus directed toward children and young people. He wanted to concretize it by means of the Brothers he founded.

Marcellin fascinates me because I think God came to us through his life. He did not know how to read, and he taught us to read. He did not know how to write well, and he taught us to write. He turned us illiterates into teachers. Yes, God acted through Marcellin. For our sake, he was a man overwhelmed by God.

Marcellin's spiritual pedagogy is so wonderful. He associated the sense

of God's loving presence with the sight of simple, everyday things, like roadside crosses, church steeples, statues of Mary....

The spread of the Institute: something like the story told in the Acts of the Apostles. The difficulties presented by the diversity of mentalities no doubt put the Brothers of that time in front of a dilemma: whether to hold on rigidly to everything (confusing the essentials with their context), or to keep adapting things to different cultures? As in the Church, so in the Institute, the Spirit was present, and went on producing that wonderful unity amid diversity.

It is important to study the charismatic conjunction of the foundational and the institutional. When the Spirit touched Marcellin it brought forth a life which reached out over the whole world, just as the clouds which discharge their water onto the slopes of Pilat give birth to the Gier which runs all the way to the sea. If the first moment is important, the next one is no less so. Marcellin and his first disciples did not exhaust the charism. A river's torrent is not made up solely of water from the source; all its tributaries are important.

"If you knew the gift of God...." The Spirit gave the Church the gift of our Institute. That is the foundation of our love for Marcellin's work. Our fidelity to the Institute is precisely our own way of being faithful to God.

I believe in the life of the Institute. The Holy Spirit is here, in the institutional charism, as it was in the foundational one. It is impossible to limit oneself exclusively to the Founder and his lifetime. We must hold on to the vision of the whole picture. The charism is still at work, and not merely an historical event. The Spirit continues to work wonders.

Each successive generation of Brothers enjoys a charism which enables them correctly to discern what is authentic within the Institute, in order to trace a faithful channel for the action of the Spirit. Any other approach would render the work of the institution impossible. The charism would have become a monopoly, or at least, the exclusive possession, of the Founder, and would therefore have died with him. Institutional survival would be based solely on the group's capacity for maintaining its historical memory.

There seem to be two conceptions of religious life: the degenerative and the evolutionary. The first limits the influence of the Spirit exclusively to the initial, foundational moment. The second makes the history of the Institute a journey animated and presided over by the Spirit, along the path first trod by the Founder. All subsequent reflection, and therefore all investigation, depend on the preference given to one of those two conceptions.

The Holy Spirit goes on working today, just as yesterday. The mission of

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General Chapters and Superiors General is not merely to preserve what existed at the outset. Fidelity to mere material realities would stifle true fidelity. It would be an attitude of "sicut erat in principio...". We must beware of the temptation to primitivism. We must study the whole developmental picture, and not see the history of the Institute as the gradual degeneration of the original idea.

Some people insist on knowing Marcellin objectively, from afar. They forget that the same Spirit that animated him, animates us. It is by the reflective and progressively deeper living out of this common charism that we will better grasp what our Marcellin intended. It is a question of interior knowledge, rooted in the phenomenon of resonance and spiritual receptivity.

And if there is a relationship between Marcellin and the Spirit? Well, we could not conceive of Marcellin without the continuous presence of the Spirit. He was a man moulded by the Spirit.

.....

"On hearing Fr. Champagnat's words, 'The miracle of the Society is that God wanted to make use of such instruments to carry out this work', Fr. Maîtrepiere said to me, 'That's true: Father Champagnat had everything humanly necessary to ruin his undertaking'." (Fr. Mayet, OM 537)

"A parish priest in the diocese of Lyons, one of Fr. Champagnat's fellow students in the major seminary, thus expressed his astonishment, some 25 years after the foundation of the Brothers: 'God chose him and told him, "Champagnat, do this", and Champagnat did it'. He could find no other way to explain such an amazing success." (Fr. Terrailon, OM 701)

"In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ... May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be always with you. I leave you all with confidence in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary until we be all united again in a happy eternity." (Fr. Champagnat's Spiritual Testament, 18 May 1840)

Translation: Br. Leonard Voegtle. Esopus. New York

THE HIDDEN INSTRUCTIONS OF FATHER CHAMPAGNAT A LITTLE GUIDE TO READING THE LIFE OF THE FOUNDER

Br. André Lanfrey

Notice: The following text is the conclusion of a work entitled 'Introduction to the Life of Fr Champagnat' to be published at a later date. Because many readers will not have the time to read so long and technical a work, these few pages will provide it in condensed form.

Part 1: A HAGIOGRAPHY, AN EPOCH, A MILIEU

1.1 A FOUNDER

Born in 1789 at Marlhes, a village in the hill country of the Loire, died in 1840, Marcellin Champagnat, priest, was founder of the Little Brothers of Mary or Marist Brothers. From the years 1814-16 he was part of the Society of Mary of Lyon set up at the major seminary by a fellow student, Jean-Claude Courveille, and comprising in 1816 a dozen members. These Marists wished to rekindle the faith in France and in the world by the missionary activity of a tree with three branches – priests, sisters, and lay people. Champagnat proposed to add to the original project a branch of Brothers dedicated to teaching. Appointed curate in 1816 to the village of La Valla on the slopes of Mt Pilat (Loire), Champagnat undertook the regeneration of his parish by vigorous pastoral activity. Aware of the difficulty of providing the people of the far-flung hamlets with instruction in the Christian life, he founded in 1817 a community of Brothers whom he at first employed in catechising the hamlets and some neighbouring parishes. From 1822 he extended this to the towns and his numbers grew as the youth of the Upper Loire came to reinforce a group of local recruits beginning to run out of steam. In 1824, with the building of the house of the Hermitage, near the city of Saint Chamond, Champagnat expanded his objective. His congregation became more openly a teaching one, in particular to contest the mutual teaching provided by the Liberals which was considered to be lacking in the Christian spirit.

At the same time Champagnat called on the man he considered his superior, Fr Courveille, to direct the Brothers. But this collaboration proved a failure, the Brothers being unwilling to accept this man of rather unstable tem-

perament who left of his own accord in 1826. Champagnat then attempted to create, still at the Hermitage, a community of Marist priests who, a few years later, assumed their independence.

At the end of the Restoration, Fr Champagnat found himself forced to take on by himself the function of founder of the Marist Brothers, while using as officers the most capable of his Brothers. Owing to his charisma and steadiness of purpose, his congregation experienced a real prosperity. Its expansion was also favoured by the Guizot Law (1833) which obliged every commune to set up a boys' school. When he died in 1840 he had 280 disciples working in 48 establishments.

In the years following, his congregation accelerated its growth in numbers, freed itself from the Society of Mary under Fr Colin's direction, created a structure of its own with the laying down of Common Rules (1852), a School Guide (1853), Rules of Government (1854), and a Manual of Piety (1855). The *Life of Marcellin Champagnat* (1857), written by Br Jean-Baptiste, was the culmination of a series of great founding texts issuing from the activity and the thought of Fr Champagnat.

1.2 HAGIOGRAPHY AND CATECHETICAL METHOD

This *Life of Fr Champagnat* belongs to a tradition of hagiography which, starting from the 17th century, aims at telling the life of a saint while trying at the same time to compose a treatise on the ascetic life. This is why this *Life* is divided into two parts, the first essentially biographical, and the second, considered the more important, aimed at providing a 'body of doctrine'.¹

For all that, this type of hagiography is not especially fond of miracles and while the historical facts related are at the service of a spiritual and hagiographical approach, they are not hidden from view. The *Life of M.J.B. Champagnat*, then, is solidly anchored in the history of a time and of a milieu, and a critical reading can discern easily enough beneath the edifying interpretation, the power plays, hesitations, contradictions, successes, failures, inspirations and evolutions which are the lot of all human enterprises. A superficial reading might judge the work out of date, but in fact it retains strong credibility if the reader possesses appropriate keys of interpretation allowing him to get past the edifying tone which no longer appeals to our sensibility and revealing what the author said without his knowing it. This biography, therefore, should be accepted as a type of hagiographical literature that requires decoding.

¹ Br Avit: Introduction to the *Annales de l'Institut*.

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But this work is also written according to the rules of the genre of catechetical literature. Each chapter, especially in the second part, is an instruction on one virtue or another. The plan then nearly always follows the composition of a catechism lesson or a 'family instruction'. It begins with the definition of a truth to be believed supported by 'proofs' drawn from Scripture or the Fathers of the Church. Then unfolds an argument meant to persuade the listener or reader by appealing to his imagination, feelings, and reason. The argument will, therefore, be littered with 'comparisons' taken from daily life, 'parables', i.e. fictional stories appealing to the Christian imagination, and 'histories' drawn most often from the Lives of the Saints. Finally, the reader is invited to put into practice the virtue he has just been shown the importance of, by some 'applications'.

Since the work has Fr Champagnat for its subject, many of the 'histories', 'proofs', 'comparisons', are taken from his life and teachings. That is why his life is a veritable anthology of his instructions, letters, words of advice, maxims, or sentences. So it is possible to lift out from the book as a whole 91 sentences or maxims, i.e. brief phrases designed to be easily memorised, 70 counsels, general or particular, of greater length, and 75 extracts of conferences or instructions, capable of filling several pages.

1.3 TESTIMONIES OF THE BROTHERS

To compose his work, Br Jean-Baptiste made use of the written and oral testimonies of Brothers who had known the Founder. We can identify 105 of them. But he was also responsible for preparing the biographical sketches of some of the principal disciples, witnesses as well as companions of the founder, who had died after him. So Br Stanislas and Br Louis enjoy the double status of disciples and of companions of the founder, for this biography is also the history of a fellowship between a central hero and his faithful disciples. Br Jean-Baptiste, himself a witness a little later on the scene – he arrived in 1822 – and author of the biography, thus indicates to us what sources he used while remaining silent about his own recollections, although they certainly constitute a notable part of the contributions. As for the testimonies of lay people or ecclesiastics, they are much less numerous and often concise, which seems to indicate that they were provided for the most part by word of mouth. In short, this biography is essentially the work of the Brothers. More than the work of an author, it is that of a group of disciples.

But these testimonies, these letters and instructions are most frequently reported in the second part of the work where the author is not concerned with questions of chronology. The problem with that is that it wipes out the evolution of the Founder and of the congregation from 1817 to 1840. So it is continually necessary to make efforts at compensation to understand, for exam-

ple, how much the practice of mortification changed. At La Valla they used the discipline and meals were more than frugal, for ascetical as much as for economic reasons. It was only after 1830 that the water was mixed with wine and that they could eat meat from the butcher's. Similar changes are seen in the relationship with the parish priests. At the beginning it appears that the parish priest was the local superior of the Brothers. The community acquired a relative independence only later.

In another connection, if we know that psalm 126 ('If the Lord does not build the house...') was often quoted by the Founder and constitutes one of the keys to his spirituality, we find it difficult to date when he first used it. It seems we can go back as far as 1824. But before that? Likewise, the expression 'Ordinary Resource' referring to Mary, when was it first used? It is noted in 1830 but it was probably in use earlier than that.

1.4 THE STEPS OF COMPOSITION

We have precise information on this subject. It was in 1841 that, urged on by Fr Colin, Superior General of the Society of Mary, and through the mediation of Fr Maitrepierre, the Brothers decided to gather information on the Founder. The work was entrusted to Br Jean-Baptiste, assistant to the Director General, Br Francois. A circular of 10 August 1841 invited the Brothers to hand in any documents capable of serving this enterprise. In 1847 Fr Mayet, Marist, was already able to consult 'bulky exercise books'. From 1854 chapters of the Life of the Founder were being read to the Brothers. At the retreats of 1856 it was read in the refectory. But the 'bulky exercise books' spoken of by Fr Mayet and used in the composition of the Life have disappeared. Of the large number of Brothers' testimonies that we find in the Life only that of Br Laurent, one of the very first Brothers, still exists. So we do not have the possibility of comparing the Life written by Br Jean-Baptiste with a great part of the sources he made use of. The work has thus appeared right down to our time as if suspended in time, without sources and so without means of verifying whether the author has not interpreted the testimonies in creating a Fr Champagnat according to his own ideas.

1.5 THE SOURCES OF THE 'LIFE'

My aim, therefore, is to show that even though we no longer have the testimony of the Brothers effectively at our disposal, we do have a large number of manuscripts and printed texts, especially from Br Jean-Baptiste and Br Francois, the study of which, only just beginning, throws considerable light on the Life. Among these manuscripts must be mentioned the 'treatise on Education' called 'Apostolate of a Marist Brother' (A.D.F.M.) by Br Paul Sester. We possess three

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versions of this: a fragment of sixty pages from probably the oldest version, which I have named 'Various Writings No 8' (ED8), a nearly finished version from the hand of Br Jean-Baptiste, and a copy of this text, made after the death of the lather. In the notebooks of Br Francois one must also pay attention to notebooks 307-309 which are collections of instructions, a certain number of them certainly going back to Fr Champagnat himself.

One of the signs that these various manuscripts take us back to the founder is that the instructions contained there are found more than once. In fact it is not rare for texts very similar but very rarely identical to be found several times in the manuscripts of Br Jean-Baptiste or of Br Francois, when they are not found in both. Certain are elliptical in style, as if the author had taken notes during a verbal presentation. My hypothesis, then, is that the manuscripts of Br Jean-Baptiste and Br Francois have preserved the instructions of the Founder, taken down probably by the Brothers but also by themselves.

This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that the Avis, Lecons, Sentences, a collection of the instructions of the Founder, was written at a later date (1866) and that this work – even when Br Jean-Baptiste's exceptional memory is taken into account – could not have been composed without written sources. Besides, many of its instructions are found in the manuscripts of Br Jean-Baptiste.

But it is also clear that a good number, particularly in A.D.F.M., have been reworked by the superiors who brought them up to date by adding quotations from contemporary authors. They also decided to embellish them with quotations from the saints or spiritual writers in order to make use of them in the many retreat conferences they had to give. This praiseworthy purpose has proved disastrous for the historian, for it necessitates the sorting out in many texts of what is original from what is gloss or addition.

Let us add that these instructions appear to have served as the basis for the writing of the Common Rules (1852), the Teacher's Guide (1853), the Manual of Piety (1855), i.e. of the Institute's fundamental texts. Obviously they also served in the writing of the Life of the Founder.

This biography, then, is not as lacking in source material as was thought, but is an essential piece of an assembly of doctrine and legislation providing the theoretical foundation of the institute. The Founder, who died prematurely, was not able to establish this except through his persistent action, his words as the medium of a powerful charism, his letters and some rare writings. In short, our introduction of the Life of Fr Champagnat could well be entitled: 'The hidden instructions of Fr Champagnat'. The latter, which have served as the essential source for all Marist literature, appear to be always within our

grasp whether in their pure state or mixed with the matrix deposited by the disciples when they thought to preserve them from the wear and tear of time by covering them over with their own commentaries.

By proceeding from the manuscripts and books of the congregation and comparing them with one another, it seems possible to separate with reasonable precision what comes from the Founder from what was added later.

1.6 BR JEAN-BAPTISTE

Before developing examples of this relatively technical operation, it is advisable to pinpoint the precise position of the author of the biography, Br Jean-Baptiste Furet.

Born in 1807 at Saint Pal en Chalencon (Haute Loire), nearly 100 kilometres from La Valla, he appears as a child to have suffered from asthma which made him unfit for farming work. He was part of the group of eight young people recruited by the former Brother of the Christian Schools, Benoit Grizard, who arrived at La Valla to Fr Champagnat's great surprise in the spring of 1822. Without belonging to the very first group of disciples, Jean-Baptiste is still very close to the origins of the institute (1817).

First assistant at Bourg-Argental (1822-23) where he was so ill that the Founder went to see him and nearly died in the snow on the way back, he was afterwards director of various schools or back at the Hermitage assisting Fr Champagnat in the administration of the congregation. In 1839 he was named assistant, a sign of the prestige he had acquired among the Brothers. He governed the province of the South from 1842 to 1860 and then the Centre (Saint-Genis-Laval) from 1860 to 1872, the year of his death.

There is no true biography of this man, an exceptional one in many ways, but some quite valuable sketches. First, just after his death, Br Louis-Marie, Superior General, consecrated a circular to him and asked the Brothers to collect his writings, especially his letters, in preparation for a biography which had not appeared by 1917. Br Amphiloque Deydier utilised the hundreds of letters collected and contributed the testimonies of Brothers still alive, but his work did not get past the manuscript stage. In 1953 in 'Our Superiors', a collection of compact biographies of the principal superiors of the Institute, Br Jean-Emile drew on the previous works but contributed very little new material. In 1990-91, in the Marist Notebooks Nos. 1 and 2, Br Paul Sester presented an historical synthesis which appears to be the first scientific work on Br Jean-Baptiste.

Despite the relative lack of material, we can draw up a portrait of the man. First of all, Br Louis-Marie presents him to us as a 'second founder' for 'the

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Venerable Founder owes it to him that he has lived on thirty two years after his death.' This is a homage rendered to the legislator of the congregation who wrote the *Life*, the *Teacher's Guide* (1853) and was largely responsible for the composition of the other fundamental texts.. He mentions also Br Jean-Baptiste's extraordinary authority in the province of the South, the vivid, striking nature of his instructions, the immense good achieved by his innumerable letters. He also describes for us a man extremely active despite the sickness that dogged him all his life and condemned him to a strict diet, to solitude and the inability to travel from 1860. Yet it was his sickness which, preventing him from moving around, forced him to write so much and gave him the leisure necessary for composing numerous works during the years 1866-1872.

Respected legislator, charismatic superior, Br Jean-Baptiste appears to have also been a spiritual director greatly appreciated by the Brothers and profoundly steeped in the ascetical and spiritual tradition in which he was widely read. For him, the spiritual life was a building having for its foundation humility, annihilation of the self, and piety. The first storey consisted of a great knowledge of the ways of God, an acquaintance with Jesus Christ, devotion to Mary, the saints, the guardian angels, the souls in Purgatory, all marked by a spirit of sonship, generosity, constancy. The second storey was made up of zeal, prudence, devotedness, charity without limit.

This spiritual master was not exempt – and his illness must have contributed towards them – from crises of doubt that the Superior General found it very difficult to allay. But there can also be found in his works observations on the fatherhood of God and his certainty of being saved worthy of Therese of Lisieux.

The writing of the *Life of the Founder*, composed from 1841 to 1856, is therefore situated in a period when this man enjoyed full possession of his powers. Still young, yet much appreciated by the older men, he had behind him a long career as school director and administrator. He had given himself completely to this work and profited from the experience to make himself a man of vast, if self-taught, culture capable of writing a work structured and documented enough to be still very readable today. His later works do not possess the same moderation and soundness.

1.7 THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The time of the writing of the *Life* coincided with the beginning in France of what has become known as the Industrial Revolution. This process prompted an exodus from the countryside, social disturbances, revolutionary doctrines. Political regimes were unstable. In 1848 the July Monarchy collapsed under the blows of the February Revolution. Then the democratic republic was quickly

transformed into a conservative one before becoming the victim of the coup d'etat of 2 December 1851 which established the Second Empire, an authoritarian regime up to 1860.

On the other hand, the Guizot Law (1833), by obliging each commune to open a boys' school, created an enormous demand for the congregation, with mayors and parish priests from all sides appealing to it to found public schools for educating the young in good principles. The Falloux Law of 1850 was even more favourable to the religious congregations.

These economic, political, legislative changes were favourable overall but they imposed on the congregation an endless cycle of foundations which forced a massive recruitment and summary formation. The number of Brothers grew very rapidly: there were 280 in 1840 and 1665 in 1857. The number of establishments grew from 48 in 1840 to 379 in 1859.

One can understand that such a rapid prosperity would have serious drawbacks: a continuing shortage of leaders which meant that the direction of schools was entrusted to men of variable experience and responsibility, a lack of perseverance on the part of many Brothers, an increase in the number of incompetents... In particular, the older Brothers, strongly motivated religious and bearers of the founder's charisma, were lost in a mass of young men better educated than they but frequently not well versed in the spirit of the Institute.

The main purpose of the *Life*, then, was to make the origins known and to maintain a common spirit. At the same time it was a veritable handbook for the perfect novice, the good superior, the good religious teacher. In brief, it was meant to cover all positions of Brothers in the congregation. Fr Champagnat, in part deprived of his priesthood, became the model of the Marist Brother, whatever his situation. And there was no shortage of denunciations of those who questioned their vocation, lacked commitment, charity...

So the reader must keep in mind that the *Life* was written at a sensitive time in the congregation's history, when it had to set in place its legislation and integrate masses of young people in a France itself in the middle of social and economic change. It was not easy then for Br Jean-Baptiste to present an ideal of stability to a body of explosive dynamism. And I ask myself if this was the moment when a fundamental contradiction was established which was later to cause disruption in the congregation: an ideal of stability set against a practice extremely dynamic. The Institute would be better equipped to adapt itself practically to any situation than to reflect on the changes it was going through. So by presenting a Founder established in sanctity from the cradle rather than evolving towards it, Br Jean-Baptiste contributed to establishing a doctrine, necessary for its period, but leading to blockages later on.

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In any case, the myth of the origins was sufficiently vital, and those who conveyed it – Br Jean-Baptiste first of all – sufficiently persuasive to endue numerous young Brothers with an astonishing missionary spirit.

Part 2: THE ‘LIFE’ COMPARED WITH OTHER MARIST SOURCES

Now I have established the broader context in which the Life was written, I can turn to a more detailed analysis of its content so as to show its sources starting with some examples.

2.1 THE CHAPTERS – WITNESSES

Chapter V on ‘His spirit of recollection and the care he took to keep himself in the presence of God’ (p.312*) corresponds in Br Francois’ notebook 308 to the instruction entitled ‘exercise of the presence of God’. The example below will allow the reader to see the correlations.

Life p. 316	Notebook 308 p. 918
‘Perhaps you will ask me,’ he said in one of his instructions, why I keep harping on this same subject; it is because it is the basis of the spiritual life. What does that consist of? In the flight from sin and the practice of virtue. Now, the presence of God will cause you to avoid sin; it will give you the strength to practise virtue, to bear with the difficulties of your state of life and inspire you with sentiments of piety. When one is tempted, the very thought: “God sees me” is enough to banish the temptation. In fact, if we do not dare commit evil in front of men, how could we dare to do so before God, if we recall his presence? Forgetfulness of God is the first cause of all wickedness.’	‘The usefulness of this exercise lies in its being a sovereign remedy against sin and a short and abbreviated way to arrive at perfection. In fact, there is nothing more suited to keep us in order than this thought: “I am in God’s presence.” Nothing more efficacious to repress the movement of the passions, to triumph over the most violent temptations, to prevent falling in the most dangerous occasions, than to say: “I am in the presence of God; God sees me! God examines me! God judges me!... With that can I be tepid and listless in his service and in what I am doing for him!...’

* The references are to the English version of the bicentenary edition of 1989 (the translation of Br Ludovic Burke).

The beginning of Chapter XVIII of the Life entitled ‘What Father Champagnat

did to preserve the Brothers in their vocation' (p.463) ties up with three manuscript texts: one of Br Francois in notebook 307 p.133 and two of Br Jean-Baptiste in E4 p.341-2 and E3 p.106-7. All three bear the same title: 'Vocation'.

Notebook 307 'Vocation' p.133	E4p.341-2 'Vocation'	E3 p.106-7 'Vocation'
<p>'There is nothing on which salvation depends more than a good choice of state, says Bourdaloue – How many sins avoided! How many virtues practised!'</p> <p>'Vocation is of capital importance. It is the foundation on which rests the whole edifice of life, says St Gregory Nazienzen. If it is a sin to abuse grace, to despise inspirations, what will it be to dry up the source in a single blow by leaving the vocation where God had prepared his graces for us and assured his protection (Gautrelet)².</p> <p>Vocation is the main driving force of the whole life (Louis of Granada). It is the keystone, the source from which flow the other means</p>	<p>'Keep well in mind, says Bourdaloue, this great maxim that there is nothing on which salvation depends more than a good choice of life because almost all men's sins come from the obligations of their state' []</p> <p>'Vocation is the main point on which our winning eternal life depends. After vocation follows justification, and justification is followed by glorification, i.e. life eternal. The one who breaks this sequence, this order of salvation will not be saved. Despite the efforts he makes and the trouble he takes, he will not succeed, and St Aug(ustine) addresses him these words: you are running well, but off the track (St Liguori). Woe to</p>	<p>'Keep well in mind (Bourdaloue) this great maxim that there is nothing on which salvation depends more than a good choice of vocation, because almost all of men's sins come from the obligations of their state'</p> <p>'The question of vocation then is of capital importance, it is the foundation on which rests the whole edifice of our life (St Gregory of Nazienzen). If it is a sin to abuse God's graces, to despise his inspirations, what fault will it be to dry up the source, so to speak, in a single blow by leaving the vocation where he had prepared his graces for us and assured his protection. Fr Louis of Granada called the choice of state the driving wheel of life³. The same in the order of salvation, the vocation failing, the whole life fails too (St Gregory, St Liguori).</p>

² Spiritual writer

³ This quotation is also found in E4 but earlier

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<p>Notebook 307 'Vocation' p.133</p>	<p>E4p.341-2 'Vocation'</p>	<p>E3 p.106-7 'Vocation'</p>
<p>of salvation – predestination, vocation, justification, glorification (Rom 8), such is the order and as it were the sequence of salvation and woe to him who breaks it! (Liguori)</p>	<p>you, truant children who stop your councils without my participation (Isaiah). Woe to the man who opposes the will of his creator'...</p>	<p>Vocation is the only way of salvation for us, so in choosing it it is necessary to consider the advantages which may accrue to us from it in relation to our eternal interests (Massillon). Vocation is the principal point on which our winning of eternal life depends. To vocation succeeds justification and justification is followed by glorification, i.e. by life eternal. Whoever breaks this order, this chain of salvation, will not be saved. Despite the effort he makes and all the troubles he takes, he will not succeed; and St Augustine addresses these words to him..' (the rest as in E4).</p>

These passages – and many others – come very probably from the Founder by way of the copies made by the Brothers when they were listening to the instruction and subsequently given to the superiors after the death of the Founder. The fact that the texts are different in form is a sign that, though they have a common source, they were written down by a number of persons.

2.2 THE 'DIRECTORS' MANUAL'

We have proof also that Br Jean-Baptiste made use of his recollections and of his notes in his oral instructions, for the 'Directors' Manual', consisting of summaries of his instructions, shows clear traces of it. For example, in 1854 he gave an instruction under four points: '1. What it is to miss one's vocation. 2. What it is to lose one's vocation. 3. What it is to abandon one's vocation. 4.

What it is to be unfaithful to one's vocation.' Now this instruction is found in A.L.S. explicitly attributed to the founder but also in the manuscript E4 p.318-329 almost identical to the text of A.L.S.

Therefore we see at work here the complex relationship between oral instructions and texts written down later. It is highly probable that when the Life was finished and read for the first time in the refectories in 1856 the Brothers already knew the essentials of it from the instructions of the superiors.

2.3 THE MANUSCRIPT A.D.F.M.

This document, completed about 1852, is undoubtedly the essential source of three chapters of the Life on education (Ch. XX-XXI,XXIII). For example, it presents us with the way in which Fr Champagnat conceived the prox-

A.D.F.M.	VIE	A.L.S.
<p>'Proximate preparation: for the one who makes a daily study of religion and who has acquired this fund of knowledge we have spoken of, proximate preparation is easy and can be reduced to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To learn by heart, as far as possible, even the letters of the chapter which needs explaining. 2. To prepare the follow-up questions necessary to develop the questions and answers of the text. 	<p>'Fr Champagnat often pointed out that one of the means most conducive to attract children to the school and to form them in virtue, was to prepare the catechism class well and make their instructions congenial. He suggested a number of ways in which they could do this.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They should learn by heart or at least read over with great attention and reflection, the lesson they have to explain. 2. They should pick out the most important 	<p>'This habitual study and meditation of religion is the remote preparation for catechism; for the proximate preparation one must also:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn by heart or at least read over with great attention and reflection the lesson they must explain. 2. Pick out the most important points and those to which the children's attention needs especially to be drawn. 3. Foresee what follow-up questions will need to be asked on each of these points, linking up

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A.D.F.M.	VIE	A.L.S.
<p>3. To divide up the instruction, i.e. what one has to develop on the subject which one wants to treat and reduce the whole to two or three main questions to which are directed all the follow-up questions prepared.</p> <p>4. To choose the historical incidents and comparisons appropriate to illustrate and reinforce the explanations.</p> <p>5. To prepare the practical applications to be given at the end of each instruction.</p> <p>6. To recommend to God, to the Blessed Virgin and to the guardian angels of the children the success of the lesson in the day's exercises of piety.</p>	<p>points and those to which the children's attention needs especially to be drawn.</p> <p>3. They should foresee what follow-up questions will need to be asked on each of these points; linking up the questions in such a way that they make the truth clear and intelligible to the weakest students.</p> <p>4. They should make liberal use of comparisons, parables, examples, and historical incidents to reinforce the teaching and gain the children's attention.</p> <p>5. They should plan follow-up questions which are short, clear, useful and simple.</p>	<p>the questions in such a way that they make the truth clear and intelligible to the weakest students.</p> <p>4. To prepare the historical incidents and comparisons appropriate to illustrate and reinforce the explanations.</p> <p>5. To settle as well on the practical applications to be given at the end of each instruction. Such should be the preparation for the catechism lesson to be well made and produce abundant fruits of salvation.</p>

imate preparation for catechism, by learning it by heart, by preparing the follow-up questions... Very similar versions appear in the Life (Ch. XXIII p.539-40) and in A.L.S. (Ch. XXXVII p.378-9), as we can see below.

It would take too long to follow step by step Chs. XX-XXI and XXIII where almost all the text has its counterpart in A.D.F.M., sometimes quoted explicitly but also summarised. This is because this collection of instructions is a very wordy work. Most of the chapters seem to have Fr Champagnat for their origin

but Br Jean-Baptiste has added certain chapters peculiar to himself inspired by Mgr Dupanloup who was writing in 1850. He has also embellished the instructions with quotations, stories, and extracts from his readings so that it requires a lot of critical work to sort out what is original. All the same, this manuscript contains some texts which are earlier than those in the Life.

For example, one can find there in two passages (Ch.2 p.24-30 and Ch. IV p.412-427) the text of the Introduction to the Life copied almost in its entirety from the work of the Sulpician Faillon History of the catechisms of Saint Sulpice.⁴

Another fundamental contribution of A.D.F.M. is the chapter on devotion to Our Lady contained in the file ED8, fragment of a first version of A.D.F.M. This chapter is largely recopied in Chapter VII of the Life p.332-343, part 5 where its origin is attributed to Fr Champagnat: 'Salvation comes from the Jews, he said...'

2.4 THE ANNALS OF BR AVIT

We cannot overlook either other later works which remained a long time in manuscript form, such as the Annals of the Institute of Br Avit or the Memoirs of Br Sylvestre. The former has contributed in particular details about Fr Champagnat's family, and it is from him that we learn that the Founder's father had supported the Revolution, something Br Jean-Baptiste was very careful not to admit. But above all (p.108, the year 1832) he summarises for us the main instructions Fr Champagnat had given in the years before. So we have at our disposal extracts from eight instructions on joy, the spirit of faith, confidence in God, the presence of God, poverty, humility, zeal, devotion to Mary, which are all found in the Life and so are complete and approximately dated. Further on (p.151, the year 1835) he gives further fragments which have their counterpart in the Life and the A.L.S.

2.5 THE MEMOIRS OF BR SYLVESTRE

These seem to be even richer in that they refer not only to the Life but also to the oral Marist tradition. For Br Sylvestre the Life is authentic because it conforms to the tradition. Moreover, his text gives us his sources: Philippe Arnaud, the founder's nephew, Br Stanislas, Br Jean-Baptiste, Brs Francois and Louis-Marie, the older Brothers and especially 'what the tradition reports'. His whole narrative is studded with expressions such as 'according to the tradition', 'Br Stanislas told me'... This lets us see that even though Br Sylvestre was strongly influenced by the Life, he had his own sources coming from his con-

⁴ Paris, 1831, p. V-XXIX

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tacts with the chief witnesses. He himself has provided us with an irreplaceable testimony on life at the Hermitage.

Br Sylvestre uncovers for us as well, better than the Life, a veritable cycle on Br Stanislas. Close to the Founder all his life and having at times played a decisive role in the history of the Institute, notably in 1825⁵, he has been one of the essential sources of the tradition, oral and written. Br Sylvestre held him in such veneration that he considered him 'one of the three providential mainstays of the Founder'⁶, and his opinion must have been shared by many of the older Brothers.

He even fills out the Life on several fundamental points. First of all, he has a taste for the miraculous. He believes that Fr Champagnat and Br Stanislas lost in the snow found hospitality with the Holy Family. In this he is the spokesman of an oral tradition inclined to see miracles almost everywhere, which Br Jean-Baptiste passes over in silence or mentions only by way of anecdote.

Another fundamental contribution completely obscured by Br Jean-Baptiste: an eschatological mentality characterised by the conviction that the Marist Brothers would see the end of time and that they would participate in the final struggle against the Antichrist. Br Avit also provides an echo of this tradition⁷. This conviction appears to come from the Marist Fathers, from Fr Pompallier in particular, and from Br Stanislas⁸. But this does not exclude Fr Champagnat himself from having been a vehicle for it was one of the fundamental ideas of the first Marists, and remained firmly rooted in the thought of Fr Colin.

Br Sylvestre is also interesting to us in that he allows himself some veiled criticisms of the Founder: he finds him too rigid on mortification (eating between meals was matter for confession), inclined to pay excessive respect to the things associated with worship, too fond of public penances. So he presents us with an image of Fr Champagnat more complex than the one the Life reveals, fluctuating between the rigorism still traditional among the French clergy, and a moderation introduced by the ideas of Alphonsus Ligouri which made him very accommodating in the confessional.

2.6 THE SPIRITUALITY OF FR CHAMPAGNAT

Finally, the comparison of the three biographies of the Founder has the

⁵ During the Founder's illness he persuaded Fr Dervieux to pay his debts and he stood up to Fr Courveille

⁶ Together with Mgr De Pins and Fr Gardette

⁷ Introduction to the Annals of the Institute, at the end

⁸ Refer Memoires of Br Sylvestre p.236

Life (chapters)	Br Avit (Instructions)	Br Sylvestre (Virtues)
I Sadness and holy joy	1 Courage and holy joy	
II Spirit of faith	2 Spirit of faith	7 Faith
III Confidence in God	3 Confidence in God	11 Confidence in God
IV Piety		4 Prayer
V Presence of God	4 Presence of God	1 Presence of God
VI Love of Jesus Christ		9 Devotion to Holy Sacrament 10 Respect for holy places
VII Devotion to Mary	8 Devotion to Mary	12 Devotion to Mary
VIII Obedience		8 Obedience
IX Poverty	5 Poverty	
X Detachment from family		
XI Mortification		5 Mortification
XII Humility	6 Humility	3 Humility
XIII Purity. Horror of sin		2 Horror of sin
XIV Love of work		
XV Attachment to one's work		
XX Zeal	7 Zeal	
XXI Charity for poor		
XXIV Constancy		
		6 Generosity (liberality)

advantage of at once giving us a more complex view of the origins and a more unified one. We have just spoken about the complexity (oral tradition, written tradition, taste for the marvellous, attention to the reasonable...) We see the more unified vision from the list of virtues each one attributes to the Founder.

All three agree on five fundamental virtues: the spirit of faith, confidence in God, the presence of God, devotion to Mary, humility. Here, I believe, are the foundations of Marist spirituality, God-centred and Marial. It would probably be necessary to add zeal to the list, although Br Sylvestre does not mention it explicitly. Perhaps this is because, being of short stature, he spent nearly all his life as a formator of Brothers, without much contact with the outside.

2.7 BR JEAN-BAPTISTE AND THE BIBLE

It is opportune also to compare the Life with sources outside the Institute and in particular with Scripture. Thanks to a critical work carried out by Br Anibal Canon, we can state that the Life cites the Bible 270 times: the Old Testament 92 times and the New Testament 178 times. Br Jean-Baptiste's preferred books are the Gospels (98 times), especially Matthew and Luke, St Paul's epistles (59 times) especially Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Galatians. For the Old Testament, it is especially the psalms (29 times). But the consultation is comprehensive: 46 books of the Bible are cited. Some passages are particularly popular: Psalm 126 obviously, Matthew 19:29 on the kingdom preferred to family and goods, John 13:34 and Acts 4:32 on fraternal charity. All this leads us back to the main features of Marist spirituality: abandonment to God, separation from the world, fraternal charity.

2.8 SPIRITUAL WRITERS

Rodriguez, a Spanish Jesuit of the 17th century, author of Christian Perfection, is the main reference. But Ligouri, St Augustine, Francis de Sales, Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, are also frequently cited. In fact, Br Jean-Baptiste appears to have had a good knowledge of the Fathers of the Church and the apostolic saints of the 17th century, especially the Jesuits. There is not much sign of the French School. His principal 19th century writers are the Sulpician Faillon⁹ and Cardinal La Luzerne¹⁰. If one credits this list of authors, Marist spirituality was not much influenced by the French School of spirituality but more by the authors of the baroque period in Europe, especially the Spanish and Italian. But closer study would be necessary. A.D.F.M. in particular shows us quite a number of writers contemporary with Br Jean-Baptiste, who appears to have kept up with the pedagogic and ascetic publications of his time.

Part 3: SOME MAJOR TEXTS AND SOME MAJOR THEMES

The reading of the manuscripts and the printed texts concerning the origins have made me convinced of the existence of major themes that keep on recurring. Two of these appear to merit a preliminary study: the aim of the Institute and the spirit of the Institute. A third, the preference for the poor, would merit one too, but I am leaving that aside for the moment.

⁹ Author on works on the catechisms of Saint Sulpice

¹⁰ Bishop of Langres, very conservative, an enemy of the Mutual Method, the great moral authority of the clergy of the beginning of the Restoration

3.1 THE 'PETIT ECRIT' OF 1824 AND THE AIM OF THE INSTITUTE

This theme of the aim of the Brothers is linked to the existence of a 'Petit Ecrit' ('Little writing') given by Fr Champagnat in 1824 which summarises the instructions given while the Hermitage was being built. Br Jean-Baptiste speaks explicitly and at length of this document and of its instructions, notably on p.128-130 and 475 of the Life (EV). He seems to make allusion to it also on p.535. The first chapter of A.D.F.M. entitled 'Aim of the Brothers' seems to come from an instruction delivered that year and to take up the subject matter of the 'Petit Ecrit' while abridging it. Br Sylvestre also gives us a summary of the 'Petit Ecrit'¹¹. The Teachers' Guide in its chapter on 'The aim of the Brothers' (Part 2 chapter 1) is also strongly inspired by this document. Finally, Br Francois in notebook 307 p.415 gives us an instruction on 'The aim of the Institute' very similar to that in A.D.F.M.

In substance these texts say that the aim of the Institute is the religious education of children, secular instruction being merely a means of attraction. So a Brother who was content with giving secular instruction would be betraying his founder and his institute. As for the 'Petit Ecrit' itself, it describes in detail what the religious education of children consists of, founded on catechism, formation to piety, love of order, courtesy, respect for authorities and for parents...

But these texts on the aim of the Institute and the 'Petit Ecrit' appear to form part of two series of instructions reported in the manuscripts of Brs Jean-Baptiste and Francois. One is entitled 'Holiness, perfection', the other 'Necessity of being attached to one's vocation'. The following table gives us an idea of their content.

HOLINESS, PERFECTION

E4	E3 (page numbers)	307
Holiness, perfection 332		Perfection 42
Vocation 338	Vocation 103	Vocation 131
Means of preserving 388	Means of preserving 113	Means of preserving 136
Religious spirit 345	Religious spirit 120	Religious spirit 143
Spirit of Institute 349	Spirit of Institute 123 of PFM 147	Character & spirit of society
Bad spirit 356	Bad spirit 130	Bad spirit 151
	Devotion 139	Devotion 39
Obedience. Necessary 366	Obedience. Necessary 152	Obedience. Necessary 195

¹¹ See his Memoirs printed in 1992, p.138

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E4	E3 (page numbers)	307
Obedience. Excellent 372	Obedience. Excellent 241	Obedience. Excellent 198
Obedience. Advantage 377		Obedience. Advantage 200
(Exercise book 62 missing)		Pride 158
		Idleness 162
		Routine in exercise 166
	Scruples 142	Scruples 169
		Faults common in pious persons 173
Particular friendships 397-9		Particular friendships 177

This simplified table aims to present an hypothetical organisation of the original record of which the manuscripts seem to have preserved fragments, the E4 file being perhaps the most reliable. It is my supposition, therefore, that the missing exercise books could cover the instructions which notebook 307 contains on the obstacles to perfection (pride...) concluding with particular friendships.

The reasoning behind this hypothetical reconstruction is as follows. The author wanted to present a treatment of the theme of perfection, perhaps for a retreat. His approach, therefore, was to take in order perfection in itself and the means of making progress therein by fidelity to the religious vocation under all its aspects: spirit, obedience, devotion. He then presented an exposition of the obstacles to perfection. And I ask myself if we are not now face to face with Fr Champagnat's instructions on the religious vocation in 1824. The fact that they are found in three manuscripts would favour this hypothesis. But only a detailed study, impossible to conduct here, would yield certain conclusions.

****NECESSITY OF BEING ATTACHED TO ONE'S VOCATION****

Another series appears to me even more interesting. It figures in the manuscript E4 p.98-107 under the title 'Necessity of being attached to one's vocation' and is found in almost identical form in E3 p.152-163. Here is its plan taken from E4:

Necessity of being attached to one's vocation.

- I. Vocation is the way of salvation**
2. Such a Brother will never acquire the virtues of his vocation...
3. He will abuse graces...

4. He makes himself unhappy...
 5. He is useless to his order...
 6. He does not fulfil the aim of his vocation...
 7. He is in great danger of losing this vocation... (cf E3 p.11-17)
- II.¹² **Obedience. Its necessity.**¹³
 - III. **Opening of the heart to the superior**
 - IV. **Rules. Necessity of keeping the rules**
 - V. **Enclosure**
 - VI. **Poverty**
 - VII. **Zeal. Aim of the Brothers**
 - VIII. **Means of exercising zeal**
 - IX. **Study**
 - X. **Silence**
 - XI. **Faults against charity**
 - XII. **The most common faults of religious**¹⁴

Such series of instructions and the presence of a written text which seems to constitute the first charter of the congregation at this date are all the less surprising as through the building of the Hermitage and the publication of a printed prospectus offering the teaching services of the congregation to the communes, the Founder was throwing his congregation into the battle against the lay teachers expert in the mutual method, suspected of providing an exclusively secular education. It would be quite normal, then, for the congregation's numerical growth and clearer vision of its aim to require some explanation.

Let us be cautious, however, for the study of these series of texts is not sufficiently advanced, owing to want of time, for us to be certain. It appears important to me, though, to signpost this track for future researchers.

3.2 THE SPIRIT OF THE INSTITUTE

On this theme the battery of texts is equally important. In chapter XII of the Life which treats of the Marial devotion of the Founder, Br Jean-Baptiste tells us (p.398) that the Brothers should imitate Mary's humility and that for that reason they are called 'Little Brothers of Mary'. They should therefore lead a life 'hidden and unknown'. At the end of the same chapter a text reminds us that in the eyes of Fr Champagnat a good Brother lives 'unobtrusively' and 'does good without fuss'. This latter expression (literally 'do good without fanfare') was, according to Br Sylvestre, typical of Fr Champagnat.

¹² The manuscript's numbering is random. We have adapted it.

¹³ The other headings carry numbered subheadings which we have avoided giving.

¹⁴ This part is not numbered and it is possible that it is not part of the series of instructions

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In his notebooks 307, p.147-150, and 308, p.544-554, Br Francois takes up these ideas under the titles 'Character and spirit of the society of the Little Brothers of Mary' and 'Mary model of humility'. We find very close texts among Br Jean-Baptiste's writings, in E3 p.123-130 and 349-356 under the same title: 'Spirit of the Institute'. A.D.F.M. offers us another version in its chapter 15: 3rd part, p.281-286, entitled: 'Humility is necessary for us to merit the protection of Mary'. The rule of 1852 in its chapter on humility is obviously influenced by these texts, recommending 'the hidden life, good done quietly, life 'unknown and forgotten by the world'. Finally, the introduction of A.L.S. p.VII-XII takes up this theme a last time. Here is a sample of the correspondences between Br Francois and Br Jean-Baptiste. The interested reader can compare these texts with those in the Life and the A.L.S.

Br Francois (notebook 307 p.148)	Ecrit 3 p.128 and Ecrit 4 p.353	A.D.F.M. p.284
<p>II From all that one must conclude:</p> <p>1. That humility and simplicity must be the cherished virtues of the Little Brothers of Mary, and shine in their persons, in their words, their actions and in all that belongs to them.</p> <p>2. That they should have a particular preference for</p>	<p>From which we must conclude:</p> <p>1. That humility and simplicity must be the cherished virtues of the Brothers of Mary, that they ought to shine in their persons, their words, their actions and in all that belongs to them.</p> <p>2. That the Brothers should have a particular preference</p>	<p>Mary being our mother and our model, it is for us a duty to imitate her and become attached like her to the practice of humility. The more we resemble her the more humble and modest we will be, the more she will bless us, the more she will cover us with her protection and help us to do good. It follows then from all we have been saying:</p> <p>1. That humility must be the cherished virtue of the Brothers of Mary, the principal virtue of their vocation, that all ought to work ceaselessly to acquire it, ask it of God daily, and strive continually to make further progress in it.</p> <p>2. That the Brothers should have a particular preference</p>

<p align="center">Br Francois (notebook 307 p.148)</p>	<p align="center">Ecrit 3 p.128 and Ecrit 4 p.353</p>	<p align="center">A.D.F.M. p.284</p>
<p>the hidden life, for the humble exercises, for hard and irksome employments, for contempt and for everything which can humiliate them and lessen them in men's eyes.</p> <p>3. That each Brother should regard humility as the principal virtue of his vocation, as the virtue in which he ought to excel, ask it of God all the days of his life, and strive continually to make fresh progress daily.</p> <p>4. That the Brothers ought to do good quietly, efface themselves everywhere, and shun with the greatest care honours, applause, and all that might draw men's attention to them.</p> <p>5. That they ought to apply themselves to the human sciences and to the civil instruction of the children solely to please God and to win souls for him and never to attract esteem, the honours and approval of men (Bourdaloue: Retreat VIth day, IIIrd meditation) Boudon: Life</p>	<p>rence for the hidden life, for the humble exercises, for hard and irksome employments, for contempt, and everything which can humiliate them and lessen them in men's eyes.</p> <p>3. That each Brother should regard humility as the principal virtue of his vocation, the one in which he ought to excel, ask it of God every day and strive to make fresh progress in it continually.</p> <p>4. That the Brothers ought to do good quietly, efface themselves everywhere, and shun with the greatest care honours, applause, and all that might draw men's attention to them.</p> <p>5. That they ought to study the human sciences and apply themselves to the civil instruction of the children solely to please God, to win souls for him, and never to gain the esteem, the praises and the approval of men.</p>	<p>for the hidden life, for the humble employments and for everything that can lessen them in men's eyes.</p> <p>3. That by the spirit of their vocation they are called to live unknown to the world as far as possible, i.e. to do good quietly, to efface themselves everywhere, to flee applause and all that may draw the attention and regard of men.</p> <p>4. That it is by humility, by modesty, that they will work efficaciously at the sanctification of their soul, that they will acquire the perfection of their state, that they will do good among the children and edify the faithful.</p> <p>5. That they will be content and happy in their vocation in the proportion they are humble, that they will succeed and obtain success in their offices in proportion to their making themselves small, and that away from the way of humility there is neither the grace nor the protection of God nor any effi-</p>

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<p>Br Francois (notebook 307 p.148)</p>	<p>Ecrit 3 p.128 and Ecrit 4 p.353</p>	<p>A.D.F.M. p.284</p>
<p>Hidden with Jesus in God.</p> <p>6. That the Brothers ought to speak, act and behave among themselves and with seculars with much humility and simplicity, carefully avoiding any air of complacency or of arrogance, anything smacking of the spirit of the world and which could harm modesty.</p> <p>7. That they ought to have a particular preference for the practices of humility, such as public penances, chapter of faults, reprimands, warnings about faults.</p> <p>8. That they cannot acquire the spirit of their state, save souls, do good among the children and edify their neighbour except by the humility, simplicity and modesty proper to their state.</p> <p>9. (sic) That outside these ways there are for them neither graces, nor the protection of God, nor any means of success.</p>	<p>6. That the Brothers ought to speak, act and behave in everything, whether among themselves or with seculars, with a great humility and simplicity, carefully avoiding any air of complacency, all arrogance, anything smacking of the spirit of the world and which could harm modesty.</p> <p>7. That they ought to have a particular preference for the practices of humility, such as public penances, chapter of faults, reprimands and warnings about faults.</p> <p>8. That the Brothers ought to be convinced that it is to them principally that these words of the Gospel are addressed: if you do not become as little children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>9. That they cannot acquire the spirit of their state, the perfection of their state, save their soul, do good among the children, edify their neighbour except by humil-</p>	<p>acious means of success.</p> <p>6. That they ought to study the human sciences and apply themselves to the civil instruction of children solely to please God, to win him souls more easily, and never to gain the esteem, the praise and the approval of men.</p> <p>7. That proud spirits, filled with themselves who seek to be seen, to be applauded, and in a word, that all who do not walk by the way of humility are absolutely useless for good.</p> <p>8. That those do not have the spirit of their state, who regard their employment as a teacher of little children as humiliating, who fear the contempt of the world or who think they can do good by any other way than that of humility, modesty and simplicity.</p> <p>(See A.L.S. p.IX-X)</p>

<p align="center">Br Francois (notebook 307 p.148)</p>	<p align="center">Ecrit 3 p.128 and Ecrit 4 p.353</p>	<p align="center">A.D.F.M. p.284</p>
<p>10. That they will be content and happy in their vocation and that they will succeed in their employment to the extent that they are humble.</p> <p>11. That what is most important to them is to acquire the spirit of the Institute, i.e. humility, simplicity, modesty.</p> <p>12. That this spirit ought to direct all their conduct and animate all their actions; that those who do not have it or have lost it are dead members because they are deprived of the life and of the grace</p>	<p>ity, simplicity, and modesty, hiding themselves; that outside these ways there is for them neither grace, nor the protection of God, nor any means of success.</p> <p>10. That they will be content and happy in their vocation to the degree that they are humble; that they will succeed in their employment in proportion to their humility.</p> <p>11. That what is most important for them is to acquire the spirit of the Institute, i.e. humility, simplicity; that it is this spirit which ought to direct their conduct and animate all their actions, that those who do not have it or have lost it are dead members, because they are deprived of the life and grace of their state and that it will even be very difficult to keep themselves in the grace of God.</p> <p>12. That the great sign of a vocation to this Institute is the love of humility, an attraction to, a natural disposition for this virtue; and those who have a proud spirit, haughty, opinionated,</p>	

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<p>Br Francois (notebook 307 p.148)</p>	<p>Ecrit 3 p.128 and Ecrit 4 p.353</p>	<p>A.D.F.M. p.284</p>
<p>of their state, and that it will be even very difficult for them to keep it in the grace of God.</p> <p>13. That the great sign of a vocation to the Institute is love of humility, the attraction to, the dispositions for this virtue.</p> <p>14. That those of a proud spirit, haughty, opinionated, who seek to be seen, to be applauded by men, who do not love the hidden life etc are not suited to the Institute and can do nothing but harm there.</p> <p>15. That each ought to be convinced that he is the weakest, the most imperfect and last of all, and that in consequence he should always give way to his Brothers in everything, oblige them, render them service and lend himself to whatever is most laborious and humiliating in the house.</p> <p>16. That the Brothers ought to regard pride, the desire to be seen, and the praises of men, as their archenemy, and to apply to themselves these words of St Bernard: if a religious wishes to be proud he should cease being a monk; for as soon as he allows this vice entry into his heart, he is no longer a monk, he becomes a demon. And these others of the Saviour: if you do not become little like children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 12).</p>	<p>who seek to be seen and to be applauded by men, who do not love the hidden life, are not called to this Institute and can only do harm there.</p> <p>13. That each of them ought to be very convinced that he is the weakest, the most imperfect and the last of all, and that, full of this conviction, he may always be ready to yield to his Brothers, to oblige them and to render them service, and to do what is most laborious and most humble in the house.</p> <p>14. That the Brothers ought to regard pride, the desire to be seen, the praises of man as their greatest enemies, and those of the Institute, that it is to them that are addressed these words of St Bern (sic): If the religious wants to be proud, he should cease being a monk; for as soon as he allows this vice entry into his heart, he ceases to be a monk and becomes a demon.</p>	

But certain of these texts give us the profound reason for this humility: the glory of God. And there we find ourselves perhaps in the tradition of the French School of Spirituality whose founder, Berulle, develops in his *Life of Jesus* (1629) the theme of Mary hidden procuring the glory of God by her very self-effacement. But we do not know by what ways this spiritual tradition would have been able to reach Fr Champagnat.

Part 4: THE DESTINY OF A FOUNDING BOOK

It was at the time of the preliminary investigation for the beatification process of Fr Champagnat, starting in 1886, that the *Life* was a basic document, for it was the basis of the canonical biography the process provided for. But for that it had to be recognised by the witnesses as authentic. Now criticisms were formulated by Fr Bedoin, parish priest of La Valla, who recalled, in particular, that at the seminary Fr Champagnat had been part of the 'joyous troupe', a group of undisciplined seminarians. He poked fun at the story of the flame above the infant Marcellin's cradle and took the Marist Brothers to task for thinking they were capable of renewing the world by themselves.¹⁵ Among the Brothers, the criticisms were more moderate but they revealed some gaps and errors on Br Jean-Baptiste's part.

The superiors reacted to the criticisms so vehemently that one is inclined to suspect that the opposition was a serious one. They succeeded, however, in having the *Life* admitted as the basis of the canonical biography.

But it seems that the suspicion cast on the *Life* lingered on. There was a persistent rumour that the Fr Champagnat of the *Life* was more a person of Br Jean-Baptiste's creation than the real Champagnat. Like all rumours, this was based on truth since every historian, however honest and methodical he may be, always writes in terms of his own personality, of his culture and his time. So Br Jean-Baptiste did not escape these limitations. Nevertheless, I believe I have shown in the preceding pages how much Br Jean-Baptiste relied on documents and on facts.

4.1 THE GAPS IN THE 'LIFE'

This does not mean, however, that the 'Life' is totally reliable. Thus chapter I which tells the story of Marcellin's childhood and youth strongly exag-

¹⁵ An indication that Fr Bedoin clearly perceived the vision of utopian renewal of the Marist Brothers who believed they were called to combat Evil until the end of time

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gerates the parts played by his mother and aunt and underrates the role of the father in his education. Chapter 2 on his formation as a seminarian is an instruction on vocation as much as a biographical account. Chapter 5 which shows how Fr Champagnat regenerated his parish is a sequence of exaggerations about the triumph of his pastoral zeal. Br Jean-Baptiste scarcely seems to notice that in the next chapter he contradicts himself, since Fr Champagnat founds his Brothers because he cannot achieve the evangelisation of the hamlets by himself.

On Fr Courveille, Br Jean-Baptiste is not credible at all. He does not mention his role in the origins of the Society of Mary¹⁶, and considers him a schemer of doubtful morals. He simply confirms the oral tradition of the Brothers concerning Courveille while Fr Champagnat certainly had quite a different picture of him. The *Origines Maristes* of Frs Coste and Lessard have fortunately reinstated a more complex and accurate vision of the origins of the Society of Mary.

4.2 DESPITE PREJUDICES – AN INDISPENSABLE SOURCE

Fortunately, since he respects the facts, Br Jean-Baptiste allows the critical reader to correct his biased interpretations in the light of what he says himself. Thus, he reports that at La Valla, the scene of his pastoral triumph, Fr Champagnat could only hear the confessions of the men of the hamlets in his room and not in the church, a fact that tends to question the extent of his success. He avoids telling us that the ex-Christian Brother who recruited the eight youngsters from the Upper Loire was certainly sent by Fr Courveille but he gives us the elements to work it out. Thus there is nothing to suggest that by making use of the facts provided by Br Jean-Baptiste, by occasionally asking questions about his omissions, and by refusing to be influenced by his interpretations, one can produce an appreciably different Life of the Founder.

4.3 MAKING A POINT ABOUT MARIST RESEARCH

Unfortunately, the critical work carried out up to now on this text seems to me still far from complete. For a long time the real problem seems to have been the lack of intellectual maturity in the Institute required, at the end of the last century, to take a fresh look at the origins, at a time when historical criticism had established some strict rules. But under attack from all sides in France and then preoccupied by its expansion throughout the world, the congregation believed it had no need to consider its origins anew. Indeed it found in its prosperity the justification for a fundamentalist attitude towards the texts of the origins. As always happens, it is paradoxically only when it has had serious inter-

¹⁶ He does not cite the Fourviere consecration of 1816 which had to be added to the 1897 re-edition. In a general way, besides, the influence of the Marist Fathers is not well covered. The Life bears traces of the congregation's situation in the process of cutting loose from the Marists.

nal problems that it thinks of returning to its past to find out if what it has held as certain up to then was really so.

We must, however, salute the efforts of Marist researchers such as Brs Pierre Zind, Balko, Gabriel Michel, Aureliano Brambila, Anibal Canon, Juan Maria, Paul Sester, Stephen Farrell, and many others. But these efforts have been made unsystematically and without taking into account the whole body of documents available to us, albeit often difficult of access. In the study of their sources the Marist Brothers have not profited from the sort of systematic work carried out for the Marist Fathers by Frs Coste and Lessard. It is true that we have greatly benefited from this contribution and that the publication of the Founder's letters is situated in this tradition of scholarship.

Today we are better equipped for Br Paul Sester has had published the majority of the manuscripts of Fr Champagnat, Br Francois, Br Avit, Br Sylvestre... Br Aureliano Brambila has indexed the essential bibliography relating to the Life of Fr Champagnat and the history of the Institute, so creating the basis of a manual for the researcher in Marist history. The work of synthesis you have just been reading is intended to make a point about the method of research to be followed in undertaking a critical edition of the Life of the Founder. With the bicentenary edition we have available a text of the Life conformable with the original edition of 1857 which the later editions of 1897 and especially 1931 had altered.

While awaiting a critical edition, which will require a good deal of time since there are available more sources for the Life than was thought, we can already be clear about one thing. The Life of Fr Champagnat by Br Jean-Baptiste is indeed a reflection of the Founder's teaching but it is also a reflection of the Marist oral tradition. A minimum of method is required to read it with profit. In summary, I would say that we should approach it with sympathy and with caution. With the sympathy of the confrere and the disciple who believes in the author's fundamental honesty; with the caution of the experienced person who knows that there is no such thing as an objective account, and that any history is also that of an author, an epoch and a milieu. The work you have just read requires the same two complementary qualities of you.

Translation: Br. Edward Clisby. Auckland. New Zealand.

MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT'S PATHWAY OF OBEDIENCE

Br. Gabriel Michel

The obedience of Marcellin is a long pathway which the Lord revealed to him step by step and which was achieved in a situation almost unique: as a Founder subject to a Superior.

I. PERIOD WHEN AUTHORITY HAS NOT MADE ITS CONVERSION.

A. OBEDIENCE AND THE GOSPEL

The Gospel reinforces some principles which are more or less tied to obedience:

"He who listens to you listens to me." (Luke 10:16)

"If your Brother does you a wrong (Math 18:13) you must tax him about it, as a private matter"...then use a little group...then use the whole community. It concludes with: "All that you bind on earth will be bound in heaven," which bring us to the role of the leader.

But there is also the manner in which this leader acts: "The kings of the nations lord it over them. But for you, it will not be like that. He who governs must act as one who serves. As for me, I among you as one who serves. (Luke 22: 24-27)

Now, the mode of action by those in palaces and armies ended up by being extended to the convents, and even the saints accepted, as part of convent existence, attitudes which were not destined to facilitate a ready acceptance of the word given by the person in authority or in the name of authority.

In the convents of the Visitation, even in the times when Saint Jeanne de Chantal was still alive, here is what the customs of 1637 indicated: "When the Sisters give to or receive from the hand of the Superior anything at all, be it letters, articles or similar things, then they will kneel down and kiss the ground, and, wherever they may be, if the Superior passes by them, they will arise and make a profound bow, except when they are kneeling in choir, on which occasion they will only bow."

And, for sure, there were also some times and situations less exacting, but which, taken as a whole, demanded a more than ordinary courage on the part of anyone who had a slightly non-conformist opinion.

To understand better the obedience of Father Champagnat I am going to evoke the attitudes of authority in Champagnat's era, and this will help us to understand how difficult it was for him to be able to make a true search for the will of God, and the merit there would have been for him in making a judicious

resistance when occasion called for it.

B. THE CHURCH AND THE JANSENISTS

In Father Champagnat times Jansenism was dying out and, in general, people had a negative attitude towards it. Its principal representative in Champagnat's region was Jacquemond, who had been obliged to quit his parish, St Médard (Loire), and who was not destined to have the right to a church burial, even though he was a saintly priest (He died in 1835).

There is no question of saying that the Jansenists were right in their moral rigorism or in their attitude in regard to Communion, but it was not for these reasons that they were persecuted. In point of fact, they had been attacked by Popes and bishops for two centuries.

First of all, it is necessary to remember that the two chief leaders of the movement died saintly deaths - Jansenius, even though his book "Augustinus" was something reprehensible; and Saint-Cyran, after having been misled by Richelieu for reasons more political than spiritual. Really, the average Jansenist appeared, above all, to be a person who would not consent to act contrary to conscience.

On a certain day in 1641 (Jansenius died in 1638), as a result of pressure from several sources, the Inquisition decided that his enormous volume, written in Latin, and bearing the title "Augustinus", in its desire to explain the doctrine of Saint Augustine, contained heretical ideas.

To simplify the problem, there were taken from this book five propositions, which, according to the theological scrutineers of the volume, were contained in the book. Here is one of them: Some commandments are impossible to be practised by certain just people; who are lacking in the grace to keep them.

They went on to demand that the Jansenists sign a formula saying: "I recognise that these propositions are heretical and that they are to be found in 'Augustinus'". The Jansenists replied: "We fully acknowledge that these proposition are heretical, but we do not acknowledge that they are in 'Augustinus'".

In the 17th Century, with an absolute Monarch like Louis XIV, not to acknowledge as valid a study made by the hierarchy very quickly appeared as a new form of Protestantism, and, as just as he revoked the Edict of Nantes, so, too, did Louis XIV persecute the Jansenists who dared to resist.

In the 18th century it became rather different, even forming a nasty pressure group linked with the worst enemies of religion, a group which was responsible for the anti-Jesuit movement and which acted ruthlessly for a long time after the Jansenists' main period. But all that does not justify mixing the good with the bad and requiring the signing of a formula which made Jansenists act contrary to their conscience.

When we now read the declaration "Dignitatis Humanae" of Vatican Council II, we see with pleasure that we have entered into a world of truth and tolerance,

which up to that time scarcely existed. Nevertheless, there have been Popes and bishops who knew how to close their eyes intelligently concerning this unfortunate story of the formula that was required to be signed if one did not wish to be classified as a heretic.

C. THE CHURCH AND LAMENNAIS

In another context, we find in the 19th century the case of Lamennais, who, in 1834, broke definitively with the Church. In his newspaper "L'Avenir", he spread new ideas of liberty: liberty of the press; of peoples who wanted their independence; liberty of conscience, etc. He was assisted by the great intellectuals of the time: Lacordaire, Montalambert, Guéranger. But all his theories flourished at the same time as the revolution of 1830, and therefore were dangerous for the absolute monarchies.

Lamennais decided to go to see the Pope in order to explain what he was about. Gregory XVI was a very new Pope, recently emerged from his monastery. The cardinals persuaded him not to involve himself in discussion with this redoubtable intellectual. He accorded Lamennais an interview of a quarter of an hour and spoke to him particularly about his Brother, Jean-Marie de Lamennais, founder of the Brothers of Ploermel. Feli Lamennais - it was thus that he was soon to write his name - left Rome, learnt that an Encyclical, "Miradi Nos", harshly condemned the theses contained in "L'Avenir", hesitated a little before making the rupture, but finally, in 1834, published "Words of a Believer", a book which was to be condemned with the greatest severity by the Encyclical "Singulari Nos".

Really, with a little humility, all could have been regularised and Lamennais could have remained at the pinnacle of Christian thought. But the manner in which authority acted in regard to Lamennais was surely not the best. Gregory XVI was the victim of an entourage which was more concerned with searching for a political arrangement favourable to Metternich than with the pure will of God.

D. CHAMPAGNAT

Our Father Champagnat was not exactly subjected to the same type of trail, but, even so, he had to confront attitudes of authority which led him to reactions which would have been surprising if the matter had not been well handled. And this is the object of our study.

II. TO OBEY OR TO RESIST

A. THÉRÈSE COUDERC

The situation of Marcellin is not unique in the history of the Church, par-

ticularly of the Church of the 19th century. How many foundresses underwent unbelievable trials at the hands of bishops! Jeanne-Antide Thouret saw herself forbidden, by Bishop de Plessigny, access to Besançon, where she had founded her congregation, simply because she had obtained Pontifical approbation with high praises.

Anne-Marie Javouhey, dealt with roughly by Bishop Troussel d'Hericourt, who treated her as "a cunning intriguer devoid of all scruple", and who regarded her congregation as "a work destined for ruin".

Marie-Euphrasie Pelletier was saved by a Pope who asked of a cardinal: "How many bishops are against the Mother Superior of Angers?" "Thirteen, Most Holy Father." "And what has she said against her enemies?" "Nothing." "Well, then, the truth is on her side."

The very recent Beatification, in Australia, of Mary MacKillop has allowed us to recall episcopal opposition just as ferocious and just as devoid of foundation.

To confine ourselves to the Champagnat region, it is sufficient to think of Marie-Thérèse Couderc, who founded the Cenacle Sisters at La Louvesc, led this congregation for ten years, was constrained to incur debts, (as was also Marcellin Champagnat), and was then the victim of one of her Sisters, who alerted the bishop to the debt and had herself elected in Couderc's place. The intriguer incurred many more debts, then left the congregation, but Marie-Thérèse was not given back her place as foundress. She accepted this humiliating situation, and remained thus, living discreetly for 47 years the life of a humble Sister of no importance.

To some extent such is also the case with Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn, foundress of the Marist Sisters.

B. CHAMPAGNAT

Such was not to be the situation with Marcellin Champagnat. The Lord guided him towards resistance, at least in the first instance. I think that I can indeed divide his life in this matter into two periods: 1. From 1817 to 1839, when he marches on towards the attainment of freedom, in spite of many difficulties. 2. From 1839 to his death, when he renounces his own vision of things in order to place his independence at the service of the broader Society of Mary (Priests and Brothers).

III. VARIOUS CASES WHERE CHAMPAGNAT HAD TO RESIST

A. HAVING HIS BROTHERS BECOME BROTHERS OF FATHER BOCHARD'S CONGREGATION.

1. The Story

Our own Brother Jean-Baptiste, and also the notes from Father Bourdin, make us acquainted with the situation very well. To speak truly, the opposition

MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT'S PATHWAY OF OBEDIENCE

which Marcellin encountered came from his very clear vision of the primacy of charity. This charity expressed itself by a zeal which is total, and therefore astonishing to those around him.

At La Valla he set up a new school for the purpose of receiving all the children who wanted to go there. From this comes the reaction of the drunken school teacher who, like most teachers, had only a small number of students and who felt himself menaced. The teacher spoke to the parish priest, who accused Marcellin of putting this man out of a job. The reply of Marcellin was: "Go to the school and, if you find pupils there who have come from another school, you can send them away."

He took orphans, and people reproached him for taking too big a share of the collections for these orphans and not allowing enough for the orphans cared for by the Sisters. How difficult such calculations can be!

He taught Latin to some youngsters who were thinking of joining the seminary, and Father Cathelin, Director of the College of St Chamond, considered that Champagnat's action would empty his own Sixth Class, already sadly lacking in numbers."All right," said Champagnat. "We shall cease teaching Latin".

He founded the school at Marthes, but subsequently had to close it, for it did not meet the minimal norms of hygiene. Thus he acquired another enemy, parish priest Alliot, who had done nothing to improve the hygiene situation. All this was reported to Father Dervieux, parish priest of Saint-Chamond, who inveighed against Champagnat, and also to Father Bochard, the Vicar General in charge of schooling, who rather admired the dynamism of this humble curate, but on condition that the curate gave his followers to the Bishop's congregation.

Marcellin Champagnat could not accept this proposal coming from Father Bochard, first of all for the good reason that the group of first Marists had well reflected on their Fourvière Promise, had duly had it approved, so Champagnat therefore wanted to found a Society of Mary and not a Society of the Cross.

The defects of Father Bochard were well known to Father Courbon, the first Vicar General¹, and to Father Gardette, Superior of the Great Seminary,

¹ In the Courbon-Fesch correspondence you have, for example the letter below of October 1814 (OM doc. 31): M. Gardette...is also a bit annoyed at the meticulous and constantly repeated drivel of M. Bochard; I advise him in secret to get the upper hand for a bit; he has not got the strength.

This M. Bochard is a tireless worker; he treats minutiae as great matters; in everything his will has to prevail. Major, minor seminaries, communities, he is everything: Superior General, local superior, superior, bursar etc. etc. That tires everyone because on top of that his head is changeable: when he falls for a subject that person is a phoenix; immediately he glorifies him; when he has it in for someone he cannot stand him any longer, he tries to have him moved; when he comes up with a project it has to be carried through. If the good Lord were to make him bishop, seminaries and communities would sing a Te Deum; the other senior vicars would shrug their shoulders and shout 'Deo Gratias'. I am not saying this to draw down upon him remonstrance or reproach but to put you on guard against what he says and that you might suggest to him that he handle everyone carefully, especially directors of seminaries, and that he be discreet in his innovations and changes."

Ten years later, a letter from Mgr. de Pins to Mgr. Devie (14-4-1824) revealed that before leaving Lyons M. Bochard had destroyed a good number of archives. For what reason? (OM doc.31 and A.E. Belley Fonds de Vic. Affaire Bochard).

who evidently could not tell Father Champagnat to disobey, but who did tell him to await the passage of time, a piece of advice, alas, which Champagnat could not throw back to all those who attacked him.

And we must add to the list, if he were not indeed an attacker at least he was one who faltered, Marcellin's spiritual director, who was, in all probability, Father Jean-Louis Duplay.

This young priest was scarcely older than Marcellin, but they had known each other since Verrières days and they came from neighbouring villages, Marlhes, and Jonzieux². Teacher at the Great Seminary, Jean-Louis had perforce to be wary of Father Bochard, who was the Vicar-General in charge of seminaries. In view of the Bochard-Champagnat struggle, it is there quite understandable that Jean-Louis should say to his director: "It is too difficult for me to take a position in this matter."

2. *Reasons for not accepting*

There were other reasons for not accepting the Bochard solution. I made allusion to them in "Né en '89", pages 201, 224. And here is one, among others, which is not mentioned by the biographers of Marcellin.

The ex-Brother of the Christian Schools, who led the eight postulant in March, 1822, and whom Marcellin sent away a little later on for moral faults, could very possibly be that Guisard who was in league with Father Bochard and Father Courveille in the regions of Charlieu and Feurs, and who was the same one who formed "novices in the la Valla manner"³.

² In "Né en 89 vol. 1" I have shown what bonds of friendship the two families could have had (p.174-184-6, 275). The biographer of Jean-Louis Duplay, J.M. Chausse, states quite clearly the role that J.L. Duplay played in the life of Marcellin Champagnat: "In the midst of his contradictions M. Champagnat often went to the seminary in Lyons to converse with M. Duplay, his friend and counsellor." He took his advice on everything concerning the welfare and the future of his Institute." When he says that, however, Chausse is only quoting a letter from Marcellin to Claude Duplay, the Brother of Jean-Louis: "You can say in all truth that your Brother M. Jean-Louis Duplay, is the cause of the existence of the Little Brothers of Mary. I would never have undertaken and especially carried on with that work if he had not formally approved it." (Letters I, doc. 26)

Can it be more clearly stated that this spiritual direction goes back to the very early years of the foundation? We know too that Jean-Louis Duplay had close ties with M. Dervieux and so must have had quite a bit of difficulty calming down that most worthy priest in the years when he was violently opposed to Champagnat. Again, Marcellin points out to Claude Duplay that his spiritual direction under Jean-Louis was quite without restraint: "When, fortunately, it was a question of the definitive establishment of the work of the Little Brothers of Mary (1824?) I went to have a talk with him as I always did in matters of any importance. While he was interested in my project, he did not think at first that I should give up my position as curate in Lavalla to dedicate myself entirely to it. After he had had a chance to have a long conversation with Monsieur Dervieux, his ideas changed. (Here we are at that time in 1824 when Dervieux, after having seen that Courbon was in favour, that Bochard had been removed, that Rebod had been put to one side, that Mgr de Pins was completely won over to the Marists, and so that in the end Father Champagnat was not a proud person but a man of God and an apostle, changed his attitude completely and urged Duplay to enter wholeheartedly into the project of the Marist Brothers.)

Another point, it is easy to understand why Br Jean-Baptiste, who knew perfectly well about whom he was speaking, did not reveal the identity of the "confessor". Presenting the reticence of the latter as something of a weakness, he did not wish to attribute that to someone who had become the superior of the major seminary.

³ This is a person, whose name Br Jean-Baptiste does not give but tells us that he was with "the Brothers of

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At Charlieu this same person brought such confusion that Marcellin saw himself forced to send his Brothers there in 1824 to replace the one who had had himself referred to as a Brother of La Valla⁴.

Father Champagnat also had the unsuccessful experience of the attempted union of his Brothers with those of Father Rouchon, parish priest of Valbenoite.

At the priests' Retreat of 1823 Father Bochard dared to profit from this time of spiritual renewal to manifest an extreme Gallicanism. Yes, he dared to turn the clergy of Lyon towards resistance to the new Pope Leo XII, who, he said, had no right to nominate an Administrator, Bishop De Pins, as long as Cardinal Fesch was still alive. Now, already, for eight years, the diocese of Lyons had been existing in the untenable situation of being without a resident bishop, its titular head having been confined to Rome for the remainder of his years by the royal decision of Louis XVIII.

To obey a disobedient superior is a problem which would be settled with the arrival of the Administrator, for, evidently, the latter would not take back into his new Council a notorious opponent. Father Bochard retired into the diocese of Belley and, after some manifestations of bad spirit, was rebuked by Bishop Devie, bishop of Belley. Bochard then he resigned himself to silence⁵.

It can be readily believed that, during all this time, Father Bochard was

Christian Schools for 6 years" (Bic. P. 98). It is a curious thing that the inspector Guillard, who had no chance of knowing young Br Jean-Baptiste, says exactly the same thing: "M. Grizar, who has been with the Brothers of Christian Doctrine for six years and whom the Rector has just authorised... is forming novices as they do in Lavalla." (OM 73.23) The archives of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Lyons (novitiate register), show that he entered the novitiate only in July 1819, but he was 32 years of age, there is nothing to stop him having been trained as a teacher and having taught before entering the novitiate, which sometimes happened. So he puts down his stay with the Christian Brothers as six years. His reference is a certificate of competence. A letter written on 25 March 1822 by the sub-prefect of Roanne to the prefect of la Loire follows up a request of Grizard: "I have the honour of addressing you, for your approval, an authorisation to teach granted by the Rector of the Academy at Lyons to M. Grizard for the commune of Charlieu." Our ex-Christian Brother, then, has jumped from Lavalla to the Rector of the Academy to ask for a post and he has been given Charlieu. In his free time he taught novices who had been entrusted to him by M. Bochard and, in order to dissociate himself from the Christian Brothers, referred back to the new congregation in Lavalla. He was in Lavalla in March. It was in May that inspector Guillard found him in Charlieu. In 1823, another inspector, Popar, recalls Grizard again, speaking of the Brothers of Feurs (a region where, the previous year, Guillard had found Courveille's Brothers. But now the 3 Brothers are no longer with Courveille, they are "a product of M. Grizard, an ex-Brother previously established and authorised in Charlieu". In fact, he was no longer in Charlieu but in Lyons "in order to come to an arrangement with Monsieur Bochard. This fellow Grizard, had run up rather shameful debts, but M. Bochard had agreed to pay them." (OM doc. 86) It would have been the limit if Father Champagnat had accepted as master of novices someone he had sent away for moral misconduct. In any case it would have been necessary to replace with real Brothers from Lavalla a person who had passed himself off as a Brother from Lavalla, and Monsieur Courveille, who was himself more or less linked with the Bochard-Grizard enterprise, was going to demand that Father Champagnat found a school in far-off Charlieu while he was right in the middle of building the Hermitage.

⁴ Brother Avit, in the Annals of Charlieu, gives the date of the opening of the Brothers' school in Charlieu as November 1824. They seem to have enrolled between 140 and 150 pupils in the first year.

⁵ Monsieur Courbon died as Mgr de Pins arrived (6 February 1824). There remained only one vicar general of the previous team: M. Recorbet. M. Barou was chosen immediately, then on 1 April 1824, Jean Cholleton and, on the death of M. Recorbet, Simon Cattet on 28 December 1825.

blocking the legal recognition of the Marist Brothers which had been envisaged by Rector D'Regell (O.M. Doc.77), and this at a time when recognition could have been easily obtained.

We must understand, therefore, that, if the position of Marcellin had some elements similar to that of Thérèse Couderc, it is nevertheless a very different situation. Replacement was imposed on Thérèse Couderc. Father Champagnat had a slight margin for manoeuvre, which permitted him to choose between, on one hand, an obedience which would be absurdly blind and, on the other, charity towards those whom God sent to him.

B. HAVING HIS BROTHERS BECOME BROTHERS OF FATHER COURVEILLE

In 1824 there came a second occasion. Champagnat sought out Courveille "on the advice of Father Superior"⁶, as he wrote later on. Without doubt, it can also be thought that the relative affluence of Courveille would contribute to lightening the financial burden. But, above all, it was generally believed that Courveille had received the most manifestly supernatural inspiration regarding the Society of Mary. Without doubt, like others in the group, Courveille had hardly thought of anything other than missionaries imitating Saint François Régis, but finally he, too, accepted the idea of teaching Brothers and, in the region of Epercieux, he was especially enthusiastic about realising this scheme.

Therefore nothing seemed opposed to the idea that Courveille could render good service during the construction of the Hermitage, remaining at La Valla where, it would seem, only some orphans still remained during the summer season, the other pupils having already quit school to attend to the work in the fields.

Champagnat gave in to Courveille, even in some outlandish decisions, such as the blue soutane which so surprised the inhabitants of St Chamond. While the Brothers of the Christian Schools were "the Brothers with four arms", the Marist Brothers were "the Blue Brothers".

Once the construction of the Hermitage was finished there were those infamous attempts by Courveille to have himself elected, attempts which Champagnat did not oppose, but which ended in the confusion of the self-seeker. In the same way, when Champagnat was away during a great part of 1825, it was really necessary that Courveille direct the house, for Terrailon, the other Marist candidate there, had no special desire to do so.

Then came Christmas and the sickness of Champagnat. More than ever Courveille tightened the reins on the house, the only difference being that he irritated those around him more than ever, and, with Terrailon, he began to announce the threatened future which would follow the death of Father Champagnat. "If Father Champagnat should die, we shall ask for a parish. We shall withdraw,

⁶ OM doc. 286.2 "Superior" probably meaning M. Gardet. It is also one way of saying: "it's not on my authority."

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and you, too, will do so," the two chaplains said to the Brothers⁷.

Father Champagnat regained his health and there was much enthusiasm among the Brothers. Courveille was in a state of shock and took his revenge by bringing about the canonical visit by Father Cattet, Vicar-General, who very much wanted to find, and to report on, the situation in its most negative aspects.

At the end of springtime there came the moral faults of Courveille, who chose to flee to the Trappist monastery at Aiguebelle. The situation for Marcellin was hardly comfortable, for, in the eyes of the public, both Courveille and one of his first Brothers, Etienne Roumezy, had walked out on him. Etienne Roumezy judged it better to go to, and help look after, an orphanage at Larajasse. Soon Champagnat was also abandoned by Terraillon, who left for Lyon to preach the quarter-century Jubilee which the Pope had prorogued. But, in the end, the Brothers remained with Champagnat and, for the first time, made their vows of religion, which, for some of them, were perpetual vows.

This particular year, 1826, had been cruel to the Founder. He spoke about it especially in his letters of seven years later. For example, this to Father Cholleton: "I saw in this circumstance (his illness) that neither the one nor the other (Courveille and Terraillon) had for my young people the sentiments of a father." Champagnat's attitude was quite the opposite. "God restored my health. I reassured my children. I told them to fear nothing and that I would share all their misfortunes and would share with them the last piece of bread"⁸.

Marcellin thus took a further step in the conviction that he must not be replaced. For being available to his followers there was only he, for now, in the diocese, he remained alone. The other two Marists of the Promise of Fourvière, Colin and Déclas, were in the diocese of Belley, that is to say, very far away, and he could hardly see anything to be gained by pestering them. For some two years he even ceased to believe in the Priests' branch of the Society. It was the vocation of Father Séon⁹ that obliged him to change his opinion and, without any doubt, from mid-1828 he became, on the contrary, the most zealous member of those busying themselves with the priests' branch of the Society¹⁰.

C. HAVING HIS BROTHERS BECOME BROTHERS OF FATHER COINDRE'S CONGREGATION

1. The story

But Father Cattet persisted with his idea. Champagnat, it is true, knew how to gather together a good number of young men; he inspired confidence, even in politicians. The Prefect took the trouble of coming to the Hermitage; he

⁷ OM doc. 286.2

⁸ OM doc. 286.2

⁹ OM doc.265.9,10,11

¹⁰ Bicentenary Life ch.19 part 1, p. 198...

gave the community the right to have its own cemetery etc...But Champagnat had too little intelligence to direct a teaching congregation. Besides, the Virgin of Fourvière had found another remarkable servant in the person of André Coindre, who busied himself with founding the Brothers of the Sacred Heart and the Sisters of Jesus and Mary (with Saint Claudine Thêvenet). There was the man that was needed. He possessed a prodigious energy; he had been appointed Superior of the Great Seminary of Blois; he constantly published replies to so many modern heresies that he was on the way to becoming an oracle of Holy Church.

Coindre was not easy to contact, for people asked for him almost everywhere. Nevertheless, Cattet sought him in order to help this work, the Marist Brothers. Proof of this comes from a letter from Coindre to one of his own Brothers which letter, without doubt, concerns the Marist Brothers, even though they are not mentioned by name.

"3rd May, 1826.

The turbulent spirit of Father Cattet teaches us the conduct we must follow. He is one of those men who wish to undo everything in order to remake in their own way. Let us beware of such a method. We can do nothing to remake in Nature what it ordinarily produces without our totally destroying it, and, moreover, we are not sure that what we have reduced to powder will be restored in the composition of the new product. It is the same with works of Grace. To think of such unions shows that one has very little knowledge of men and of the works of God. It is the same as saying that we should blend together all households so as to make but one, all states so as to make but one. Besides, if people are content, what more is necessary?¹¹

Father Coindre had indeed received his inspiration at Fourvière, but Our Lady of Fourvière knew what she was inspiring and, from well before Vatican II, she knew the theology concerning the charisms of Founders and she knew how to arrange similar currents of spirituality without mixing their waters.

2. *The death of Father Coindre*

Father Coindre had certainly exceeded his strength, for he fell into a depression which ended in suicide (30th May, 1826). And this accident, so much more difficult to explain in that epoch than in ours, concerning a man who was a saintly priest, doubtless gave a little more wisdom to the turbulent Cattet, all the more so in that, in the same period (18-24 May, according to Father Coste)¹², they learnt about the scandalous faults of Father Courveille and about his departure to la Trappe.

¹¹ OM doc. 151.1

¹² OM vol 4 p.255

3. The archiepiscopal council

In any case, we see that, on the 8th August, Article No. 13 of the archiepiscopal council announced the end of all this procrastination: "The proposal to unite the Brothers of the Hermitage with those of the Sacred Heart does not appear to be admissible. The Council favours charging Father Brut ¹³, Principal of the College at St Chamond, with giving care and attention to the Brothers of the Hermitage for their own welfare and for that of the establishment."

No doubt that conclusion provided an honourable way-out for Father Cattet. Although the conclusion obliged Father Cattet to recognise that no one could do better than Father Champagnat at the Hermitage, it still gave scope for his desire to be able to say that his canonical visit had had some effect.

4. Conclusion.

As irritating as these interventions were, they had the advantage of continuing to guide Father Champagnat step by step in a pathway of obedience which could be claimed to be both very delicate and very difficult. Yes, in a period when authority had scarcely undergone any change, it was necessary for him to discover the will of God yet one more time on the fringe of classical obedience.

IV. THE CASE OF SAINT VIATOR

A. FIRST PART OF THE STORY

The preceding facts show very well that each time the Saviour was there to guide his servant in spite of the fog which formed around him and which, for sure, could cause him understandable irritation. He now had almost twenty years of experience in guiding his community, but that did not count with inveterate demolishers. They did not recognise the evident signs, did not distinguish between good and bad fruits. They did not have the spiritual depth to assess well. They had only theories, and, according to these theories, an intellectual was necessary to form a community of teaching Brothers. It was necessary to form the Brothers through books, not by manual work. Such, anyway, was the vision of the future Bishop Pompallier.

¹³ OM doc. 159. This M. Brut may well have given the Brothers some lessons for he was the director of the college of S. Chamond from 1824 to 1831. He is the one who got Br Laurent to pass his brevet exam. After S. Chamond he was appointed curate in Ampuis and later became parish priest. At the age of 89 he was "still active", very pleased with the Brothers and did all he could for them. He died in 1875 at the age of 95. Almost right up to his death he was giving lessons to young people were preparing to go to the seminary. Two years before his death he began to study English. (These details are found in the Annals of Ampuis by Brother Avit.

1. First signs

Up to 1830 the pressure exercised for an accord with the Clercs of Saint Viator did not have grave consequences. They were of the nature of what was later brought about with Father Mazelier.

A letter from Father Cattet (5. 12. 1832) shows that, if the archiepiscopal council proposed an accord with the Saint Viator authorities, it was to avoid having to make recourse to the Marianists, who were very far away. Father Champagnat had indeed been thinking about the Marianists¹⁴.

At the bottom of the matter was the question of legal authorisation, which had not been obtained for the Marist Brothers, but which the Marianists had obtained in 1825, and the Clercs of Saint Viator just before the Revolution of 1830, even though, in both cases, these two congregations were less structured than were the Marist Brothers. Since, after the Revolution of 1830, the government was less favourable to the congregations, there was scarcely question of having yet another congregation recognised. Thus it was necessary in some way to unite with a congregation already legally existing.

Nevertheless, Bishop de Pins wanted to try his luck, for, at last, events were developing less harshly than the years 1830-1831 would have given people to believe possible. De Pins therefore went away to Paris on 6th December, 1832 to try to obtain legal recognition for the Marist Brothers. He obtained nothing.

The Marist-St Viator question returned to the archiepiscopal council on 7th August, 1833, but this time its members began to speak quite clearly of union: "In view of having the Little Brothers of Mary enjoy the benefits of legal existence, the Council is of the opinion that they be united to the work of the Clercs of Saint-Viator of Vourles, who are legally authorised. At least, there is scope to make the attempt to do so".¹⁵

That very month of August was the month of contacts with Rome, or, rather, the end of preparations for the voyage of Father Colin to Rome. Colin had called on Champagnat to attend a meeting at Lyon, set down for 29th August. The latter had not been able to go there, but he knew very well that the object of the voyage was the pontifical recognition of the Society of Mary. It would therefore be stupid to make decisions concerning a branch of that Society before knowing the result of the visit to Rome.

2. Resistance of Marcellin Champagnat

A. LETTER OF AUGUST-SEPTEMBER, 1833¹⁶. FIRST PART.

Anyway, Champagnat had come to Lyon on 21 st August¹⁷ and, learning

¹⁴ OM doc. 286.2

¹⁵ OM doc. 276

¹⁶ OM doc. 286

¹⁷ OM I p. 618

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about the decision of the archdiocese, he had expressed his reticence to Father Cholleton, who was very sentimentally attached to the Society of Mary¹⁸.

On his return to the Hermitage, Champagnat therefore wrote a letter, of which we have the draft copy, but we do not know whether the letter was actually sent:¹⁹

"Dear Vicar General,

I have not yet made the journey to Vourles:

1. Because I have been extremely busy;
2. Because I did not consider this injunction to be a definite order (previous situations had taught him that it was not necessary to consider merely any suggestion at all as an order);
3. Because I have not properly understood the matter. I believe that it was said that the parish priest of Vourles should make the first approach.

Champagnat knew Querbes. Querbes, a younger man, became a deacon on 21st July, 1816, at the time when Champagnat became a priest (22nd July).

B. CONSULTING OTHER CONFRERES.

"Not one of my confreres to whom I have spoken of the matter approves of it and, in this affair, I do not believe that, on my own, I can undertake so important a step as this one. I don't dare to speak of it to the Brothers, seeing the trouble it caused among the Brothers at Millery when someone imprudently told them about it".

It was an easy thing to consult those who had made the Promise of Fourvière, given they were not numerous. Champagnat added more information, other material such as that concerning the older Brother of Father Colin, or about young Séon, who had come to the Hermitage seven years earlier, who was already responsible for the community at Valbenoite, and who knew how to criticise the archdiocese for not having done enough for the Society of Mary.

The response was clear. There was a Society of Mary, which Father Colin was presenting to the Pope. The Marists therefore had some weight, and should have a say in this matter, for, really, there were 80 Brothers, 10 novices, and, in addition, in the diocese of Lyon, priests at the Hermitage and at Valbenoite who were preparing to become Marists. At the same time the congregation of Father Querbes had only two Brothers and two associates.

C. RADICALLY DIFFERENT PRINCIPLES BETWEEN THE TWO CONGREGATIONS

The letter continues: "At the time when, left to myself after the sad affair of Father Courveille and the desertion of Father Terrailon, you counselled me

¹⁸ M. Jean Cholleton, in the Major Seminary, was the spiritual director of almost all those who made the promise at Fourvière. When he stopped being vicar general in 1840, he became a Marist Father and Provincial of the Marist Brothers of whom Brother François was the Director General.

¹⁹ Annales des Frères Maristes cahier Champagnat 3 p. 11-13. In OM doc. 286

to confer with Father Querbes and to come to an understanding. I saw him, but, certainly, I did not come to an agreement with him, as I have had the honour to tell you."

That signified that Father Querbes had an understanding of his work that was very different from ours. Indeed, his idea is that the Brother lives with the priest, both the one and the other being Clercs of Saint Viator. Moreover, this can facilitate the establishment of the Clercs in small parishes where there would be only one class. But, among the Marist Brothers, all the communities are composed of Brothers only. The Priests' branch is quite separate, and even a little more so, since half of the Hermitage priests had left to establish themselves at Valbenoite. From that point the letter changed its tone.

D. LETTER OF AUGUST-SEPTEMBER: SECOND PART (CF. PAUL 2.COR.11-12)

The archdiocesan plan shows quite clearly that Champagnat was esteemed. He was a saint, but was shod in huge wooden shoes (sabots). He was also a good mason who, at La Valla, knew how to construct a building on his own. He was the key workman of a great house at the Hermitage, but now he should give place to a more gifted person for the formation of religious.

Champagnat therefore reacted like someone who had received a blow. All the same, like Jesus on a certain occasion, he did not offer the other cheek to the servant of the High Priest. Champagnat had his model in the St Paul of the Second Corinthians: "I am also going to be boastful." (11. 18) "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they Christ's servants? These are wild words, but I am something more than that. I have toiled harder; I have been beaten so cruelly; I have made voyages without number; I have been in danger from rivers, in dangers in the city, in danger from false friends. I have been in labours, in fatigue, in frequent vigils, in hunger and thirst, in repeated fasts. I have had the care of all the churches. If it is necessary to glorify oneself, it is of my own weaknesses that I boast."

So much for Chapter 11. And in Chapter 12 we have: "There I am; I have become stupid. But you have compelled me to say these things."

Let us therefore take up again the letter of Champagnat which sets out to evoke in a disorderly way some of the sad memories of long ago, for certain memories go back even to the 1820s.

"After the most terrible menaces uttered against a priest who is giving his all and all his resources, I at last saw, in the arrival of Bishop de Pins, the re-birth of tranquillity."

This passage is the evocation of what we know about through Brother Jean-Baptiste, who tells us of the eventual intervention by the police²⁰, and also of what we know through Father Bourdin, who, in his cryptic style, speaks about

²⁰ Bicentenary Life p. 121

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Journoux, the young priest-friend of Marcellin, who warned Champagnat that he was going to be denounced to the archdiocesan authorities. Journoux also advised Champagnat that he must burn the confidential letter Journoux sent²¹.

Champagnat's letter went on to say: "Soon, new dangers, more terrible than the first, came to assail the Little Brothers of Mary. What a disastrous step was that which I took with the advice of the Reverend Superior, I mean to say, when I asked for Father Courveille, who was at Epercieux! Oh, truly disastrous day, and one more than capable of overthrowing this work if the divine Mary were not supporting it with all the strength of her arm!"

Evidently, this is an allusion to the faults of Courveille, even if what follows emphasises the lack of paternal interest on the part of the two chaplains: "During a long and very serious illness, with heavy debts weighing me down, I wanted to make Father Terrailon my sole heir. He refused my inheritance, saying that I had nothing. To the Brothers he and Father Courveille did not cease saying, 'The creditors will come very soon and drive you out of here. We can quite easily accept a parish and leave you to yourselves.' At length, God, in His mercy, alas, perhaps in His justice, finally restored me to health. I reassured my children. I told them to have no fear, that I shared all their misfortunes as I would share with them the last morsel of bread. I saw in this circumstance that neither the one nor the other of these men had for my young people the feelings of a father. In other respects I have no complaints whatever to make against the parish priest of Notre Dame²², whose conduct has always been edifying in our house".

The letter now went on to sum up all the signs of protection which gave hope and, for the second time, Marcellin declares that all his confidence is in Mary: "Surely," he suggests, "you believe that others will do better than I. Nevertheless, here is what I have done." And it is then that, like St Paul, he outlines what he has brought about, as if to say: "Yes, well now, has anyone done as much about the project? It was found that the page was torn and so it was necessary to re-establish the text as accurately as possible²³ (the parts below in brackets): "Although I was left on my own by the withdrawal of Father Courveille and the departure of Father Terrailon, Mary did not abandon us. We paid our debts as they fell due and other confreres came to take the place of the earlier ones. I am all alone in handling the expenses of their upkeep. Mary is helping us; that is sufficient.

"I am increasing the property, either by (clearing the ground, or by) new acquisitions. Here is established (however, the fall may come upon us) 'the throne'. A house inspection was made at Notre Dame de l'Hermitage so as to terrify us. A great (detachment of police, but they found no one) had something terrifying

²¹ OM doc. 754.18

²² OM doc. 286.2

²³ Fr Coste. SM has made a reconstitution and I am taking it as it is (OM 1, pp. 620-621)

about it. (The new authorities whom the Revolution) has set in power were menacing us in several places, but, in spite of that, Feurs was the only (place where, because of intrigues, we) withdrew our Brothers (although with a heavy heart, but yet obliged to do so. I may add) that not one Brother has had to quit his vocation or his employment) because of (military service)".

Father Querbes etc.

E. INTERPRETATION OF THE LETTER

We do not know whether this letter was sent. If the draft copy had been torn on one half-page, was it merely through clumsiness? That is hard to believe. We can imagine the hesitations of Marcellin Champagnat: "Yes, I can say everything I feel to the one who was my spiritual director...Certainly, I am in a state of irritation, but how can I dam up this flow of thoughts which has swept over me? Would it not be better to keep them to myself than to brood over them?"

Champagnat was a very sensitive man; this time he is truly suffering. There are moments in the life of a saint when the saint, like Saint Paul, can lose his calm. "For 17 years, in spite of everything, Jesus and Mary have helped me. That means something." There are times when we can say to ourselves at the end of the day, "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine. Mary Queen of peace, keep me calm." And, in spite of that, calm does not immediately return.

Besides, it is possible that a certain resignation manifested itself, and that we can, in this sense, interpret a particular letter from Father Chollerton to Father Querbes saying that Champagnat "appears to me to be well disposed"²⁴. Yes, perhaps there had been an attempt at reciprocal understanding and that, in order to avoid military service for four of his Brothers, Father Champagnat considered confiding them to Father Querbes. We could, however, look for another solution, and this we spoke about, as mention was made of it in a letter from Father Colin²⁵.

In any case, this interior turmoil has nothing in it which was to disturb matters in regard to the sanctity of Marcellin. Saint Ignatius says tellingly that, were the Society of Jesus to be suppressed, he would suffer for a quarter of an hour before being restored to peace. That it should be necessary for others to take a longer time for regaining peace is the secret of the Lord, who knows his elect. Anyway, Saint Paul, was knocked over by interior turmoil by the attacks

²⁴ As we cannot give an exact date to Father Champagnat's letter, we do not know if it comes before or after.

²⁵ OM doc. 212 (13 February 1830). Father Colin said to Father Champagnat: "Mgr answered that he kept advising you to have the Brothers approved with the statutes of Brothers who had already been approved. ... he has written to Valence. Writing to Valence (in 1830) meant making contact with M. Fièrè and M. Mazelier. Perhaps at that time Fr Champagnat was not very much in favour of that union, nor was M. Mazelier. This would explain the slow progress of their contacts

of "certain people" (2 Cor. 10. 12) And this did not cancel his canonisation. The same applies to Champagnat. Mary alone is immaculate.

3. What happened then?

So we do not know whether the letter was sent. The Archdiocesan archives do not preserve everything, and this letter was very personal. And, despite the allusions, given above, from Cholleton to Querbes, we can see that nothing was done about a union with the Clercs of Saint Viator. We have only the comment of Brother Jean-Baptiste, which is rather likely to be the true version. Father Champagnat would have said to the Archbishop: "To propose to our Brothers that they abandon their Rules, their costume, their method of teaching, their way of living in order to take on that of another community, whatever kind it may be, would be to lose them and to throw them back into the world. With the knowledge that I have of these things, I do not believe, your Grace, that I can in conscience support this measure. If your Grace orders it, I shall go along with it. I shall resign myself to it; that is my duty, but I tremble for what will follow."

The archbishop still insisted. He tried to refute the reasons brought forward by Father Champagnat and, not being able to change the latter's sentiments, he sent him away, asking him to reflect on the matter... Things remained like that...²⁶

That is not exactly the version of a text written by the Archbishop or by Champagnat, but at least it is the only light thrown on the two years of cold relationships between the Archdiocese and the Hermitage (1833-1835). We must add that, if the edition of 1931 puts the date of 1835, this date is not in the original text of Brother Jean-Baptiste.

4. Who is the principal party responsible for this attempt?

Let us come back to the beginning of the intrigue. Who influenced Cholleton? This Vicar General, friend of the Marists, about whom Brother François made such a warm eulogy when Cholleton died, allowed himself to be manoeuvred by Father Pompallier, former chaplain of the Hermitage and a brilliant speaker, who, without any doubt, said words that were somewhat close to those which Jean-Baptiste wrote him down as saying: "Father Champagnat, despite his piety and his virtue, has none of the qualities necessary for a good community superior. He is not capable of carrying on correspondence, of instructing his Brothers, of dealing with founders of schools and of suitably conducting a novitiate. Beside, he scarcely concerns himself with these matters and he employs almost all his time building and clearing the mountainside. From this it follows that the Brothers are not sufficiently formed to piety, to the religious virtues, nor to the knowledge necessary for teachers. Many other things suffer"²⁷.

²⁶ Bicentenary Lif p. 194

²⁷ Bicentenary Life p. 193

Later on, Father Colin had diverse reasons to be irritated with Bishop Pompallier and his manner of conducting the Mission. In 1847 he sent to the Holy See a passionate report, but a report which permits us to see what happened in 1833: "Restless and insinuating, Father Pompallier gained the confidence of the Archbishop-Administrator (Bishop de Pins) and had Cholleton appointed as Grand Vicar in place of another (Cattet) as the Superior charged with the new house of the Brothers of the Hermitage, and, some time later, he almost succeeded with the Administration in having Father Champagnat taken away from the direction of the work that Champagnat had brought to birth, and in having him replaced by a priest unknown to the Brothers (Querbes). It would have destroyed the new establishment. Providence willed that he did not succeed"²⁸.

In the documents available to us we see, it is true, Cholleton's part, but this evidence from Father Colin, added to, moreover, by those of Jean-Baptiste and Avit, do not leave any doubt about the identity of the true instigator of the intrigue.

Concerning Father Courveille, Brother Jean-Baptiste was lacking in the very minimum of prudence, speaking clearly about his moral faults at a time when (1856) the culpable old man had been, for twenty years, a good monk at Solesmes. Evidently, Champagnat's biographer did not know this fact which, undoubtedly, Father Mayet had not passed on to him.

Concerning Bishop Pompallier, Brother Jean-Baptiste knew very well that he was not dead and that he was a Missionary bishop. Therefore he had to be very careful. Nevertheless, he set out to show quite clearly Pompallier's responsibility, but he did it in a falsely ingenuous way. He wrote: "Bishop P", which is evidently a Punchinello secret which anyone at all can interpret. And he affected to diminish the responsibility of the person concerned: "Bishop P put so much good faith into what he said and he showed so much zeal and devotion for the Little Brothers of Mary that people allowed themselves to be persuaded by his words"²⁹.

When we realise that Bishop Pompallier was at Saint Génis-Laval in the month of August, 1861³⁰, it is evident that he could have read the biography of Father Champagnat and received this page as a slap, and a slap that was undoubtedly somewhat merited.

5. *The dates of this story*

The idea of finding a solution to the problem of exemption from mili-

²⁸ OM doc. 909.3

²⁹ Bicentenary Life p. 193

³⁰ Brother Avit wrote (Summary of the Annals p. 567): 1861 In the month of August, Mgr. Pompallier, having come to France to conduct business concerning his mission in New Zealand, paid a visit to our Mother House... We had reason to believe that Mgr. and Father Colin were on bad terms because of the debts that His Lordship had contracted for his mission. We think that the purpose of this visit was to get Brothers for New Zealand. Our superiors had not sent any since 1859, not being satisfied with the use the Marist Fathers were making of them.

tary service was in the air from the beginning of 1830, for in the early part of the Revolution it was not necessary to count on the clemency of the government. The Prefect of Montbrison, Scipion Morgue, was a type of firebrand, full of mistrust of religious, especially of the Marist Brothers, who had had the misfortune of being pleasing to the previous regime. It suffices to cite only some of his proposals:

"This institution (the Marist Brothers) is so much the less worthy of encouragement in that it is public knowledge that the pupils who come out of its schools are in a deplorable state of ignorance and the Brothers are useful more in guaranteeing the loss of time by the children than in putting them on the way to even the most trivial knowledge"³¹.

Yet the real contacts with Father Mazelier and with St Paul Trois Châteaux began only in 1835. Therefore there must have been, between 1833 and 1835, two years of procrastination on the part of Father Querbes, the archdiocese and Father Champagnat before the archbishop changed his mind. The year 1835 shows that something was done, for Father Champagnat wrote to the Queen and to Bishop Ardaillon, and he made out draft letters to several Deputies (3rd May)³². Consequently, the archdiocese must have told him that from now on it was up to him to take the steps. Moreover, in 1834 he obtained from Louis-Philippe the recognition of the Statutes of his congregation, which, alas, was only the first stage towards legal recognition.

6. *And Father Querbes?*

As for Father Querbes, it is much more difficult to say what he thought about what had been proposed to him by the archdiocese. We have one letter of August, 1833 - at the beginning of the campaign, where, before accepting, he sets some conditions:

- the help of another priest, Father Mouterde;
- an interview with Father Champagnat;
- the necessary powers.

And we know hardly anything more about it. Like Coindre, Querbes was a wise man, who did not desire to refuse formally, but wanted to gain time, as Champagnat had often done.

7. *Concerning the texts of Brother Jean-Baptiste*

We can put in here a reflection on the texts of Brother Jean-Baptiste. He indeed claims to tell the truth, but, like most biographers of his time, without having occupied himself too much with documents. For example, as being part of the same conversation, he presents two fragments which are surely two years apart in time:

³¹ Fr. GI Michel, Marcellin Champagnat and the legal recognition of the Marist Brothers.

³² *Annales des Frères Maristes* 113 noo 28

Assuredly, the following was in 1833: "My Lord, my Brothers and I are in your hands and Your Lordship can do with us what you wish." And the following sentence was, without doubt, in 1835: "As for the union that you propose to me, I do not believe it to be necessary in order to exempt our subjects, seeing that Providence has furnished us with a means of getting out of this difficult situation".

It is indeed, as we have seen, in the year 1835 that real contacts with Father Mazelier began. A brief reconstruction from memory evidently runs the risk of being only an approximation.

8. Provisional Conclusion

The conclusion from these events is that the Lord led Marcellin Champagnat, as he led so many other founders and foundresses, along a bumpy road, but one which caused him to live out the Paschal Mystery of Death and Resurrection. As Champagnat said to Father Barou in 1827,³³ "I was expecting, and I still expect, rougher trails".

Nevertheless, at the date which we have now reached, the Lord consoled him by showing him that he had acted well.

B. SECOND PART OF THE STORY

1. Resistance and Obedience

Let us pursue the story by recalling two sentences of Father Champagnat:

1. "In my opinion, this union will be the ruin of our Institute and will probably cause the ruin of the Brothers of Saint Viator."

2. "If Your Lordship orders it...I shall resign myself to it. That is my duty, but I tremble for what may follow."

Brother Jean-Baptiste says that the archbishop insisted, but no order was given³⁴. We have cited the principal texts from "Origines Maristes". It does not seem that we can bring any more light on the matter.

If there had been pressure on the part of the archdiocese, that was also able to arouse pressure in the opposite direction. Father Colin, even if he was no longer of the archdiocese, was, even so, a former directee of Father Chollerton, and thus could have urged him strongly about the idea of the Society of Mary, and about the vow which the future Marists made in 1833 (2nd February)³⁵ of working for the success of the Society.

Father Séon and Father Bourdin, who had not long before come very vol-

³³ OM doc. 173.16

³⁴ Bicentenary Life p. 194

³⁵ Vow to work for the success of the Society (OM doc. 263). This involved the Belley group. Father Champagnat was not present but he must have been informed of it later.

untarily to the Hermitage, were surely very much opposed to the idea of a union with the Clercs of Saint Viator, and they surely must have spoken strongly of their opinion in this matter. It would also be necessary to know what influence the suggestion of Father Colin could have had in regard to the advice of Bishop Devie to adopt the statutes of a congregation already approved, which would have been that of Valence (St-Paul-Trois-Châteaux), to which group he would have addressed himself³⁶.

Anyway, up to 1835 nothing definite had been decided on this matter, and the archdiocesan authorities could well have thought that Father Champagnat was persisting in pursuing a path that led nowhere.

2. *The about -turn of the archdiocese*

The real contacts with Father Mazelier were in 1835, but, rather, the definitive about-face of the archdiocese was in 1836. It was in November, 1836 that the archbishop sent, through Father Cattet, a violent letter of reproaches to Father Querbes.

"Father, some individuals, former Clercs of Saint Viator, have not given honour to the ecclesiastical costume, and, the matter being able to be imitated by such a great number of aspirants, the archiepiscopal Council formally disapproves their wearing ecclesiastical clothing.

As a consequence, they invite you to chose another costume, which is more in keeping with their state through its modesty, and which does not compromise our holy attire³⁷.

It is not necessary to look at the date of 24th November to situate the conversation between the archbishop and Father Champagnat, of which Brother Jean-Baptiste speaks. Champagnat was invited to lunch by the Archbishop and, in the course of the meal, he heard himself being congratulated. "Father Champagnat, I should like to tell you that you have given proof of good judgement when you opposed the union of your community to that of Saint Viator. I congratulate you on the conduct which you have maintained in this matter. To-day I should be very angry if the matter had been concluded, and I recognise that those who had advised me about this measure had badly informed themselves about your Institute"³⁸.

³⁶ Letter from Colin to Chamapgnat. OM doc. 212

³⁷ Life of Father Louis Querbes by Father Robert, Bruxelles, Dewit, 1922 p. 216. The letter is dated 23 November. Monsieur Querbes had hardly any trouble justifying himself. He could say: "No fact concerning this point has come to my knowledge unless you meant to refer to someone named N. who presented himself in Lyons dressed in a clerical suit and saying that he had at one time been associated with our Institute. He was, they say, solemnly clothed in the soutane by the bishop of Belley" You should also read his admirable reply: "His Lordship can throw us to the ground; we shall get up without complaining and, with a haversack on our back, we shall go, guided by Providence in search of new trials." P. (218)

³⁸ Bicentenary Life p. 194

3. Conclusion

The obedience of Father Champagnat had always been to seek the will of God: If there were no superior duty to be taken into account, I must obey, but it can so happen that the love of my Brothers leads me not to do too quickly what authority asks of me and, on this occasion, here is the authority itself telling me that I have done well not to obey too quickly, that I have given proof of wisdom in resisting these suggestions. Therefore, I shall continue to look for the will of God by being open and truthful to my superiors.

V. THE OBEDIENCE OF A FOUNDER TO HIS SUPERIOR

In 1835 the situation was restored, but Marcellin Champagnat had not finished his apprenticeship in obedience. His problem now is with Father Colin.

A. SITUATION BEFORE 1836

1. The Intuition of Father Champagnat

First of all, we must recall the fact that the situation of Marcellin Champagnat is very special. In regard to the teaching Brothers, he had an inspiration well before the other future Marists, but, at a given moment, he contemplated attaching his wagon to the Marist train of which Courveille spoke, an enterprise about which Colin also was concerned, since Colin, too, had his own vision: a tree with three branches, about which he would speak later.

Colin's conversations in the years of the 1870s (O.M. Document 844.3) clearly situate Champagnat's idea as separate from that of the Society of Mary: "The Teaching Brothers were never to be found before God in the original plan of the Society, and if, later on, the Brothers were brought into the Society idea, it was through kindness and in recognition of the services that they rendered, and, especially, on the insistence of Father Champagnat and his Brothers."

In Jeantin, 1869 (O.M. 820.10) we find it again: "Father Champagnat had dedicated himself to the foundation of the Institute of the Marist Brothers. The idea of this Institute belongs to him alone. It was he who, influenced by the difficulty which he had experienced in procuring an education, said to his confrères and associates at the Great Seminary: 'We must also found teaching Brothers.'"

2. Marcellin and the Marist Fathers

That Marcellin had done the impossible for the Marist priests there is no doubt, starting especially from 1828, but it is not on this point that he precedes the others. It is the branch of the Brothers, about which he alone thought; and that idea was from around 1804, as Brother François points out in his offi-

MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT'S PATHWAY OF OBEDIENCE

cial report to the Minister of Public Instruction:³⁹ "Still a child and a simple shepherd in the house of his parents, he already had the vague idea of the work which he would found later on". ('Origins of the Association', dated 22 .4. 1851)

But what interest could he have in engaging himself in a situation which would surely bring about difficulties? That is explained only by a spirit of faith which wishes to acquire, through obedience, a greater certitude of doing the will of God. It was thus explained one day by Brother Basilio Rueda: "Religious obedience aims at a more direct mediation to discover and accomplish the will of God"⁴⁰.

In Champagnat's desire to enter the Society of Mary, there is also, without any doubt, the influence of Courveille: If the Holy Virgin truly spoke, I can do no less than to adhere to her will in being part of the Society which she asked for.

Champagnat therefore considered this possibility, but, in 1826, the faults of Courveille and the desertion by Terraillon stifled in him all the motivation, let us call it mystical; and, furthermore, in these same years, his relationship with Father Colin were of minor importance only⁴¹.

It was, above all, the vocation of young Séon which relaunched Champagnat's desire to be a Marist priest and to work for this branch. In 1830 each small group of four or five Fathers (the Hermitage and Belley) held its little Chapter, which, in the archdiocese of Lyon confirmed the election of Champagnat as Provincial for the Hermitage group. The Belley Chapter confirmed the election of Colin. Provisionally, both groups were of the opinion that Father Colin should be recognised officially as the leader responsible for the whole group.

As to the confirmation of the election of Father Champagnat by the archdiocese, it was a stupid action, for, besides the four priests in residence at the

³⁹ G. Michel, *Frère François and the legal recognition of the Marist Brothers*. (1991) p. 63

⁴⁰ Circular on obedience: "Taking God's will seriously does not only mean doing it at whatever cost, as a duty, but loving it with all our heart because it never makes us feel estranged in any way." (Circulars of the Superiors General, vol 26 p.26)

"Everyone has more or less need of mediation" p. 51

"A person who seeks mediation remains active in that mediation, both in order to present the facts and by not allowing himself to be used either by authority or by the mediator." p. 68

⁴¹ The letter (August-September) in which he explains his disappointment will be studied later. For a year, it seems, he no longer counted on the branch of the Fathers. The pilgrimage he made to Valfleury on 25 July 1828, and where he even writes down the time, could correspond to the time he regained confidence with regard to the Fathers. Here is what he wrote: "25 July, at half-past eleven in Valfleury, under the protection of the most blessed Virgin and Saint Jean-François Régis, I renew the resolutions below, especially 2,3,4." Nothing, indeed, in these resolutions alludes to the Society of the Fathers, but it is rather the pilgrimage itself, and this curious indication of the time that leads one to think there is something mysterious in the motivation. In any case, a letter from Champagnat to Monsieur Cattet, on 18 December that same year 1828, shows that he has completely regained confidence in the branch of the Fathers, "the Society of the Brothers not being able to be positively regarded as the work of Mary, but only as a branch which came after the Society itself." (OM doc. 185)

Hermitage, there was also a group of 50 Brothers: "His Lordship commissioned me to announce to you that his plan is to make you Superior in title of the Society of Mary," Father Cattet wrote to Champagnat.

Between 1830 and 1836 the Colin-Champagnat contacts became more important and Champagnat, in particular, made extraordinary efforts in favour of the priests.

In 1833, on the 2nd February, the future Marists of Belley made a private vow of bringing to bear "all their efforts for the growth of the Society". Champagnat had not been summoned to pronounce this vow, but everything would lead us to believe he made it later on, for no one carried it out as well. Brother Jean-Baptiste says it quite clearly: "To bring about the existence of this Society was for him a matter of conscience, for he had promised God to consecrate for this work his health, and, if it were necessary, his very life." (Life, Bicentenary, p.204)

3. Valbenoite

The Fathers of the Hermitage who had elected Champagnat were certainly satisfied with his direction and with their life shared with the life of the Brothers. They had not been happy about the intervention of Father Colin, who preferred to see them separated from the Brothers⁴², but they then nominated Father Séon as Superior of the community which they were about to form at Valbenoite.

Father Rouchon, friend of the Marists, had already offered his house to the Brothers in 1824, and the latter had occupied the primary school since 1827. The new community of Fathers established, little by little, the Secondary College at Valbenoite so that they would not limit themselves to the role of curates of a parish.

4. Appreciation of the vocation of the priest

We must add that, in Brother Jean-Baptiste, we have a very positive attestation of the opinion Father Champagnat had concerning the Marist priest: "God knows how much I love the Brothers, and He is my witness that, for them, I am ready to give my blood and my life. Nevertheless, the work of the priests appears to me to be so much above that of the Brothers, and I have devoted myself to it to such an extent that, in order to assure its success, I would give, if need be, all that we have - my work, my strength, and even my life. No matter what happens, I am resolved to work with all my strength and to my last gasp to make it succeed".

Brother Jean-Baptiste also speaks of: "an almost feverish ardour" in Father Champagnat concerning this activity for the benefit of the Fathers. He exhausted himself in journeys to the archdiocesan authorities and to the seminary in order to acquire subjects who would come to live at the Hermitage or at Valbenoite. He also took steps to ensure that the two dioceses (Lyon and Belley) should agree

⁴² OM doc 242 (introductory lines)

that there would be a centre of unity for the Marists.

Certainly, the writings of Brother Jean-Baptiste are not exact quotations, but are literary reconstructions. Nevertheless, several passages could not have been invented. To have Father Champagnat say that "the work of the priests is so much above that of the Brothers" would have appeared to be needlessly irritating if those words had not indeed been said.

Besides, to understand all this, it is necessary to have reference to the epoch. In a catechism, the Curé of Ars repeats strongly what he must have heard as a child: "if I see a priest and an angel, I would first of all greet the priest." It is something like the problem of the "superiority" of the state of virginity vis a vis the state of marriage, evoked in the writings of St Paul. (1 Cor.7. 38) Like his contemporaries, Marcellin placed the dignity of the priesthood in a very high position. When he was on family holidays, they used to put a tablecloth on the table in his honour.

Let us also say that such an appreciation was prophetic, for, in the years 1836-1850 especially, the name of the Marist priest was equivalent to what was regarded as one of the highest concepts of a missionary. The Marist Fathers had in the Pacific 117 representatives, of whom several were martyrs, others died of fever or during voyages - Bishop Douarre, at 42 years of age, Bishop Colomb at 32, etc. And the missionary magazines which spoke about these missionaries certainly exalted this vocation.

B. REGARD FOR AUTHORITY AND THE INTERIOR LIBERTY OF MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

Let us now see how Father Champagnat acted in regard to Father Colin.

1. Regard for authority

Here is what Brother Sylvester says about the respect which Father Champagnat had for authority, especially in the case of his Superior, Father Colin.

"If the submission, respect and the attachment of Father Champagnat for the Sovereign Pontiff were so accentuated (as Sylvester has just said), they were not less so for the other superiors whom his lively faith made him regard as the representatives of God as far as he was concerned and as the bearers of God's authority. His life contains several features to support this. In confirmation of this I shall content myself with saying that, when the Reverend Father Colin, regarded at that period as the Superior General of the Fathers and the Brothers, came to the Hermitage to visit Father Champagnat, the latter received him with the most worthy distinction. Everyone had to put himself in a state of tidiness as if for a solemn Feast. He put on the most beautiful and richest chasuble for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice; the organ was played as on Doubles of the First Class. It was a day of celebration for the whole community. Father Champagnat was splendid and radiated good humour. One could readily understand that the

venerated Father revered his visitor, not as a simple confrere, but as Jesus Christ, whose place he held⁴³.

2. A sense of interior liberty

But this respect did not spoil his interior liberty. We know what respect he demanded of his Brothers and of himself in regard to the clergy. But that did not lead him to unjustified concessions. And we know about the interchange that Brother Jean-Baptiste reports concerning the sacristy of Fourvière, a topic which Father Barou was able to pass on to us so well:

"Father Champagnat, I do not understand you...The job at Fourvière is desired by several congregations. The archbishop, who loves your community so much, prefers you above all others. He believed he was giving pleasure to you and rendering you a service by confiding to you the sanctuary of Fourvière - and you dare to refuse us! All who are concerned with this matter say that it is suitable that Mary's altar should be looked after by the Marist Brothers. If you refuse Brothers to the Holy Virgin, she will not bless you."

"My dear Vicar General, I am extremely touched, and thankful for the interest which you have for us. But it seems to me that that the reasons that you give me in order to make us accept the post at Fourvière are not strong enough to take us away from the principle to which we have remained faithful up to this day, which is to confine ourselves to teaching and to refuse any work which would have not have the education of children as its goal.

"You menace me with the Blessed Virgin. I hope that she will not be angry with us, for it is to please her, to merit her protection and to preserve her work such as she founded it that we refuse to load ourselves with the care of the sacristy of Fourvière"⁴⁴.

It is very necessary to recall all this in order to understand how, at first, it was especially the sense of interior freedom that dominated the first years of Marcellin, Marist priest, and how a shock-event provoked a progression in the direction of blind obedience during the last year of his life.

VI. THE RESIGNATION OF 1837

First of all, we must examine an earlier problem: the resignation of Champagnat in 1837.

A) THE LETTERS WRITTEN DURING THIS PERIOD

⁴³ Frère Sylvestre raconte Marcellin Champagnat. Rome 1992 p. 274

⁴⁴ Bicentenary Life p. 489. Fourvière today is written without the s. The former spelling comes from a wrong etymology. Fourvière does not come from forum vetus (classical Latin) but from foro vetere (vulgar Latin) which corresponds to the time when the abandoned forum had become the old forum.

During the year 1836-37 we have some letters from Father Colin to Father Champagnat (the letters we have are only from Colin to Champagnat) which are at times a little bitter-sweet:

11-4-36-. Colin has to apologise for not having yet informed Champagnat about the approval by Rome of the Marist Fathers (11 March). An excusable lapse of memory, no doubt, but who had more interest in that news than Father Champagnat? Colin took advantage of this occasion to ask for Brothers for Polynesia. That, in fact, had been one of the reasons for the granting of pontifical recognition.

He also asked for a place for his old Brother among “the old men of private means at the Hermitage” – The Lord knows if they really were men of private means! - Mademoiselle Fournas had recently given money to establish an old people's home at the Hermitage and Father Champagnat had been more than willing to take on that work⁴⁵.

23-6-36. “No doubt you know that the brief of approval of the Society authorises us to elect a Superior General” (so he had not been informed directly of this). This letter is in answer to a request of Father Champagnat who wanted to make his vows. Father Colin tells him, then, that he is greatly edified by this request, but that previous nominations do not count and that he has no power to accede to that request⁴⁶.

16-9-36. Colin is acting as the superior of the Belley sector and asks Father Champagnat to “leave us Brother Luke (Father Champagnat had appointed him to another post, putting Brother Félix in his place)”. The problem, then, was already arising: On whom did the Brothers depend? When a Brother has been appointed to work in a house of the Fathers, can he be changed?

24-9-36. Colin was appointed Superior General.

A year has passed.

1-7-37. Colin wrote to Champagnat telling him to take matters gently at La Côte-Saint-André with Monsieur Douillet for, in the diocese of Grenoble, Courveille had left people with a bad opinion of the Marists. He also said that he was applying himself to finding some means to achieve unity; otherwise the different branches of the Society would do each other harm, “it happens that we do not see any drawbacks where the Superiors see several”. What does he mean by “the Superiors”? Himself? The bishop?

So, still in 1837 Father Colin recommends his old Brother and asks Fr

⁴⁵ OM I, doc.380

⁴⁶ OM I, doc. 396

Champagnat to meet him in Lyons. In August 1837, a most authoritarian letter as a result of a request by Champagnat to make a certain purchase:

1. The Brothers branch had still no rules drawn up on which a reply to that question could be given. (So, for 20 years Fr Champagnat had been making purchases, putting up buildings, incurring expenditure etc... and that with due economy. Now, humanly speaking, he had put himself in irons. Father Colin's excuse was that, between 1835 and 1837, the buildings had been on a particularly big scale, and so too, therefore had the expenditure, for, by adding the big chapel, the quadrilateral had been completed).

2. He should suspend any kind of project for three months.

3. He should busy himself solely with forming his subjects, put his mother house on a good footing and his establishments too and so regulate his affairs that, should he happen to die within three months, everything would be in order.

4. He should spend less time on external matters than on the spiritual matters of his community: his health will be the better for it and his soul too. (It's the kind of letter you read over again, wondering if you are really awake)⁴⁷.

B) FATHER COLIN'S CHARACTER

Before going any further, it could be useful, in order to throw some light on what follows, to say a word about the character of Father Colin.

Father Colin had an authoritarian character. He had not wanted to become superior, but once he occupied that position, he was going to give orders without consideration and could even be terrible. Maîtrepierre has said of him that when someone else had done something, he rarely found that it was well done.

And he recognised this defect in himself, but considered it his duty to command, and to command as a leader; therefore he never corrected himself. He admitted: "When I am away, no one dares make any decisions, even on important matters, and it is my fault." He said also, when Father Eymard was appointed Provincial to take Father Maîtrepierre's place: "Father Maîtrepierre, by being with me for 4 or 5 years, has learned to become a man of decision." And in spite of that, his way of acting was not only accepted, but even attracted people.

We must not think, then, that he did not appreciate Champagnat. He simply acted with him as he did with the others, and above all he could not bear people incurring debts. We should remember too that he was superior of the whole body: Fathers, Brothers, Sisters, and therefore responsible for the financial problems of that body. He had to make each one give an account, and Champagnat's dynamic character frightened him. On his side, Champagnat acted in faith, and therefore with daring, and knew, moreover, that his Brothers,

⁴⁷ For the different letters from 19-9-1836 till August 1837: A.P.M 233.2

even with their small salaries, were putting money by for the Hermitage. He knew too that he could count on some generous benefactors.

Father Colin would come to realise that more and more and one day, 4 June, he would admit, in front of the Brothers at the Chapter, that their superiors had trained them well.

You could even add that Colin knew the strength of Champagnat's virtue and was able to give him a shaking to form him in humility. These views of faith are not pure imagination. That is how Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn thought, she who was so much ill-treated by Father Colin, when she was treating a certain very virtuous Sister very harshly. When people reproached her with it, she replied: "I know what I have to do; I know her virtue and I am afraid that one day the Lord may reproach me for not having sufficiently helped the souls he has put in my charge to become more perfect".

C) WHAT IS SAID ABOUT M. CHAMPAGNAT'S RESIGNATION

1. Reflection

The congregation of the Marist Fathers had been approved by the Holy See since 1836: it was normal, therefore, that Champagnat, the Marist, should leave his Superior General every latitude for appointing him to any position whatsoever and that he should resign from his duties as superior of the Brothers. Even if he was the founder of the Brothers, he had to accept a post that was quite different from that of their superior, or else accept that same post through obedience.

He had really thought about going to Oceania, even if that possibility had to be ruled out because of his health. He said so himself to M. Douillet. At the time when Courveille-Terraillon were in the Hermitage, he could have some doubts about the paternal attitude of a successor, but now, out of the 20 Marist Fathers who had made their vows, he could no longer dare to doubt that one of them, chosen by Father Colin, would be capable of showing that necessary quality of paternity.

2. A story that comes from no one knows where.

That page, which does not exist at all in Br Jean-Baptiste's work, has been slipped into the 1897 edition without any footnote or any indication in a preface informing the reader, and it is quite possible that no one, except perhaps in the first years following 1897, had noticed it.

What had happened, then? The reply to that question can actually be found in OM II, p. 719, doc. 752 §57. It is part of the "Account of Fr Maître-pierre" used by Fr Jeantin in his "Life of Father Colin" in 6 volumes: vol. I, pp.327-328. You will have no difficulty recognising our text, even if the borrowed words are not quoted literally. As Jeantin's first volume was published in 1895, it was not difficult for a Marist Brother reading it to find in it at that date a

good reason for adding an unpublished detail in a reprinting of the Life of Father Champagnat. Here, then, is the text:

“At the general retreat which took place in the minor seminary of Meximieux in 1937, he (= Champagnat) gave us an example which edified us greatly. Since up to then, because of circumstances, he had been working at his project in an almost independent way, it had been judged fitting to ask him to resign from his post as superior of the Brothers. Everyone knows how founders and former superiors are attached to their work and are keen on directing it according to their way of seeing things; well, immediately Father Champagnat understood what was being said to him with all due tact, he replied: “Why yes, I shall give my resignation, and I ought to do so; the only thing that upsets me is the carefully chosen phrases used to tell me so. I had the grace of state to begin the work; I have not got the grace of state to continue.” And he handed in his resignation in a positive way. The Father Superior General re-appointed him immediately. His dependence became thereby more regular, more perceptible and more fruitful for himself and for his congregation”.

D. HISTORY OF THE PUBLICATION OF THE DOCUMENT

1. The text

As to the resignation document itself, the first time it was revealed was when Br Louis Laurent (Zind) published it in the Bulletin de l’Institut, vol. 22, p. 389. Fr Coste judged it so important that he inserted it into the end of the documents concerning the period ending in 1836, although it occurred in 1837. Here, then, is the text, really most astonishing: “Mary, my tender Mother, I give, purely and simply, into the hands of the Rev Superior General of the Society of Mary the branch of the Marist Brothers which had been confided to me in the year one thousand eight hundred and sixteen. Be kind enough, I beg you, Mother of mercy, to obtain for me forgiveness of all the faults I may have been guilty of by neglecting or not not having given the attention I ought to have given to the obligations demanded by this work.

By this surrender, which I give most willingly, I wish in no way to harm the rights that our most illustrious bishop may have for this work which he feels affection for and which he has helped in time of need by his generosity.

Given at the minor seminary of Maximieux, after an eight day retreat, 18 September one thousand eight hundred and thirty-seven.

Joseph Marcellin Champagnat.

I therefore give into the very hands of M. Jean Claude Colin, Superior General of the Society of Mary, in presence of M. Etienne Terrailon, the Father Assistant, and other members of the Council.....

2. Commentary

The resignation is therefore addressed to the Blessed virgin. That must

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not surprise us too much, for it is also very much in the line of Fr Colin to consider Mary as the first superior and to act in consequence. You can find plenty of similarities to that tradition in Cluny, at la Chaise-Dieu, among the Cistercians and even, if you want to go back to Saint Ildephonsus of Toledo. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the first Marists invoke this saint whose Marian sense must have surprised them: "With your servant Saint Ildephonsus we wish to proclaim everywhere your greatness and your privileges", says a group of future Marists in a consecration in 1831⁴⁸.

In the case of Father Colin himself we would have to recall his decision to make Mary the Queen of the college at Belley; it would even be she who would give permissions to the pupils through the intermediary of the superior of the establishment⁴⁹.

What is most surprising about Champagnat's resignation is that he forgets the actual word "resignation". He uses a long sentence - "I place..... Members of the Council" - and leaves the phrase unfinished. Are we to see in this one of these acts of forgetfulness explained by the psychology of a man worried about the unforeseeable consequences of what he is doing? Or is it simply excessive speed (of thinking) normal enough with Champagnat?

It is particularly interesting to recall what happened in 1916, since it confirms, more clearly than any other witness, the mission confided to him alone by the co-signatories of the Fourvière promise.

He insists on the shortcomings of his work as regards this branch of the Society, which he hands over to the Blessed Virgin. We cannot say that he hands it over to Fr Colin, which would be the case if the missing word is "work", as Br Zind thinks. But since the missing word is much more probably "resignation", as Fr Coste thinks, it appears that the Institute of the Marist Brothers is clearly handed over to the Archdiocese of Lyons; this would be normal, since it is still a diocesan Institute, not yet having obtained pontifical recognition. Marcellin stresses the fact the the Archbishop has been his principal benefactor; with a bit less humility, he could have recalled that this same archbishop had named him as superior of this work in 1830, and had never rescinded that decision.

It is difficult to think that this resignation was not given serious thought, and discussed with a member of the Council, let us say, with Mr Cholleton. The latter, who had a major part in the St Viateur episode, has a good knowledge of the thinking of the archbishop, and also of the character of Fr Colin, who was not too keen on having responsibility for the Brothers, but was capable of intervening in a most inopportune way in one or other concrete case.

However, if the document is not signed by Fr Colin, this does not imply that he was irritated by this recourse to the archbishop. Champagnat's prudence

⁴⁸ Om 1, DOC. 8 December 1831 p. 534

⁴⁹ OM Colin quoted by Jeantin, Spiritual conversations doc. 13 §4

cannot be offensive to him, and in any case, later on it is exactly what he proposes and what is accepted⁵⁰.

E) WHAT PROBABLY HAPPENED.

Before ending the study of the text, perhaps it is possible to imagine just now what could have happened. This end of the retreat meeting at Maximieux is a kind of short Chapter of the Fathers and it must be remembered that Father Colin was adamant that such an assembly should remain secret⁵¹.

So Father Champagnat came back to the Hermitage, obliged to speak, but using well-chosen words. He would keep to himself the text of his resignation, no doubt as a secret about which he would talk little, since Br Jean-Baptiste does not allude to it. Here he is then coming back from Meximieux:

-Well then, Father, anything new?

-I've resigned as superior of the Brothers.

-What do you mean?

-I had to. I've made a vow of obedience like you.

-And Father Colin accepted it?

-Well, yes.

-That's not possible! Then what's to become of you?

-I remain at the Hermitage.

-In what capacity?

-As Superior of the Brothers, for that's the post Father Colin has given me.
(Laughter)

-Bravo! Magnificat!

This resignation document, even if it is rather official, has not been kept in the Archives of the Fathers; it can be said that it remained a personal matter between Colin and Champagnat. It was sufficient that an act of obedience should have been performed

F. THE POSTSCRIPTS

Father Champagnat added two postscripts. The Fathers who signed the document noted that Champagnat had become one of them, entirely submissive to the Superior General, but the text said nothing of the decision of Father Colin naming him Superior of the Brothers, this decision having been for several years

⁵⁰ Mgr de Bonald, who replaced Mgr de Pins, changed the members of his council. Father Cholleton could then enter the Society of Mary. The archbishop appointed him Provincial of the Marist Brothers of whom Br François was only the director General. He would have the title of Superior General only in 1852, on the day when Father Colin came to tell the General Chapter of the Brothers that they should consider themselves completely independent from the branch of the Fathers.

⁵¹ Mémoires- Mayet. Quelques souvenirs doc. 288 §1

that of the archbishop. What can be seen is that, having been submissive to Father Colin, he would have to put some of his Brothers at the disposition of the Fathers, as he was already doing. Moreover, it was in that same year, 1837, that the printed Rule would say in article 3 of the first Chapter: "The Brothers will fly joyfully to the help of the Marist Priests as soon as the superior requires them to do so." This, then, already shows – before the Spiritual Testament – a certain priority given by Champagnat to the aim of the Fathers in relation to that of the Brothers. At the very beginning, Marcellin envisaged dealing with a) children who were underprivileged because of their situation in a country village, b) orphans, but now there is added help to the Fathers branch. "Fly to the help of the Fathers" seems perhaps somewhat exaggerated, considering that there were only two houses where the Brothers were rendering this service: Belley and Lyons, but obviously Father Champagnat is thinking of those who had left, or were going to leave, for Oceania. And he does not know the future. In any case, if he keeps his resignation to himself, it is no doubt to show the Archbishop, who may well have advised him to be prudent and to have recourse to him in the long run: "After all," he may well have reminded him, "I appointed you Provincial of the Lyons part of the Society of Mary. Even if I no longer have any direct right over the Fathers since 1836, I do have it over the Brothers, as your resignation attests. We shall see if one day that may be of use to me or to one of my successors."

But, resignation or not, nothing prevents Father Colin from acting as Superior towards someone who has made the vow of obedience. In the ensuing years there would be no shortage of orders.

VII. THE PERIOD FOLLOWING THE RESIGNATION

A) THE LETTERS

The letters from Colin to Champagnat, in the period following the resignation, are quite often couched in a tone that is hardly affable.

29-9-37. Send me all the Brothers (who had left Lyons or Belley for the retreat at the Hermitage) or send suitable replacements. Don't take Br Timothée away from me.

12-10-37. You owe yourself to all of your disciples. You must treat them carefully. Send at least one Brother immediately to the house in Lyons. Br Luc cannot manage on his own.

19-10-37. I am astonished that you have not sent me at least two (to Belley). The general tone is one of impatience.

29-10-37. I am asking for a Brother who is quite presentable, is well educated, has a neat hand for writing and whose moral behaviour is good.

I have asked for Bellinas ...for fear of getting another who is even less

fitting. I don't mind putting myself about to please you, but you too must try to give us what we reasonably need. I rely on you except when I am complaining that you are serving me badly. Let the houses of the priests be well served and, if necessary, found fewer schools. I am thinking about a great reform in the government and conduct of the Brothers and I am expecting from you a truly religious observance that will be good for your health and happiness. Your ideas appear to me to be too fixed on certain points and I doubt whether in that respect you are doing the will of God (it's no use stressing just how painful such a reflection could be for someone who, as it happened, was seeking to do only the will of God.) Train M. Chanut well. Avoid an abrupt manner in your dealings. Shun any kind of joking which I regard as completely opposed to the religious spirit. (It was true that Father Champagnat liked to joke and at times went a little beyond the limit, for example when he decided to give the name Br Barulas to the postulant Mercier, since he had just tumbled (roulé) down the stairs. Anyway the Brother was not hurt.)

Almost nothing in 1838. However:

14-7-38. I do not believe that Br Régis is called to the mission in Oceania. Please find a replacement. Please replace Brother Amiens immediately. What we need here is not novices or people whose health is weak. Perhaps in time we shall manage to form a body of Brothers who are destined only to serve the Fathers⁵².

From these letters it can be seen that relations between Father Champagnat and Father Colin appear somewhat strained.

B. THE PROBLEMS OF BROTHERS IN THE SERVICE OF THE FATHERS

The problem which arose most frequently between the two men was that of the Brothers who were in the service of the Fathers: Who ought to be assigned to that service? In general Father Champagnat thought that teaching ought to be the first choice for any Brother who was fit for teaching. Hence either Father Colin or other priests would tend to think that they were being given the rejects. And the Brothers who did not give satisfaction to the Fathers felt more tossed about than if they had remained at the Hermitage. Their other concern was that if, on the contrary, they gave satisfaction and stayed for a long time in a house of the Fathers, the Brothers' world would forget them and consider they were no longer Little Brothers of Mary.

⁵² For all these letters, see APM 233.2

C. THE TERRAILLON PROBLEM

1. An episode

Moreover, the only Assistant appointed in 1836 was M. Terrailon who kept his position as parish priest of Notre-Dame de Saint Chamond, which Champagnat did not like. The episode that Br Jean-Baptiste recounts is characteristic.

Champagnat had had to shake up Terrailon who was hesitating about entering the Society of Mary. He said to him in a tone that was half in fun and half in earnest: "God has given you a vocation for this work (that of the Marist Fathers). You are obliged to answer that call if you do not wish to expose yourself to something regrettable. If you enter the Society, if you make your vows, I answer for your vocation, but if you are unfaithful to this first vocation, beware." Then after the retreat of 1836, Terrailon, who had made his vows, said in his turn to Champagnat: "You are now answerable for my salvation: don't forget you promised me that." Champagnat answered that to be saved you must first of all observe your vows. That was obviously one way of telling him that he ought to give up his post as parish priest. And when they were coming back from the retreat, we have the story of the carriage bringing the group of Marists to Saint Chamond, the Hermitage or Valbenoîte. One of the travellers made an unpleasant remark about the bad carriage and the bad coachman who, alas, was not deaf and snapped back: "bad parish priests". Champagnat followed that up with: "The 'bad' is all for you, for you are the only parish priest here; there is nothing there to assure you of your salvation as long as you are a parish priest. So I advise you to relinquish the post as soon as possible." This he did, but only in 1839⁵³.

We have seen that this mocking tone of Father Champagnat did not please Father Colin. In this case at least it must not have pleased Father Terrailon either and we can well imagine other remarks made in similar vein. For example, if Terrailon received a letter at one time or another from Father Colin telling him to ask Father Champagnat for something, he could well receive some reply like "I obey the orders of my Bishop and of my Superior but I have no obligations with regard to parish priests."

2. Letter from Terrailon to Chanut

One thing which shows that this supposition is plausible is a letter from Terrailon to Chanut who was at Verdelaix (near Bordeaux).

3 February 1839

"I saw M. Champagnat several times. I spoke to him of your business with great interest (Chanut wanted Brothers for Verdelaix which is a place of pil-

⁵³ Bicentenary Life p. 211

grimage which the Marists accepted to take over). The Superior (Colin) himself recommended it to him (by word of mouth? In writing?) but it appears we are getting neither one thing nor the other; he is becoming more and more susceptible about anything that has to do with his Brothers. He seems to be afraid of the influence of the priests of the Society on them. (?)

What is certain, my very dear friend is that he has only negative replies to give us for anything we ask him for under the pretext of impossibility.

What I have the honour to tell you will not go any further; I have no fear of confiding it to your discretion which I know."

He adds different items of news: the purchase of the Patouillard property which he wished to buy from a merchant of shoelaces. And he goes on: "I am delighted with the turn our affairs in bordeaux (=Verdelais) are taking; in the hands of a bishop who is as clever as he is zealous they can only prosper... signed Terraillon⁵⁴.

VIII. A bomb is about to burst

A) TEXT OF THE LETTER

Father Colin was writing a letter which was much more terrible than the previous ones. We shall try to understand the reason and the consequences it would have. Brother Avit did not dare to pass it on in its entirety in his Annals, but Brother Eubert certainly kept it in the material he gave to Rev Father Martin who was Superior General of the Fathers from 1886 to 1905. Here it is:

"Belley, 22 February 1839,

Father and dear confrère, That is four or five times that I have invited you, or have had someone ask you (no doubt he is talking of Terraillon) to send a Brother to M. Chanut in the diocese of Bordeaux. My request, which I have repeated so often, shows you the importance I attach to this act of obedience which I expect from you (no longer an invitation, then).

Remember that Mary, our Mother, whom we should take for our model, after the Ascension of her divine Son gave her whole time to the needs of the apostles (exegesis?), that this is one of the aims of the Marist Brothers and Sisters with regard to the priests of the Society, so that the latter, being completely free from temporal worries may apply themselves more freely to the salvation of souls." (We have seen that Father Colin had asserted that teaching Brothers had never entered into his plan. What he is saying therefore is applicable to the non-teaching Brothers, but he is unjustifiably extending to the whole body what concerns a restricted group.)

⁵⁴ APM ... personal dossier Chamut

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A Brother in the service of the priests of the Society does twenty times more good, in my opinion, than if he were employed in a commune where, thanks be to God, there is no lack of means for teaching young people. (In 1837, it is true that only 5,600 communes did not have a school building – out of 35,280 – but school attendance affected only a quarter of boys and 1/6th of girls between the ages of 5 and 15 years. In 1839 the situation could not have been much different.) But you have not been able to understand correctly this order and this aim of the Society. In any case, after you receive my letter, you will spend three days in a kind of retreat in order to humiliate yourself before God for having up to now done his will so rarely (?) on certain points; and then you will choose the Brother or the novice whom you judge before God to be the most capable of travelling alone from Lyons to Bordeaux to take charge of the household and to form other Brothers to the spirit of the Society with Monsieur Chanut. (Obviously it is a formal order.)

Do not forget that God always blesses full and entire obedience and that it must be the distinctive characteristic of the children of Mary, that she will be your security and the foundation of your greatest reward. Please accept the assurance of the sincere attachment with which I have the honour to be, my dear confrère, your most humble and obedient servant. Colin, Superior.” (This ending must not make you laugh. The signatory is certainly sincere.) He adds a post-script:

“I recommend that you indulge in no argument or delay in obeying the request I make, that you send a Brother to Verdélais. A letter I have just received from Bordeaux insists that two Brothers be sent, one to direct the work in the enclosure and the other for the kitchen. They already have some novices. They need, then, as soon as possible, at least one Brother to take charge. M. Chanut is paying for the transport.”⁵⁵

B) WHY WAS THE LETTER PARTIALLY PUBLISHED?

If Brother Avit has published (or known) only part of the text, it is because the whole affair posed an irritating question, for it was well known that no Brother had been in Verdélais in Father Champagnat's time. Now, we are dealing with a formal order and we can even find a supplementary proof of the signatory's intention to make of his order an obligation that could not be ignored. In his “Mémoires”, Father Mayet quotes a remark of Father Colin which he dates as “about 1838” and which has every chance of having to do with our case: “One day he said to me: ‘I have just given an order *ex obedientia* to one of our older members (that is one of the first group in the Major Seminary). It is the first or second time that I have been obliged to do that. Ah! Yes, if peo-

⁵⁵ AFM doc. 122.30

ple think that everything must go to pieces because in the beginning we were living somewhat loosely, they don't know their man."⁵⁶

So, if there is a scandal, it must not be covered up but on the contrary all the details must be revealed.

IX. DISOBEDIENCE OR PROGRESS IN OBEDIENCE

A. FATHER CHAMPAGNAT DID OBEY.

Let us say at once that Father Champagnat did obey. Here are the proofs:

1. A letter from Father Chanut.

Father Champagnat wrote to Father Chanut. We do not have his letter, but we have Father Chanut's reply, written on 6 March 1839 and it is in our Circulars⁵⁷. This last letter allows us to guess, at least partially, the tenor of the correspondent's letter. Here, then, is Chanut's text:

"N.D. de Verdélais, 6 March 1839, Reverend Father. I received your letter: it gave me great pleasure, as does everything that recalls my memory of you, but I could never tell you fully how much your decision with regard to Verdélais has grieved me. I have no doubt that you have great difficulty in granting me what I am asking for and that it is only by causing yourself a great deal of trouble that you would be able to send me two Brothers (therefore Champagnat envisaged the despatch – with difficulty – of two Brothers, and he must have indicated what changes that would oblige him to make, whence the regret of Chanut, who would not wish to be the cause of too many problems. Champagnat could also have told him that it was in virtue of an order in the name of obedience that he was acting and that, of course, it was the first time in his life that he had received such an order.)

But, Reverend Father, if you knew our position, the urgent need we are in, you would be the first to move heaven and earth to get them for us. Things have reached the point that I shall be obliged, from Easter Monday, to engage a daily woman to cook for me and to give up right at the start an establishment that seems to be the work of Providence. (He knows how much Champagnat is opposed to the employment of a woman as cook.)

In a letter which I have just addressed to our Reverend Father Superior (=Colin) I explained everything to him. I think he will send you the details and that you, touched by the seriousness of the matter, will surrender to my ardent desires. You are concerned about the subsistence of your Brothers but, according to our rules, I believed that the Brothers had to be at the same table as the Father and that, when one of our Fathers has a piece of bread in his place the

⁵⁶ G. Cl. Mayet (chosen texts presented by J. Coste, Rome) 1981 p. 22

⁵⁷ Circulars of the Superiors General vol. 1, pp. 283-5

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Brother has right to half of it. If I did not see that there were the means for their subsistence you know very well that I would not be asking for them. (So Champagnat has really taken the problem in hand and asked different questions which, if not provided for, would create future problems.)

The property that his Lordship is giving us for our use is as big as that of the Hermitage. He told me he would do everything necessary for this establishment: so far I have nothing but praise for his generosity and kindness towards us. I believe that, with such advantages we could, without being foolhardy, start an establishment.

I was very pleased that you purchased the Patouillard property: that puts you in a very advantageous position. M. Balmé (he was to become a Marist Father) is still on his travels; I am alone with a lad of 14 who wants to become a Brother and is still waiting impatiently for his master in his new career. He already writes very well, he knows a bit about arithmetic and is witty. I think he will make a good subject. M. Convert is to send me three more. With the Brother you will send me there's a start. When you come to visit us you will judge what their dispositions are. (Champagnat, therefore, had envisaged that it would be too difficult to send two Brothers at that moment and promised one for the moment. It may well be too that he had actually promised to go to the spot himself if his health allowed it.)

The second Brother I am asking for is a Brother to do the cooking, conduct outside business, receive callers – the pilgrimage brings a great deal of people, some of them often quite distinguished – look after the cow, the cellar etc. etc. I would need, then, a man who was sufficiently mature and sufficiently well formed. If to these two you could add a Brother for heavy duty for big jobs, for the garden, the grounds, the meadows you would be rendering a service for which God alone could reward you. You will tell me that I am doing what all other favour-seekers do, asking for nothing but the best. I agree with that, but you will admit that, for a house that is just beginning and which could, with the grace of God and the protection of the Blessed Virgin, become so important, I need those subjects I am asking for. Moreover, it is an establishment that is in the interests of the whole Society, and the interest in your Brothers which I have always shown must be a sure guarantee to you of the care I will take of them. It's a confrère who is asking you to do this, a confrère who has given some small service to your house, who would like to have given a hundred times more and who is ready, when Providence allows it, to be useful to you again.

That's enough, Reverend Father, to persuade you to open your arms to us. I am convinced that Our Lady of Verdélais will say a word to Our Lady of the Hermitage and that our prayer will be heard. I recommend myself to your prayers. Accept the profound respect of your humble and most obedient servant. Chanut.

2. *A short commentary*

The commentary has already been made throughout the letter. However,

I am adding some repetitions and some further details. Champagnat has, therefore, agreed in principle, but is asking for a delay, because, even if means for instructing young people are not lacking – as Father Colin said – it is not easy in the middle of winter, the time when school attendance is at its height, to break contracts with town councils. Ten or fifteen years later, in the time of Brother François, when vocations were still more numerous, when there were outbreaks of influenza or other epidemics, replacements were an almost insoluble problem. Even novices had to be called in. No doubt Father Champagnat said in his letter that he would send a Brother as soon as the classes started to empty, that is round about Easter. And it is that delay also which pains M. Chanut.

He must also have said that he would see later on about another Brother, since Father Chanut concluded from it: “With the Brother you do send that’s a beginning.”

Champagnat also put the question of subsistence for, since after all the Brothers of Verdélais would depend on him, he wanted to know who would pay what. He also had to leave hope for greater developments since Chanut could keep dreaming of an establishment with three Brothers one of whom could be a kind of Master of novices.

In a letter dated 25 October 1838, printed in our Circulars⁵⁸, he had already spoken to Father Champagnat about creating a novitiate.

3. Why was a Brother not sent?

Father Champagnat obeyed, then, and we shall see later the sense of this obedience. But let us say first that the despatch of Brothers to Verdélais did not, after all, take place although it was clearly intended. On 8 April 1839, Father Champagnat wrote in fact to Brother Marie-Laurent and among other news he slipped in this item: “We are just about to send Brothers to Bordeaux” (Letters of the Founder)⁵⁹. What happened, then? Father Colin, who was not very satisfied with Father Chanut’s attitude, decided to go himself to Bordeaux to see exactly what was going on. He no doubt asked Father Champagnat to put off sending the Brothers. The Belley municipality gave him a passport for Bordeaux on 16 May. He left on the 22nd and came back at the end of the same month. Now this journey marks the beginning of serious misunderstandings between Father Colin and Father Chanut which were to end in 1843 with the expulsion of Father Chanut from the Society of Mary⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ Circulars of the Superiors General vol. 1 pp. 271-275

⁵⁹ Letters of the Founder: II, p. 116-117

⁶⁰ He was then appointed chaplain to Saint Louis des Français in Rome, then parish priest of Cours, then of Saint Cyr au Mont d’Or. He came back again to the Society of Mary in 1856, was superior at Bon-Encontre for 6 years, in Nevers for 3 years. He then asked to leave the Society, was released from his vows in 1869. Died parish priest in Roanne (Sainte Anne) in 1873. You can say that, in spite of having left twice, he was superior on several occasions. But finally, Father Champagnat, who knew him, saw in him, perhaps, as in J.M. Granjon, some defects which made him doubt his value as a formator. For his biography see OM 4, p. 223

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It is hard to see, then, how, after the end of May 1839, Father Colin could have dreamt of sending Brothers to Verdélais with things as they were. There were two Fathers at Cognac and one at Verdélais. They were finally to be re-grouped in Verdélais in October 1840, but in the spring of 1839 Father Colin was rather thinking of giving up Verdélais for Cognac.

4. Conclusion

Like Abraham, Father Champagnat had the merit of obedience without having, at the last moment, to sacrifice his Brothers, for it is certainly that which must have made him hesitate. He could have had the temptation of saying to himself: "Wasn't I right again?" But I don't think he gave in to that but that, on the contrary, during that last year of his life, he tried to follow that form of obedience which consists in trying to understand the ideas of the Superior and to adopt them, even if human prudence advises the opposite.

You could say that that is a kind interpretation. I would like, therefore, to show you that it can be solidly supported.

B. AGREE WITH THE VIEWS OF THE SUPERIOR

1. Clues to what Father Champagnat could have done.

First I believe there is a kind of material proof that Father Champagnat replied, and immediately, at that, to Father Colin. In the accounts he kept from day to day, or almost, you can read this:

22 February 1839

powder 6.60f

noix de galle 1.90f

day wage for a tailor 7.00f

day wage for another tailor 20.00f

carriage of a letter 3.00f

The day which follows in the accounts book is not the 23rd but the 24th. We could therefore attribute these different items of expenditure either to the 22nd or the 23rd. This carriage of a letter that comes to 3.00 francs is quite exceptional. That is the price you paid for a good workman doing a day's work for, if a carpenter at that time earns 4 francs for a day of 10 hours, you can calculate that, taking non-paid days into account (Sundays, feast days, etc.) the real price of his day is about 2.80f. You would have to translate those 3 francs into at least 200 francs at today's value. We are not talking about the price of a stamp, it was the price of a journey made by a carrier going to Belley with a letter from Champagnat to Colin.

A new item of expenditure for the "carriage of a letter" is entered for the 27th or 28th February. This time the cost is one franc and it can reasonably be supposed that it is the postage for the letter to Father Chanut by mailcoach to which the addressee would reply on 6 March.

In any case the two dates remain quite within the probable dates for the

actions that Champagnat had to take, the interval between the two being the three days of retreat.

Since Father Colin's letter left him no alternative, we cannot see how Marcellin Champagnat could avoid the three-day retreat. It was normal, then, that he should write to Father Colin immediately that he was going to do that kind of retreat to humiliate himself before God and choose the Brother or novice destined for Verdélais. At the end of these three days (from 23rd to the 26th?) he wrote to Chanut.

2. *The letter to Colin*

We are free now to reconstruct in our imagination what the letter to Colin could have been like, even if that one is not as easy to imagine as the one to Chanut. However, there too a relative reconstitution is not impossible.

A) THE POSSIBLE EXCUSES:

Even while deeply humiliating himself, Father Champagnat could show Father Colin that his reluctance did not come from bad will. You could easily imagine a superior today saying to his secretary: "Make me a copy of the requests for January and February; they will do as a reply."

7 January. M. Champagnat wrote to the bishop of Autun – who is asking him to open the novitiate in Vauban - : impossible before November 1840. The Rule of 1837, in fact, imposes a delay of one year before a foundation. To tell the truth, however, as every rule suffers exceptions, the novitiate would be opened at the end of 1839. He added that he would talk to the Superior of the Marist Fathers, so that at that time he might be able to give a priest for the spiritual direction of the novices. And he promised the bishop that he would seize the first occasion to go and see him and talk with him directly about that problem. We are a month and a half away from Father Colin's letter-bombshell.

9 January. He wrote again to tell a priest in Isère – who wanted Brothers for a school – that his request was being considered, but that it was impossible to fix a date.

21 January. He wrote again to the bishop of Autun (Mgr d'Héricourt) to suggest that instead of opening Vauban, they could bolster up Semur (which is quite near) and that in this way it would be sufficient to add one Brother to look after the postulants.

23 January. He wrote to the bishop of Aix – who was asking him to open a school: Promises had already been made to other communes and they had to be honoured; it was better in any case to found a novitiate at Lorgues (Var) which had been planned, and have a pied à terre nearer to the diocese of Aix in order to make visits easier and so avoid isolating the Brothers.

26 January. He wrote to the bishop of Belley who wanted Brothers for Nantua (sub prefecture). He told him of the difficulties he foresaw, especially in the case of an important town, but hoped to be able to discuss it soon with Father Colin.

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17 February. He replied to a parish priest in the Allier that it was impossible for him to fix a date for the eventual opening of a school⁶¹.

There, then, are some of the documents that Father Champagnat could have put forward to explain the difficulty he still had to send one or several Brothers to Verdélais.

B) A SLIGHT DELAY.

He could also have told Father Colin that, for the time being, he really had no one at hand – since that would well be the tenor of the letter to Chanut – but that he was going to do the impossible to take away at least one Brother with as little delay as possible.

A) IMMEDIATE STEPS

In any case, one or two days before the 6 March, we find in the accounts book: 5 francs for the journey of the Father Superior (=Champagnat) to Semur (120-130 km from the Hermitage. This school, founded in 1836, gave other things as well as satisfaction; among those other things the salaries there were badly paid. But the bishop of Autun had insisted that the Brothers stay there. The interview with the bishop was already envisaged in the letter of 7 January, but now Champagnat could have another reason for going to see him in order to tell him: “I have to obey a formal order from my religious superior. I have to take one Brother from a school and send him to Verdélais. You see how I am placed.”

Father Champagnat was certainly capable of moving heaven and earth to do the will of the Lord which was now quite clear but, since 1833, Guizot's school law did not allow the mobility that the former one did and, if Father Champagnat had had to wait till April – the letter he wrote to Brother Marie-Laurent – to be able to withdraw someone from a school, there is certainly no doubt that there had not been a solution before Easter (31 March that year).

3. *Principles which guided him*

Let us go back now to the three days retreat. It was a document that Father Champagnat had not been able to make use of on that occasion. His reflection and his prayer must have been centred on his conception of obedience. Now, in the Rule he had had printed in 1837, he had introduced an annex almost as long as the Rule itself, and that was an instruction on obedience which Saint Ignatius sent to his religious on 26 March 1553.

Here are some sentences from it that I believe are most relevant to his case:

“The second means – to obey well – is to make every effort to justify to yourself the order and the feeling of the superior and never to blame him; for

⁶¹ You will find all these letters at the date indicated in *Letters of M.J.B. Champagnat*, I, Rome 1985.

that you have to take in good part and with affection what he commands you to do. (No XVI)”

“The last means ... is to put firmly in your mind that everything the superior orders is the will of God himself and that just as you strive with all your power to believe what the Catholic faith proposes to you, in the same way, without examining it, by a kind of blind compulsion which the desire to obey imposes, you strive to do what the superior has commanded you to do.” (XVII)

However, it is not forbidden to enlighten the superior “about what occurs to you to be contrary to his intention and that you might believe you have to explain to him, after having consulted the Lord about it. But in order not to be deceived by self-esteem and too much attachment to your own judgement, it will be good, before and after having explained your thought to the superior to remain perfectly indifferent to what he decides, forcing yourself to approve and to look upon what he has enjoined as being what is best.” (VIII)

That, approximately, was the narrow channel in which the will of Marcellin Champagnat could move in his reaction to the order of Father Colin.

4. What was the root of the problem?

A) WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

To understand that there could have been, between two men of God who were most faithful to the Spirit, such strong tension, it is important now to get a good grasp of what constituted the problem between them. Father Mayet, SM, in a letter concerning the retreat at Belley in September 1839, tells us:

“The Reverend Father Superior (Colin) proposed to the Society in the assembly that it might be better to have Brothers coadjutors who would be distinct from those of the Hermitage, would not form a part of them and would be attached solely to the Fathers. He asked those in favour to vote by standing up. Most were for having the Brothers as we have them today. And that is what was done. That decision hurt Father Champagnat; however, there was greater harmony between the Fathers and the Brothers of the Hermitage, there being no longer any occasions for reciprocal complaints”.⁶²

It was decided, therefore, in September 1839, that there would be two quite separate categories of Brother: the Little Brothers of Mary and the coadjutor Brothers or the Joseph Brothers. And that grieved Father Champagnat, which is surprising since that was precisely the way to avoid tensions like the one in Verdélais.

In my opinion, if Father Champagnat is grieved, it is because for six months he has been trying to enter into the views of his superior, that is to give up a certain independence of the Little Brothers of Mary in the choice of their apostolates in order to grant priority to the service of the Fathers.

⁶² Mémoires – Mayet, vol. 5, p. 247

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By performing thus a somewhat blind act of obedience to Father Colin's idea, even although it had been expressed in an abrupt and unjust manner, he no doubt understood that it was one means of working for the unity of the Society of Mary.

Alas! or all the better! His will and that of Father Colin would not be enough to rectify a tendency that was going in that direction, either on the Fathers' side or on that of the Brothers.

B) RESISTANCE ON THE BROTHERS' SIDE

It was obvious that Brothers who had been formed at the Hermitage were sentimentally attached to that house and, especially after the decision in 1839, did not want to lose their identity as Little Brothers of Mary. Those who were in a community of Fathers (Belley, Lyons) began seriously to fear just that and one detail reinforced their fear: decisions concerning the habit. As the Brothers in the service of the Fathers wore a soutane that was slightly different from that worn by the Brothers from the Hermitage, those among these latter who were at Belley or in Lyons had no desire to wear the soutane of the coadjutor Brothers, for their soutane of the Little Brothers of Mary was a kind of identity card which would be valid on the day they returned to the Hermitage. That is not at all childish and we must understand them. You can ask subjects who are well advanced in the spiritual life, have no complexes, are very humble, to be ready to go to no matter which community of Fathers, that is to say into the unknown. But from the average religious you must expect negative reactions like: "I have made my vows in a certain congregation and they want me to live in another", or else, "they are making decisions over my head; I did not become a Brother coadjutor of the Fathers, I want to live in a community of Brothers from the Hermitage." It is one thing to be appointed to a community some of whose members, even the director, are difficult, and quite another to fall into a community which is practically a stranger to you. In the first case, there are many things which put you on the same level: rising at the same time, same prayers, same *coulpe* where you can accuse the director himself etc. And especially you have the possibility of telling Father Champagnat how you feel you are being treated, knowing that he will not be at all embarrassed about giving any one at all a piece of his mind, be he director or other.

But in a community of Fathers, even if they were man for man more holy than each Brother, a Brother risks feeling different, having the impression that he is being treated like a servant, for in 1839 there was, to be sure, a world of difference between Fathers and Brothers. The Fathers had done 5-10 years more study than the Brothers, even those employed in teaching, all the more so than Brothers engaged in manual work.

Often too, the social milieu where the Fathers came from was at a higher level than that of the Brothers. Father Champagnat was well aware of the reaction of his Brothers. Ten years before this he had had to quell a minor revolution before imposing a change of dress on the Brothers; now he spoke of it as if he

was losing interest in it. Here is the letter he wrote on 1 February 1840 to Brother Timothée and the other Brothers who were in service to the Fathers at Belley:

“My dear Brothers, I am profiting by the journey of Father Superior General (Colin) to Belley to write to you and assure you that your dedication to the Fathers will be a joy for the whole society. You should not balk at a simple change of habit, which changed nothing about your status. You will not be considered any less members of the Little Brothers of Mary of the Hermitage. Everything that can help to bind the two branches together is perfectly in line with our own views and those of Providence. Tell Father Superior you abandon yourself into his hands as the Brothers in Lyons have done, and as the true children of Mary will always do. I continue to recommend myself to your good prayers, and I am, in Jesus and Mary, your most devoted father and servant. Champagnat”.⁶³

Let us say that he is trying to take the drama out of a situation, but that, on the other hand, he is not deluding himself about the possible outcome that might ensue. Moreover, he has to take the arguments of the Brothers into account.

We know what goes on at General or Provincial Chapters. The right to speak, which had been so limited before, presented a good occasion for outbursts. Even simply on the occasion of an end of retreat gathering, it was quite natural that people should ask for news about each other and more than one were ready to show concern for “these poor Brothers in Belley and Lyons”, and would not fail to defend them with the zeal of the just man defending the widow and the orphan. “After 5 years, after 10 years, who will still know them?” the speaker who held the floor would say. “How will they prove that they belong to a congregation that we are forcing them to forget?”

Perhaps they already had news from Oceania and all the Brothers over there were not thrilled with what they were made to do. In respect to this we can quote a letter written some time after this, but which tells us of the difficulties some of them were having. We are not questioning the zeal of the first missionaries, but it shows the almost inevitable consequences of a condition of life that was badly planned and was irreversible.

It is the letter written by Brother Florentin to Brother François.

“Karoa, New Zealand, 9 March 1842

Very dear Brother Director,

The news of the death of our esteemed Father Superior has greatly distressed me, as much because of the loss to our Society as for the fact that in him we had a true Father. The memory of the time I spent in the home of the congregation of Brothers is always a cause of fresh joy to me and I cannot speak of the Hermitage without experiencing great emotion. I am far from being so content in New Zealand; I cannot pretend otherwise, as you are my superior. Also I admire the feelings of the Brothers whose ambition is to share our lot. What has extremely upset me and

⁶³ Letters of Marcellin Champagnat p. 579

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will continue to upset me is that I no longer wear the soutane, not even on Sundays as if I had left it for ever in leaving the Society. It would appear that new complaints to his Lordship on that subject are useless. I thought I would be helping the Fathers by teaching and giving religious lessons, but my employment is reduced to that of a servant. However, I am able to perform my exercises of Rule.

Such is my situation and that of the other Brothers. I would not complain about it if I had had clear knowledge of it when leaving France, which I left, as you know, more from obedience than by choice. Moreover, if it were the will of God that I should return to the Hermitage, it would be only death or obedience that would hold me back.

I am not saying anything about Brothers Michel and Amon: you must know that they have left the Society and that the latter is dead. I send affectionate greetings to the whole community and recommend myself to their prayers and especially to yours..."⁶⁴ Before his death Father Champagnat could well have heard complaints of that kind.

C) RESISTANCE FROM THE FATHERS

Moreover, the Fathers on their side had been fully aware of the problem and, if they needed Brothers in their service, they must have said to themselves that the solution was the classic solution of other congregations: to have Brothers who were solely coadjutors of the Fathers. A letter from Father Colin dated 29 February 1840 also shows that the problem was not a simple one. This letter is an indication -that Father Colin is ready to do anything in order not to cause Father Champagnat any bother; -that, if there had been only Father Champagnat and he, there would have been no problem, for what counted for them was solely the glory of God; -that Father Colin had looked for solutions in order to preserve unity, but that these solutions (especially concerning the habit) had been badly received both by Champagnat and by his Brothers (we have just seen that that is not quite true); -that he had to take account of the decision of his Fathers relative to the constitution of two categories of Brother which, in fact, had been suggested several times by Champagnat in the past; -that he cannot really direct the teaching Brothers himself and that they, therefore, should not form part of the community of the Fathers; -that Champagnat alone should direct the Little Brothers of Mary. Anyway here is the text of that letter:

"I was pleased to see your reply and that of the Brothers to my account of our future commitments. As I have often told you, there will never be any difficulties between us two. I will make my observations, lay out my ideas, which I am far from believing to be infallible, and if they are not to your liking I shall be the first to give them up.

⁶⁴ AFM Dossier 48 Letters p. 89

I had believed that, in order to bind the branch of the Fathers to that of the Brothers, I had to establish a kind of mutual dependence between them, placing the two branches in the necessity, should the need arise, of the one having recourse to the other. I had seen no difficulty in the Brothers changing their religious dress when passing from one branch to the other, the more so as it was in the interest of the Fathers that this change take place only in the case of there being a real need. I imagined that, since even at the Hermitage the Brothers change their dress for manual work, the same thing could take place for the time they would spend in our houses. Nor did I think there was any difficulty in the teaching Brothers receiving some novices for our houses, and it was by that means that I thought of joining the two branches together, putting them in the position of rendering mutual service.

But since these points seem to raise some difficulties for you and the Brothers, since they feel some reluctance over it, I willingly give up the idea. Nor will there be any question of changing the religious habit or of receiving our postulants into your houses, Providence will see to that. The habits for the lay Brothers are ready. They are waiting for my permission before taking them. And if it suits you I will try to replace your Brothers as soon as possible, for I see a great inconvenience in having two kinds of Brother in our houses.

By taking some Brothers for our use, we are going back to our early ideas. We think that is in line with the will of God and is even a necessity for the Fathers' branch. Moreover, you know as well as I do that you yourself have several times suggested that the majority of our confreres have declared themselves to be in favour of that measure. Because of this change in the Brothers' habit, I see, to my great regret, a difficulty in the beginning should the teaching Brothers end up in the Fathers' houses. You will understand that as I do. But that difficulty will disappear later. In spite of my great desire to arrange things so that later everything will go on peacefully and according to the mind of God, I feel obliged to tell you that while you are alive I am hardly able to have to do with the teaching Brothers. Consequently, you can continue to govern them according to the mind of God as in the past, and if, because of your vows, you may need any permissions whatsoever, I grant you them as far as it is in my power. Please receive..."⁶⁵

Brother Avit, who published this letter also adds these few lines which complete the explanation of the question:

"It was very fortunate that Rev Fr Colin gave up the plan he had conceived: it would not have suited our Brothers. Those who were still with the Fathers withdrew and kept their religious habit. Moreover, Rev Fr Colin, as you see, showed himself to be very accommodating".

⁶⁵ APM 233.2

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D) FATHER CHAMPAGNAT'S WISH FOR UNITY

So Father Colin gave up the vision he had had in February 1839, but it seems that Father Champagnat, right up to the end, continued to espouse, in faith, an aspect of the will of God which had come into his mind in the course of a particularly arduous exercise of obedience and which consisted in saying to himself: "priority to the service of the Fathers".

Br Jean-Baptiste was able to write of Father Champagnat: "he would have preferred to give up a work than undertake anything without the consent of his superiors".

Champagnat, exhausted by a most painful illness, would wish, three weeks before his death, to transmit to his Brothers in writing the result of a research which remained unfinished, but which he had done with all his heart. Yes, his life ended with a proclamation of obedience to Father Colin and a placing of his congregation at the disposition of the Society of Mary: "I die full of respect for the Superior of the Society of Mary... May it be your pleasure to come to their (the Fathers') help as often as is required... your wills are to be united with those of the Fathers of the Society of Mary in the will of one and the same Superior. ... The Superior General of the Fathers being also the Superior of the Brothers, ...it is my wish and my expectation that the Superior General receive the same obedience and submission (as you gave me)".⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

What is to be said? "The Lord," thinks Father Champagnat, "has led me to see, in faith, a reading of his will which before was not evident to me. Perhaps events are going to change, and the slope is irreversible. But I am going to die before seeing that evolution. My superior, Father Colin, without maintaining as strict a line as in February 1839, thinks all the same that the Society must preserve a certain unity among its branches. Therefore, for my part, I am doing all I can to protect that unity, even if the price to pay is a less efficient functioning of the Little Brothers of Mary. By not hesitating to tell the Brothers to come to the help of the Fathers as often as is required I am taking up again almost the terms of the order I received from Father Colin and which indeed I had put into the Rule."

At the Chapter of the Fathers in 1842, the Brothers were to present an entreaty to the Capitulants that this section of the Spiritual Testament be realised more fully. However, the Holy See opposed the move in 1842 as it had in 1833. In 1852 Father Colin would come to the Chapter of the Brothers to tell them as coming from the Holy See that the two branches (Fathers and Brothers) had to live in complete independence.

⁶⁶ Bicentenary Life p. 241

What message are we to take from that for our time when new congregations are not afraid even of the mixture of services, ministries, sexes, where families can live a kind of religious life? The spirit is always at work if you listen to him and call on him.

Translation: Br. Frederic McMahon. Randwick, Sidney.

MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

A SAINT

Br. Paul Sester

The canonisation of Marcellin Champagnat seems to me to provide the chance of reflecting on what sanctity really is, thus giving to the event a sense beyond the superficial. In our language, we use the word "saint" so loosely and in many different connotations that we are no longer clear what is really meant when the Church, in some official way, designates someone as "saint". We speak of "a holy man" which can have a wide range of meanings, for example we refer to the Pope as the "Holy Father. But when we want to treat of "a saint in heaven", we know that we are speaking of "saint" in a special way, speaking of a person who can work miracles and who, during her/his life on earth, has lived the virtues to an heroic degree, shunning evil and devoting one's life to doing good; someone who has concentrated on seeking perfection.

The presupposition behind this is that the human person is imperfect, situated in adverse conditions which he must overcome in order to live a flourishing spiritual life. A presupposition that, behind the title now placed before his name, in the depths of his personality, something is at work which gives a fullness to his being, and a response to the question of the meaning of life, which perplexes so many.

Why are we here, on earth? The first question of my catechism, and the reply: to serve God as the way to reach heaven. An answer sufficiently vague to content a docile mind, lacking a critical sense, but inadequate when challenged by deeper reflection. If we lift it from a setting that aims only to edify, what meaning can we give "to serve God", who, being almighty, has no need of any service? "God has no need of you, nor of me, in order to bring about what He wants in His Church" states Father Alphonse Rodriguez¹ who nonetheless insists that our one aim, here below, is to please God.

If it is true that in our condition of dependence here on earth where each entity seems to call for some Superior Being from which it emanates, we need Him to dialogue with us, this does not offer much of a path of reflection on our reality. The one solution which remains is to begin with ourselves, setting out to explore the unknowns of our nature. In the present case, this has us completely reversing the perspective - coming to understand sanctity not from the point of

¹ The Exercise of Christian and Religious Perfection, French edition in 3 volumes, vol. 1, p. 434

view of God, but from that of the human person, the being most directly affected.
“It is for you to take your salvation to heart;
it is your affair; you alone are involved there”
says Rodriguez, faithful to the thought of St. Thomas².

It is not that - as can be judged by my quotations - I look down on the spiritual writers. Alongside statements that stem from the feelings, sometimes quite gratuitously, logical reasoning and pure common sense have their rightful place, despite the disdain that these authors have for philosophical reflection, looked down upon as being pagan. Yet they do not hesitate to make use of findings of psychology, preferring to speak of the “tendency towards perfection” rather than “sanctity” properly so-called, dealing with the road rather than the destination towards which it leads.

In my first section, I shall rely on the writings of Father Rodriguez, which I have already quoted from. There are two reasons for this -

* because this is one of the books that Father Champagnat recommended to his Brothers to read;

* it coincides, in several places, *mutatis mutandis*, with my own ideas of sanctity.

1. Rodriguez Today

Alphonse Rodriguez saw the light of day in 1526 at Valladolid, Spain, and 20 years later, in 1546, he entered the Company of Jesus. By 1549 he was professor of Moral Theology, then Master of Novices at Mantille in 1561... for 33 years he had the task of “giving talks on spirituality, which were part of the weekly routine in all the houses of the Company” (p. III) He spent some time in Rome, in 1594, for the General Council of his Order, then lived for 12 years in Cordova, acting as spiritual director for his Province. In 1606 he was named Master of Novices at Seville, where ten years later, after a retirement of two years, he died, 21 February 161, aged 90.

It was near the end of his 12 years at Mantille “that gathering up all that he had put together on the subject, he wrote the work entitled “The Exercise of Christian and Religious Perfection.” (p. IV), but he did not publish it until 1615, near the end of his life. Taking into account the tasks he carried out, this book is truly his life’s work, in the dual sense that he poured into it all that he had learned, and that in it he preaches only what he himself had practiced. In 3 vol-

² Ibid. p. 13

umes, 1,634 pages, he develops in minute detail the path to perfection for a person who wishes to live life as fully as possible. The knowledge that he has of the complexity of human nature embodies what we know as modern psychoanalysis, if one knows how to gather together the insights scattered throughout the various striking examples and quotations that he gives. This is what I set out to do here, following a plan that modern anthropology suggests.

THE BECOMING

"The true wisdom that we must long for," says Rodriguez, on the first page of his book, "is Christian perfection, which consists in uniting ourselves to God by love this is the greatest, or to be more exact, the only task that we have; it is for this that we have been created." And in chapter III of the second, dealing with the intention we bring to our actions, he quotes St. Ambrose reflecting on "the reason why, in creating the world, God after having created things and animals, immediately praises them but when He comes to create man, He seems to pass by without praising him, since it does not say immediately that he is good, as He has with all the rest of creation." (op.cit. I, p. 99). Rodriguez replies, "This is because the goodness and perfection of man consists only in what is hidden within him," "first, he must show the intimate side of his being" adds St. Ambrose. Erich Fromm, the German thinker, clarifies, "This means that animals and things find their fullness immediately they are created. But not so with man. Man can, himself, led by the word of God ... can develop his intimate nature throughout the course of his life³". As if to say that man is a being-becoming, as the existential philosophers maintain: "Become what you are".

By this they mean that the human being is born endowed with all sorts of potentialities which characterise him, but which he has only as possibilities; he must bring them into play himself by the way he acts during his earthly existence in his social setting, in the historical and geographical environment he encounters, and to which his own life will make its contribution. Each human existence is graced by fate with the power of making oneself, of building in some way, one's own personality on the bases that have been given, but on which one can build freely the spiritual structure, bring to blossom one's own self, different from every other self.

If you want to see proofs justifying this theory, just look at what happens in nature around us. "Becoming" is everywhere about us, especially in the generation of living beings. A seed, right down to the very smallest, has enscribed in it the whole programme of the future development of the being throughout its

³ Erich Fromm, *Ihr Werdet sein wie Gott (Vous serez comme Dieu)*, coll. rororo, Reinbeck bei Hamburg, May 1980

whole life. Why should man be exempt from the all-embracing law of creation? The need that he has to be educated, of developing his intellect and, if he is a religious, of working for perfection, presumes that his personality, far from being complete, sees the need and the ways to develop, to become oneself.

THE LONGING

“To become oneself” states the goal that a person wishes to reach and, as well, the way by which to come to that goal. Beyond the wish to live that is found in every living being, human awareness experiences it as the yearning to take one’s own place in the world. The human psyche is not the calm waters of a lake mirroring the shores; it is rather the current that forces a foaming passage through the rocks. Whether serene or agitated, there is always the yearning within, so much so that Louis Lavelle could define man as “a yearning being”.

On this topic, Father Rodriguez has a passage that might need clarification. “We want things only according to how we value them. All the more so as the will is a blind force which can only follow what the understanding sets before it; the worth that it attaches to an object becomes of necessity the order of our desires; and, as the will is what commands all our other faculties, the inner and exterior faculties of the soul, we ordinarily seek things and strive to acquire them only to the extent that the will presents them to us as desirable.”⁴

In this kind of “voluntarist” spirituality, the will rules the desire. But in fact, it is quite the other way round - the desire comes first, in relation to the will, because you do not will something, which is not longed for beforehand. The worth which we may think of as ruling what we desire is nothing else than the desire itself attracted by the value. It follows that desire is not something superficial, but a constituent of the human psyche, its living energy, we may say.

The object aimed at is always seen by the awareness as something of value - the good, the beautiful, the useful, the pleasant. However, no tangible object is ever able to fully satisfy. As soon as we possess it, our desire shifts to something else, now seen as more desirable. Clearly then, the concrete value of an object never corresponds to what we imagined it would be. Proof also that our desire aims at an ideal which by definition can never be attained.

So arises the question whether it is possible to find something that would totally satisfy the desire that gnaws our heart. This would suppose that there was

⁴ The Exercise of Christian and Religious Perfection, vol. I, p. 2

one value, with all the other particular values but different glimpses of the one. The philosopher, Louis Lavelle, in his study "My Powers", finishes his analysis of Desire, which he considers at the same time as Awareness as a characteristic of our being, by saying that:

"Desire, like Awareness, would be able to find fulfilment only if the individual and the All succeeded in being united. ...Desire appears to us to be the very essence of the Self. Only it gives movement and life. Only it is capable of establishing a bridge between what we are and what we seek to be".⁵

We can say, then, that the deepest desire of man is to be and to be in all fullness, such as the Creator wanted, a sharing in His absolute Being. In the story of the fall of our first parents, Genesis seems to confirm this thesis. If the serpent replies to the woman, "You will be like the gods !" (Gen. 3, 5), there is nothing strange in this wish, since temptation always follows paths already walked.

Father Rodriguez could well have found there the justification for his long treatment of the difference between the yearning for material things and the desire for spiritual. Referring to the first of these, "scarcely has one attained what has been desired, than one begins to despise it to fix one's eyes on something else, which, once it is in its turn possessed, proves to be equally boring" and, with regard to the spiritual desires, "the more we taste them, the more eager becomes our seeking them ... because we are not born for this world, and thus, there is nothing in this world that can completely satisfy us".⁶

ACTION

Elsewhere the same author adds, "Once this Desire is firmly imprinted in the soul, we must set ourselves, with attention and with ardour, to obtain what we long for, for we will naturally work hard to seek and find the things that we are attracted to by our inclinations",⁷ giving us to realise that our desire however great it may be, is not enough to bring about the goal - we need to **act**. That is so obvious that it scarcely needs to be mentioned. Whoever does nothing, is nothing. Commenting on the words of Psalm 61 "You repay man as his works deserve", Father Rodriguez states, "It holds true that the good or bad condition of our soul, derives from our good or bad actions, since we will be what our actions will be, and in the end it is they who reveal what we are."⁸

⁵ Louis Lavelle, *Les Puissances du Moi*, Flammarion, editor, 1948, p. 68

⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 20

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 13 - 14

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 93

Indeed, if we take the example of a sportsman, how can he know all the potential within himself, if he does not practise his sport and pit himself against fellow sportsmen? This holds good for everyone who wants to make use of his latent powers, his capabilities. In this sense then, we can say, quite truly, that the human person makes himself/herself. “Doing, and in doing, making oneself”, is the very apt comment of the philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre.

But we still need to understand clearly what this creating action does. On this point, Rodriguez devotes much time to explaining what our actions must be if they are to contribute to our spiritual progress, which is to say, our fulfilment. “It is not enough for our progress and our perfection to do everything we ought; we must do this **well**”,⁹ is the first point that he makes. And in so doing, highlights the two things necessary to ensure that **action** will prove effectual in the process of **becoming**.

The first is what the philosophers call **value**. A subjective value, born from the subject’s desire for something that he feels will satisfy that yearning. The more one wants an object, the more one is ready to pay to get it without worrying about its intrinsic value. Value is called objective when the quality, good or bad of the object or the action, is under consideration. For the purpose of what we are dealing with here, I shall call “good” whatever accords to the sense of my nature, and “bad” what does not. Consequently, the good alone is to be sought for by whoever takes upon himself the task of self-realisation.

The second condition is what I shall call **commitment**, meaning by that the attention, the awareness and the application needed by the action, so that the person can claim it as his own. To the extent that I devote myself to my action, with a free and voluntary decision, taking upon myself alone to carry it through, then this action can be said to be mine, and so the creator of my personality. The warning given by Rodriguez, “This matter of Christian perfection, is not something that is brought about by force; the heart must embrace it,”¹⁰ emphasises the same point. Further, when he claims that, “Our progress and our perfection consist of but two things: to do what God wishes that we do and to do it as He wishes it to be done,”¹¹.

I would translate that as the need to act according to our nature, for what God wants of us, is that we be ourselves, to be what He has created us to be. “The glory of God is Man standing erect,” says Saint Irenaeus.

⁹ Ibid. p. 93

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 12

¹¹ Ibid. p. 95

GOING BEYOND

Even with all these conditions fulfilled, more is needed, except in exceptional cases, than just one act to achieve the “becoming”, because a single act does not bring into play all possibilities of a being. Practice makes perfect, it is said, but on condition that the action practised is driven by the desire to get better and better. Like the athlete forever trying to better his performances, the tendency within us to open out our capabilities to their fullest, is the heart of our wish to go always further and further. To do this, we must “go beyond” ourselves. This yearning to have the “more” which haunts the depths of our hearts, drives us to search for it in what we are not as yet, going outside ourselves, beyond ourselves..

To let weariness bring us to a halt, or to have no other aim than winning the good opinion of others, would be a mistake, because that is to be closed in on oneself. The writer of the treatise on Perfection first sounds a warning with the well-known “To halt, is to lose ground.” Then he spends six chapters of the third treatise “on uprightness and purity of intention” to expose all the possible harm that “vain glory” can do, which, according to him, consists in giving to creatures, the honour and glory that belongs to God alone.

Louis Lavelle would have us see the situation in quite another light. He sets it out in his book “Narcissus’ Mistake”¹², the beginning of which I shall briefly summarise. We all know Ovid’s fable about the adventure of Narcissus - “Aged sixteen pure of heart ...there he is, going to quench his artless thirst in a virgin fountain where no one yet has been mirrored. All at once, he becomes aware of his beauty and his thirst disappears - he wants only himself. It is his beauty which from now on will torment him, which divides him from himself in showing him his image, and which drives him to seek himself where he sees himself, that is, where he is not he plunges his arms in the water, to grasp the object which can be nothing but an image and he lives on now, at the edge of the fountain, as witness to his sad adventure, as a flower with a saffron-coloured heart, surrounded by white petals.”¹³

His mistake was to stop to contemplate his image, to fail to realise that the image had no reality, not to have known how to go beyond it. His being and his “becoming” thus became set in one thing, without a doubt beautiful, yet no more than a water-lily.

“Narcissus disappeared in the fountain for he wants his surpassingly beautiful

¹² L’Erreur de Narcisse

¹³ Louis Lavelle, L’Erreur de Narcisse, ed. B. Grasset, Paris, 1939, pp. 7 - 8 passim

image to fully occupy the place of his being, as happened to Lucifer, when he became Satan.”¹⁴

Action, therefore, can open out and develop the being of the person who is active only in so far as it is dominated by a view-point higher than itself, which goes beyond self and which urges it to reach out beyond what it has achieved. If it is the desire to **be** that animates us, would not it be an illusion to stop the momentum at an object which, by definition, will always be different from us ? It is only the Absolute Being, from whom we hold our being, who can bestow on us the more-than-what-we-are that will bring us to fullness. The word of the Gospel, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” is neither more nor less than an invitation of the Lord to perfect our “becoming” by possessing **being** as fully as we can, just as the Absolute Being possesses His. From this flows the need that each of our actions, which since its results remain finite, be surpassed, renounced we might say, or seen as nothing, as Jean-Paul Sartre would have it, so that our ambitions have free rein. Made capable of beginning again, wiping out the past, so that we can, with fresh enthusiasm, conquer new heights, as St. Paul says - “forgetting the past, I strain ahead for what is still to come, I am racing for the finish...”¹⁵ Rodriguez links up with that, using the words of St. Basil and St. Jerome who, he says “teach us that whoever wishes to be a saint, must forget the good that he has done and set his mind continually on what yet remains to be done.”¹⁶

FREEDOM

Do we still need to go back, after all, on the essential character without which **action** would not affect the person, that is **freedom**? Without freedom, in fact, the personality is not at stake, neither, consequently can his “becoming” be thought of, lacking responsibility, the fruit of freedom. “Becoming” is nothing less than the blossoming of the personality, nothing that it cannot realise by itself. From which it follows that it is totally responsible for its “becoming”, no excuses, no appeals.

We must then, come to an agreement on this word **freedom** for in general use it is interpreted in different ways. The usual meaning attached to **being free** is to be able to do what you want, to be able to act without restraint. Taken to mean this, **freedom** is, for the most part, only exterior. But there is another **freedom**, an interior freedom. If it is praiseworthy for me, in a democratic coun-

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 19

¹⁵ Phil. 3, 13 - 14

¹⁶ Op. cit. p. 32

try to do and to say what I will, within the limits of the law and of morality, how can I be sure that I am not being influenced in a way that determines me towards one mode of action rather than another ? Am I not the slave of some passion, of tendencies that I lack the courage to resist ?

We have seen that the will is always animated by some desire stemming in some way from the absolute desire to **be**. But this desire is, we might say, cheapened in actual life by particular desires which are related to it closely or distantly, as one interprets them. These secondary desires determine us only to the extent that the will accepts them or turns them away. For often, disguising their deep source from us, they lead us astray into pathways that do not lead to the expected end. Hence the need to free ourselves from these misleading mirages, and to return to the desire that we experience in the depths of our being as the authentic road to our personal fulfilment.

It is true that in the present situation in which we find ourselves, immersed in a material world which calls to us from all sides, it is not easy for us to free ourselves from attractions, even interior ones, or from passions which are like abnormal growths holding us back on our progress forward. Real freedom is not given us a hundred percent pure; it is our task to refine it, to master it, sometimes even at the cost of a hard-fought struggle.

Such is the price that we must pay in order that our actions may be entirely responsible, that is, truly our own. This is the one stipulation needed if our actions are to give birth to our own personality, ready for our "becoming". This finds expression in Rodriguez, though in terms other than we have used - "Our advancement and our perfection rely on the perfection of our actions. the more they are holy and perfect, the more also we shall be holy and perfect. If we accept this as incontestable, we can still maintain that our actions will have more merit, more perfection in proportion as our intention is more upright, more pure, and when we are following a higher and more sublime aim, for our intention and our aim are what give the character to our actions."¹⁷

This too idealistic road promises to be arduous. But it is the narrow road that the Gospels speak of. The road to sanctity, for "becoming" and sanctity are one. But it is important not to forget two things - first the Absolute Being seen as the aim of our journeying, is not a Being who is elusive and remote. He is the God of Love, eternally present to support our efforts. Secondly, it cannot be denied that our deepest joys follow our victories over ourselves and the accomplishing of our purest desires, in the full sense of the word. Possible therefore,

¹⁷ Rodriguez, *The Exercise of Perfection*, vol. 1, pp. 128 - 129

despite the distance that separates us from this distant God to unite ourselves to Him through love, towards whom our being yearns, because that is where it finds completion or perfection.

MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

That Father Champagnat, whom it is reasonable to presume read Father Rodriguez, would have understood him in the way we have just presented, is quite out of the question. He did not have the means to do so. However, his intuition, supported by a well-based and realistic judgement, enabled him to form his own interpretation in which the apostolate was the base. His spirituality, in as much as he lets it come through spontaneously, breaks free from that of Father Rodriguez, in his having a deep and close intimacy with God through a relationship that grew more and more free and trusting. Recall the lighthearted way of speaking, which persisted right up to the solemn moments that preceded his death, and the kind of discussion that he brought to his spontaneous prayers. Moreover taking into account his exuberant activity and his care to do only what God willed, how can we doubt that he saw the task given him by his companions in the seminary, as a mission coming from God, which he had to accomplish, as the price to be paid for his own salvation. In fact, through the way he gave himself to the task, despite his failings, he realised the “becoming” implanted in his nature.

But who can judge the way he gave himself, who can know the extent of his holding firm, his obedience to the divine impulses that led him on ? He never speaks about his interior life, nor does he let it be seen, unless perhaps by those who were his constant companions, those whom he had formed by his example and words. These then, are the men to question, notably, Br. Jean-Baptiste, his biographer and the author of numerous writings aimed at handing on to us the spirit of the Founder.

In one of these works, entitled *The Sayings, the Teachings and the Advice of Venerable Father Champagnat*,¹⁸ there are two chapters which deal with his thoughts on “what is a Saint ?” setting out how he sees the ideal he took as his own. It is these two texts that I shall first analyse to get an idea of how Father Champagnat thought of “a saint still living on earth” before going on to examine how he himself lived sanctity.

WHAT IS A SAINT

Chapter 20 of the book mentioned, treats of six indispensable characteristics of a saint, namely,

¹⁸ *Sentences, Lecons et Avis du vénère Père Champagnat*

Someone who fears sin more than all the evils of the world and who avoids sin more than he would avoid death; someone who lives a well-founded piety; who loves Jesus; a humble, obedient and mortified person.

I would remark that the characteristics given above are in italics in the text, to show that they are from Father Champagnat himself.. On the other hand, we should remember that he is speaking to the Brothers, more particularly to the novices, to enthuse their fervour in the religious life.

He treats the subject rather superficially, one might say, describing a saint by the outward aspects and the reporter in his commentary, is careful to keep to the same level. His concern is to justify what the Founder says, rather than explain it, rather than deepen the sense and nuances of what the Founder expressed.

These six characteristics can be grouped in threes - first, the three attitudes directed towards God (fear of sin above all evils of the world; to be a man of prayer; to love Jesus), and second, the three virtues that the saint must practise (obedience; humility; mortification). The first three attitudes are arranged in the sense of going from the exterior to the interior, from the negative to the positive and they stand each on its own without any link between them. It is not stated that the saint fears sin, because it is the enemy of love; neither is it claimed that prayer stimulates love by creating intimate contact with God; love is presented as a "liking for Jesus", as "a sign of the chosen", almost a strongly platonic love. Certainly this passage is not inspired by Rodriguez, who insists strongly, from the very beginning, on love as the foundation of sanctity as he sees it, and he makes no express mention of the "fear of sin", at least in his first treatment of the topic. In contrast, the three virtues are certainly those on which sanctity rests, and Father Champagnat indicates that it is the example of Jesus that shapes his choice of them.

At the end of this chapter, he again stresses these characteristics which "are so truly the essence and the elements of sanctity that if a single one of them is missing, then sanctity is no longer present."¹⁹ Then he lists them, three times more, but forgetting each time one or other of them - thus, the fear of sin is repeated only once, mortification twice, while the love of Jesus does not appear at all. We are then, a long way from Rodriguez, for whom

"Christian perfection consists in our union with God through love."

Consequently, rather than sanctity properly so called, we are dealing here only with the means to obtain it.

The next chapter of the book takes up again the same theme and in a similar way without going any deeper. It lists the effects that a saintly life produces

¹⁹ Avis, Leçons, Sentences, ed. 1868, p. 236

in the person living it - "light, a sun which radiates light and life an example for everyone ... the instrument of God's goodness ... although he may be a man like us, but he never complains, neither about the weather, nor his work, nor his superiors or any of his confreres no matter what their characters or weaknesses may be ... not even of his enemies and persecutors ... and even less of his bodily infirmities and spiritual difficulties." The double presentation of these last points explaining first of all their positive side and then their negative, shows that there is no question of a description here, rather of an exhortation. In the situation described the reasons put forward for the practice of the virtues of mortification, obedience and humility are that they enable us to pile up merit and to attain heaven, all of them focusing in on the love of God:

"They find God everywhere, who is the sole object of their love." (239) Though it is not highlighted, this last comment underlies the whole text and show us in a flash the key understanding of the Founder. It is a pity that the reporter has not set it out more clearly, as a summary of all that goes before, a bringing together into one single attitude of attachment to Jesus, the goal which, when sought after, underpins everything else. We could then see the person taking into his own hands the responsibility of working to achieve his own "becoming", his supreme worth, drawn on by the love of God, in the setting shaped for him.

Noticeable that there is no reference to the apostolate, though this may be sensed in the wording of the first two points:

"light, a sun which radiates light and life" and "...example for everyone..."

Having in mind to speak of sanctity in general, he does not apply it in any special way to the Brother - which leads us to suspect that Br. Jean-Baptiste did not know how to point out the links which the Founder hints at and which the last Council set out clearly, the connections there are between apostolic work and religious life.

However, the first chapter of the book, entitled, What is a Brother in the eyes of Father Champagnat ? brings into higher prominence this aspect, especially in his first two points. A Brother, the Founder explains, is - "1. He is a soul predestined to great holiness, to a life of high purity, to solid virtue; a soul towards whom God has special plans of mercy; a soul called to study Jesus Christ, to love God and to devote himself forever and entirely to the service of God a soul predestined to great glory, whom nothing of this earth can satisfy.

2. He is the co-operator and companion of Jesus Christ in the sacred mission of saving souls."

Here, Father Champagnat directly addresses the ideal that he has for his Brothers. He does not speak of sanctity, but of the vocation which is, when all is said and done, merely the road to "becoming", the call felt by everyone. Without entering into philosophical deliberations, he sets out clearly the goal, in which

every human being finds fulfilment. No less explicit is his reference to **action**, in which two characteristics immediately appear, namely the end-point, reaching the state of fullness destined by the Creator for His creature, and the mode, the going beyond oneself precisely that the other might benefit, the forgetting of oneself.

The 4th point of the chapter refers implicitly to **freedom**, where it deals with the Brother taking the place of "soldiers and police". In addition to the idealist vision of a society without laws, we could call to mind here St. Paul's idea, in which Jesus Christ frees us from law, in order to set us completely free, responsible only to Him, as Augustine says, "Love, and do what you please !"

REAL ACHIEVEMENT

Far from using these texts to have Father Champagnat say what he did not say, I wish merely to share my conviction that the thinking of Marcellin Champagnat reached beyond what he could put into words and far beyond what the Brothers who reported them, were able to grasp. Like the philosopher of whom H. Bergson speaks who never succeeded in communicating his intuition is all its depths²⁰, so Marcellin Champagnat was unable to express clearly what was his intuitive understanding of human life. But everything that he was able to say and do shows, more or less accurately, what this was. So it is there, in what he says and what he does in the circumstances of the moment, giving us the opportunity to discover it.

His environment, physical, family and social, certainly influenced Marcellin Champagnat more than we might expect. By nature, he has an inner nobility, scarcely noticeable because of the peasant milieu of the mountain people. Although he comes from a family that does not lack material and spiritual values, his upbringing inclines him to a certain reserve, a reserve arising out of good sense and honesty and from the religious and social conditions found in a big family steeped in the Catholic faith. His temperament, in as much as we can see it from the accounts given by his biographers, puts him in the category of bilious whom Mounier describes as having - a driving urge for action physical strength contrasting with a slim build quick to react having a yellowish tinge angular features deepset eyes a gaze that is ardent and wide-ranging lips firmset lively gestures precise clear and distinct voice easy and rapid way of talking.²¹

An active man not given to dickerings or long reflecting before putting into action his decisions. A practical man rather than a theorist, who could glimpse

²⁰ cf. Henri Bergson, *L'Intuition philosophique*, a conference given at the Bologna Philosophical Congress, 10 April 1911, and included in *La Pensee et Le Mouvant, Essais et Conférences*, pp. 118 - 123.

²¹ Emmanuel Mounier, *Traité du Caractère*, ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1947, p. 184 passim

the goal without worrying to much about what steps will take him there, relying on his courage and his skills, sometimes to the point of rashness.

Book-learning holds little attraction for him so that he dodges it on the slightest pretext, but he is an observant and a quick learner from his father when it came to all kinds of manual work to the point of launching into money-making ventures such as sheep trading. Accepting reality, permitting the fundamental laws of his nature to shape him, he is able to develop his taste for enterprise. Political activity, the melding of ideas, the interchange of theory, all this seems too unreal and holds no interest for him. His mind inclines to things concrete - he can visualise the revolution as a "monster".

However the realm of the incomprehensible, of the supernatural cannot fail to make a profound impression on him. From his earliest days, as in every Christian household, his mother had sown in his soul the highest spiritual and (even more so) the highest religious values. It was from her, as well as from his aunt-nun, that he received the basics of the Christian faith - an awareness of God, prayer, the service of the Lord of heaven and earth. We can well imagine how religion fascinated the child. A son of the countryside with its secret seedings and growings, surrounded by wooded mountains, dark and mysterious, his awareness easily absorbed the world of the supernatural.

More than that, delighting in the setting and beauty of liturgy, in watching its dramatic display, his heart must have quickened to the splendour of the ceremonies in honour of the God whom he pictured as the Lord, unseen yet present as could be sensed from the recollection showing on every face. In contrast to her husband at the beck and call of public affairs, his mother was a home-lover, concentrating on seeing that her household, with its numerous people, ran smoothly. Habits of order and rightness, a wise modesty in one's attitudes, reserve in outside relationships were the focus of her watchful care, the standards which she passed on to her children. Young Marcellin, the last of the family after the premature death of his little brother, followed the example of his brothers and sisters, accepting to be shaped in this mould, satisfied to exercise his vitality within this framework, knowing no other.

So when the priest-recruiter said to him, after their short personal exchange, "You must become a priest. This is God's will," how overwhelmed he must have been by two emotions - astonishment at such a revelation and joy at the glimpse of the realising of a yearning that he had, without doubt, secretly dreamed of, without ever expressing it through fear of revealing a wild fancy. Even after this meeting, whenever he spoke of being a priest, he would immediately add, "since God wishes it." It is not lightly that he so speaks, for along with obedience to the call of God, his fondness for adventure was finding an outlet.

His mind made up, no matter what. From this moment on, he took his future into his own hands. The way forward far from being even faintly marked out, was but a mountain track overgrown with branches and roots, and so the struggle against obstacles began. The people closest to him gave him conflicting advice, and there was the unexpected death of his father - these were the least of his problems; he had some money saved up and the support of his mother who did not hesitate to accompany him on pilgrimage to La Louvesc. As far as the studies went, he relied on his readiness to work, his courageous tenacity, to make the grade.

Leaving the home of his birth, something he had to face sooner or later, brought a twinge to his heart, which was quickly forgotten in the feelings arising from finding himself in a new world of boys, mostly younger and more advanced than he was. Shy, awkward at first, his usual self quickly emerged. The minor seminary scene at Verrieres had really nothing that could daunt him for long. On the contrary, his unusual height, his well-built body, his quick and lighthearted way of speaking with the country twists of expression and the spirited repartee, made him stand out and quickly admitted him to the "happy gang". But not for long, it seems, since his teachers, once they had brought order to the place, put him in charge of a dormitory. He gives us, himself, a glimpse of his real conversion in his "resolutions": "I will make no distinction when speaking with my fellow-students, no matter what unpleasantness I might feel, since now I see that this is a result of my pride creating difficulties. How can I look down on them ? Because of my abilities ? I am the last in my class. Because of my holiness ? I am full of pride. Because of the bodily beauty ? God has shaped my body, but it is far from being perfect, and ultimately I am nothing but a pinch of dust." He needed more time to master his wordiness, as he adds a further resolution: "I will try as well, during recreation, to be less talkative."

Despite all this, his world of relationships retained the characteristics already mentioned. His ease with words, where often his bent for spiritual witticisms and jests had free rein, delighted and surprised those close to him - even on his deathbed, as Fr. Maitrepierre testifies.²² During recreation time, he liked to tease some one of the Brothers, mischievously, to get him to react to some amusing sally to the amusement of those present, not to score off the Brother, but to show a personal interest in the man. This, as much as what was said, shows the mutual love and confidence that coloured these relationships. While Marcellin Champagnat poured out on the Brothers a love that was virile, deep and no holds barred, they, in their turn, loved him as their father in all the fullness of the word, a father totally dedicated to their welfare.

²² OME, doc. 164 (752), no. 56, p. 417

“He was firm, yes, firm indeed; we would tremble at the mere sound of his voice, at a glance from him, but first and foremost, he was good, he was compassionate; he was our father...”

writes Br. Francois. These qualities, taken together, give us a personality that is likeable, strong, reliable, that gives a sense of security based on an all-embracing, calm and serene kindness. It gave him a strong hold and influence over his companions, which they willingly accepted since it seemed to them to be a help, freely given, to living out their common vocation.

This spontaneous giving, this forgetting of self show through in different ways in Marcellin’s way of acting. In spite of the great interest he had in his Brothers, he saw to it that they had a certain autonomy, even when this was not, strictly speaking, called for. In the first years when they were isolated in their little communities, nothing was more normal than their choosing a superior among themselves; even more striking was that Marcellin, in coming to visit their poor houses, showed no wish to “take over the direction of the house” since “beyond that fact that the work of his priestly ministry made it impossible, he realised that this was not his concern, but that of the Brother Director.”²³ Later, at the Hermitage, although he mingled with the Brothers at recreation time, “in the dining room he sat alone, his table was set apart.”²⁴

Where the spiritual direction of the Brothers was concerned, he preferred to leave this to others, partly out of lack of time, partly out of respect for their freedom but also, no doubt, from being aware of his own inadequacy in theology. This accounts for his wish to have another priest with him - first going off to find Fr. Courveille, then calling on help from the archdiocese in the form of young Fr. Seon. In the same spirit, he recommended in his letters that the parish priest be the spiritual director of the Brothers who worked with the young people of the parish. He touches more fully on the same point in a remark reported by his biographer, which we have no reason to doubt comes from the Founder...

“In speaking to you in this way, I am fulfilling a duty of conscience; now it is up to you to fulfil yours,”²⁵

spoken to his Brothers when pointing out to them the need to teach catechism, putting on their shoulders, we might say, the responsibility for the work, to boost which was for him, his only mission.

The fundamental inspiration for this way of acting is undoubtedly his modesty. Taking into account his happy character, the success he enjoyed with young people and in his undertakings, Marcellin Champagnat had every reason to be

23 Vie de J.B.M. Champagnat, bicentenary edit. p. 79

24 Br. Sylvestre speaking of Father Champagnat, ed. Rome, 1992, p. 112

25 Vie, ed. 1989, p. 520

a proud man. Admittedly an abiding shyness, his peasant manner, his lack of academic training ever present to his perceptive judgement - all this prevented him from having a distorted sense of himself. On the contrary, he made every effort to keep on the right side of the line. His reply to a priest who was impressed by the discreet bearing of his companions, is typical: "They are Brothers who run schools for the younger country children ... some young men got together they had a Rule drawn up in keeping with their goal, a curate gave them some help God has blessed their community and made it grow beyond all human expectation...."²⁶

This attitude could be interpreted as keeping his distance from the Brothers - which would be quite wrong. On the contrary, despite his priestly position, he gave himself totally to the work, mixing with the Brothers as if one of them, sharing their life fully, yet being all the while the animator and organiser of the venture. So he found ways to give an example, especially of humility which he saw as the fundamental virtue, which consisted for him, essentially in candour and simplicity. Any pretence, any kind of vanity were for him foolishness unworthy of a thinking man. So he reacted vigorously against high-flown language, cut down the pride of those seeking to be praised, yet he put up with their unthinking blunders, even when he had to suffer from them himself. In dealing with those in authority, he came as he was, without pretence, even at the risk of being taken as insignificant by those who judged only from the exterior. All of which did not prevent him from standing up to anyone in defence of the Brothers and of their interests.

There can be no doubt that such a way of acting was in tune with his character. The resolutions taken in his adolescence are a clear indication of this, and, if the efforts of his mature years corrected his natural tendencies, they did not destroy them. Events, seen by his good judgement and perception as significant and valuable, helped him form a right relationship with God. The arrival of the group of eight postulants following his urgent petitions that "we do not perish, like a lamp without oil"; deliverance from death in the snow through the fervently prayed "Memorare"; the construction of the Hermitage without any fatal accident; the successful outcome from various difficulties that threatened the congregation's future - these were so many facts revealing God's intervention, through Mary, in the establishing of the Society. His clear-sighted faith led him to accept to be an instrument in the whole process, and to give himself completely to it with a courage ever more selfless. It was "Jesus and Mary have done everything for us," again and again he came back to this with ever deeper conviction. Knowing that he had been chosen by God to complete what "was lacking in the passion of Christ" he found in this his whole reason for being and the

²⁶ Vie, p. 407

way to direct his future. Hence there was but one alternative left open to him by his personality - to give himself without reserve in a union with the Master that became ever more and more intimate, with His will the one driving force of everything that he does.

His tireless activity stemmed from the pulsing conviction that he would reach fullness only in God and from the impact that this conviction had on his energetic nature animated as it was by an extraordinary apostolic fervour. Becoming aware in the seminary of the situation of the Church and especially the plight of young people, he seemed to detect, in the planning of his companions to set up a Marial Society, the voice of God, saying to him, "We must have Brothers." His drive countenanced no delay in putting into action what had been decided, and, as soon as he was made curate in the parish, he drew together some young people with the view of forming them to be Brothers.

In his mind, the aim was clear-cut : "We must have Brothers to teach catechism, to support the missionaries, and to set up schools for the children."²⁷ But what was his idea of a Brother? We can take it as certain that he had a sufficiently clear idea of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to use them as a model, and the intention to do the same task as they did, but in places where they could not go. His words and his writings present a Brother as a man on fire with the desire to make known to others the love of Christ the Saviour, a love that engulfs him to the deepest reaches of his being. A man anchored in the conviction that the salvation of the human race, both here below and beyond, is to be found only in the total and deep embracing of the Gospel of divine love. Once this goal has been set, here remains the need to work out the means to attain it. They are of two kinds - the agent and the instrument.

The agent is the Brother whose main traits we have already touched on. Marcellin wants him to consecrate his person and his entire life solely to the mission of educating children. Thus he has to be free from any other occupation, aiming only at forming young people, teaching them the basic elements of learning, and even more, teaching by example how to live "as good Christians and worthy citizens." He knows this is no easy task, seeing the need to have the children with him for a long time, to devote himself fully, to have a real humility, for, at least on the surface, the teaching profession is not a glamorous one. Beyond that, he has to accept to live frugally so that parents only a little more favoured than himself, can confide their children to him for a reasonable fee. To live like that, a Brother needs to be animated by a genuine religious life and to be supported by community living.

²⁷ Vie, ed. 1989, p. 31

As to the means available to him, how - in that first half of the last century - would he put his faith in anything other than the school, and the primary school at that? Against the temptation to set his sights higher, the Founder never gave up on insisting on the teaching of catechism and on humility - two points that he laboured to live himself, since he maintained they were the pillars of his spiritual structure throughout his entire life: "I cannot see a child, without wanting to teach him his catechism,"²⁸ he recalled, with nostalgia.

Events led him to a higher level, if that is the word for it, since instead of doing this himself, he was forced to work to multiply resources by training teachers and at the same time, to organise the field of work for them. For all that, his work did not become easier. Quite the contrary, he poured into it all his energies. His letter to Fr. Barou, vicar-general of Lyons, gives us an insight into this: "Briefly, this is my situation..... I estimate that by the end of August, we will number more than 80 by All Saints we will have 16 establishments, which it is imperative that I visit every 2 - 3 months at least, to see that everything is going well, and to arrange with parish priest and mayor to collect what is due to us I'll pass over without comment the accounts that have to be kept, the correspondence to attend to, arrangements that have to be made, bills to pay or to collect, the spiritual and temporal needs of the house. Everyone agrees that it is vitally important that the young people get good training. It is therefore very important that those who give themselves to such an excellent task be themselves well trained, and that they are not left to their own resources once they have been appointed."²⁹

Although the diocese, heeding these quiet calls for help, did supply some aid, the work never seemed to slacken off, since the scope for action got wider and wider.

It preoccupied him so much that it overrode all personal interests; obedience to the will of God, he believed, required him to establish this venture. Everything that he poured into it - the totality of his physical and spiritual resources, his time, his weariness and sufferings - all had only God as its end.

As to his spiritual life we find the relationship between himself and Christ becoming more and more intimate - he the servant, the instrument to bring to blossom, in the hearts of children, the power of Christ's redemption. As the sense of being led by God became more clearly defined in Marcellin's soul, his inner attitude towards Him became simpler, more confident, more spontaneous. He saw himself as a fellow-worker, a companion of Jesus, sharing the same work, with a similar love.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 504

²⁹ Letters of Father Champagnat, vol. 1, doc. 7, p. 40

And he felt just as close to Mary. The somewhat sentimental devotion, the legacy of his childhood from his mother and aunt-nun, took on, as a result of his life experiences mentioned above, the more concrete character of an active presence forever at his side. The titles, "Good Mother", "Ordinary Resource" were commonplace to him, because they expressed the outcome of his own experiences. Yet, surprising is the familiarity that can appear, that he showed towards her: "Get Mary on your side; tell her that after you have done everything you can, then too bad for her if her initiatives don't work out!"³⁰ This recommendation to Br. Antoine - which shows his own way of acting.

He had no shadow of a doubt that Mary returned in generous measure the love that he had for her - so he could write to Bishop Pompallier in May, 1838: Mary shows her protection of the Hermitage very clearly. Oh, what power is in the name of Mary ! How blessed are we to be graced with it ! Our Society would long ago have dropped out of notice but for this miraculous name. Mary - there you have the entire resources of our Society."³¹

He was convinced that she was the one who inspired his plans and who guaranteed help in the difficulties which seemed insurmountable at first sight. She, handmaid of the Lord, is his perfect model, for to become like her, is to serve the Lord Himself.

Through Her, in that way to be yet more devoted to the service of Jesus. Although more robust and respectful, the feelings he had towards Jesus were no less warm. His preferred exercise of the Presence of God kept him in almost continuous contact with Jesus, whether in his office, or on his journeys. So what had he to fear, or to worry what others might be thinking ? Fr. Maitrepierre was mistaken when he said of Marcellin, "Fr. Champagnat was, humanly speaking, fully equipped to fail in his undertaking,"³² since he directed all his human qualities to giving back to God what he had received by nature and by grace. Much more perceptive was the comment of a parish priest of the diocese : "God chose him and said to him, "Champagnat, do this," and Champagnat did it."³³

This committing of his entire person to the redeeming work of Christ with a freedom of complete abandonment, in which confidence had banished all fear, led him into a union with the divinity that was almost tangible.

³⁰ Ibid., doc. 20, p. 64

³¹ Ibid., doc. 194, p. 393

³² O.M.E., doc. 157 (337), p. 363

³³ Ibid., doc. 162 (701), p. 396

“When he offered the sacrifice of the Mass,” testifies Br. Sylvestre, “you would think that he saw Our Lord made visible, and that he spoke to Him thus,”³⁴

The Brother highlights the intense faith, this sense of the presence of God, but we can see it all as the result of a love relationship, of complete collaboration throughout his entire life with the action of God, which filled him with the satisfaction of having accomplished his mission.

CONCLUSION

Such is the success of this life, of which I have outlined some features just to show how, in an outpouring of action, it kept on towards the unique goal of making known the love that God has for us and of convincing us that the only worthwhile way to reach fullness, to taste true happiness, is to respond to this love with our own love. God gifted him with abilities, just enough to grasp and to carry out the vocation that He put before him. He lacked anything that would have set him on a path ablaze with glory, he made do with the struggle through darkness. Lucky for him - for thus he was able to bring into play all the latent powers that enriched his nature, and, leaving all else to help from on high, could enter into the closest possible friendship with Him, who is the Source of Being and Becoming.

- To do God's work to the exhaustion of every capability that one has, what is this but to give oneself so completely as to identify oneself with God ? This is to realise oneself, to raise the personality to the height of completion, to accomplish “becoming” and to satisfy completely the deepest of hopes which is nothing less than the blessedness which is the destiny of every human being.

Translation: Br. Romuald Gibson. Auckland. New Zealand.

³⁴ F. Sylvestre raconte M. Champagnat, p. 276

DOCUMENTS TESTIMONIES ON MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

Br. Francois

1. He is still speaking after his death (Heb.9b.11). It seems that I still hear him! ... The oldest remember this touching souvenir... Our good Father was there in the middle of his children... When we think of that morning prayer which we attended every morning with him, of that meditation he used to do in such a pious way, in a voice so filled with unction, with an air so penetrated, what feelings we had! ...

As a reward no doubt for his faithful servant, but also as a pious souvenir for his children, God allowed him to breathe his last at the very moment when each day he used to intone the Salve Regina before meditation. Furthermore, let us recall that community Mass he used to celebrate every day with so much reverence and spirit of faith! Let us contemplate that life so completely devoted to the ministry of the salvation of souls and to the sanctification of his children...

Let us savor the pleasure he used to find in the most humble and most arduous tasks! Let us think of those constant cares, that indefatigable vigilance, that wholly paternal solicitude exercised sometimes for the benefit of a single Brother!

He knew how to wait for a soul and provoke its return by a thousand maternal ingenuities. His direction wasn't made of many words. It was often a paternal caress, a word, the same word repeated several times, but, said by him, it descended to the bottom of the heart to bring forth there repentance, the love of God, the desire to become better. How many near him found peace, trust, happiness!

He was firm, yes, definitely; we would all have trembled at the sound of his voice, under just one of his looks, but he was above all good, he was sympathetic, he was a father... In founding his congregation he wanted to build a family whose head would be a father and where the older Brothers would watch over and protect the younger ones.

Let us therefore all be his family, his children. Love, respect, mutual service. Let us follow his example, let us be inspired by his sentiments, let us make him somehow relive in the midst of us.

2. Two officers having come to visit the grave of an illustrious warrior, after a few emotional moments, drew their sword, passed it silently again and again over the marble tomb, as if to take the military spirit of the leader they had lost.

Let us imitate these warriors, let us go to the tomb of our venerated leader, our good Father; let us pass our mind and our heart again and again in the circumstances of his life, of his sufferings and his death to take there from something of his spirit and his heart.

Everything here talks to us of him and he talks to us in everything. We live in the house he built and which we look upon as his grand reliquary. This is where he worked so much, spent so many sleepless hours for the good of the Institute.

The meditation hall was the first provisional chapel where he said Mass as soon as this house was habitable. It was also his first bedroom. That's where, later, he used to give us instruction during the year and especially at retreats. That's where he was given the Last Rites and gave us afterwards such a moving allocution.

He prayed, said Mass, chanted the Office in that chapel which he built. He ate in that refectory, in that hall. He walked in these rooms, visited the sick in the infirmary. He walked along these paths, cultivated this land, planted these trees, established this cemetery where he has his grave. But especially he sanctified this room which he occupied for 15 years, which he perfumed with his virtues, where he received so many Brothers, gave so many good counsels, recited so many prayers, wrote so many letters, meditated so many things, experienced so much pain and consolation, until finally he breathed his last.

Let us often tell ourselves in this paternal house where Father Champagnat and his beloved children practiced so many virtues: "If this good Father saw me, were with me, how would I do what I'm doing?" ... If it is a glory for us to have had him as Father, let us now in return be his glory and crown, according to the expression of Holy Scripture (Prov.17; Thess.2)

3. Do you take God to be a tyrant and do you think he instituted confession to tyrannize people? Stick to what your confessor, your superior tells you. It would be pride and rashness to want to follow your own feeling. You have to despise those doubts and empty fears. Those worries, those perplexities ruin one's health and piety. We are pleased, we are happy when we are serving a good master. And what better master than God!

(Fr. Champagnat)

5101.302, manuscript p.6

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4. He who lives without a rule lives like a little devil. He who lives according to a rule lives according to God.

3 (Fr. Champagnat)
5101.302, manuscript p.14

5. Our enemy wants to take from us the merit of the good deeds which God works through us by falsely attributing their glory to us. We have to despise him, that liar! (conf. of Fr. Champagnat)

5101.302, 1828 retreat.

6. We leave the world for God and our salvation by entering religious life, and we then leave God for the world by abandoning religious life at the risk of losing ourselves.

(Fr. Champagnat), 1828 retreat.
5101.302

7. A God comes to us through humility and mortification; let us go to Him by the same way. Let us look at that Child lying in a manger, bereft of all human help: He holds His little hands out to us and invites us to go to Him in order to enrich us with His goods.

(Fr. Champagnat),
conf. of 13 Dec, 1928
5101.302

8. It is true to say that today is the last day of the present year and tomorrow the first of the following year. A day will come likewise when it will be true to say: "Today is the last day of my life on earth and tomorrow will be the first of my eternity." And then will I have grounds to be glad or to be sorry?

(Fr. Champagnat),
conf. on 31 Dec 1828)
5101.302

9. Pride is like a drainpipe which falls on the main beam and which, in short time, rots it and makes the whole roof fall; and then there's water in the whole building. -- It's astonishing how we can be proud in the sight of a God so humble! ... Whatever the virtues of a religious are, if he lets himself be taken by pride, he'll soon be good for nothing.

(Fr. Champagnat)
5101.302

10. What we have the most trouble to do is what causes us the most pleasure when we have done it well, and a single exercise of piety well done gives more happiness and consolation than all the pleasures of the world can give over

long years.

(Fr. Champagnat)
5101.302

11. I will stay in the saddle until all those who are under my direction have been judged; then I'll see the Sovereign Judge turn towards me.

(Fr. Champagnat)
5101.303, p.55

12. The spirit of Father Champagnat is a spirit of humility and poverty. Every congregation has to keep the spirit of its Founder in order to do the good God had in mind when He inspired it; otherwise, He won't bless it. What can we expect from a man who has lost the spirit!

5101.304, 1864 retreat,
manuscript p.1560-61.

13. You know what is said in the Life of Fr. Champagnat about the angelic virtue. He used to say that the impure spirit fears that house and doesn't dare enter it, unless we go get it and open the door for it. Several Brothers have felt the salutary influences of their stay in this blessed solitude.

5101.306, LVIII, 3
5 octobre 1862

14. Silence, the presence of God in all humility, towards God, towards our neighbor, towards ourselves. Act as if the Superior, Fr. Champagnat were there to witness what we say and do. He wouldn't dare say or do anything improper.

id. LIX, 3
12 octobre 1862

15. Arrival of the novices and postulants from St-Genis-Laval in July-August 1863:

1. You come with pleasure and we likewise see you arrive in this house built by Fr. Champagnat, our venerated Founder. This is where he worked so much, prayed so much and watched so much over the good of the Society. This is where finally he suffused so much and died. His grave is in the cemetery of the community.

2. It's in this hall that he had his first room in the house. This is where there was the first provisional chapel, after the wooden one. This is where, later, he used to give us such practical instructions during the year and especially during the retreats. This is where, finally, he received the Last Rites and that he gave that moving allocution which is his spiritual testament.

TESTIMONIES ON MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

3. *Everything here speaks to us of Fr. Champagnat, everything recalls this good Father. The walls, the brick partitions, the floors tell us he was everything: mason, plasterer, cabinet-maker; and that he used to help with everything. He walked these floors, he crossed these rooms, he prayed, sang, heard confession, said Mass, gave Communion in this chapel which he built; he tilled the land, the garden; he strolled there, he ate in the refectory, the living room; he gave lessons to the novices in the novitiate hall; he picked at the rock. Finally he rests in the cemetery which he made. You will eat the fruit from the trees he planted, you will live in the place he chose, he lived in.*

4. *You will, then, be in this house as in a grand reliquary of Fr. Champagnat. You will try to fill yourself fully with his spirit, imitate his virtues, recall and put into practice his counsels, his instructions, in a word, live at N.-D. de l'Hermitage (he's the one who named it such) as if this good Father were still with you. Thus, you will be content and happy here and you will draw great benefit for your advancement in religious perfection. You will go with love, confidence, to his grave to ask his blessing and to beg of him to obtain for you the great grace to always show yourselves his worthy children.*

id. LXXX, manuscript, p.40

16.

1. *Let us often tell ourselves: "If Fr. Champagnat saw me, would I do that? would I talk like that? would I stay there? How would I behave during prayer, at meals," etc.?*

2. *While reading or listening to a reading of the life of St. Francis de Sales, founder of the Visitation Sisters, or of Fr. Champagnat, founder of the Little Brothers of Mary, what beautiful parallels we can make! Let's not fail to do so. The two Societies have the same spirit, almost the same rules.*

3. *Reading the writings of St. Francis de Sales and the instructions or the counsels of our venerated Father, we honor the relics of their spirit, or rather the Spirit of God who talks to us.*

id. LXXXI, 3 August 1863

17. Fr. Champagnat wanted us to say the "Miserere mei" every day at prayer.

id. XCII, 29 November 1863.

18. Jesus comes to us through the path of humility and obedience; we have to take the same path to go to Him.

(Fr. Champagnat)

id. CXIII, 2, 13 December 1863.

History, Fr. Champagnat used to say, is a list of dead people. What feelings do we get when we hear the account of what they did? Where are they now? Where will we ourselves be one day? What legacy will we leave our Brothers?
ibid. 5.

19. I thought that reading the counsels that Fr. Champagnat used to give the inhabitants of Lavalla at fruit harvest time could interest you and be of use to you (In his Life, 1 p.c.5, Ed.1989, p.50) ... He used to talk that way to the lay people, but when he spoke to the Brothers, he was more severe. Take a look at what is in the 2nd p. C.11, Ed.1989, p.396)
id. CVII, 5, 31 July 1864

Counsels of Fr. Champagnat to the inhabitants of Lavalla during the fruit season (Life, id.). He spits out a cherry he had taken (p.27). His counsels to the Brothers on mortification (Life, p.396).
id. CLXXX, 1, 2 June 1867

20. Respectful silence in the house of Fr. Champagnat, our venerated Founder. There we see: 1. his room, where he received so many postulants, gave so many good counsels to the Brothers, where he wrote so much, prayed so much, suffered so much, where finally he died. 2. the infirmary which Our Lord visits so often to give Himself to the sick, where so many Brothers died a saintly death after long and painful sicknesses suffered with so much patience and edification and where Fr. Champagnat wanted to come to die. 3. the yard, Our Lady, St. Joseph, the path to the cemetery ending at the grand promenade where Our Lord passes in procession twice a year, where the statue of Our Lady is carried in triumph on Assumption Day.

Mass was said successively by Fr. Champagnat:

1. in the little wooden cabin;
2. in the meditation hall;
3. in Room No.1 on the first floor;
4. in the present chapel.

id. CXI, 1,2,3,4
16 October 1864

21. Fr. Champagnat had a great devotion to St. John Francis Regis, as we can see in his Life. He gave him as secondary patron and he used to make his novena with piety and confidence.
id. CXXVIII, 9
11 June 1865

22. Monday, St. Ignatius Loyola, Founder of the Company of Jesus. His motto

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was: All for the greater glory of God. And Fr. Champagnat used to add: And for the honor of the august Mary, Mother of O.L.J.C. The Jesuit Fathers and the Little Brothers of Mary are close.

id. CXXXI, 1
30 July 1865

23. What made the saints tremble above all, Fr. Champagnat used to say, was the fear of abusing grace. .sk;.in 35;.fo off

id. CXLVI, 4
11 March 1866

24. We have among the writings of Fr. Champagnat the lesson which serves as introduction to the Rule, written entirely in his own hand. Order comes from God and leads to God. He who lives according to the Rule lives according to God. That's the path, the ladder to Paradise.

id. CLVI, 4
28 October 1866

25. This house was blessed by Bishop de Pins, Archbishop of Amasie and Administrator of the diocese of Lyons, built under his inspiration and in part through his generosity. It's Fr. Champagnat who founded it, who inhabited it and sanctified it by his holy sacrifices, his prayers, his work and suffering, as well as all the good Brothers who lived with him and after him and several of whom lie next to him in the cemetery as in a grand reliquary.

id. CLVII, 4
11 November 1866

26. (One) Brother saw on the table of this (Marist) Father a Spiritual Combat, a Golden Book, a Think-Carefully-About-It: books which are like foundation blocks in our Institute and which Fr. Champagnat recommended so strongly.

id. CLXXXII, 4
28 July 1867

27. If the young Brother in charge of the money who took books without permission had come himself to admit his mistake and return those things to Fr. Champagnat, would he have been sent away? No, because that move would have been proof of his atonement. (Life, 1989 ed., p.383)

id. CLXXXVI, 4
22 September 1867

28. Fr. Champagnat used to say that his uncle said an Our Father and a Hail Mary every day for foolish people, namely who don't know how to manage their affairs and who gradually ruin themselves, and he used to apply that to certain Brothers

who don't help matters and who don't take care of the furniture.
id. CLXXXIX, 2
13 October 1867

29. Thursday, St. Joseph Calasanctius, founder of the Pietist schools in Rome. His life has much in common with that of Fr. Champagnat. His zeal for the instruction of children from his youth; the goal of his congregation which is the proper Christian education of children, to teach them to read and write; the favors he received from the Blessed Mother, etc. ... offer great similarities between the two Founders.
id. CCXIII, 1
23 August 1868

30. We can say that the Hermitage is now the beginning and the end, that is to say that the postulants go there to start their religious life and the old Brothers go there to prepare to end their career properly by a happy and holy death. Thus Fr. Champagnat sees the elderly and the young men.
id. CCXIV, 4
13 September 1868

31. You know what is said in Rodriguez' Christian Perfection (3 P, 1 Tr. C.32) and what Fr. Champagnat says (Life, 1989 ed., p.313) about those anonymous Brothers, employed in the lowliest jobs in the community, hidden from the eyes of the world and who, by their prayers and virtues, make the schools prosper and missionaries succeed, etc. ...
id. CCXVII, 6
18 October 1868

32. Happy the Brother who faithfully practices what is written in the Collection of sayings, counsels, and lessons of Fr. Champagnat! He leads a holy and edifying life; he makes people happy in this world and prepares for himself eternal joy in heaven.
id. CCXVIII, 4
20 December 1868

33. Fr. Champagnat used to say: "This thought, 'God sees me!' is enough to chase the devil away and eliminate temptations." And the Cure of Ars: "With this thought, 'God sees me,' we would never sin." Let's use it to walk generously and constantly in the path of virtue.
id. CCXIX, 6
10 January 1869

34. He who commits a venial sin, who fails in his duties, and disturbs the order of the house does us more harm than any the Prussians and the revolution could

TESTIMONIES ON MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

do. He who is in the state of grace has nothing to fear. The friend of God is happy in any and all circumstance. (Fr. Champagnat)

id. CCLIII, 3

4 September 1870

35. Fr. Champagnat used to say that we know the sick especially in the refectory. It is not a good sign when we are sick only for prayers; and, besides, what difference can a half-hour or an hour more in bed make?

id. CCLIX, 4

27 November 1870

36. We can consider ourselves, like the Blessed Virgin, in the apartments in the temple, since our chapel is part of the house and, according to Fr. Champagnat's expression, we are living under the same roof with Our Lord Jesus Christ.

id. CCLXXV, 2

19 November 1871

37. Fifty-two years ago I was in Fr. Champagnat's room with Br. Louis and the other Brothers, gathered for prayer at the last hour of the year and the first of the following year. When the clock in his room (the same one used for classes) rang midnight, Father cried out: "Goodbye, 1819! Goodbye forever!"

The impression these words made on me is still vivid. (cf. A.L.S., 1868 ed., p.128)

id. CCLXXVIII, 1

31 December 1871

38. "Follow your Rule faithfully," Fr. Champagnat used to tell our Brothers, "teach catechism well to the children; that's what will console you the most at death." (cf. Life, p.247) "Think only about what you are doing now or about what you would have wanted to do at the hour of death," he said to another. (ibid.)

"My friend," he said to a young Brother. "what causes you the most trouble today in religious life will give you the most consolation at death." (Life, p.287)

ibid. 3

39. You know from reading the Life of Fr. Champagnat what he says about a director who doesn't uphold the Rule (Life, p.449). You see that there was no compromising then with the Rule nor with duty and that he didn't hesitate to punish, even to dismiss, when it was necessary; yet he needed Brothers, but he wanted good ones.

id. CCLXXX, 3

21 January 1872

40. Fr. Champagnat used to say (Life, pp.452f): "The Brother Director who upholds silence, who stresses study, who requires everybody to do a good job, avoids every

day a host of faults, he keeps the Brothers from an infinite number of dangers, of temptations, and does them the most eminent service." (Note the variants)

id. CCXCIII, 5

9 June 1872

41. Fr. Chapuis, our chaplain, ...talked to me several times about his attachment to the Brothers and the Society. He loved especially the Hermitage because of Fr. Champagnat whose house reminded him of Champagnat and for whom he had great veneration.

id. CCCI, 2

1 September 1872

42. Oh! how I wish we could fully understand that doctrine of penance, regular, daily, imperceptible like, but very meritorious in God's eyes, as Fr. Champagnat tells us. (Prelim. Instruction. Introduction to the 1837 Rule)

id. CCCXIII, 2

9 February 1873

43. Fr. Champagnat, our venerated Founder, listed among the principal means of perfection: Proper use of recreation time, and he wanted us to remember that every time we had the chapter of faults. During the holidays, recreations are longer.

id. CCCXLVII, 5

30 August 1874

44. The good Father, before dying, clearly promised that he would not forget us and that he would use in favor of the Society all the credit he could have in heaven. See! At his death we were about 200 and we had 43 houses; today we have 445 (475 by 28 December) and we have about 3000 members. Our venerated Founder died 34 years ago.

id. CCCLVI, 4

22 November 1874

45. Our venerated Founder used to say, "I am confident that Mary will not allow to perish any at all of those who persevere till death in their vocation." Experience proves it. All the Brothers who died in the Institute left this world with the most Christian dispositions and several with visible signs of predestination. Therefore, devotion to the Blessed Virgin appeared to him to be a good sign of vocation.

id. CCCLVII, 3

29 November 1874

46. *1. Monday, St. Vincent de Paul, our patron of the month. What a beautiful model of piety, regularity, charity, humility! When we compare his life with that of Fr. Champagnat, what beautiful traits of similarity we find!*

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2. *Born of parents who make their living by work; one keeps sheep, the other raises lambs. Both have a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin and teach children.*

3. *St. Vincent did lots of good in Clichy, in Chatillon by his charity, his preaching, his sweetness and other virtues. Fr. Champagnat did the same in Lavalla.*

4. *It was in hearing the confession of a sick person that St. Vincent recognized the needs of country folk and founded a congregation to instruct them. It was in hearing the confession of a child that Fr. Champagnat resolved to execute without delay his project to found a congregation of Teaching Brothers.*

5. *Both their occupations in their communities, their work, their difficulties, their sufferings, their lessons, their counsels, were almost identical. Same manner of governing, correcting, encouraging, directing their religious.*

6. *Let us consider finally their conduct, so regular, so edifying at the time of their final sickness and death, two centuries apart, happening at the same time (4 a.m.) while the community was in the chapel. And they continue to do good through their religious.*

id. CCCLXVIII.

18 July 1875

47. Our dear and venerated Founder also always taught us, by word and example, the necessity and importance of prayer. Before undertaking this work of providence and zeal which we are called to continue, strengthen, and spread, he would often say to God: "God, if it's not your will that I undertake this work, take the thought and the means from me." And since its foundation: "God, sustain this little work and make it prosper, if it enters in the designs of Your divine Providence; but if it's only a purely human work, destroy it, make it disappear, let it fall, even to my confusion." How often he told us and repeated these words of Psalm 126: "Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum, etc." "If the Lord Himself does not build the house, those who build it work in vain. If the Lord does not guard the city, the one who's guarding it watches in vain!" He returned often to that to encourage us to never count on ourselves, nor on our efforts, but to lean only on the help and protection of Him Who works everything in everybody. With what feeling and tangible emotion he would recite every day, in saying the prayer, the Pater and Ave for the Society and for all the Brothers employed in the establishments! How happy we'd all be to be at prayer, at the meditation which he would make out loud! His tone was so pious, his feelings so simple, affectionate, natural! How beautiful it was to see him at the altar during Holy Mass! With what noble and respectful seriousness he performed the ceremonies! How his exterior was so

modest and recollected! How he inspired piety! (Allocation to the Capitulants)
5101.308,
manuscript, pp.1042f

48. One day we were talking with Fr. Champagnat about the defects of a young Brother. "I see lots of merit in this Brother," he answered. "Since his coming to the Society he hasn't asked me once to go see his parents."
id. p.1073;
5101.310, p.80 (28f)

49. Fr. Champagnat said one day to a Brother Director: "You're not complaining about the Brother I gave you?" - "No, Father. We're at peace." - "But the others couldn't do a thing with him." - "I know his character and I ask of him only what is absolutely necessary, without arguing over trifles." (1821)
5101.310, manuscript p.74

50. Fr. Champagnat said one day: "I could have been very undisturbed in a little parish, instead of being continually overwhelmed by governing the Society, but the glory of God and the salvation of souls require this work of me. Likewise, I could have stayed in my family, working, instead of so much trouble, so many worries and trips brought on by the government and direction of the Brothers, but God wants it this way and I'm content."
id. p.77

51. A Brother Director was showing strong repugnance to returning to his establishment because of a few unpleasant matters he was experiencing there. Fr. Champagnat, who saw that this Brother could succeed and, besides, he was hard up to replace him, nonetheless did not want to order him imperiously to return. Instead, he asked him kindly, encouraged him gently to continue his duties in that assignment; he even took on a tone of familiarity, telling him: "Come now, if you agree to return to St-Symphorien d'Oz, I'll give you a holy card."
id. pp.85f

52. Fr. Champagnat said one day that a Brother Director having written to him in these terms, "Father, I'm not good at being in charge", he had concluded that there were some Brothers in the establishment who did not know how to obey.
id. pp.103f

53. Fr. Champagnat used to say that it's in the sacrifice of the Mass that priests draw the strength needed to bear the fatigues of their ministry.
id. p.113

54. A Brother one day said to Fr. Champagnat that he was not without apprehension for

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the future because there were many evil tongues and one could be slandered. The good Father answered: "Brother, don't be afraid of slander, but be very afraid of gossip," wanting to make him understand that we have nothing to fear if the evil people say of us is false, but that we have everything to fear if our bad conduct gives rise to gossip.

id. p.195

55. Fr. Champagnat often repeated these words of St. Augustine: "God, make me know You and make me know myself; may I know You to love You and may I know myself to despise myself."

id. p.249

56. Fr. Champagnat was born on a Thursday, feast of the Ascension, day in the year consecrated to Our Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament, and he died on a Saturday, day in the year consecrated to the Most Holy Virgin. All his life he had a great devotion to Jesus and Mary.

id. p.291

57. One day we were talking to Fr. Champagnat about a Brother who, having quit his state to go back to the world, had become very rich. "It remains to be seen," he answered, "if he'll be just as rich when he enters paradise."

id. p.307

58. Fr. Champagnat often repeated, in the immediate preparation for meditation, these words of Our Lord: "If two or three are gathered to pray in My name, I am in the midst of them." (Mt 18) And he added: "Yes, Lord, it is truly in Your name that we are gathered, it is for You that we left the place of our rest, to come to pray to you. You are, therefore, truly and especially in the midst of us, in a special way, to answer us."

id. p.397

59. Fr. Champagnat never took the Brothers of the Hermitage to Valfleury (church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, famous pilgrimage). Neither did he ever allow them to go as a community. When we were a half-dozen in Lavalla, he once led us up the neighboring mountain and had us drink milk. When we were only about fifty at the Hermitage, he led us two or three times to Pilat. Since then, vacation outings, after retreat, were limited to Lavalla where the community used to sing the Salve Regina in the church, with the pastor's permission.

id. p.547

Br. CONON

V.J.M.J.

St-Genis-Laval, 16 March 1886

Reverend Brother Superior,

I have again reread with great attention the Life of our venerated Father Champagnat written by Brother Jean-Baptiste. To answer your circular of this past February 2 which you addressed to all the Brothers and especially to the old ones who knew our venerated Founder. - I can say that Brother Jean-Baptiste knew our beloved Founder well. Everything he wrote about him is exact. The portrait he draws of his person, the way he used to say Holy Mass, the way he officiated at the altar, in the chapel, at the morning Salve Regina, is exact. Which I can say because I saw him myself.

Father's talks which he quotes, most of which I heard, are exact; they are admirably faithful, they are so well preserved that they seem textual, especially those referred to in chapter 2 on his spirit of faith, in chapter 3 on his trust in God, on his insistence on forming the Brothers in piety, in devotion to the Blessed Virgin. In reading it I seem to see and hear Father talking to us then.

Father had his own style: he didn't talk to....., as his conferences show. He was simple, relaxed, dignified, noble even, and his voice was strong; he was penetrated with what he was saying. We listened to him with respectful attention, with an eagerness which didn't tire of hearing him; we were touched, penetrated by what he said.

I can add that the words said in different circumstances by Father and recorded by Br. Jean-Baptiste agree with what I have heard from the Old Brothers I have known, with whom I talked. I knew Brothers Bonaventure and Stephen; they were my masters in the novitiate; Brother Louis who, Sundays and feast-days, used to give us instructions on the Office of the day, on the Church ceremonies, and a class on good manners; Brothers Laurence, Damian, Stanislaus, sacristan and Father's personal confidant; Brothers Polycarp who taught me when I was small; Ambrosime, Remi with whom I lived in Digoïn, in St-Maurice; Gabriel with whom I stayed in Thoisseÿ, in Grand Lemps; Matthew in Frontonas; Joseph, John-Joseph, Marcellin, Arsenius, Cassian, Peter, Hippolytus, Benedict, Anastasius, Apollinaire, Theophile, Marie, Alexander, Louis-Bernardine, Alexis, Vincent, Eloi: these latter died only a few years ago.

The Brothers who are still alive and who lived with Father Champagnat can tell you the same. Thus, Brothers Xavier, Marie-Jubin, Sylvester, Marie-Lin,

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Euthyme, Modeste, Avit, Justus, Malachy, Marie-Stanislas, Basin, Bertin, Carton, Castule, Chrysogonus, Dacian, etc. ...accepted and accept, as coming from Father Champagnat, everything Br. Jean-Baptiste has written about him. Therefore our Brothers Superiors: Brother Francois, Brother Louis-Marie, then Brother Nestor insisted on recalling on all occasions, especially at the annual retreats, the teachings of our venerated Father, and all the Brothers received them as coming from him. Which you yourself have also thought necessary to do, Reverend Brother.

However, I will say that the extraordinary things, like favors from heaven, have not been published; we've kept them hidden. Thus the fact reported on page 116, vol.2, is not complete; the marvelous part has been omitted (about the "Memorare" on the snow, at La Chaperie). I have heard it said that when Father and Brother Stanislaus, the day after they had left the house where they had been so well received, going towards the steeple to go to Mass, at a certain distance turned around to see the house that had sheltered them and they no longer saw it; that later, talking to the Pastor of Tarentaise about this house, the Pastor told them there was definitely no house in the spot they pointed out to him. Which could have been kept quiet because of the spirit of modesty proper to Father Champagnat. The same reason could have made them keep secret the favors obtained through the veneration of the relics of Saint Priscillian which we have at the Hermitage since 1845. The same reason again for the silence on the exhumation of the body of a young Brother which was found perfectly preserved in the little cemetery where he had been buried for fifteen or so years. Brother Peter told me that in 1852, showing me the spot where they had found the body. He added that they knew this young Brother and that he was considered a saint, but that they didn't want to cause a stir. The present Brother Titus knows this same fact.

This would be the place to say that several of our Brothers have left a memory of blessed, as just about all the Brothers who have died in the congregation, but, not to attract any public attention, people didn't talk about them. I will say, however, that Brother Vincent assured me, a year or two before his death, that he had obtained, through the intercession of Brother Arsene, several favors while he was at Lavalla, that he turned to him in his difficulties.

If these Brothers were saints, speaking popularly, without wanting to anticipate the decisions of Holy Mother Church, for which Brothers, in any case, we don't want to ask, it is certain that he who formed them, who gave them his spirit, his religious lifestyle, must be a saint. Consequently, Father Champagnat has always been regarded as a saint and a saint of heroic sanctity. In fact, what heroism of all the virtues did he not need to begin his community, almost without resources, for having founded from 1817 to 1840, in the space of 23 years, in a manner so profoundly religious and so strong that it has developed astonishingly, in spite of the problems: the finger of God is there. God, Who used him

for such a work, had filled him with His spirit: he was certainly a saint. At his death the community was composed of 3 to 400 Brothers (I have 247 as my official number), today it has 3,600 Brothers.

In 1840 after the annual retreat the Brothers went in procession to the cemetery, reciting the Rosary; they lined up tightly on both sides and Reverend Brother Superior, Brother Francois, standing on Father's grave, slowly read the Spiritual Testament of our venerated Founder, the entire assembly religiously reflective. Then the procession started up again: the singers divided into two choirs, at a distance of some 50 paces, all the Brothers joined in, singing the Salve Regina, the Ave Maris Stella, the Inviolata, the choirs alternating. This chorus of voices, echoed by the valley, produced an admirable effect, but which didn't disturb recollection. They returned thus to the chapel. This was repeated in the following years. Thus we kept the memory of our venerated Founder alive.

I don't know, Reverend Brother, if I can talk here about what pertains to me. I entered the novitiate on 6 February 1839. I often saw Father Superior in the chapel, at the Salve Regina, at meditation; he used to say the community Mass admirably. In the refectory he ate with Fathers Matricon and Besson, at a small square table placed a few feet from the Brothers' table; he sometimes received an unknown priest. There was reading during the meals. The reader's chair was located near the wall which follows the river. Brother Francois was seated near the wall and corrected the reader when needed; Brother Louis-Marie sat opposite. Father sometimes corrected the reader, would have him come down from the chair and occasionally have him kneel, but that was rare: that was only to correct some young scatterbrains. Often Father would ask about the reading, in the evening, especially at the end of supper. Brother Columban was frequently chosen to be questioned. (I don't know if he wanted to.) Father would approve, would complete or would correct what wasn't exact in the answer, or would add a few reflections on the content of the reading. I remember he once asked Brother Francis Xavier, who had studied for a time at the Major Seminary, how America had been populated before being discovered by Christopher Columbus. Father approved his answer and added a few reflexions that I don't remember.

Other times he would ask such and such a Brother where he was, what he was doing, at such and such a time. Father knew that they had broken silence or been idle. He would correct the fault more or less severely, but paternally, would comment or give a penance generally well received by the delinquent, to the satisfaction of all the Brothers, and they weren't inclined to draw such reprimands.

Father noticed everything: in a glance he knew what was happening, would correct it if necessary, the way he did once in my case in the following two

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instances. One morning after breakfast, there was no soup left for all the cooks. The head cook, Brother Bertin, told me to take some bread and dunk it. I go get some bread and cut it very thin to put in my plate. Father then comes along and tells me: "What are you doing, Brother?" I tell him there wasn't enough soup and that I was cutting one." "Eh," he said, showing me some bread already cut. "this one's not good enough?" I hurried to put this bigger slice of bread in my plate, as it had been cut for the community and I wasn't eager to start over. Another day, as I was skimming off the broth, Father passes by. At a glance he sees where the broth is at. "You're skimming off the fat," he tells me. "Father, there's still more." "Come now," he tells me in a low voice. I get the point that I must stop skimming and answering. Which I do immediately: in fact, the broth had been skimmed enough. -- Another fact. The day after a heavy rain, arriving to play "boules," we found the bag which held them all wet and muddy. At the end of the recreation we put the balls under cover and I take the bag to the river to wash it. The river was high and brimming. I shake the bag a few minutes, but I drop it and the torrent sweeps it along. I run after it, but can't see it. After a moment of futile search, I go up to Father's room and tell him, "Reverend Father, I've come to ask you a penance." "And what for?" I tell him how I had found the bag of balls and I add that I thought I was doing the right thing by washing it in the river, but that I had lost it while washing it. "Have you looked for it below, under the house?" After telling him I had gone there and not found it, he told me, "The penance won't bring back the bag. You'll kneel during the Benedicite." Which I did.

For me, venerated Father was very good, as he was for everybody, no doubt. He entrusted me to Brother Bonaventure who had known me when I was very young and who used to see me often privately. After I caught cold working in the refectory, I had to stay in bed in the infirmary for a few days. After I got well Brother Stanislaus, who often came to see the sick, asked me one day if I would be happy to go see Brother Polycarp in Perreux, to do the cooking. Brother Polycarp had taught me in Ampuis and it was thanks to his good catechism lessons and the care of my good parents that I was set in the practice of good and that I became a religious. I answered Brother Stanislaus that he couldn't give me any news more pleasing. "Don't say a word," he told me; "in a few days our good Father is going to send you to Perreux." Where, in fact, I did go on the feast of St. John the Baptist. I was accompanied up to Valbenoite; Brother Joseph, cook for the Fathers, welcomed me. He had known me when I was very young; he gave me a good bed; the next morning he gave me a hearty breakfast and I left for Perreux. I spent happy days there, until vacation time, with Brothers Polycarp and Agape. I think they were happy with me and I was happy with them. There, while doing my little job in the kitchen, I devoured the books in the library, some of which had been given by Fr. Moine, the pastor, recently deceased.

Another care of the venerated Father for me, a care which he no doubt had for the young Brothers. After the 1839 retreat I was named to the lower class in Thoissey (Ain), with Brother Gabriel as director. He also was from Ampuis, I knew his parents and he knew me. He had entered the community about the age of 13. He had gone to St-Paul-Trois-Chateaux for his exemption. He could have been 23 or 24 then; I was 18. He was a competent teacher, full of devotedness, he taught class perfectly, he also trained me to teach well. Mr. Reybert, inspector in Ain who then went on to Rhone, after a lengthy inspection of the school in Thoissey, told him how satisfied he was and his high esteem for the way he taught class and for the progress of his pupils; he communicated this high esteem to the district Committee, to the sub-prefecture of Trevoux, as we later found out. I was thus trained by this capable teacher and I taught my class well, a big and difficult class. When the 1840 vacations came I was exhausted, because we lodged in St-Didier, we took our meals there and we went to teach in Thoissey. It's there that we got the news of our dear Founder's death, in June 1840. Fr. Ducret, the pastor, said Mass the next day for the repose of his soul: it was Monday in the Octave of Corpus Christi. We were deeply afflicted but resigned, and we continued our life of regularity and dedication.

Reverend Brother Superior, we can say that God used our venerated Father like a good and faithful servant to form our numerous Society of modest and devoted teachers of youth, entirely subject to the Pastors of the Church; that he had the spirit of God for this great work so needed in our day, that all the Brothers had this high esteem for him.

I remember that in confession he would lead us to virtue, to the love of God, of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to trust in the Blessed Virgin with so much sweetness and strength that we would be all filled with these when we left him. I will add that our congregation, its founding and development, the blessings God has poured out on it, must be attributed, I think, to the holiness of our venerated Father, to his prudence, his justice, his temperance and his moral virtues which we could call heroic.

Reverend Brother, I end this long letter by telling you the joy we all feel at the steps you are taking to obtain the beatification of our dear Founder, Father Champagnat. It is high time to gather the usual information for these Causes: the Brothers who lived with him are becoming very few.

I hope that this Cause will succeed. It will be a great joy for all the Brothers, a great consolation and a powerful encouragement to be penetrated more and more by the teachings of our venerated Founder and to put them into practice in these unhappy times we are crossing, in which they are led to slacken off in teaching catechism properly because of the many subjects they have to teach.

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*Reverend Brother Superior, I offer you my very humble respects and I am
Your entirely devoted and very humble servant*

Brother Conon

N.B. Brother Conon, Antoine GERMAIN, born in Ampuis in 1821, was not able to testify at the ordinary process, because he died at St-Genis on 23 June 1886.

Br. THEOPHILE

I have always heard and seen the Servant of God venerated as a saint by all the old Brothers who had known him and by all the other Brothers.

And today, in the whole congregation devotion to the Venerable has grown so much that all the Brothers are happy, have a sort of need to invoke him in their distresses. This confidence, justified by the many favors received, keeps growing every day.

The Novenas made in honor of the Servant of God for the sick are multiplying more and more.

As for me personally, I have to say that, before entering the congregation, I had, without realizing it, such an idea of the high sanctity of the Venerable that the Hermitage itself seemed to me a place consecrated by holiness, and I was convinced that those who resided there were saints. To test me they used to quote some facts from the life of the Venerable about the trials he had the Brothers undergo. How many times I was told: "You'll have to get a dead calf out of the latrines."

And this idea of the Hermitage, far from fading, when I was admitted to the novitiate on 11 September 1866, only increased, especially at the sight of our first Brothers. If the disciples are so rich in holiness, what holiness must he have attained who was their master!

This thought which rose in me unconsciously was logical because it flowed naturally from what I saw.

In fact, when we saw a Brother Francois so united to God, enraptured going to Communion, returning, and even during the Divine Office; a Brother Louis-Marie so penetrated with the great truths, so full of zeal for the perfection of his Brothers; a Brother Jean-Baptiste so full of the spirit of God and all those Brothers so accomplished in the virtues of humility, zeal, devotedness, fear of sin, etc., could we have any other idea of the Venerable, except that he

was a great saint!

"When I came to Lavalla, in 1866," Reverend Sister Beatrice, Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Infancy, told me, "my infant imagination was vividly struck by all I heard about Father Champagnat. I especially liked to hear the people who had known the good Father; they spoke of his holiness with so much admiration, such perfect conviction that, not knowing the canonical rules, I was astonished that he was not invoked."

A parent said to me one day, eyes filled with tears, "I can't tell you what I feel when I think that a saint, Father Champagnat, took me by the hand."

What drew my attention, again, when people spoke of Father, was the holy pride with which his contemporaries never failed to add: "I remember him. - I knew him. - I spoke with him. - My parents often went to seek his advice." - Etc.

"The day of my entry into religion," said Sister Eustachia of the Holy Infancy, "an old man said to me: 'I knew Father Champagnat. Ah! He was thoughtful, serious, very peace-loving. He was pious like an angel. It's not surprising he founded a community, he had all the qualities needed for that.'"

Brother John-Stephen told me that one day when he was out walking he met an old man who stopped him, saying, "You're from the Hermitage," and saying this big tears flowed down his cheeks. - "Does the Hermitge bring back some sad memory?" Brother asked. "Oh no, on the contrary, I used to love to go to the chapel so much to see the good and holy Father Champagnat," and praise of the Venerable didn't stop.

The same Brother also tells the story of an old man who came to the Hermitage, removed his hat, and made a big sign of the cross when he noticed the bust of the Venerable, saying, "Oh! There's the saint Father Champagnat."

Every time I spoke with my cousin, Angelique Sejoubard, about the Venerable Servant of God, she said, "What is said in the life of Father Champagnat is nothing compared to what could have been put there. Ah! If we had started these inquiries earlier we would have been able to find things that have been lost because of the death of those who had known the good Father."

To complete this, I must add that people often come to ask me to make a novena in honor of the Venerable to recommend to him some delicate and difficult matters. At Lavalla people have the habit of recommending to him difficulties that appear insurmountable, and experience has proven that this confidence which they have in the Venerable Servant of God is not in vain.

The St. Joseph religious in Lavalla have assured me that their elderly Sisters

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who lived at the time of the Venerable often spoke to them about the Venerable. They looked upon him as a great saint.

Dear Brother Syndulphe, who entered religion at the Hermitage and lived almost 30 years at the Hermitage with the disciples of the Venerable Founder (17 of them). He told me that he could guarantee that he had never heard these old Brothers criticize the least action of the Venerable Founder. They spoke of him only with respect. They loved him and esteemed him more than they could say. His memory would move them to tears. When they saw something reprehensible, they would exclaim, "Oh! If Father Champagnat were here, how hurt he would be!" Almost every day they would go visit the grave of the Venerable and when there was question once of moving the cemetery, they protested, so great was their desire to rest near the Founder. They spoke of him as of a Saint Francis Regis.

Reverend Brother Francois in particular often recommended himself to his intercession and exhorted us to do the same. He loved to use the books which had belonged to him. In his opinion Father Champagnat had not ceased being Superior of the community, and if difficulties arose, he said invariably: "Father Champagnat will arrange all that with God and the Blessed Virgin."

Good Brother Syndulphe adds that he was put in charge of the stone-cutting in 1879; this job put him in touch with 20-25 outside people in that business, several of whom had known the Venerable. Well, he noted that these people, like the old Brothers, looked upon Venerable Champagnat as a great saint.

The nephew of the Venerable told him: "My uncle was really an extraordinary man. I keep his watch as if it's the relic of a saint. I wouldn't part with it for a fortune." That man has remained one of the good Christians of Isieux. He left his four children a small fortune, fruit of his labor and frugality, and the precious watch was a much appreciated and envied part of the inheritance.

Here are some other testimonies given by a few of the people the good Brother knew.

The widow, Madame Galley, of Lavalla, who died two years ago, had often told him that upon arriving in Lavalla Father Champagnat had declared a terrible war on dancing and other abuses. He succeeded in ending the dances and the small reunions of women gossips who go sew or knit in the street with their neighbors.

Even today a few people in Lavalla, formed in this school by their mothers' lessons, stay home and say when they see the small gatherings outside: "If

Father Champagnat were there, things would have changed fast."

The widow Madame Despinasse used to say: "Just the thought of Father Champagnat was enough to have us avoid many faults, because we wouldn't have wanted to cause him any grief."

Madame Moulin-Jayet assured me that she had been prepared for her First Communion by Father Champagnat. She was among those children spoken about in the life of the Venerable and who, for fear of missing Catechism, would arrive long before the early morning hour when it was given. "I had had a pair of leggings made," she said, "in order to cross the snow, for I lived an hour from the steeple. I would always arrive early enough to attend Father Champagnat's Catechism, and I've kept an indelible memory of that saintly priest. He was my counselor and my family's counselor as long as he lived. It's to my parents' house, in our kitchen, that he'd come, accompanied by two young Brothers and a teacher, to instruct the children of the hamlet and to train his Brothers. In spite of the disturbance that caused, my parents were as happy as could be to help out Father Assistant whom they looked upon as a saint. The more one approached him, the more we were drawn to respect; never has a priest impressed me like Father Champagnat."

Mr. Ginot, former mayor of Lavalla, said: "This Father Champagnat is admirable in his enterprises: once he has reflected and consulted his superiors, nothing can stop him, neither the lack of workers, nor the lack of money, nor the threats of the wicked, not even the jibes of his confreres. He always keeps going. What a holy headstrong man!"

Reverend Brother Francois would repeat to the Brothers who didn't act respectfully during prayers: "Oh! If Father Champagnat had seen you in that posture, he who acted so properly, even when he was tired. I assure you he would have drawn you out of your negligence."

Mr. Linossier, mason, who worked with the Venerable on the construction of the Hermitage, often told me that Father Champagnat didn't want anybody to even speak to him about the very threatening events taking place then. "We have nothing to fear," he said, "the wicked will do only what God allows them to do. Let's be more faithful than ever to our duties, you as good Christians, we as good religious; that said, let's work and build." Mr. Linossier added: "It was easy for me to see by the silence and the recollection of Father Champagnat that even while working he stayed united to God."

Mr. Lyonnet said: "I was the only one to know that Father Champagnat suffered from lower back pains caused by the confessional in Lavalla."

Nothing saddened Father Champagnat more than sins against the holy

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virtue. Those guilty faced immediate dismissal. On this score the Venerable was inflexible and really terrible. The old Brothers, who rarely broached this matter, said they were unable to express their impressions.

We would often visit the workshops to see if people were making full use of everything. On these occasions he would give lots of advice and lessons. He would have old clothes patched, which he gave to the poor, for he felt that many indigents would not have the foresight to do it. Br. Theophile

Fr. Francois MAZELIER

The respectable Father Champagnat was a holy priest, who crowned a very generous, very priestly life with a saintly death. But there are sometimes imperfections in saints. As for him, he was thought not to keep his word enough. Father Douillet, superior of the boarding school of La Cite, used to reproach him for that. Fr. Colin also told me that Fr. Champagnat was taken up on that score. I had had the occasion to complain about it when he was lax in fulfilling the condition I had stipulated concerning the Brothers he sent me to exempt them from the draft, namely that they stay in St-Paul until they obtained the brevet...

One day Fr. Champagnat himself told me: "People reproach me for not keeping my word. I promise, then if I can't... I knew by his words that he intended no malice, but that perhaps he didn't take enough trouble.

1853.01.18, AFM. 43.115

Father TERRAILLON

I saw Fr. Champagnat several times. I spoke to him of your (Father Chanut) matter with the liveliest interest. I see that Fr. Superior himself recommended it to him, but it appears that neither one is getting anywhere. He's becoming more and more sensitive on anything pertaining to his Brothers. He seems to fear the influence of the priests of the Society on them. What is sure, my dear friend, is that he has nothing but negative answers to give us on everything we ask him, under pretext of impossibility...

Letter to Fr. Chanut 04.02.1939

Fr. GERY

I only passed through St-Etienne the last time I visited that city. However, I had the opportunity to see very briefly the Superior of the Brothers who had gone to St-Chamond to discuss establishing some Brothers in the village next

to the city of St-Etienne on the request of the Mayor. This Brother struck me as modest, well-intentioned and very pious. I don't know why I got a better idea of his prudence and piety than of his talent. Perhaps he's not, thereby, less capable of directing the excellent work which Providence has entrusted to him: the spirit of God breathes where it will, and, besides, one can have the resource of the neighbor's good counsels.

Letter to Fr. Mazelier 30 November 1835

A PRIEST

Fr. Champagnat, who has formed and who directs this establishment (Brothers at the Hermitage) is indeed an ecclesiastic of great virtue and much zeal. I don't know what his competence is in general. However, the obstacles of all kinds which he has overcome to found his work, his success in spite of the contradictions of his confreres and of his superiors, make me believe that he doesn't lack intelligence and even that he can do much for the good government of his community. Besides, this is the general opinion.

Information given by a priest to Fr. Gery, who transmits it to Fr. Mazelier 22 December 1835

Fr. PETIT

Many times I heard my grandmother, Madame Lagier, tell the following story, which she herself heard from her mother, Madame Perrochia.

This family inhabited a property located in the place called Le Coin in the village of St-Martin-en-Coailleux. The family often enough came to Fr. Champagnat's help. It seems he himself took refuge in Le Coin during the troubles of the Revolution of 1830. Often enough he suffered from stomach pains and my ancestor, to soothe his pains, used to have him take a liqueur of his fabrication made from quinces, known locally as "quince water." Father Champagnat often told her: "Madame Perrochia, if my stomach could talk it would tell you, 'quin-quin' to thank you."

This bit of humor, at a rather stressful time, struck my great-grandmother and the memory of it has been kept in my family.

Testimony of Mr. Petit, 25 September 1963.

Translation: Br. Joseph Belanger, Poughkeepsie, New York.

