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## MARIST NOTEBOOKS

### STUDIES

- **Father Vernet (1760-1843),  
Vicar General of Viviers, and his failure  
with the foundations of the Brothers**  
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- **Essay on the origins of spirituality**  
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- **Marcellin Champagnat, his spirit, his  
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- **Brother François evokes  
Father Champagnat**

Institute of the Marist Brothers

# SUMMARY

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# *Father Vernet (1760-1843), Vicar General of Viviers, and his failure with the foundations of the Brothers*

*Br. Alain DELORME, FMS*

These lines find their inspiration in 266 letters written by Father Vernet to the Parisians in charge of the Society of Saint-Sulpice and kept in the Archives of this Society, at 6, rue du Regard, Paris(6<sup>e</sup>). We were able to consult them thanks to the friendliness of Father Irénée Moye, archivist. (Dossier 26 G III, Viviers)

We must add to this the information drawn from Nicolas Dabert's: *The Life of Father Vernet: a priest of Saint Sulpice, Superior of the Major Seminary of Viviers, Vicar General of the Diocese, Founder and Superior of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary.* Lyon – Pérusse 1848; and of the works of Anatole Moulard: *The Apostolic Life of the Venerable Marie Rivier, foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary of Bourg-Saint-Andéol (Ardèche), 1768-1838* Lyon, Paris – Emmanuel Vite, 1934.

After the presentation of a few personality traits of Father Vernet, extracted from his correspondence, we will attempt to discover the reasons for his failure in his long attempt to found a religious family of Brothers, a failure that undoubtedly accelerated the union of the Brothers of Viviers with our Institute in 1844. This is the reason why he attracts our interest.

## **A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Joseph Laurent Régis Vernet was born September 20, 1760, in Villeneuve-de-Berg, in the southern part of Ardèche (*Ardèche à l'huile* as opposed to the northern part of the department, *l'Ardèche au beurre*). He attended

the College of Aubenas at the time when the Jesuits were leaving it, the administration being left in the hands of one of his uncles. He then went to the Seminary of Viviers for courses in philosophy and physics. He finished, with distinction, the studies that gave him a Master in Arts from the University of Valence.

In 1778, he was at Bourg-Saint-Andéol for his Theology. He felt at that time that God was calling him to work with the Society of Saint-Sulpice. He left for Paris towards the middle of 1784. At his arrival, Father Emery placed him at *La Solitude*, the Society's Novitiate. At the beginning of 1785, he was sent to Toulouse to occupy a chair of dogma at St. Charles Seminary.

## **A RESISTER**

Father Vernet was expelled from his position in Toulouse because of his refusal to take an oath in favor of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and returned to the diocese of Viviers where he attempted, inasmuch as he could, to protect the priests and the faithful from the influence of the constitutional schism. Obligated to escape to Lyon, he exercised his ministry as the circumstances allowed him to.

Bishop de Savine, the renegade prelate who swore in favor of the Constitution, had administrated the diocese of Viviers. On March 19, 1795, Bishop D'Aviau who had been mandated by the Pope to head this diocese, sent letters from Rome to Father Vernet as though he were the Vicar General. Father Vernet devoted himself totally in administering, reorganizing, governing this diocese through a multitude of difficulties.

In the Concordat of 1801, the diocese of Viviers had been suppressed and attached to the diocese of Mende. On May 30, 1802, Bishop Chabot, who was then its Bishop, vested Father Vernet with the powers of Vicar General for Ardèche. As soon as he was able to do so, Father Vernet undertook the re-establishment of the Major Seminary in Viviers. He succeeded but not without difficulty. As superior of the Congregation, he guided Marie Rivier, foundress of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary and her rapidly developing community. He died in Bourg-Saint-Andéol, on May 4, 1843. His heart remained in the convent of the Sisters of the Presentation while his body was buried in the cemetery of the Major Seminary of Viviers. (Data extracted from "L'Histoire littéraire de la Compagnie de Saint Sulpice" by L. Bertrand, Paris MCM, Librairie Alphonse Picard, 82, rue Bonaparte – Vol 2, pp. 151-152).

**THE SULPICIAN**

Father Vernet always remained a faithful disciple of Father Ollier. We do not know in what circumstances he joined the Society, in 1784 at the age of 24. But it is sure that his novitiate at *La Solitude*, in Issy, made of him a true Sulpician. His correspondence shows his fidelity to the founder.

For instance, in a letter to M. Garnier, the Director of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice announcing the death of a confrere and friend, he writes: *“I am sorry to announce the death of our dear Father Pontanier. In everything his behavior showed the spirit of the Society: a great detachment for the things of the world, a spirit of poverty, a great simplicity and modesty in his clothing and in his furniture, an edifying moderation and mortification enjoying only what was most common... in him I lose a support, a counselor, a friend... Father Pontanier was buried in the cemetery of our Sisters of Bourg-Saint-Andéol of which he is part founder.”* (Viviers, October 20, 1824: letter n° 55)

Father Vernet was very careful in discovering and guiding candidates for the Society. In a letter dated December 19, 1822, to Father Duclaux, he writes: *“A gentleman from Valence recently came to confer with me about his vocation. He desires very much to enter Saint-Sulpice but he must wait until his health is better. He ran himself down while teaching rhetoric in Valence. He is highly gifted for teaching. His name is Mazelier. I believe that he would be interested in going to Canada... The Bishop of Valence will agree to the departure of Father Mazelier, in the hope of having some Sulpicians in his seminary, just as does the Bishop of Mende. But my confreres and I believe that it will be in neither place that Saint-Sulpice will recruit candidates; the people from Mende and from Valence are of a character that is not that of the Society. Father Mazelier is an exception.”* (Letter n° 46)

This candidate introduced by Father Vernet is none other than Father François Mazelier, the future superior of the Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. He never did enter the Sulpicians and we regret that FATHER Vernet was not more precise in his letter in “what Father Mazelier was an exception.”

Often enough, in his correspondence with the Superior of Saint Sulpice, Father Vernet spoke about sending the candidates to Paris. He described their qualities and their weaknesses. He kept in touch with those he directed toward the capital. It was that way with Father Duclaux in a letter dated November 18, 1816: *“Father Deluol will await your final*

decisions.” He wrote to this young priest on February 22, 1817: “...As for you, without ceasing to be devoted to Saint Ignatius (he had thought of becoming a Jesuit) you think only of becoming worthy of forming good priests, and this work is not less glorious to God and advantageous to the Church. O yes, you must become a true disciple of Father Ollier, to have his spirit, his zeal for the clergy, his love for Jesus Christ sovereign priest, his trust in Mary. You will grow in their love day by day. I would like to share your happiness that would make it possible for me to spend a few months in solitude.” He then advised him to make the topics of his prayer less speculative: “It seems to me that you speak more to the spirit than to the heart.” (Letter n° 65.)

## THE ADMINISTRATOR

Father Vernet remained many years, from 1795 to 1843, in a situation of responsibility as superior of the Major Seminary of Viviers, Vicar General of the diocese, as well as superior of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. Even if he complained now and then of being overwhelmed by the diversity of his tasks, he always seemed to be comfortable in the functions he assumed.

He was gifted with good health and was never afraid of work. He wrote to his superior on September 30, 1816: “*Work tires me less than it does someone else.*” (Letter n° 27) Bishop Chabot of Mende would say of Father Vernet: “*He works like an ox.*” (Cited by Dabert, p. 315)

He was also gifted with a good mind for business. Father de Sainte Suzanne, prefect of Ardèche, once said: “*A man such as this could govern France by himself.*” (Id p. 321) In Paris, Bishop d’Hermopolis, Minister of Worship, confided to one of the division chiefs of his ministry: “*Father Vernet is the man we should have here.*”

His talents as administrator and negotiator worked marvelously well in his contacts with the civil authorities, notably at the time of repurchasing the buildings of the Major Seminary in the Episcopal city that Father Vernet hoped would be returned to the Society. (Letter n° 48) He had the satisfaction of attaining his goal.

In his correspondence with his superiors, Father Vernet always expressed himself frankly. For example, in the letter of December 19, 1822, he told Father Duclaux that he could not do everything: “*Besides being superior, I must attend to the supply room, see to a considerable part of the accounts, the repairs, and the sacristy; see to the vestry purchases, as well as to those*

of the library. Add to that the responsibilities of Vicar General. I try to rid myself of it as much as I can, but the Bishop and the priests do not overlook me. And since God will be giving us a bishop in Viviers, who will begin by living here at the Seminary, someone must take care of the provisions, the wines, the meals, of all the priests who will come to see him. Father Mathon, the bursar, is not able to do it. I end here: this is already too much. My aim is not to complain but to unload my conscience if, after having exhausted myself from work, the temporal needs of the house go from bad to worse.” (Letter n<sup>o</sup> 46) At that time, the Major Seminary lodged 120 boarders; hence, the administration was not a time or a place of rest.

To Father Garnier, the Director of Saint Sulpice who was asking his advice, Father Vernet answered from Viviers, on May 14, 1825: “*You had the graciousness of asking me if it would be wise to undertake the visit of the seminaries. After having weighed the different considerations you gave me, it seems to me that the greater glory of God requires that this visit be made. What the seminary of Paris might suffer could only be partial and passing. It might even be a very small thing because each of the monitors will increase in care and vigilance, and the young people themselves will be honored by what you will tell them before leaving.*

*On the contrary, it is urgent that you yourself evaluate all our seminaries, the superiors and the directors who govern them, the way in which our rules are observed, the abuses that may have filtered in. Besides, this visit is announced solemnly. It is very important to respect the ordinances of the general assembly. According to the letter I received from Father Cartal, I sense that you are animated by these same motives.*” (Letter n<sup>o</sup> 59)<sup>1</sup>

As Superior of the Seminary, Father Vernet planned to write a book based on the extensive experience he acquired in his dealings with young people. In 1815, he began to write a book entitled *Népotien*. But his many occupations did not allow him to bring his plans to completion. On January 1834, he complained to Father Deluol, his American correspondent, about not being able to finish his book for the following reasons: “*The*

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<sup>1</sup> M. Cartal Jean-Jacques, born February 3, 1756 in Saint Martin de Polignac (Haute-Loire), entered the Seminary of Le Puy in 1779. He became a priest of Saint Sulpice on April 5, 1783. In 1795, he was Vicar General for the diocese of Viviers at the same time as M. Vernet. After the Concordat of 1803, M. Cartal taught dogma in Lyon until 1811. In 1814, he was superior of the seminary of Bordeaux. He returned to Paris in 1817 for health reasons. He taught theology to the “solitaires”. He died at the age of 84, on May 14, 1840, a few days before Marcellin Champagnat, whom he had perhaps recruited during the summer of 1803. (Cf. Life, Bicentenary edition, Rome 1989, p.8, note n<sup>o</sup> 4)

*seminary, the diocese, the convent of Bourg, our constructions, a congregation of teaching brothers, etc. etc.*” Népotien, ou l’élève du sanctuaire (the student of the sanctuary), appeared only in 1837, in Lyon at Pélagaud, Lesne et Crozet, successors to Father P. Rusand, grande rue Mercière, n° 26.

The talents that shone in Father Vernet as an administrator were not without a few shadows. At first sight, his demeanor had nothing attractive. In 1815, he described himself quite roughly in a letter to Mother Rivier: “*Perhaps also, I have been lacking in this amenity, this indulgence, this thoughtfulness that I should acquire and that is lacking in me.*”

### THE EQUILIBRIUM OF A PERSONALITY

Father Vernet was a faith-filled priest, a perfect Sulpician, a wise administrator. His correspondence also reveals a levelheaded personality, full of common sense, and concern for detail.

Thus, experience taught him that “*The architects know absolutely nothing in what concerns a community.*” (Letter n° 27, August 30, 1820) He wrote that to his Parisian superior, Father Duclaux, after having examined the plans for the future seminary of Valence. About the one of Viviers, he has this to say: “*... It is a failed seminary, a lovely giant, a nice parade horse, but with no practical commodities...*” (Letter n° 39, November 1820)

In spite of the permanent presence of an architect, he insisted on supervising himself the work undertaken to adapt the convent of the Visitation nuns of Bourg Saint Andéol as the Mother House of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. The construction of the chapel of the Major Seminary in Viviers created many difficulties in obtaining various permissions from the Prefect or the Minister of Worship.

His correspondence with Father Houssard, Director, then treasurer of Saint Sulpice, shows a “peasant” side of Father Vernet. On October 20, 1828, he writes to him saying that “*the almonds are inexpensive and abundant. With honey and almonds, we almost have nougat.*” (Letter n° 142) Montélimar, the French capital of nougat, is very close to Viviers! And one had to know that the Parisian seminary would come to the Midi for their supplies of olive oil, wine, olives and chestnuts. We learn also that the honey is that of Orgnac, a village south of Ardèche, which today enjoys certain renown because of a chasm discovered shortly before World War II. Father Vernet ends his letter by asking his correspondent: “*Have you ever tried our wines of Languedoc? They are very high in color. This year they are abundant and excellent. Just send me a word. For the past*



*year we have been drinking only that kind and it is first class quality (St. Gilles wine) at 80F per hogshead which contains 684 liters....*” Three weeks later, in November 15, 1828, he speaks again to Father Houssard about this wine: *“We drank some throughout the year and we are still drinking some. Our bursar adds a third water. You could even put half.”* (Letter n° 144)

On March 3, 1829, he writes to the same: *“...I want you to taste our dried chestnuts. Two bales, weighing 112 K have just been shipped to you. The departure from Aubenas was scheduled for March 1. Two whole days are needed to go up to Lyon. One whole bale is for you alone. As for the other, give it to Father Gosin for himself and his friends. If you believe that Father Ferry would like to have some, you may break off a part of it for him. His consumptive wife would certainly eat some, it is very mild to the taste. I will send him the wine.”* (Letter n° 147) He adds: *“When you have time, please have someone who is skillful to measure the height of the statue of the Virgin of Saint Sulpice.”* He needed this detail for the installation of an altar in the seminary chapel.

In his correspondence, Father Vernet revealed himself to be most gentle and attentive. As a Christmas gift, he sent wine to his Parisian friends. We read in the letter dated December 6, 1836, to Father Houssard, the treasurer: *“I have not lost sight of the wines of Cornas and of Mauves about which I spoke to you.”* And he transcribed the response of a friend from Valence to whom he had asked advice: *“I took care of your errand for wine. It will be easy enough to find it in Cornas, or to purchase it from a certain individual, and to choose a good local wine... Cornas is opposite Valence. Mauves is about eight kilometers further. I believe that the wine of Mauves is barely inferior to that of Cornas. They are both of a deep red, easy on the stomach but would need to be aged. Now, my dear confrere, please send me your orders and I will hasten to fill them the best way I can.”* (Letter n° 182)

In several instances, the biographer reveals that Father Vernet took snuff. *“In spite of the fact that tobacco had become a need because of the habit he had contracted, he had made it a rule for himself never to use it in church, however long the services might be.”* (p. 336) We would have liked to learn the reason why he contracted this habit but the writer says nothing to this effect, but rather presents the fact of not taking snuff as mortification during the liturgical celebrations! This reminds us of what Brother Avit tells us about Father Colin who, while speaking to the brothers forbidding them to use tobacco, reached into his own snuffbox five times during his talk!

## THE SUPPORT OF A FOUNDRRESS

Throughout his life, Father Vernet was the firm support of Marie Rivier, the foundress of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. Born in 1768, in Montpezat, a village in the mountain region of Ardèche, Marie Rivier began her work in education in 1794, in Thueyts, not far from her native village. Very short in stature and of frail health: *“I have more courage than health,”* she would say. She had the heart of an apostle and a radiant personality.

In 1796 Marie Rivier met Father Vernet who, after Father Pontanier, was her spiritual director. This was not an easy responsibility because Marie Rivier was constantly assailed with scruples. *“All this will not last,”* he would say. *“I have always hoped that God would have pity on you.”* But the healing never came and the foundress was tormented until her death.

In his biography of Marie Rivier, Anatole Moulard writes: *“We must never lose sight of the fact that when Miss Rivier met Father Vernet, she had already, by herself, under the inspiration and help of God, conceived established at least the essential part of her works: schools, orphanages, boarding schools, instructions for Christian mothers, formation of the Sisters, evangelization of peasants, foundations, help for the poor.... If the powerful and helpful hand of Father Vernet touched the life of Mother Rivier, throughout forty years, it is justifiable to recognize that his role was more that of support, encouragement and moderation than of creation.”* (p. 93)

In 1800, Bishop d’Aviau appointed father Vernet as Superior of the Presentation. On August 5, 1801, disguised as a wig maker, the Bishop arrived in Thueyts with Father Vernet. He confirmed Miss Rivier in her charge as Superior General for life. As early as June 1801, while visiting in Thueyts for about ten days, Father Vernet had prepared a draft of the Rules and Constitutions. He enjoyed resting in Thueyts and would often bring his friends.

In 1798, Marie Rivier founded her first schools at Coucouron, Fons, Saint Martin-de-Valamas. When she left Thueyts for Bourg Saint Andéol in 1819 she had opened more than 80 schools and most of them in the diocese of Viviers. From 1819 until her death in 1838, she opened over fifty more schools in the course of travels that Father Vernet named *“apostolic journeys.”*

He was proud of the works of the Sisters and of the convent of Bourg-Saint-Andéol of which he supervised the planning. *“Our Sisters of Bourg*

*are almost (this word was added) worth curates in the parishes, and they have reawakened many of them.*" (Letter n° 42, to Father Duclaux, September 19, 1821) He always remained very attached to them: "*There are two moments,*" they would say at the seminary, "*when one can ask all the permissions one desires without fear of being refused: it is when he has celebrated Mass and when he returns from Bourg-Saint-Andéol.*" (cited by Nicolas Dabert, p. 351, in notes) On her part, Marie Rivier had complete confidence in Father Vernet.

On February 15, 1838, from Bourg Saint-Andéol, he addressed Father Houssard, director of the seminary at Saint-Sulpice: "*On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of this month, we had the sorrow of losing our superior and foundress, Marie Rivier: She remembered the pleasure of seeing you in her house.*"

After the death of the foundress, whom he had assisted in her last moments, Father Vernet was amazed at the healings attributed to her intercession. On March 7, 1839, he wrote to the same Father Houssard telling him that Mother Rivier had healed the Most Honored Father. And since his correspondent's vision was poor, he proposes to make a novena through the intercession of the Mother: "*We will make the novena here (in Viviers) and at the convent. I have sent you some little things that she used. There is much talk about healings through her intercession. One healing in particular is about a young girl who had lost the use of her eyes for several months. I have the doctor's attestation in due form.*" (Letter n° 192)

Father Vernet was personally interested in beginning the process in view of her beatification. This beatification actually took place under the pontificate of John Paul II.

A contemporary of Marcellin Champagnat, Marie Rivier (1768-1838) resembled him in many aspects: trust in God, in Mary, zeal, love for her Sisters, humility, faith. A few quotations of the Mother will highlight these similarities:

*"If I had had money to do my work, I would never have been able to do it, and I would never have dared to undertake them; but since I had nothing, I always hoped that God would do everything.*

*I can assure you that it is this good Mother who does everything in this house... I acted without really knowing what I was doing, and the Blessed Virgin led everything, directed everything, did everything.*" (To her Sisters, September 7, 1821)

She would half-jokingly say that if God allowed her to do it, she would go to Paradise to get Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Saint Stanislaus Kostka and all these young saints who had lived but a short time on earth, so that they might return to work for God and help win souls.

“Yes, *my children*,” she would say often, “*I am your mother and I carry you in my heart.*” (To the orphans)

She never accepted to establish a school without a formal request from the pastor and approved by the mayor. She insisted on a house that was suitable but without luxury. As much as possible, she received the poor children gratuitously and asked of the others a minimal tuition.

## **THE FAILURE IN THE FOUNDATION OF THE BROTHERS**

In spite of all his efforts, Father Vernet, who had been an efficient and permanent support for the foundress of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, did not succeed in establishing the Brothers of the Christian Instruction in the diocese of Viviers.

## **A BEGINNING WITH NO TOMORROW**

As early as the end of 1803, Father Vernet laid the first foundations of the novitiate of the Brothers in Thueyts but was not able to follow his foundation closely enough because of his many responsibilities as Vicar General and as Superior of the seminary of Viviers. He began by confiding to Father Boisson the direction of the novitiate, soon transformed into a minor seminary. Father Boisson was then transferred as assistant to Father Pierre Richard, aging chaplain of Notre Dame de Lablachère, in the southern part of the department. Father Richard had welcomed a former Brother of the Christian Schools, Joseph Boyer, who had taken in four other Brothers to teach Catechism as well as to assure the primary education in the villages surrounding the sanctuary. They were called “Brothers of Notre Dame de Bon Secours.” In spite of his efforts and the support of Father Vernet, Jean-Antoine Boisson never succeeded in opening a novitiate for the “Little Brothers.”

## **A LEGAL AUTHORIZATION FOR A BUDDING CONGREGATION**

In order for the Brothers to have a legal status under the name of “*Brothers of Christian Instruction of the Diocese of Viviers*,” they had to wait for the arrival of Msgr. André Molin. On March 19, 1825, Msgr. Frayssinous presented the bishop with the certified copy of the royal ordinance,

signed on March 10, by King Charles X. (Pierre Zind, *Les nouvelles congrégations de Frères enseignants en France, de 1800 à 1830*, Saint-Génis-Laval 1969, p. 333)

On May 14, 1825, Father Vernet wrote from Viviers to Father Garnier, the director of the Saint-Sulpice Seminary in Paris: *“I do not want to forget a concern about which I would like you to tell me candidly what you think. Our prefect and bishop are desirous that we do for the boys in the mountain villages and among the poor who abound in this area what the Sisters of the Presentation are already doing for the girls; that is, that we gather the children to draw them out of their poverty and misery, teach them manners and piety and prepare them for a state in life. We will, in a short time, have regenerated all this countryside. Most of these children, boys and girls, are brought up in idleness and laziness and they often take to the roads to beg. You can imagine what happens then. It is hoped that I get the work going. I can see that if I don’t move, nothing will happen. As for me, I would form one of our seminarians inclined toward this kind of work, to place him at the head of a nucleus of brothers who would band together on one of our properties, very close to Viviers. The brothers would have a novitiate there and would be assigned to solicit alms throughout the Vivarais and to direct the children as well. We could then establish larger houses. The project seems easy enough in its execution once the first elements are established. My age and my occupation do not allow me to follow this work that is a major project and which can serve as a model for many departments. But I would be happy to initiate the process and it would not be a difficult task for me. However, I do not want to do anything if our most honored Father and you see too many obstacles. It is but a development and improvement given to what our Sisters are doing with the girls. The plans have been conceived for a long time and will not be difficult to execute. My plan is to confide the work to one of my nephews who is the pastor of a district and who seems capable of directing such a project. I would be there only as an advisor and I hope it will be soon.”* (Letter n<sup>o</sup> 54)

These lines are surprising coming from a man who, for more than twenty-five years, had accompanied the foundation of Marie Rivier and thus should have known about the difficulties surrounding it. There is no allusion to the Brothers of Notre Dame de Bon Secours: had they disappeared? On June 8, 1825, he announced to the same correspondent: *“As for our work, the bishop is giving me my nephew to direct it. He is 36 years old and healthy.”* (Letter n<sup>o</sup> 61)

## AN AMBITIOUS AND WIDELY DIFFUSED PROSPECTUS

Several years before the revolution of 1830, Father Vernet drew up a project that he communicated to very important people among whom was the Count of Voghé, first a deputy then a peer of France. The events of July 1830, pushed him to publish a prospectus in which he detailed the mission of the Brothers. Below are some extracts given to us by Nicholas Dabert:

*“Religion, decent manners, humanity have been groaning for a long time over the misery of the inferior class of the Vivarais, especially in the mountain areas, and on the deplorable consequences of this misery...*

*Besides that, there is a great number of children found or abandoned, which the department has confided to mercenary foster parents for a great sum; others are in hospitals; and since no one is there to care for them, around the age of 12 years, they end up mixing in with troops of vagabonds.*

*What a great work it would be if we could at least lessen so many ills gathered together or perhaps even end them! ...*

*The fundamental way, to which everything else is attached, is to gather these young children, to raise them well, give them some religious principles, teach them how to work, provide a trade for all of them, and make them useful to society.*

*This pious enterprise is very simple in its elements and in its execution. It will surely be insufficient to begin with; but it will perfect itself and will grow each year, and it is easy to see that in some time soon it will attain some of the advantages, which we can morally hope for.*

*This work of charity must naturally be divided into two branches: an establishment for the boys and another for the girls.*

*The Sisters of the Presentation of Mary have already formed such an establishment for the girls a long time ago in the diocese of Viviers.*

*What has been started for the girls is easy enough to do for the little boys. First of all, there is a need for a religious Congregation that has the same goals as that of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. It exists, and it has been authorized by a royal ordinance; there only remains to give it more ample direction, which takes in the work of little children who have been found or who are indigent. It is the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Instruction, which has already been tried at Notre Dame de Lablachère, and which we will continue on a larger scale. Everything leads us to believe that candidates will not be lacking. They will be submitted to a novitiate of two years, during which time the degree of virtue of each one, his capacity, the kind of work he is able to do, will be known.*



*Those who seem more open to teaching and like it will be applied to teaching in the primary schools. The others will be sent to supervise and care for the poor children, instruct them in religion show them how to work, and teach them a trade for which each one seems to be suited.*

*There will, therefore, be among the Brothers, plowmen, gardeners, bakers, tailors, cobblers, weavers, manufacturers of wool, etc., masons, even locksmiths, carpenters, etc.*

*The various workshops should be in place in the establishment and no child should have to leave without having been formed in one or another of these various trades.*

*A zealous priest appointed by the Bishop will preside over the novitiate that will be located only in the motherhouse.*

*The different houses where the little boys will be gathered can be only in the country side as distant as possible from any other housing so that they may have more quiet time, and so that the children will not be exposed to finding themselves in contact with other children of their age, who could be of a bad example or who could try to convince them to leave the establishment.*

*It is necessary that the establishment have sufficient possessions to occupy all these people, and to equip the various workshops just spoken about, as well as the necessary shops.*

*Two large adjoining houses surrounded by a small property are already available to begin the work. And it is hoped that divine Providence will soon furnish the means of obtaining more considerable ones and then the work will operate to our expectation.*

*If God deigns to bless our first efforts, other secondary establishments will also be founded and will be like branches, where the little children, especially those incapable of working yet, will be gathered.” (Dabert, pp. 292-296)*

How can a man with such a long experience of government be able to write: “*What has been begun for the girls, will be as easy to do for the little boys,*” when he is aware of the concerns of Marie Rivier and does not ignore that the progress of her work resulted from the constant solicitude of the foundress for her sisters?

Father Vernet had a great vision, but his utopia took on the appearance of a fantasy: he had hoped to find candidates, have the bishop appoint a zealous priest in charge of the novitiate... everything was in a future that the present failed to announce.

## **A FOUNDATION WHICH DOES NOT TAKE OFF**

In 1833, faced with the lack of candidates, Father Vernet published a circular letter to call in volunteers and sent those who presented themselves to Avignon, to the novitiate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. All this to say that he had not found a single Master of Novices among the priests of Viviers. *“The time of their novitiate over,<sup>2</sup> Father Vernet recalled them all to him in order to give them his instructions, their habit, their names, their tasks, and a provisional rule.”* (Nicolas Dabert, p. 290) This was lightly stated, but one can readily question the daily guidance these young men received from a man who was already overburdened with work.

## **BUT WHICH REMAINS A PROTECTED TERRITORY**

In 1837, Father Vernet called the novitiate back to direct it more immediately, which leads us to believe that the work was not progressing very well.

Yet, the Vicar General was protective of this foundation since, that same year, he wrote to the archbishop of Lyon asking that Marcellin Champagnat withdraw his Brothers from two houses they had founded in Ardèche: Boulieu and Peaugres. (CF. doc 148 and 150, in Letters of the F. Champagnat, Paul Sester – Rome 1976)

We know that our Brothers did not leave Ardèche and that Father Vernet confided the government of the Brothers to his bishop, Msgr. Guibert. However, on April 29, 1843, five days before his death, he was still taken up with his Brothers!

How can the failure of Father Vernet as founder of the Brothers of Viviers be explained?

## **BROTHERS WITHOUT ROOTS**

In his biography, Nicolas Dabert gives an explanation: *“The members of the congregation were bound to their vocation only by the free choice of*

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<sup>2</sup> Brother Avit writes in the Annals: “In 1834, Father Vernet sent 10 young men to the novitiate of Avignon to take on the spirit of the Brothers of the Blessed de la Salle; in order not to indebt himself, he recalled them after 3 months.” (Annals of the Institute, Vol 2, p. 94)



*their will. Conveniently applied, this disposition could have had broad advantages. From the Society of Saint Sulpice where he had found it, Father Vernet passed it on to the Congregation of the Sisters of the Presentation; he wanted to introduce it also in the Institute of the Brothers but it was the downfall of the budding community... Also, when his faltering hands placed the work of the Brothers into those of Bishop Guibert, was he determined to introduce religious vows?"* (p. 298) This remark seemed to contradict what the same author reports about the voluntary candidates that Father Vernet sent to be formed in the novitiate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in Avignon. Could a novitiate be complete without the profession of religious vows?

By comparison, we recall how Marcellin, from the very beginning of his foundation gave his disciples a formation to religious life, even if they did at first commit themselves only by promises. He had felt the importance of this commitment to stabilize the Brothers in their vocation.

#### **A FOUNDER WITHOUT A PRESENCE**

By reason of his responsibilities, Father Vernet could not dedicate much time to his foundation, even less live with his Brothers. Did he not declared in one of his letters: *"I have given everything to the diocese, my fortune, my health, my life, my spirit and my heart."* (Dabert p. 349)

Now we remember that as early as 1818, Marcellin came to live with his Brothers and that he remained with them until his death. Considering the material he had to construct his religious family, he understood that nothing solid could be done without the presence of a father in the midst of his sons. The testimony of Brother Laurent is eloquent in this area.

In 1824, when his work had received the support of Msgr. de Pins, Marcellin refused the pastorate of La Valla in order to consecrate himself to the construction of l'Hermitage de Notre Dame. At the same time as the construction of the house of stones, he continued to construct the spiritual edifice of a community of Brothers to whom he could say: *"I breathe only for you."* The Brothers always called him *"the good Father!"*

In his desire to give Brothers to the diocese, Father Vernet had the capability of organizing his community by writing a rule, but he did not have what it took to give it breath. He lacked a mystique. How is it for example, that he never thought of giving them a name, when one knows all that this can suppose in a spiritual journey? Can one imagine the life of the first Brothers at La Valla without the name of Mary?

In short, it could be said that Father Vernet appeared as an initiator and administrator of a group of Christian instructors, while Marcellin Champagnat is the founder and the father of a community of apostles of youth.

One year after the death of Father Vernet, the Brothers of Viviers were united to the Little Brothers of Mary, after those of Saint Paul-Trois-Châteaux (1842). This union was at the origin of a rapid expansion of the Institute in the middle of France, from the novitiate of Labégude, which was transferred to Aubenas in 1878. At the end of the century more than a thousand Brothers, natives of l'Ardèche were working on the five continents. Two among them became Superior Generals: Brother Théophile, from 1883 to 1907, and Brother Stratonique, from 1907 to 1920.

# *Essay on the origins of spirituality*

*Br. André LANFREY, FMS*

Having completed a rather long study of 188 A4 pages bearing the above title and published by the General House in Rome during the Chapter, I thought it appropriate to present here an abridged version in the form of an article. Readers are asked to overlook a certain lack of nuances in the thought and the rarity of the bibliographical references, due to the necessity of making this as short as possible.

## **1/ DEFINING THE SPIRITUALITY**

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A/ ITS THREE COMPONENTS: ASCETICAL, MYSTICAL, THEOLOGICAL

In the French language, the term “spirituality” began to be commonly used at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the meaning that we give it today. Father Champagnat and Brother John-Baptist, speak rather of “perfection” and of “holiness” to designate the same reality. Obviously, the change in vocabulary is not purely formal: it really expresses that today we are evolving into a mental universe different from theirs.

In fact, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century religion is steeped in an anti mystical context that settled in at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the condemnation of Quietism of Molinos, of Madame Guyon and of Fénelon. It was what a historian of spirituality called: “The twilight of the mystics.”<sup>3</sup> Hereafter, all mystical talks as suspected of creating illusions, spiritual laziness and even secret moral turpitudes. Holiness is founded on asceticism

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Cognet

(the famous “solid virtues”), on prayer. Mystique is only considered as a special grace that God grants to whomever he wants to lead into a “extraordinary way”, “admirable but not imitable.” What is important is holiness acquired through “ordinary ways.”

Yet, this way of looking at a relationship with God does have the disadvantage of offering a soul a way that is more stoic than Christian, more heroic than holy. And many have become discouraged before a program offering them the cross without the resurrection. However, it is also true that previous, mystical literature continued to be read. Above all, many souls continued to live an authentic mystical life, but they lived it either in silence, or in expressing their experience in ascetical terms, the only ones that seemed to be legitimate. From there came this enormous and mediocre ascetic production of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which we were often so poorly formed.

By giving the term “spirituality” a more modern twist, the authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wanted to return to a concept of spiritual life more conformed to Tradition and to the needs of souls. For them, spirituality has three complementary aspects: first of all, a mystical aspect, “*the experience of radical passivity,*” an awareness “*of a new invasion by something or someone who thereafter takes the initiative of life.*”<sup>4</sup> But this passivity is not inertia: it is the transformer of the spirit and of behavior. It leads into a struggle with self in order to perfect one’s spiritual dispositions. In short, it is asceticism. But the encounter with the indescribable gives the spiritual person an intelligence of the ways of God that allows him to formulate, because of his own experience, a true theology which, even if it is grounded on dogmatic theology, is first of all a theology of experience.

Whenever I speak of Marist spirituality, it will therefore be under its triple mystical, ascetical and theological aspect. And my goal will be to show that behind the essentially ascetical statement of the Institute, there is the outline a true mystical and spiritual theology of great value.

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## B/ TWO WITNESSES OF A MARIST MYSTIQUE

The story of two of our first Brothers who manifested mystical gifts has been preserved for us in the *Biographies of a few Brothers*. The first, Brother Dorothée, was an almost illiterate cowherd. He is considered

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<sup>4</sup> Dictionnaire de spiritualité, article “Mystique,” col. 1893.

however, as an expert in the science of saints, to the point where a priest who questioned him on the love of God found that he spoke like a doctor. Once, after the evening meal, Father Champagnat questioned him on the reading of the Imitation of Jesus Christ that had just been heard. Since he did not know what to reply, he excused himself in these terms:

“Forgive me, Father, but the verse of the Imitation of Jesus Christ which we just read caused me to forget everything else [...] I noticed that the whole life of Jesus was but a cross and a martyrdom, **and these words made such a great impression upon me, that I cannot explain it.**”

And so, Brother Dorothée naïvely revealed in public that a spiritual word had led him beyond himself, into a real ecstasy. One must read his biography where it is written about his method of making the Stations of the Cross, and of attending Mass, essentially affective, without words, and at the same time strongly theological since he was meditating on the Incarnation and Redemption. Brother Dorothée was definitely a great spiritual who without being aware of it.

The first disciple of Father Champagnat, Brother Louis, was a spiritual man who was more learned: his biography developed a long conversation with Father Champagnat on the *Treatise of the Love of God of St. Francis de Sales*, one of the monuments of mystical literature. Above all, a few days before his death, he confided to a brother:

“O Brother! How sweet is love! How strong is love! If you only knew how much I am under attack! In meditation, at Holy Mass, and especially after Communion, I feel my heart all aflame, and so filled with ineffable delight that I feel transported [...]. I cannot do anything else! In the end, love is sufficient for me, and hereafter, I only want to study, contemplate and love Jesus my Savior, my love and my beatitude.”

Such words are worthy of the greatest mystics, and the fact that they have been preserved shows that the Institute was a place capable of understanding the state of a person invaded by the presence of God. Yet, this passage seems to be forgotten today, probably because like many pearls of the Marist spirituality, it has been drowned in edifying and ascetical statement not adapted to our mentality.

Let us end this part by affirming that there really exists a Marist mystique, but more often lived than explicitly expressed, preserved in the state of traces in our texts, because the anti-mystical ambiance and the necessity to present the Brothers with a simple doctrine imposed a rather ascetical and normative statement. However, if we take a little trouble to read Marist literature with spiritual spectacles, we can perceive richness up to now unsuspected.

## 2/ THE ELABORATION OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF CHAMPAGNAT

To discover the mystique of disciples is to return to the one who formed them: the Founder. Unfortunately, he did not leave us with a systematic exposé of his spirituality and we must content ourselves – especially for his first years – with rare documents or only evoking the subject indirectly. It is nonetheless permitted, as we explore his resolutions of 1812, of 1815 as well as his resolutions for holidays to draw out a few lines of development.

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### A/ HIS EDUCATIONAL VOCATION

The first axis appears to me as being contained in an expression that keeps coming back several times: *“to teach the rich and the poor”*<sup>5</sup> which is inscribed in the tradition of J.B. de la Salle who was preoccupied with welcoming both the rich and the poor in his schools, because the Christian doctrine is for everyone. This will end up with *“we need Brothers”* which shows the originality of Champagnat in the midst of a Marist group.

A strong Marian devotion is combined with this project. Still manifested in an ordinary way in 1812, it took on a more personal twist and an even more profound one in 1815. In fact, in his resolutions that year, Champagnat declared himself to be *“a slave”* of Mary. And the prayer to Mary at the end of his holiday resolution that year was a lot more personal than the one of the preceding year:

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Resolution (1814)

“It is with your help, o holy Virgin, that I hope to abide by this little resolution. Through your intercession, may it be pleasing to your Divine Son and may he keep me from sin and everything that could be displeasing to him during this time of holidays and throughout my life. Amen. P.B.J.C. (Praised be Jesus Christ)”

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Resolution (1815)

“Holy Virgin, I do not ignore that without your protection I am incapable of faithfully executing this little resolution on the exercises and the occupation of time during my holidays; that is why I implore your powerful intercession with God and I hope that, because of your tenderness for sinners who desire their conversion, you will obtain for me the grace of accomplishing it punctually and this for the greater glory of your most merciful Son. Amen.”...

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<sup>5</sup> The rich is the one who enjoys a situation that allows him to live in a relative security; the poor is the one who lives day by day.

A third aspect, clearly marked in his resolutions of 1812, is the struggle against pride.

It seems to me, therefore, that when he manifested his desire to found the Brothers to the other Marist aspirants, Champagnat expressed the first synthesis of his spirituality. Because, for a priest, what is the significance of founding a congregation of Brothers? It is to dedicate oneself to the last rung of the apostolic system whose most honorable functions are preaching, missions, seminaries, colleges. He was ready for a life lived in humility, because he perceived a call and he probably discovered in himself a talent for caring for children. His encounter with Montagne, the young man who was dying, was the result of an itinerary already sketched as early as 1810-1812.<sup>6</sup>

Let us add that this itinerary was personal. Champagnat was so conscious about it that he considered almost to the end that the Brothers were not the Society of Mary but rather a later branch, therefore, not being part of the contract entered into by Marists by means of the Formula of 1816.<sup>7</sup> His encounter with Montagne is therefore for him both a sign from heaven, and a stumbling block because how could he reconcile his own revelation with that of the tree with three branches considered by the Marist aspirants?

As far as his personal relationship with Mary went, it was enriched at the heart of the Marist group, even if, like several of the early Marist aspirants—among whom J.C. Colin—Champagnat adhered to the project of Society of Mary because he found in it the accomplishment of an earlier personal aspiration.

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B/ THE FORMULA AND THE CONSECRATION OF JULY  
23, 1816

Champagnat certainly participated in the elaboration of this charter of the Society of Mary in the course of the spring of 1816 and he was certainly present at the consecration of Fourvière. We must note the fact however, that in his biography, *Life*, Brother John-Baptist does not mention the event or the text that was then pronounced. Is this not an indication that the Brothers consider themselves as tributaries of a traditional and

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<sup>6</sup> The resolutions taken by Champagnat dated in 1812 seem to have been written several times.

<sup>7</sup> It was also of the opinion of P. J.C. Colin: "The idea of this Institute was his own" (OM, doc. 819).

spiritual tradition?

At first sight, the text of the Formula<sup>8</sup> seems to be highly constructed. But the attentive reader is struck by the many repetitions as though two or three distinctive editions had been merged. The conclusion in particular, seems autonomous from the rest. Briefly, I put forward the hypothesis that the Formula reveals two or three distinct tendencies at the heart of the primitive Marist group, as is indicated in the table below, which shows that at the cost of a few minor modifications the three texts

Conclusion	1 <sup>st</sup> Source	2 <sup>nd</sup> Source
<p>“We solemnly promise to give ourselves and all that we possess, for the salvation of souls in every possible way, working in the name of the Virgin Mary and under her auspices. In this whole matter, however, we remain submissive to the judgment of our Superiors. Praised be the Holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary! Amen.”</p>	<p>“We, the undersigned [...] through the present act and our signature, dedicate ourselves irrevocably, ourselves and everything that we have, as much as possible, to the <b>society of the B. V. Mary</b>. And this commitment we contract not lightly and like children, nor for a human motive or with the hope of a temporal interest, but seriously after having reflected maturely, taken counsel and weighed all things before God, for the sole glory of God and the honor of Mary the mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ [...] with all our strength attaching ourselves <b>to the most holy leader of the Church, the Roman Pontiff and also to our most revered ordinary Bishop</b>, so that we might be good ministers of J.C. nourished with words of faith and with the good doctrine that we have received through his grace.”</p>	<p>“We, the undersigned, wishing to labor for the greater glory of God and of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, affirm and publicly declare that it is our sincere intention and firm purpose to dedicate ourselves, as soon as is opportune, to the foundation of the pious Congregation of the <b>Marists</b> [...] Hence, we commit ourselves, for that purpose, to difficulties, work, suffering and, if necessary, every kind of torture. We can do everything in him who strengthens us, Jesus Christ, to whom we promise fidelity <b>in the bosom of our Mother, the Holy, Roman and Catholic church</b> [...] <b>We are confident that under the peaceful and religious rule of our very Christian king</b>, this excellent foundation will see the light of day.”</p>

<sup>8</sup> See edition of the *Life* in 1989, appendix 3 at the end of chapter 3 p. 32



become coherent:

It could be that the conclusion is but the recapitulation of the text that precedes it and therefore does not testify to a particular tendency. Nonetheless, it adds two important ideas, implicit only in the body of the Formula: to save souls and honor the Immaculate Conception of Mary. On the other hand, in his Spiritual Testament, Father Champagnat twice used the expression “*under the auspices of Mary*”<sup>9</sup> which was utilized in this conclusion. Therefore, I wonder if this one translates rather the older formula of adhesion of the Marist aspirants, at once vague and succinct. The two other texts, remarkable in coherence in spite of the cuts, seem to translate clearly two opposing tendencies: source 1 defines a “*society of the B. V. Mary*” and does not allude to the most Christian king. The second one uses the term “*Marist*”, considers a heroic apostolate, makes a clear allusion to the king but does not speak about obedience to the bishop.

We can therefore put forth a first hypothesis, of a chronological type. Therefore—as I have already stated—the conclusion would indicate a first phase; source 1 would be a second one, at a time when cardinal Fesch had not yet been challenged and when the Restoration of the royalty had not yet been achieved, that is when Napoleon was still in power (the first time he abdicated was on April 6, 1814) or a little later during the 100 days (March-June 1815). Source 2 is obviously at the time of the Restoration. The use of the term “*Marist*” and its somewhat exalted character, betrays the influence of Courveille.

We immediately see the problem caused by this hypothesis which supposes that the Marist group existed as early as 1814 while Courveille constitutes the “*Marists*” only in 1815-1816. However, J. C Colin backs up this hypothesis by always affirming that a project existed before Courveille and that the latter (Courveille) only revealed the society. Besides, in a recently found document,<sup>10</sup> M. Pousset, Marist aspirant, mentions that he had been in contact with the “*Marists*” as early as 1814-1815.<sup>11</sup>

But these bits and pieces can be seen in a non-chronological order: like a simple division of a Marist group of 1816 into two tendencies, some more moderate, the others more fanatical. Let us note that Champagnat, who always referred to his Brothers as “*Brothers of Mary*” and not as

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<sup>9</sup> By distinguishing her elsewhere from belonging to the society.

<sup>10</sup> Archives of the Carthusians, autobiography of M. Pousset.

<sup>11</sup> The word “*Marist*” certainly did not exist in 1814-15 but Pousset evokes, the period of November 1814-May 1816, during which he was in contact with the Marist aspirants.

“*Marists*”, seems to have adhered rather to the moderate camp. In any case, that there might have been from the beginning at least, two tendencies at the interior of the group of Marist aspirants which bears no doubt about the fact that the rivalry between Courveille and J. C. Colin during the years 1822-1830 seems to flow from it.

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## C/ INFLUENCES ON THE FORMULAIRE

But let us go beyond this critical historical problem to return to the spirituality revealed by this document. First of all, the insistence granted to obedience to the church, the pope, the superiors, is indicative of the main preoccupation of the young clergy at the time that wants to reestablish the spirit of religion by promoting obedience to religious and civil hierarchy. The influence of Mr. Bochart, the Vicar General, is also strongly felt in this way. Msgr. Dubourg, the bishop of New Orleans, who resided at St. Irénée for several weeks in the spring of 1816, gave several conferences to the seminarians praising both the mission and the obedience.<sup>12</sup>

But, to a more fundamental degree, the *Formulaire* is marked by the second epistle to the Corinthians, chapters 2-6 in which the apostle develops a theology of apostolic ministry: the favorable time has arrived; the ministers of the new covenant must work in the service of the Kingdom in spite of all kinds of tribulations.

But we must also link the consecration of Fourvière to the ordination that took place the preceding day and which the priestly spirituality considers as a new Pentecost. Moreover, this assimilation is very clear in Marie d’Agréda, the controversial Spanish mystic, but faithfully read by J.C. Colin and probably also by Champagnat<sup>13</sup> who considered that Pentecost, obtained through the intercession of Mary, launched the apostles into the world of evangelization:

“By this benefit, [...] the twelve apostles were elevated, renewed and made capable of being ministers of the new Covenant (II Cor 3:6) and founders of the Church throughout the whole universe because this new grace [...] led them [...] to practice what there was most heroic in all the virtues and most sublime in holiness.”

Therefore, the “*Formulaire*” expressed a high apostolic and Marian

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<sup>12</sup> Archives of the Carthusians, spiritual notes of Mr. Pousset.

<sup>13</sup> In 1840, his library had a copy of her *Cité Mystique*.

spirituality and gave us one of the keys of interpretation to the spirituality of Champagnat, that was life-giving, apostolic and Marian at the same time.

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D/ THE LETTERS OF FATHER CHAMPAGNAT

The years 1816-27, the most decisive for Champagnat, are almost devoid of any document coming from him. Only the letter of December 1, 1823 to Brother Jean-Marie Granjon, gives a few insights, notably when Father Champagnat mentioning that a novice who has just arrived is a “*man of nothing*”<sup>14</sup> immediately bounces back spiritually: “*but with nothing God had done great things.*” It is a transparent allusion to the Magnificat, manifesting at the same time a Marian mystique, humility and confidence in God. He closes by calling himself “*father in Jesus and Mary.*”

This last closing returns frequently in his future letters, but in 1823, it is highly meaningful: the Brothers are still at La Valla and they have already given him the title of “*father*” to which Champagnat gives a spiritual meaning by joining to it *Jesus and Mary*. It is more understandable then why M. Courveille who arrived at La Valla only in June 1824 never succeeded in imposing himself as superior because the spiritual bond woven with the Brothers since 1817 was already strongly knit: Champagnat, and no one else was “*father in Jesus and Mary.*”

The year 1827 provided Champagnat with an occasion to write a true expression of his spirituality after the great trials of his illness, the rivalry with Courveille and finally the departure of the latter along with M. Terrailon. Four drafts of letters to his ecclesiastical superiors<sup>15</sup> express his disarray before this “*terrible effort of hell,*” his solitude, (“*Here I am the only priest*”) but also his confidence in Jesus and Mary, his perseverance in spite of everything (“*This upsets me but does not discourage me*”), his conviction that “*God wants this work*” even if his ways are hidden. It is one of these rare moments when Champagnat, evoking the struggle between Satan and the Society of Mary, discretely manifests an eschatological idea, much more present in Father Colin. Above all, the *Nisi Dominus* found for the first time in his writings, summarized a spirituality of abandonment during

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<sup>14</sup> That is without a trade, without any definite competency.

<sup>15</sup> To Msgr. de Pins (letter 6), to Mr. Gardette (letter 3), to a Vicar General (letter 4), to Mr. Barou (Letter 7).

the dark night of trials, which reminds us of the great mystics.

He used similar terms, but expressed in greater moderation in 1838, at a time when the deterioration of his health gave him a premonition of his oncoming death. In a letter to Brother François<sup>16</sup> announcing his failure in the effort to obtain an official authorization for his Institute:

*“I am very annoyed but not disconcerted; I always have great confidence in Jesus and Marie [...] God knows best what becomes us and what is good for us...”*

Another aspect of Champagnat was manifested in the fifteen circular letters spaced out over 1828 to 1840 where his paternal tenderness burst forth. The Hermitage appeared as the sanctuary of the Society of Mary, a true mystical place<sup>17</sup>, a replica of the Cenacle, a closed garden where Jesus and Mary have gathered their children so that they can live and die under their auspices, in peace, charity (*“one heart and one soul”*) but also in a struggle for the glory of God. One finds themes written between the lines such as *“the unknown and the hidden,”* of *“Mary first superior”* and *“ordinary resources.”* As early as 1828, this spirituality had matured enough to express itself in a concise formula:

*“God has loved us from all eternity; he has chosen and separated us from the world. The Blessed Virgin has planted us in her garden, she has seen to it that we lack for nothing.”*

Likewise, in a letter to Msgr Pompallier in 1836 he describes the progress of the society of Brothers<sup>18</sup> to whom he attributes the merit to the name of Mary:

*“Had it not been for this holy name, without this miraculous name no one be speaking about our society any longer... Behold Mary, she is all the resource of our society [...]. Mary, yes, Mary alone is our prosperity, without Mary we would be nothing and with Mary we have everything, because Mary always has her adorable Son either in her arms or in her heart.”*

This couple, Jesus - Mary, so strongly evoked here, is found elsewhere in the closing of this letters, either when Champagnat affirms himself as *“father in Jesus and Mary”*, or in a more audacious formula: *“the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary”*<sup>19</sup> which seeks to want to express the conscious-

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<sup>16</sup> Letter 197, of June 23, 1838

<sup>17</sup> One can suppose an influence from la *Cité mystique* of Marie d'Agréda.

<sup>18</sup> Strangely, Father Champagnat makes no reference to the Society of the Fathers, as if the Brothers were the Society of Mary.

<sup>19</sup> In good doctrine, it is better to say the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Holy Heart of Mary.

ness of such an intimacy between them that they are inseparable, and therefore the attributes of one are applicable to the other.

All things considered, like many of the founders and foundresses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Champagnat was a high flying spiritual person but more affective than speculative, unless he had never had the time to put his doctrine in writing. Nonetheless, he expressed it sufficiently so that one might judge that he had experienced, in abandonment to God in the midst of trials and in a vibrant awareness of the intimacy between Jesus and Mary, a true mystique served by a spiritual theology rarely made explicit in writing.

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## E/ THE SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT

Obviously, the Spiritual Testament of M. Champagnat, read a few weeks before his death, is a very rich document, but which poses many difficult questions to be resolved. And before speaking about it, the circular letter of January 19, 1836 must be evoked. It seems to have played the role as a first testament offering to the Brothers a true program of holiness founded on humility, obedience, charity, and zeal. Champagnat was inspired by Saint Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 and in 2Timothy 4:6-8:

*“Courage then, my very dear Brothers, the sorrows and struggles of life last but a moment. Let us often look to the great glory which will forever be our reward, remembering incessantly that the just judge will crown only the one who will have conquered and persevered to the end.”*

As far as the Testament itself, it can be read on several levels. It is first of all a transfer of his patrimony – the Marist Brothers – to the superior of the Society of Mary, Father Colin. On a spiritual level, it appears to be divided into two parts. It is first of all an exhortation to charity, first among the Brothers, and then toward other congregations, finally toward the Fathers of the Society of Mary and in particular its superior, Father Colin. Saint Paul’s hymn to charity can be read between the lines, (1 Corinthians 13:1-13): *“Charity is patient; charity is kind...”* as well as the evocation of the primitive Church marked by *“one heart and one soul.”*

After having spoken as founder, Champagnat expresses himself rather as a spiritual master recommending to his Brothers the exercise of the presence of God, obedience and simplicity, devotion to Mary *“the kind Mother”* and *“first superior”*... . It is surprising to see his strong expressions such as *“Mary ordinary resource”*, *“Nisi Dominus”*, *“To Jesus through Mary...”*, *“humility, simplicity, modesty”* not appearing explicitly, nor does

zeal. All in all, the program of sanctification he proposes[ to the Brothers appears to be original enough, as if Champagnat were returning to the primitive sources of his own spirituality. But it is also possible that the spirituality of the Brothers, coming from Champagnat, has already been formulated in a way that is relatively autonomous of him. We will return a little further on to this problem.

But there are other important aspects about this Testament: for example the many references to Jesus, to Mary or to Jesus and Mary which makes of this text a kind of Christological and Marian hymn.

The reference to saint Paul, probably implicit in the first part, becomes explicit in the last lines:

*“May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communication of the Holy Spirit always be with you.”*

It is exactly the salutation that the Apostle addresses at the end of his second epistle to the Corinthians and it is in order to cite the preceding verses which summarize the whole of the Spiritual Testament:

*“For all that, Brothers, be joyful: work at your perfection; encourage one another. Have the same sentiments; live in peace, and the God of Love and of peace will be with you.”*

Finally, The Testament refers to the *Formulaire* of 1816 by twice using formulas that are close to its preamble: *“All for the greatest glory of God and for the honor of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Like the *Formulaire*, and twice more, he evokes life “under the auspices” of Mary. Finally, like the *Formulaire*, the Testament is permeated with the epistles of Saint Paul. It seems to me that, in these similarities, there is more than a coincidence.

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## F/ THE INFLUENCE OF THE AAS

A certain number of Marist formulas such as *“the greatest glory of God and the honor of Mary”*, *“the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and of Mary”* or still *“one heart and one soul”* are relatively exceptional in religious literature. On the other hand, they are frequently found in a spiritual trend born in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in French seminaries and formed by small groups called the AAs, probably an abbreviation for *“Assemblée des amis”* – (*Assembly of friends.*) Their definition<sup>20</sup> is as follows:

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<sup>20</sup> Treatise of the esteem of the Aa, archives of the Jesuits, in Vanves, CA 101/2 p. 354-362

*“The Aa (Af) was a holy and secret congregation made up of chosen persons who united together by the bonds of an admirable charity, and especially consecrated to the service of Jesus and Mary under the protection of Saint Joseph and the guardian angels, forget nothing to animate themselves to piety and bring others to it.”*

Often enough, these AAs were coupled with a Marian congregation of young people from which they drew their recruits. The confreres recognized one another by their motto: C.U.A.U. (*Cor Unum et Anima Una*). Never more than twelve, they held secret meetings during which they exhorted one another to fervor and organized works of zeal. This type of organization, Jesuit in origin, was quickly copied in Sulpician seminaries, often under the name of “petites sociétés” (little societies) and whose statutes more or less closely copied those of the AAs. Their task was to promote fervor and the spirit of zeal in the seminaries, notably combating the “joyful bands”<sup>21</sup> generators of non-discipline. In its first phase of organization, the Society of Mary was one of the “little societies.”<sup>22</sup>

This is all the more probable as the recent discovery of documents<sup>23</sup> show that Jean Cholleton, the director of the first Marist group was part of an AA at the seminary of St. Irénée before 1809 and of another one at St. Sulpice in 1809-1811. Anyway, in 1813-1816, there existed at St. Irénée another “little society” other than the Marists, who were called “amis du cordon” (friends of the cord) whose motto was L.S.B.M.C.J. (*Labora sicut bonus miles Christi Jesu*), and that without counting the followers of the *Pensée pieuse* of Mr. Bochard. Like St. Irénée and St. Sulpice, many seminaries had such types of societies that often gave birth to vocations or missionary congregations.

It is possible that Courveille himself was part of an AA or of a Little Society at Le Puy. We have discovered one, but at a later date – in 1851<sup>24</sup> – which could be the heir of the one that Courveille might have known. In any case, when he arrived in Lyon, he came up with a strategy very typical of the AAs. Besides, the resolutions of Champagnat 1810-1812 seemed marked by a belonging, not to an AA, but to a Marian congregation.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Champagnat was part of one while at the seminary of Verrières.

<sup>22</sup> J. C. Colin uses the expression “little society” to designate the newly formed S.M.

<sup>23</sup> Carthugians Archives, Mioland papers.

<sup>24</sup> Life of Father Barry, Trappist at Aiguebelle.

<sup>25</sup> Invocation to Mary and to St. Aloysius Gonzaga, concern of giving good example.



It is useless to push these details any further but we need to understand that the Marist spirituality, and therefore that of Champagnat, is inscribed in a precise spiritual trend for whom the expressions “*Glory of God and honor of Mary*”, “*Sacred Hearts of Jesus and of Mary*,” “*one heart and one soul*” are current either in the statutes or in the correspondence. This trend, Jesuit in origin but assumed by the Sulpicians, is of Marian and apostolic spirit.

As far as the Marists are concerned, they differ with this tradition, because in the AAs and Marian congregations, the consecration consists in choosing Mary as Mother, Queen, patron advocate... whereas with the Marists – and it is the contribution of the “*revelation*” of Puy – it is Mary who has chosen her society and each of its members. But it is true that with the Marist Brothers, this conviction seems less notable than in the other branches.

Therefore, let us end this first part by recalling that the evolution of Champagnat seems to have known a few noticeable stages: in 1810-12 a conversion is made, perhaps in the midst of a Marian congregation; 1815-16, revelation of a spiritual maturation opening upon a personal apostolic project: founding the Brothers. About the same time, takes place the encounter with a Marist group and a commitment to a project of Society of Mary partially contradictory with the first. In 1827, there was the passage through the dark night of failure and in 1836 the awareness of his end close at hand. In 1840, Champagnat is aware of having led and unified his double task since his Brothers were from then on part of the Society of Mary, to whose construction he had greatly contributed.

As early as 1815-16, his spirituality appears to us as being profoundly Marian and apostolic. It is probable that the epistles of Saint Paul, Marie d’Agréda, the tradition of the AAS had a lasting influence on him. The trial he suffered in 1825-1827 seem to have led him into a mystique of abandonment to God expressed in the *Nisi Dominus*. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the center of his spirituality is located in the contemplation of the intimate union between Jesus and Mary, as if his spiritual theology was more founded on the Christology and the Incarnation than on a well-defined Theo centrism.

### **3/ FROM THE FOUNDER TO THE OFFICIAL DOCTRINE**

In the preceding part, I utilized only sources that came directly from Champagnat. But the memory of the Founder is also preserved in the



manuscripts and notes of Brothers John-Baptist and François who gathered on their own or from the Brothers, his oral teaching given in his many instructions. Certainly, they are sources of problematic value because these documents come from notes taken on the spot, sometimes modified or completed later. If it cannot be absolutely guaranteed that they express the spiritual theology of the Founder, they allow at least coming very close, allowing the clarification of the spiritual history of the Congregation from 1817 to 1850.

From hundreds of diverse instructions we have of the Founder or of his successors, and which are now exploitable,<sup>26</sup> I do not claim to giving an exhaustive view, but focusing on certain important points of the spirituality.

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A/ HUMILITY: FROM THE IMITATION OF MARY TO THE ASCETIC VIRTUE

Thus, on humility, a study of the manuscripts has allowed me to conclude that there was a progression from the unique notion of humility to humility coupled with simplicity to end up with the trinity of humility, simplicity, modesty: a normal process after all, but while making itself clearer, Marist spiritual theology needed to distinguish among notions close in meaning. Nonetheless, in this elaboration of a more precise doctrine, vital bonds might have been broken, causing humility to slip from the state of a spiritual attitude to that of an ascetic virtue. Whatever it may be, it appears to us as:

1<sup>o</sup> That primitive Marist humility was not conceived outside a relationship with Mary, and therefore from the Incarnation to the Trinity. But this more properly speculative aspect appeared in only a few texts and they were soon to be forgotten.

2<sup>o</sup> That Marist humility was perceived as a filial abandonment to Mary, Mother not only of persons, but also to the body that bears her name. It was in this privileged relationship between the Mother and the Son – between the Mother and the sons – illustrated by “All to Jesus through Mary...” that can be situated the basis of a true Marist mystique more lived out than thought.

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<sup>26</sup> See A. Lanfrey, *Un “chaînon manquant” de la spiritualité Marist. Les Manuscrits d’instructions des F. François et John-Baptist*, Rome, June 2000, 47 pages.

3<sup>o</sup> That Marist humility also situated itself in a monastic and ascetic tradition, which, very strong in the beginnings, seemed to fade only to triumph later with the structuring of the Congregation in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

4<sup>o</sup> That Marist humility tended to take on a social and professional color (living in a modest condition as a submissive educator vis-à-vis local authorities) to the extent that the congregation was developing itself and was specializing in the field of education.

Therefore, it is clear that the spiritual doctrine contained in the official literature of the Congregation established between 1852 and 1856 (*Règles communes, Guide des Écoles, Vie...* only indirectly reflects the original spirituality of the Institute. Thanks to the manuscripts of instructions, it seems possible to go back as far as the Founder and sometimes up to the first years of the Institute. To truly know the original spirituality of the Institute, we can no longer be content with the printed literature.

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B/ VIRTUE OF RELIGION: RENDERING ONE'S DUTIES TO GOD

When we browse through the collections of instructions left to us by Brothers John-Baptiste and François, we find many texts on Jesus and Mary which situate us well in the thought of Father Champagnat, a profusion of ascetic instructions, but very little on God or the Trinity, as if the relationship to God, the theocentricism, was unthought of in the Marist spiritual theology.

But in fact the Marist theocentricism is essentially manifested by the virtue of Religion which St. Thomas makes a virtue appended to justice:

“Justice in general consists in rendering to each one what is due to him; its “parts”

are made up of religion which is concerned with the honor and cult due to God [...], piety which concerns the duty toward parents, the ‘observantia’ which encompasses the duty toward superiors in dignity or responsibility.”<sup>27</sup>

In this way, the Marist spiritual theology develops a great many texts on sin and the horror one must have for it, the end of man, vocation, heav-

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<sup>27</sup> Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, T. article “Religion”, col. 309.

en, hell... which all have as a goal to recall the necessity of giving to God the cult that is due to him and the profound perversity of those who stray from their duties of justice on this point. If one is content to see in these texts a somewhat morbid, moralizing obsession or a religion of fear, one risks falsifying the meaning.

Likewise, when Father Champagnat or the superiors recommend respect for civil and ecclesiastical authority to the Brothers and ask that they inculcate it in the children; equally when they recommend to supervise them constantly to preserve their innocence, it is not first of all through obsession about sin and social conservatism but because they are permeated with a sense of the justice we must render to God and to his creatures.

Having said this, this virtue of religion which establishes between God and man a quasi juridical bond of justice is essentially located in the register of duties towards a sovereign God and his earthly representatives. Therefore, it implies an ascetic process, made up of fear of sin and of concern about observing the commandments. Also, a quick reading of the Marist spirituality would tend to lead one to think that the Marist is invited to render his duties to God and to love Jesus and Mary. Besides it is a schema conformed to the Catholic religiosity of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century from which the Brothers cannot completely escape.

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C/ A DISCRETE PRESENCE OF THE THEME OF THE LOVE OF GOD

But one must quickly add a nuance to this tableau because some instructions are frankly based on the love of God, such as this one treating of the “Filial spirit toward God”<sup>28</sup> which is:

“A happy disposition of the soul which makes us look at God as the best of fathers and leads us to rest peacefully in him for everything that regards us, knowing that he cares for us, and to occupy ourselves in seeking only the ways that please him and to accomplish his holy will [...]. Filial spirit is also an abandonment of self in the hands of God [...] who makes us go to God with the same freedom, the same *laissez-aller* as a cherished child....”

Let us add that Brother François reports these remarks of Father

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<sup>28</sup> Collection 307 of B. François p.993. It is probably not of F. Champagnat.

<sup>29</sup> Retreat notes, manuscript 302, p.6.

Champagnat in 1823<sup>29</sup> :

“Do you take God for a tyrant and do you believe that he established confession to tyrannize people? [...] One is content, joyful when in the service of a good master. And what better master can we have than God?”

I often ask myself if Brother François—and in this he distinguishes himself from B. John-Baptist—was not the great apostle of the love of God, because his personal journals are filled with prayers and *aspirations*<sup>30</sup> to God with a tone that is frankly mystical like this one:

“My God, my All, my sovereign good and my final End, I want nothing else but you alone. God most pure in his understanding, without any ray of light. God most pure in my will without the fire of fervor. God most pure in my heart without any sweetness of consolation.”<sup>31</sup>

It is true that, overall, Marist spirituality treats the relationship with God in a problematic way. The insistence on the great truths—very strong with Brother John-Baptist—harbors a fear that is quite superficial: less the tremor of the creature before divine grandeur than the sentiment of the servant toward his master. If the image of God the Father is present, it seems less demanding than that of a God who is a demanding master. Perhaps we can summarize the Marist spiritual theology by saying that toward God, it is essentially purgative while in the presence of Jesus and Mary it is more unitive. All in all, the Trinity is not well connected to the Incarnation.

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#### D/ THE PRESENCE OF GOD: MYSTICAL ATTITUDE OR SPIRITUAL EXERCISE?

Let us qualify the subject we have just offered by observing that the theme of the presence of God is central to the spiritual Marist theology. A chapter in the *Life* is dedicated to it. And, in his Testament, Father Champagnat considers it as the “*soul of prayer*” and therefore a general attitude toward God rather than a spiritual exercise.

The best Marist text on the presence of God is not in *Life*<sup>32</sup> but rather in a collection of instructions by Brother François<sup>33</sup>. Entitled “*Exercice de*

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<sup>30</sup> Ejaculations with a strong mystical orientation.

<sup>31</sup> Collection 303 p. 588. Text of 1844, inspired from P. Guillore

<sup>32</sup> Even if it inspires it very strongly.

<sup>33</sup> Notebook 308 p. 916 – 922.

*la présence de Dieu*” (*Exercise of the presence of God*), it is much more than that: a reflection on the divine perfections whose knowledge gives rise to fear in us but which also reveals the holiness and the goodness of God who draws us into his love. Thus, because God sees us in the most intimate part of ourselves, we become purified; then, entering into divine love, we walk with courage and swiftness toward perfection.

From this text inviting us to the unitive life with God, Brother John-Baptist draws a trite enough doctrine that had the advantage of being more easily understood. But this process, too devotional, has the disadvantage of smoothening out a notion which could hold a mystical savor. And so, when in the Institute we will use the well-used expression “*God sees me,*” it will be understood as “*God is supervising me*” when it really means: “*God accompanies with his loving eye, asking in return a filial attitude.*” And so the same expression, according to whether it is interpreted in ascetic or mystical terms, completely changes its meaning. On many subjects, the literature of the Institute appears to have chosen rather the first interpretation.

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#### E/ SPIRITUALITY OR EDUCATIVE ETHICS?

In 1853, the general chapter completed the *School Guide*, the educational charter of the Institute. But it was preceded by many instructions which remained as manuscripts, and in particular the voluminous “*Treatise on Education*”<sup>34</sup> of which one part seems to come from Father Champagnat and the other from Brother John-Baptist.<sup>35</sup> Out of these texts, emerge two syntheses of Marist education: the first considering the Brother as the guardian angel of the children<sup>36</sup>; the second treating of “*The Risen Jesus, model of the religious teacher.*”<sup>37</sup>

In the first theme, we see a sliding perspective: first, angels are seen as the celestial court divided into three hierarchies before the throne of God, becoming the guardian angels of children, that is, more or less, their devoted but vigilant guardians. The normative text of the *Guide* limits

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<sup>34</sup> Named by Br. Paul Sester “Apostolate of a Marist Brother” (A.D.F.M.)

<sup>35</sup> See A. Lanfrey, *Elaboration de la pensée Mariste*. “Apostolat d’un Frère Mariste.” *Ses sources et son influence*. 1824-1868, Rome, 2000, 70 p.

<sup>36</sup> *School Guide* 2<sup>nd</sup> part, chap. VII. This chapter is inspired from instructions on the angels contained in the manuscripts 307 p. 101, 384 and 308 p. 940.

<sup>37</sup> Collection of instructions 308 p. 1297.

the extent of the doctrine about angels, which saw them as emissions of divine attributes, perfect adorers and ministers of the divine solicitude for the cosmos and for humans. Disconnected from this tradition, the text of the *Guide* seems able to be read according to three keys: the rhetorical key which makes of the guardian angel the metaphor of the perfect educator; the ascetical key which raises the moral portrait of the Christian educator; finally, the theological key which looks at angels as images of the divine benevolence for humankind. This last key is the least visible of the three in spite of the previous instructions strongly supporting this interpretation.

Here we are once again, before the phenomenon of trivialization of the Marist doctrine, hardly avoidable in any way when one wants to transform these instructions into normative texts. From this comes a certain superficiality of the Marist educational doctrine that looks at the Brother as an obedient being (who has not revolted as did the evil angels) responsible for pouring the children into a pre-set mold. Certainly, the Brothers must act with solicitude and respect but basically, the freedom of the child is not to be taken for granted. And the image of the guardian angel appears so rhetorical and moralizing that in the *School Guide*, the Institute seems to formulate a Marist educator's ethics rather than a true spirituality.

To a certain extent, one can ask if the Marist educative practice is not more spiritual than its codification, because the letters of Father Champagnat and many other texts reveal a genuine love for children. And there we reach a distortion between doctrine and life which, for better or for worse, is of all times.

The theme of the Risen Jesus is rich in spirituality: separated from his apostles, thus living a hidden life, but instructing them, correcting them, encouraging them, taking care not only of their souls but also of their bodies, he is the perfect model of catechists. This instruction, composed in 1850, is certainly that of Brother François, at a time when the word "Instituteur" (teacher) was imposed to designate schoolteachers. It presents a willing openness, considering secular subjects as an integral part of the brother's mission as well as physical education. But it is achieved only partially because the formation of the spirit and the care of the body remain subordinate to the education of the soul. Besides it remains ambiguous with regards to the word "Instituteur" which seems to be poorly separate from the function of catechist.

Using intermediary beings between heaven and earth (angels and the Risen Jesus) as models, the Marist pedagogy appears at least in its theory, and in contradiction with the Marist spirituality itself, as a pedagogy

for the soul more than the Incarnation and by that very fact, poorly equipped to think of itself as being in coherence with the secular world which places its priorities more and more in the things of the spirit and of the body.

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CONCLUSION: "ASCETISATION" OF THE DOCTRINE?

The comparison of the manuscripts with the printed literature gives the impression that, around 1850, an "*ascetisation*" of the doctrine took place: the presence of God, at first, a general spiritual attitude, became a simple devotional exercise; humility partially detached itself from the Marian model to become an autonomous virtue; the educative spirituality struggled to find an expression that went beyond rhetoric or ethics.

On the one hand, we must agree that such an evolution was fatal in an effort to codify the doctrine. On the other, we must remember that this normative reduction was also compensated by the permanence of a powerful, oral, spiritual tradition, constantly fed by conferences of superiors returning to the teaching of Father Champagnat. The real problem is that the collection of instructions that best translate the primitive spirituality, and from which the superiors drew, were then forgotten when they could have continued to enlighten the printed literature by showing where it came from and that, after all, what they had was but a simplification and a compilation that is more or less accurate of a first Marist theology going back to the Founder.

#### **4/ THE FIRST SYNTHESSES OF THE MARIST SPIRITUALITY**

In the first part, we worked on the writings of Father Champagnat. In the second part, we showed the importance of up to now unexploited source manuscripts giving a first glimpse of a Marist spirituality, which seemed to go back to the very first years of the Institute up to around 1850 and serving as a basis for the data of the printed literature of the years of 1852-56. Now we will perform an inverse operation, that is to show that this literature, like a geological terrain, piles up layers of the earlier spiritual theology while trying more or less skillfully to construct spiritual systematic syntheses. In summary, this literature faces a formidable contradiction: to be a work of the memory and the systematization of the spirituality.

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A/ THE LIFE OF FATHER CHAMPAGNAT: IN THE

## MONASTIC TRADITION?

In the preface of this work, Brother John-Baptist situates Father Champagnat in the lineage of the great founders of monastic orders: the Fathers of the deserts, Saint Benedict, Saint Francis of Assisi, who left a rule of life to their disciples.<sup>38</sup> By doing this, Brother John-Baptist attached the rule of 1852 and Father Champagnat to a prestigious tradition, but by assimilating the Marist Brothers to a monastic order, he distorted somewhat the apostolic ideal of the origins by assimilating it to a patriarchal model. By doing this, he revealed a traditional politico-religious product of the imagination in a century that was attempting to rid itself of the patriarchal model on all levels. In a certain sense, he seemed to harden the initial Marist project so as to better found the rule of 1852 and, perhaps, better estab-

### **LIFE, p. XIV, bottom**

*“This life (of the Founder) [...] is a Rule in action, teaching us on every page what we must do in order to be pious and fervent Religious, zealous for the glory of God: in order to be filled with love for Jesus Christ; in order to be Religious truly devoted to Mary and genuine imitators of the humility, simplicity and modesty of that noble Virgin and of her hidden life. Each of us, while studying and meditating on the virtues depicted for us in that life, should say to himself: There, is the model which I ought to copy, which I must labor to reproduce; I shall be a perfect Religious, a true Little Brother of Mary, only if I bear a resemblance to that prototype of my state.”*

### **LIFE, p. XV, bottom**

*“Let us fix our eyes constantly on the one whom God has given us as Father and model; let us study his spirit of faith, his outstanding confidence in God, his burning zeal for the salvation of souls, his tender and generous love for Jesus; let us master his filial attitude towards Mary, his profound humility, his mortification, his detachment from creatures, his constancy in the service of God.”*

lish the Institute against the spirit of the world.

As for the work of the memory, this preface is precious to us because on his page IX it seems to evoke two successive phases of the primitive

<sup>38</sup> It is significant that he does not mention the founders of apostolic orders such as Ignatius of Loyola and Vincent de Paul.



**1<sup>o</sup> Interpretation of the Marist spirituality**

- 1/ "To be pious, fervent religious
- 2/ zealous for the glory of God,
- 3/ filled with love for Jesus Christ
- 4/ religious truly devoted to Mary
- 5/ and genuine imitators of the humility, of the simplicity, of the modesty and of the hidden life of this noble Virgin"

**2<sup>o</sup> Interpretation**

- 1/ let us study his spirit of faith,
- 2/ his outstanding confidence in God,
- 3/ his burning zeal for the salvation of souls,
- 4/ his tender and generous love for Jesus,
- 5/ his filial attitude towards Mary,
- 6/ his profound humility,
- 7/ his mortification,
- 8/ his detachment from creatures,
- 9/ his constancy in the service of God."

Marist theology:

Even if the first text is longer than the second one, it offers a more narrow spiritual program in only five points whereas the second presents nine:

In my opinion, the first program seems to formulate a doctrine of the years from 1820, the period of La Valla. Besides, it is close to the spirit of the famous dialogue spoken about in the *Life*, between Father Champagnat and Brother Laurent as they went up to Bessat. The second reveals a greater elaboration: piety and fervor are now replaced with spirit of faith and trust in God. Humility is detached from Marian devotion. The three last points give an ascetic touch that the first program does not

<b>Virtues of the Marist</b>	<b>Preface: virtues of F. Ch, (p. IX)<sup>39</sup></b>	<b>Chapters of the 2<sup>o</sup> part of the <i>Life</i> (1856)</b>
	1/ Spirit of faith 2/ Trust in God	1/ Portrait and character. Joy 2/ <b>Of the spirit of faith of F. Champagnat</b> 3/ His trust in God 4/ <b>His love for prayer</b> 5/ <b>His recollection and his attention to remain in the presence of God</b>
1/ <b>Pious and fervent religious</b>		20/ <b>From his zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls</b> 21/ From his charity for the poor 22/ What he did for primary education 23/ Advice of F. Champagnat on education
2/ <b>Zealous for the glory of God</b>	3/ Ardent zeal for the salvation of souls	6/ <b>His love for Our Lord</b> 7/ <b>His devotion to the Blessed Virgin</b> 12/ <b>His humility</b>
3/ <b>Filled with love for Jesus Christ</b>	4/ Tender and generous for Jesus	11/ <b>His love for mortification</b>
4/ <b>Truly devoted to Mary</b>	5/ Filial piety toward Mary	10/ <b>His detachment from his parents and from the goods of this world.</b>
5/ <b>True imitators of his humility...</b>	6/ Humility 7/ Mortification 8/ Detachment from creatures 9/ Constancy in the service of God	24/ <b>His constancy</b>

contain. This program shows the years 1830-40, as preoccupied with struggling against the inconstancy of the Brothers or their attempts to rise in the social scale. That is the one that serves as the principal basis for the second part of the *Life*:

Let us notice that the *Life* essentially resumes in its twelve first chapters, the fundamental themes of these two programs in the preface. Only zeal and constancy are omitted at the end. The table below presents us with the chapters which do not show in the two programs of the preface

<sup>39</sup> This program of holiness was perhaps added at the time of the writing of the *Life*

- 8/ His obedience and his respect for the clergy.
- 9/ His love of Poverty
- 13/ His love of purity
- 14/ His love of work
- 15/ His love for his Brothers and his attachment to them
- 16/ Care taken by Father Champagnat to correct his Brothers' defects and to form them in virtue
- 17/ Care Father Champagnat took to train Brother Directors
- 18/ What Father Champagnat did to preserve the Brothers in their vocation.
- 19/ Steps taken by Father Champagnat to preserve the Brothers in their state and his firmness in upholding the Rule.

and which seem to come from the initiative of Brother John-Baptist and therefore constitute an important contribution to the spiritual Marist theology at the time of the Founder and which tries to complete the fan of virtues and give value to the “abbot” functions of Father Champagnat.

What is striking in the order of the Chapters of the *Life*, is that the zeal that was at the beginning part of the first virtues is now placed last. In my opinion, this choice is coherent with the objective aimed at: in a monastic order, zeal is of secondary importance. Thus the Institute is thought of—in essence—as a religious and apostolic order rather than as an apostolic congregation.

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B/ THE SERIES OF SAYINGS OF THE FOUNDER (1822-1840)

During the first years of the Institute, very little writing was done, because of the incapacity of some and for lack of time, and we had to wait for the last years of the Founder before the use of lithographic equipment was possible. The essential of the spirituality was therefore expressed orally and it necessitated mnemonic means such as sentences or maxims of the Founder which, short and grouped in series, constituted the first synthesis of the spiritual doctrine. It seems that these successive lists more or less came into being as it often happens when the presses have not printed the texts.

Let us attempt to unravel the whole thing. In the *Life* p. 103-106 (Chapter X) Brother John-Baptist situates in the years 1822-23 a first series of 15 sayings which are found elsewhere with a few changes in the sayings

<b>Life, chap. 10, p. 103-106</b>	<b>Prayer Manual</b>
1/ A Brother who doesn't know how to pray is incapable of doing good among the children. <sup>40</sup>	Probably Nº 43
2/ Without piety, impossible to live as a religious.	
3/ A religious who lacks piety cannot love his vocation	Nº 44
4/ How easy it is to practice virtue when we love Jesus!	Nº 45
5/ What a shame it would be if religious were less impelled by the love of Jesus than the worldly are by money.	
6-7/ He who loves Mary loves Jesus. Mary accepts simply to give us to Jesus.	Nº 42
8/ Jesus grants devotion to Mary only to privileged souls	Nº 46
9/ Virtues are like roses among thorns.	Nº 47
10/ A religious is happier from a single exercise of piety than those in the world who are most favored by fortune.	Nº 48
11/ The seculars resort to noise because their heart is not happy.	Nº 49
12/ By vocation, the Brothers are apostles.	
13/ A brother's strongest desire would be to excel at teaching catechism.	Nº 50
14-15/ We teach catechism well, when we pray much for the children and give them good example.	Nº 51

nº 43-51 from a list of 52 sayings found in the *Prayer Manual* published in 1855. The *Principles of Perfection* which succeeded to the *Prayer Manual* in 1866 carries a list of 80 sayings that seem in fact to group three distinct lists 1-42; 43-51; 51-79.

<sup>40</sup> The formulation is not literal but is content to give the meaning.

The first list, the oldest one, gives us the following themes:

It can therefore be said that around 1822-23, the spiritual Marist doctrine of the sayings referred to the following points which are quite close, by their number (5) and their contents, very close to the list of the first program of holiness in the preface of the *Life*:

- Prayer: sayings 1-3
- Love for Jesus Christ: 4-5
- Love for Jesus and Mary: 6-8
- Happiness of religious life: 9-11
- Zeal: 12-15

As for the other two indicated series, they are close to one another, but also to the second program of holiness exposed in the preface of the *Life*:

#### **Sayings 1-41 in the Prayer Manual**

- 1/ **Joy**: 1-3
- 2/ Spirit of faith and **trust in God**: 4-8
- 3/ **Prayer and presence of God**: 9-13
- 4/ **Obedience**: 14
- 5/ **Mortification**: 15-18
- 6/ Pride, humility: **19-20**
- 7/ **Zeal, education, catechism**: 21-28
- 8/ Detachment from family: **29-32**
- 9/ Vocation: **33-41**

#### **Sayings 51-79 in Principles of Perfection**

- 1/ **Trust in God**: 51-53 + 71
- 2/ **Prayer**: 54-57
- 3/ **Presence of God**: 58-59
- 4/ Love for Jesus Christ: 60-62
- 5/ Devotion to Mary: 63
- 6/ **Obedience**: 64
- 7/ **Mortification**: 65
- 8/ **Joy**: 66-70
- 9/ Zeal: 72-79

In the *Annals of the Institute*, written at a later date but founded mainly on the oral tradition of the Institute, Brother Avit mentions, in the year 1832, the titles of the principal instructions that the Founder had given “for several years.” Curiously enough, we find in a large measure the themes of the two lists of sayings above:

1/ On courage and holy joy. 2/ On the spirit of faith. 3/ On the diffidence of self and trust in God. 4/ On the presence of God. 5/ On poverty. 6/ On humility. 7/ On zeal. 8/ On devotion to Mary.

Finally let us note and it is not of less importance, that almost all the sayings are found again in the chapters of the second part of the *Life*, a sign that Brother John- Baptist wanted to integrate this tradition with the doctrinal synthesis that he was constructing.

The study of the series of sayings brings us to the same conclusion as that of the programs of holiness: about 1822-23 the Marist doctrine was

established around the five fundamental points. Then, it was made more complex up to nine. As it is normal in an oral tradition, the series hold variations but the common basics are undeniable. And we can say that these lists of nine themes translate the Marist spirituality, elaborated around 1832 if we believe Brother Avit.

Let us note that the texts emanating from Father Champagnat offer formulations of the same spirit although in different form, as if the tradition of the Brothers was being built autonomously from him. Perhaps we can perceive there the normal hiatus between the spiritual expression of the master and that of the disciples.

Whatever it may be, the circular of January 19, 1836 presented a program of holiness which already announces the Spiritual Testament:

“To serve God with fervor” that is to say:

- Fulfill one’s state of duty
- Detach one’s heart from creatures to give them to Jesus and Mary
- Abandon oneself to the movements of grace
- Imitate and follow Jesus Christ
- By a tender affection for children
- By forming them to piety

Have charity reign:

- Through the humility of those who obey
- Through the charity of those giving orders

To be zealous for one’s perfection:

- Through observance of the rule

In his Spiritual Testament of 1840, Father Champagnat, after having asked in the name of Jesus Christ, the obedience of the inferiors and the charity of the superiors, recommends to the Brothers: 1/ presence of God, the source of prayer and of mental prayer; 2/ obedience and simplicity; 3/ devotion to Mary, Joseph and the holy angels<sup>41</sup>; 4/ fidelity to one’s vocation; 5/ poverty and detachment; 6/ fidelity to the rule as guardian of chastity.

At the death of the Founder, there was already a spiritual theology conveyed by oral tradition, instructions, collection of sayings, letters and circulars and finally the Spiritual Testament. But if all these sources reveal an undeniable common basis, their variations pose a problem. Aware of the problem, from 1840 to 1852-56, the superiors made an effort to build, from this corpus, an official printed doctrine that would hold it together

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<sup>41</sup> In a spirit of zeal: spread devotion to Marie; be guardian angels for the children.

definitively. Concern for not letting this treasure be lost, the superiors proceeded by compilations that were more or less adequate; (for example, the collections of sayings placed end to end and repeated in the *Life*) and the effort to synthesize, somewhat satisfying, as in the second part of the *Life*. Anyway, it is important that the readers of the literature relatively late in coming be aware that it is the fruit of an already long evolution, carried probably by the different trends, from which we have been able to detach two previous phases.

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C/ THE CIRCULAR ON THE SPIRIT OF FAITH: UNIFYING THE SPIRITUALITY

The writing of the *Common Rules* (1852) inaugurated the officialization of the Marist doctrine. But it is not its first synthesis after the Founder because the circular on Spirit of Faith, written in four parts by Brother François from 1848 to 1851 clearly preceded it. Well forgotten today, it deserves to be brought back into light because it deeply influenced the chapter in the *Life* on this subject, as well as the second part of the *Common Rules* that begins with a chapter on the spirit of faith. In spite of the fact that Father Champagnat is never quoted, it is filled with his teaching.<sup>42</sup>

Although confused enough and betraying a relative mastery of the referred sources (St. Paul, the Gospels, Rodriguez...) it is a worthy effort of synthesizing the Marist spirituality. In fact, for Brother François, the spirit of faith is not a “simple pious practice” nor “a doctrine of the mystical life uniquely for contemplatives” but a doctrine of salvation that asks every Christian to carry his cross in imitation of Jesus Christ. He therefore suggests a model of holiness altogether different from the preface in *Life* since he makes no reference to monastic life. On the contrary, this

<b>The baptized</b>	<b>The teacher</b>	<b>The religious</b>	<b>The Brother of Mary</b>
Spirit of Faith	Zeal	Evangelical counsels	Humility, hidden life

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<sup>42</sup> See André Lanfrey, “The circular on the spirit of faith”. *Cahiers Maristes*, n° 16, November 2000, p. 21-52

way of faith is presented as the one for every Christian enlightened by Scripture. Without admitting it, Brother François suggests a concept of holiness that strongly integrates mystical life. However, addressing himself to Brothers, he offers them a more specific program of holiness founded on baptismal life, which we think can be synthesized this way:

Even if the general tone of the circular remains ascetical, Brother François deviates incessantly, as in this passage where he treats of the presence of God:

“But let us seek him above all within ourselves, at the bottom of our heart; for that is where he is as in a sanctuary to receive our adoration and our homage [...]

Let us enter often in this interior cell, into this temple of our soul, to find God, to converse with Him and to pay our respects [...] in this is the great secret of holiness and perfection.”

Doesn't this bottom of the heart, which he mentions, make Brother François come close to “*la fine pointe de l'âme*” of the mystics, (acute sensitivity of the soul), of the “*depths of the soul*” dear to the speculative rhenoflemish mystique?

Certainly, one could ask if such a long and complex text would be beyond the understanding of most of the Brothers. Anyway, it was sufficiently understood by a certain number among them to deeply influence the *Life* and the *Common Rules*, even if,

as a chapter among others, it has lost its character as synthesis of the spirituality that Brother François wanted to give it. Today, this text has been forgotten perhaps because our vision responds to a defect that Brother François denounces in this same instruction, speaking of spiritual reading:

“We do our readings in a spirit of curiosity and vanity [...]. Thus, the holy books, as well as the pious books are like sealed books where we see nothing, where we understand nothing, and which, although made to enlighten and touch us, always leave us in ignorance of the things of God and lukewarm in his service.”

This complaint echoes that of the spiritual masters of all times and should incite us to consider that Marist literature, especially that of Brother François, merits rereading with an interpretation chart that is clearly spiritual if not mystical.



The *Prayer Manual* published in 1855 was a catechism destined for the formation of novices. Almost immediately, the Brothers called it "*Principles of Perfection*" because the first part deals exactly with this subject. The third part presents the text of "*Diverse Prayers to Sanctify the Day*." But it is the second part entitled *Qualities of a Good Brother*" that will retain my attention because it appears to me as a synthesis of Marist spirituality, partially autonomous from the others we have already seen.

In fact, this *Manual* is the ancestor of *Principles of Perfection* and of the *Directory of Solid Piety*. Published as I said in 1855, it is probably much earlier, and must have been gradually elaborated, first in the state of manuscript, by the masters of novices. That is why it is difficult to attribute it to a single author. It would probably be the fruit of a spiritual trend coming directly from Father Champagnat and borne by the Brothers in charge of formation.

Its second part developing the qualities of a good brother is arranged in thirteen chapters all inspired by the instructions of Father Champagnat.<sup>43</sup> They successively deal with piety, with love and knowledge of Jesus Christ, of devotion to Mary and St. Joseph, of zeal, of openness of heart, of obedience and of regularity, of family spirit made up of humility, joy and finally constancy. This being said, here is a total of nine themes as in the spiritual programs of 1830 already studied. Nonetheless, the fundamental themes such as spirit of faith and trust in God do not appear in them, which lets us suppose an ancient origin and the keeping of a certain spiritual archaism. But, in another sense, there is much insistence on religious and community life, which shows preoccupations relatively late in coming. Briefly, probably composed a little at a time, this manual accompanied the development of the Institute, therefore containing passages that are more or less ancient.

Here and there, and in spite of a literary genre made up of questions and answers that constantly break the discourse, one finds spiritual definitions of great values such as in the section that deals with Marian devotion where there is question of "*taking on the spirit of Mary*" and not only imitating her. This expression is close to the "*Live the life of Mary*"

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<sup>43</sup> We can easily retrace the elements in the Collections of Brothers François and J. B.

<sup>44</sup> Dictionnaire de spiritualité. T. 10 article "Marie", col. 470. treating with the Marian mystique of F. Colin.

of Father Colin, which does not consist in special practices but rather in an attitude of “*mystical identification with Mary*.”<sup>44</sup>

In Chapter XI of the first part, which deals with the exercise of the presence of God, we find a definition of this presence, in a frankly mystical tone, which I have never found elsewhere in our primitive texts:

“It is an ineffable feeling of God which brings a habitual, infused peace, it is the spirit of Our Lord filling the soul and at each moment suggesting to it what it must do.”

We must therefore give greater importance to this little forgotten catechism<sup>45</sup> because for the most part, it is an earlier spiritual synthesis of the official literature of the Institute; because it testifies to a systematic effort of formation of the Brothers begun at the very time of the Founder and finally, because it contains spiritual pearls not found elsewhere.

## CONCLUSION

If the meaning of this essay is really understood, one will perceive that it is the fruit of a double process: on the one hand reinterpreting the sources already known in the “*Formulaire*” or the *Life of Father Champagnat*; on the other hand, revealing the documents which are dormant in our archives and which are of great value for the understanding of the first decades of the Institute.

In my opinion, therefore, the spirituality of Champagnat seems to have been crystallized as early as 1815-16 around two axes. The first being that of humility linked with a strong relationship with Mary and leading to the choice of catechism and the school as that privileged means of apostolate. The project of the Society of Mary seemed in partial contradiction with this attitude that led to the “Montagne” experience.

The second axis of the spirituality of Champagnat is obviously found in the text of the Marist “*Formulaire*” inspired by St. Paul and Marie d’Agreda and which looks at the Society of Mary as a new “*Mystical City*” conceived by the intercession of Mary at Pentecost.

Champagnat long lived a tension between his personal vocation and his belonging to the Marist project, which will only be resolved in his Spiritual Testament.

The spirituality of the man Champagnat will pass on into the body

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<sup>45</sup> To my knowledge, only one copy exists in the general archives.

he founded by his instructions, his sayings, his letters, his examples. From this long initiation will result two successive programs of holiness, one from the time at La Valla, in five points, the other in nine points, more ascetic and more precise, which corresponds to the period of l'Hermitage. The oral traditions seem to have played a major role in this tradition still not stabilized and which already seems a little independent from the one that Champagnat himself manifested in his Spiritual Testament.

That is why, after 1840, the superiors undertook to constitute a body of unique doctrine through an attempt at compiling the sources. It was the task of Brother John-Baptist and Brother François who left us collections of instructions of great importance in which they drew to continue the oral teachings and to put in place a clear doctrinal synthesis. The effort ended in 1852-56 with the *Common Rules*, the *School Guide*, the *Life of the Founder*.... The normalization of the spirituality obviously led to a certain impoverishment. It tended to cause earlier efforts already accomplished to be forgotten, such as the circular "on the spirit of faith" or the prayer manual.

Because of this, from 1852-56 to our days, the spiritual memory of the Institute is established around a literature that is relatively late, and of which the Institute is largely unaware of how it was elaborated and therefore cannot be enlightened by the tradition of the years 1817-1840 still preserved in manuscripts and which up to today have not attracted any attention.

The study of these sources up to now "*unknown and hidden*" allows me to affirm that if the official spirituality of the years 1852-56 is strongly inscribed in the tradition going back to Champagnat, it is nonetheless an interpretation marked by its time: the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That is why it offers an ascetic and monastic aspect to the detriment of the mystical breath more present in the earlier decades.

There is therefore an authentic Marist spirituality, but, to perceive it in its complexity and richness, one cannot be content with the writings of Champagnat and literature after 1850. One must join to it the manuscripts of Brothers François and John-Baptist as well as certain printed texts that have been neglected up to now. It is through them that we will be able to enrich our knowledge of the spirituality of Father Champagnat and bind it to the official literature that finds its foundation in it even if at the same time it is put into perspective.



# *Marcellin Champagnat, his spirit, his personality*

*Br. Paul SESTER, FMS*

**“It is very little to accomplish lovely actions, great works, hard and continual labors; what gives it value and merit, what really constitutes the excellence is the spirit which animates them. And so, it is this spirit which forms the ensemble of the feelings and dispositions of the good Father whom we have undertaken to make known in the second part of this work which, in our opinion, is the most edifying and will be the most useful to the Brothers.”**

It is with these words that Brother John-Baptist introduced the second part of his work: *“Life of Joseph Benedict Marcellin Champagnat.”* His intention is unequivocal. After having related the life of Father Champagnat, his deeds and actions, he wanted to cast a light on his personality and his spirit in order to propose him as a model to his disciples, the Marist Brothers. The meaning he gives to the expression “spirit” differs from the one we give to that of “spirituality.” The expression “spirit” here designates, according to the dictionary, *“the thought that determines, orients the action, the intention, the will.”* It is therefore this interior strength that incites to perform something precise, that is judged as necessary, beneficial, profitable and for the realization for which one has the necessary capabilities, even a personal interest. Contrary to spirituality, which designates the particular characteristic of an individual’s activity, the orientation of his life, which he shares, with the ensemble of his group, the spirit applies itself to his manner of being, to what motivates him within. Therefore, if one asks what kind of man was Marcellin Champagnat, it is his spirit that must be described as a response. And so, that is what this study intends to do.

Obviously, one might think that it is useless to return one more time to this subject because so many things have already been said that nothing new can be added. That is not so sure, because one never finishes studying the personality of a man, to reflect on his achievements, to question his writings in order to acquire a more precise idea, at least to approach him a little more, because it is impossible to know a person in his originality.

What is more, the knowledge a person can acquire about another will never be objective, because it can only be approached with one's own personality, one's own way of perceiving and of feeling. It has justifiably been said that only fifty percent of a biography really depicts the personage, the other fifty corresponds to the author. One can then conclude that the different biographies of the same person give only one point of view of the reality, and consequently these various points of view are as many lights that allow a better view of the object.

For some time now, historical research has been casting a light upon the origins of the Society of Mary, on the historical, social and spiritual ambiance in which our founders were immersed. In order to better understand the study made on their account, we must look at them in the light of more recent information. From this perspective, the purpose of this study is to deepen our knowledge of the personality of Marcellin Champagnat, founder of the Institute of the Marist Brothers, to grasp as much as possible the spirit which animated him, the spirit which led him to his accomplishments.

As for the method, it has already been mapped out. The basis will necessarily be the second part of the "*Life of Joseph Benedict Marcellin Champagnat*" by Brother John-Baptist. He announces himself in the preface that he wants to make known in this part the spirit "*that formed the ensemble of the sentiments and dispositions of the good Father.*" A critical and systematic study, completed by the data received from elsewhere will allow us to draw out the essential traits of his personality.

The following article is but the beginning of this study and is limited to the first chapter.

## **PLAN OF THIS SECOND PART**

An overview of this second part allows us to notice a line of direction. The 24 chapters that compose it can be regrouped according to the

four themes preceded by an introduction (Chapter 1) and by a conclusion (Chapter 24). It is as such that the plan can be determined as follows:

- Introduction: presentation of the personage, Chapter 1;
- Relationship to God, chapters 2-7;
- Practice of virtues, chapters 8-14;
- Relationship with the Brothers, chapters 15-19
- Education of children, chapters 20-23
- Conclusion, chapter 24.

This plan shows the orientation of the ensemble: beginning by showing his personage's life in God, he arrives at presenting him in his function as an educator of children. If we must see there the advance toward a goal, it is clear that the intention of the author is to present an apostle whose spiritual life is the very condition of his apostolic success.

This way of seeing is corroborated by the structure of the different chapters. In fact, most of them are constructed on a binary diagram. After having exposed the way that the Founder lived the particular aspect treated in the chapter, he is shown how he formed the Brothers to follow his example. Thus, in the last quarter of the first chapter one can read about cheerfulness: "*This was a frequently-recurring theme in the Founder's instruction.*" (p. 274)

Likewise, in the third chapter, the last third is introduced by these words: "Throughout his life, Father Champagnat never let up inspiring his Brothers with confidence in God." (p. 296)

The following chapter dedicates more than half of its volume showing that *the dearest wish of his heart, was to inspire a love of prayer in his Brothers.*" (p. 303)

It is the same in the following chapters which deal with recollection, love of God, Marian devotion and just as clear in the ensuing chapters that deal with the virtues of obedience, of poverty, of humility, of love of work, etc.... The intention of the biographer is therefore to show that the Founder paves the way the Brothers must follow. And, if there is a question about the justification of this duty, the answer is clearly formulated in the very first chapters when Marcellin Champagnat says: "*To edify the children, to lead them to God one must be truly pious and solidly virtuous.*" (p. 274)

In writing the life of Marcellin Champagnat, the intention of Brother John-Baptist leaves us with no doubt. This is not a contemplative saint he presents to us, but an apostle so preoccupied with the mission of making Jesus Christ known that he feels the need to form workers for this mission. This general aspect of the work and therefore of the personality he wants

to describe must be kept as a backdrop in order to have a just view of Marcellin Champagnat.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

Seen as a whole, this chapter presents a rather curious texture. It begins with the physical and especially moral portrait of Marcellin Champagnat, and then lingers on joy to end up with the theme of education. Three themes, at first seen as having little compatibility are found in a same chapter. However, the incoherence is more apparent than real. We have just seen above that the general orientation of the second part of this Life goes from the spiritual dispositions of the apostle to the concrete exercise of his function, going through the required qualities. This same orientation is found here: in order to present the subject who will be the topic throughout this work, he is described as gifted with physical and moral qualities, enhanced by an optimistic character, so many dispositions that predispose him wonderfully for the function as an educator. It is therefore with reason that this chapter is presented in the general plan as an introduction, even though nowhere is it announced as such and explains neither the general plan nor the directive line according to which the chapters will be arranged.

Moreover, it is the intention of this chapter to present the physical and moral portrait of the personage in question throughout the work. Now this portrait describes too summarily the characteristic traits that would help to understand many of the aspects of the behavior to be presented in the future. It will then be useful to extend more amply on this point.

## PHYSICAL AND MORAL PORTRAIT

The physical picture is briefly presented through a few favorable traits: *“tall, with an upright and dignified carriage; his forehead was broad and his facial features strongly marked; his complexion had a brownish tint.”* A footnote completes the description by the description found on the passport of August 22, 1836: *Height: 1.79 m; hair: brown; forehead: broad, free; eyes: gray; mouth: medium; face: longish; complexion: pale.”* From these traits, one easily imagines a man with an impressive stature, a fine-looking man. He himself, in his resolution of January 9, 1812, estimating in an act of excessive humility that his body *was “poorly built”* testi-



fies by this remark that he was well aware of his physical appearance. Speaking of the *“imposing exterior of the venerated Father”*<sup>46</sup> Brother Sylvester notes the impression made on him by “the lofty stature, full of majesty, his kind but reserved manner; his countenance which commanded respect; his hollow cheeks, his slightly projecting lips verging on a smile, his piercing and searching eye; his strong and resonant voice; his speech pronounced clearly and free from curtness and verbosity...all his limbs well proportioned.”<sup>47</sup> To complete it, Brother John-Baptist adds: *“grave, modest and serious appearance... inspiring respect and often enough, at first even timidity and fear.”*<sup>48</sup> However, he did not seem to raise himself with his advantages, because the testimonies coming from his stay in Paris describe his peasant ways,<sup>49</sup> *“he was looked upon as a rustic person, without worldly manners,”* and, according to Father Chanut, that is what would have hindered him the most when he sought the legal recognition of his Institute.

## HIS CHARACTER

According to his biographer, *“under the appearances somewhat hard and an exterior rather severe, he hid the happiest character.”* Without discussing the psychological contents of the word character, let it suffice here to take account of the given information.

*“He had an upright spirit, a judgment that was sure and deep, a heart that was sensitive and kind, sentiments that were noble and worthy.”*

Knowing the tendency that Brother Jean-Baptist had to inflate by style one way or another the very strong influence exerted by the Founder on the Brothers, one can discuss the degree of objectivity in these affirmations. How far did his straightforwardness extend in considering the criticisms formulated by Mazelier in his report on the unity of his Brothers with ours?

*“The respectable Father Champagnat was a holy priest, his most generous and priestly life was crowned with a holy death, but sometimes there are imperfections in the saints. As for him, he was thought of as not hold-*

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<sup>46</sup> Brother Sylvestre describes Marcellin Champagnat, p.17.

<sup>47</sup> Idem, pages 239-240

<sup>48</sup> Life, page 265

<sup>49</sup> O.M. Extract, doc. 154, (428), p. 360

ing enough to his word. Father Douillet, superior of the boarding school at La Côte reproached him for it. Father Colin also told me that this reproach had been made to Father Champagnat. I had reason to complain when he was not quite exact in fulfilling the condition I had put for the Brothers he was sending me to exempt them from the draft, to remain at Saint Paul's up until they had obtained their diploma... . One day, Father Champagnat told me himself: I am being reproached for not always holding to my word... I promise and then if I cannot... I understood by these words that he did not intend to be malicious, but perhaps he did not take enough trouble to fulfill his promise."

Father Laverenne, vicar general of the diocese of Valence also accuses the Founder of the Marist Brothers for his the lack of honesty. On January 13, 1836, he wrote to Father Mazelier:

*"I met with the superior of the Marist Brothers and his traveling companion. From their conversation I conclude only one thing, that they really want us to be useful to them but that they are much less concerned about being helpful to others. They fear very much that we put a hand on their subjects."*

In another letter the following year, on November 30, 1837, he writes once more:

*"The delay that the superior of this congregation (Marist Brothers) took to respond denotes somewhat that he would not be disappointed to be rid of you."*

Facing these criticisms, the said superior speaks a very different language in his correspondence of 16 letters with Father Mazelier. In each of them, he expresses his friendship with his correspondent, his gratitude for the eminent service he is rendering him. On September 28, 1837, he wrote:

*"Having the same goal and working for the same master, we wish to be united with you and act in agreement with you. You have rendered and you continue to render us great services. Your kindness and your paternal tenderness toward our Brothers who have had the advantage of living with you for a time will never be erased from our memories. It is sad for us at this time to have but sterile words to recognize it."*

In another letter dated February 23, 1837, he goes as far as suggesting that he keep one of his Brothers for the manual works:

*"If among those who will have the advantage of being with you, there were one who could be useful to you while studying, we would not be opposed to it. We will be sending you a cobbler; he is a very good man, he could be useful to you."*

How can we think that Father Champagnat was playing games, that his words are not conformed to his feelings? Who can reproach him for looking out for himself when it is precisely for this reason that he has concluded an arrangement with Father Mazelier? The accusation of thinking only of himself proves false before the offer made in the letter that was just cited. As for not holding to his word, it seems that there is some truth in it because he himself admits to it in a certain way. The will to reach his goal is stronger than his own honor. Harassed on one side by the request for Brothers, he sees himself obliged on the other to recall from Saint Paul, a Brother who is advanced enough in his studies to have the opportunity of succeeding in the next exam that will give him a diploma. Like a chief executive officer obliged to manage his affairs, Father Champagnat, according to his expression, “fait flèche de tout bois”<sup>50</sup> (uses every means available) to see that his schools function well.

His uprightness of judgment could be questioned in other events reported by his biographer such as the severe dismissals whose seriousness did not justify the sanction. Is it sufficient to consider his horror for the contagion of the sin of impurity to explain the cruelty of sending away a young man during a rainy night in the winter? The least that could be said is that the criterion observed then was reinforced by an unconditional love of God that did not allow judging according to pure reason. Consequently, in the cases mentioned, the uprightness of judgment resided in the absence of all meanness but in the distance between the finiteness of man and the infinity of God. A solid faith and an ardent love do not allow any compromise even at the price of any disagreement. Besides, it does not exclude that this attitude manifests a basic characteristic of intransigence barely perceptible however in the following description:

*“Marcellin’s disposition was bright, open, frank, resolute, courageous, enthusiastic, constant and equable.”*

In a few lines further to show that God had gifted him with a character conformed to the mission for which he had been invested, the biographer is still more precise:

*“Father Champagnat owed much to the success of his ministry and in the foundation of his Institute, to his bright, open, friendly and considerate character with its ability to resolve situations of strife.”*

As we see it, these two descriptions are in agreement and complete

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<sup>50</sup> O.M. Extracts, doc. 164 (752), p. 417.

one another. If the first one shows an iron hand, the second one puts on a velvet glove. The two first traits are picked up both times. That it be inadvertently or voluntarily, in one and the other cases are shown the will to give a certain importance to these two traits which will be spoken about later.

The following highlights his reputed strength of character: *frank, resolute, courageous, enthusiastic.*” Facts are not lacking in the life of the Founder to illustrate them. From the beginning of his life as a student, one day, judging that his teacher had no sense of pedagogy because of an unjust punishment inflicted upon one of his comrades, he decided not to return to school. Later, when he decided to enter the seminary to become a priest in spite of all the obstacles presenting themselves, he held firm and did not waver in his decision. Likewise when his seminary companions gave him the responsibility of carrying out his idea of joining the Brothers to the plan of the Society of Mary that was being planned, he went to work at it without delay as soon as the occasion presented itself. The most remarkable is the perseverance to pursue the project in spite of the many difficulties presenting themselves on this way.

Testimonies about this are not lacking. Brother Theodose testified before the diocesan proceedings for the Beatification: *“He combined a healthy judgment with a moral strength that made him triumph over all obstacles.”* At this same proceeding, Mr. Guiot, former mayor of La Valla designated Marcellin Champagnat as a *“stubborn saint.”*

Handwriting analyses done on a few of his signatures strongly support this character trait. For his part, Mr. Tavernier<sup>51</sup> judges him as *having “an ardent and intense nature, ... passionate, endowed with an exceptional will.”* As for Mr. Palaferri<sup>52</sup> in a more recent analysis, arrived at the same conclusion, judging the person being analyzed whose identity he was not aware of, as *“tenacious and firm in the face of a determination which he is desperately trying to accomplish with an inflexible will.”* He ended his conclusion by saying that this is about a person with much self-control and who presents great dependability.

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<sup>51</sup> Graphological studies on the writings of Father Champagnat by B. Tavernier, Paris, 1974.

<sup>52</sup> Graphological study made by Father Nazzareno Palaferri of the Urbino University, Italy, in 1981 and which Brother Umberto Bellone, of Genoa reports in “La Graphia del B. M. Champagnat, Genova 1981”, in “Cerchiamo l'autentico B. Champagnat, Genova, 1982” and finally in “Studio di un profilo des B. M. Champagnat (1789-1840), Genova 1983”

This trait did not harden him because we also have much evidence that portrays him as a man of feelings. His biographer states again that his character was *easy, thoughtful, conciliatory*," but the testimonies collected elsewhere are unanimous in placing the accent on his sensitivity, on this love of neighbor. The Brothers were never exhausted in praises on this point. Toward the end of his life, Brother François often exclaimed: *"He was firm, yes certainly, we would tremble at the very sound of his voice, at one of his looks, but above all, he was good!"* On his side Brother Laurent testifies: *"A mother has no more tenderness for her children than he had for us."* (O.M. Extraits, p. 455) This tenderness was not on command, under a rather rude exterior, his sensitivity was expressed itself in his most intimate relationships. Almost all the letters written to the Brothers end with an expression of sincere affection he has for them. For example, in a letter to Brother Dominique of the community of Charlieu, he writes: *"I hold you all very dearly in my heart... I love you all."* (Letter n<sup>o</sup> 49, L.M.C., p. 129)

Surely, he avoids saying: *"I love you"* to a Brother in particular, when he said it freely when speaking to several, showing in this way a certain modesty. Again, he was showing it more by strictly observing the morality of the times, which prohibited all acts of tenderness, because what he prescribed to the Brothers, he observed himself. His biographer says *"that the Brothers were not to take the children by the hand, pat their face, embrace them and show them any other sign of affection."* (Life, p. 406) On this aspect of Marcellin Champagnat's personality, the graphology reveals a more profound analysis. Palaferi's says on this subject:

*"On the erotic-sentimental level, the subject presents a richness and an intensity that are not common and which only the assimilation of educative principles could orient toward superior forms of expression of the libido. This can be deduced from the great power of inhibitions of which he disposes and which seem inflexible..."*<sup>53</sup>

The analysis of Mr. Tavernier supports this one by this observation: *"The temperament must have been ardent and sensual by natural disposition, but the sensorial was severely repressed, without ever being satisfied. Even if it was kept in check, this sensorial accentuates his receptivity and allows him to understand the necessities of daily living in others. We could say that he understands them without excusing them, because the deprivations he imposes through ascetism have made him intolerant to*

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<sup>53</sup> Op.cit. p. 37

*the weaknesses of nature which he condemns all the more severely that he is not sure of himself in this domain.”*

The chapter on purity will be an occasion to return to this question. Let it suffice here for the time being to conclude with the strong self-control that made of Marcellin Champagnat the solid personality upon which the Brothers leaned without any apprehension.

By this very fact, Tavernier adds in his report, *“It was altogether natural that he should have exerted so much influence on his companions. An innate aptitude to direct and to command led him naturally to find himself at the head and to assume responsibilities. Undoubtedly, he would have had more difficulty playing a secondary role and to remain in the shadows.”* However, the pride that such dispositions must have necessarily nourished, his tenacious will arrived at putting under the yoke of a behavior guided by the humility that gave his character the qualities of openness, frankness already signaled out by his biographer. However, he kept vivacity in his reactions, notably in his replies because of his fluency with words. Besides, he expresses himself more easily through the mouth than in writing, which allowed him a great sense of humor to liven up his entourage more than to bring attention on himself. A welcoming person and sure of himself, modest and reserved whose face radiated with the calm serenity of an interior life and a contact with the spiritual, but with a simple, modest and reserved demeanor. Such seems to be the picture that the Brothers have preserved of the one they venerated as a father, and even by the people he had the occasion to meet for affairs concerning his work.

## **THE SADNESS AND THE JOY**

Speaking about the different situations he had to deal with, his biographer underlines: *“What was most admirable in Father Champagnat’s character was that he was always the same... nothing altered the peace of his soul and the serenity of his face.”* About this constancy of character, of this even-temperedness, whose importance seemed so great that he dedicates half the chapter to it, he will treat of sadness and of joy, more exactly of what he sometimes calls *“holy joy”*, and sometimes *“the joy of the soul,”* designating by that, not this state of intense happiness, of fullness which is joy in its exact meaning, but rather this feeling of happiness, the fruit of well-being of satisfaction, which comes from this affirmation: *“Nothing altered the peace of his soul and the serenity of his face.”*

And yet, it would be to poorly interpret the picture that Brother John-Baptist wants to transmit to us of Marcellin Champagnat if we saw him always beaming with joy, with a never-ending smile on his face. He would contradict it himself in many occasions in the course of his text. Before the obvious faults of the Brothers, his face did not remain impassive, but expressed resentment, grief, his look inspired terror and the tone of his voice rose up to a cry, his narrator tells us. Allowing for perhaps some exaggeration in the literary style, it is nonetheless true that on certain occasions, Marcellin Champagnat manifested a sensitivity that made him react energetically at times.

But rather than lingering on the way he personally reacts before sad or joyful events which he might have met, his biographer prefers to show concretely what he did to combat sadness in the Brothers and to show them how to radiate joy. That is why in order to be more objective, it suits us first of all to examine his attitudes and his personal reactions that Brother John-Baptist speaks about, not in this chapter, but in the course of those that follow and which allows to give a more just value to the first affirmations.

Surely, whenever there is question of constancy of character, of even-temperedness, one understands the absence of deep sadness as well as great outbursts of joy. If such temperament changes were never seen in Marcellin Champagnat this does not mean that he remained passive before the events that affected him in some way. In fact, the end of this account is not lacking in evocations of strong reactions to fortuitous cases. In that of a Brother abandoning his vocation, *“On such occasions, he was sometimes noticed to be incapable of eating or drinking, so deeply moved was he, so keenly did he feel the loss of his children.”* (Life, p. 471) *“He wept at any open fault against purity; if there was corruption of others, he was terrifying and inexorable, showing no mercy to those responsible.”* (p. 409) *“Again and again, he denounced* (missing Mass or Communion through lack of devotion through indifference) *such conduct and his energy and vigor in doing so always reflected the tender love that he had for Jesus Christ.”* (p. 330) On many occasions, the author mentions that he raised the tone of his voice, cast a look at the Brothers which *crushed* them. To a Brother entering the chapel without removing his hat: *“What! Brother, he cried out to him, “don’t you take off your hat when you come in here?”* (p. 281) undoubtedly judging the cry less disrespectful than remaining with his hat covering his head, unless he cried out louder this time than when he called out to Brother Jerome who was doing the rounds of the house during the night. (p. 469). Whatever it may be, his biographer shows that



he was sensitive and did allow himself to be overcome by emotions, but there is never mention of anger. His self-control allowed him to show only what was necessary for the welfare of the person he was speaking with.

On the other hand, in moments of joy, exterior manifestations were no less apparent, even though he was never seen to laugh showing a real joy. In four different places, Brother John-Baptist reported that Marcellin Champagnat answered his interlocutor *“laughing.”* To the postulant wishing to leave he *“says laughingly: Here is your money, I have not touched it!”* (p.272) When ironically asked if he had some privileged access to the public treasury, *“My purse has no bottom to it,”* was his reply. *“It is the purse of Providence.”* (p.297) On the subject of mortification: *“A little discipline does no harm and is even necessary for some.”* (p.388) To a quarryman overcome by the hardness of a rock, the Father *“replied with a laugh: What! You have no more courage than that?”* (p.416) While showing his friendship in these cases, it was not displeasing to him to challenge those who were lacking in courage. There were other circumstances, however, reported by Brother Avit, when humor did more than brighten a face. How can we not see him laughing whole-heartedly when he brought his friend Father Préher, the pastor of Tarentaise to greet Brother Dorothy: *“Greetings, brother of the cow!”* to hear the response: *“Greetings, Father!”* and have him quickly remark: *“And so, you are father of the cow!”* (Annals 1, p. 280) How could he not laugh when giving to the young Mercier the name of Brother Barulas because he had (*“débaroulé”*) (fallen) down the stairs a few days before he received the habit (Ibid. p. 239). Other facts show us that by character, he was always part of *“the happy band”* in the noble sense of the meaning and, quite the contrary; his natural psychological disposition did not incline him to sadness,

These considerations obviously go beyond the frame assigned by Brother John-Baptist to this chapter, but they are far from being useless to a more complete description of Marcellin Champagnat’s personality corroborating the thesis to which he consecrates the remainder of this chapter, that is his efforts to maintain the Brothers in a spirit of joy, because he firmly believes that without the blossoming of the heart, one’s perseverance is jeopardized. Consequently, the postulants who display a sad and closed demeanor should never be admitted if they do not achieve some kind of openness in the service of God. From there came the concern of helping the young to maintain joy within themselves. His character predisposed him to render this service, for his biographer affirmed that *“Never was he seen as being sad or discouraged, ...far from that, he lifted the*



*courage of his Brothers*” which does not mean that they always succeeded as the example below proves.

Often, Marcellin Champagnat took someone along with him in his travels. So at one time, it was not surprising that he made the most of an occasion to bring along a Brother who showed a depressive nature so as to change his mindset and to convince him that he should try to overcome his natural tendency to be sad. The conversation, reduced to two sentences that Brother John-Baptist gives him, does not correspond to the Father’s temperament. He was not usually lost for words nor was he intimidated by intimacy. The monologue that follows is echoed by an obstinate silence. The singing that St. Francis de Sales suggests as a remedy to melancholy, remained ineffective here. Besides, one can question the timeliness of the final recommendation, which being too general, did not penetrate the heart of the personal problem of the Brother. Also, the affirmation: “*According to the feeling of Father Champagnat men inclined to sadness and melancholy are not made for religious life nor for teaching,*” leads us to understand that the Brother in question did not remain in the Congregation.

This sentence states a general truth which the Founder used as the subject of a conference to the Brothers. He was obviously inspired by Father Alphonse Rodriguez’s “*Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection*” 6<sup>th</sup> treatise of the second part: “*Of sadness and joy.*” The first chapter treats of “*the great evils that sadness causes.*”

These great evils are four in number: sadness takes away a taste from prayer and spiritual reading; it causes bitterness and rudeness for our brothers; it leads to anger and often troubles the spirit; it is the cause of many temptations and failure; it also leads to eternal death in hell. The similarity with the three first causes mentioned by Marcellin Champagnat is striking even though the order is different. The difference is felt in the exposition. When Rodriguez develops the first cause, he does it calmly and lengthily. Brother John Baptist throws out short, incisive sentences and has no fear of exaggerating, as in this passage: *For a soul which allows itself to be dominated by **damaging** sadness, **nothing** is so difficult as prayer; this constitutes a veritable **martyrdom** or rather a **kind of indescribable hell**.* It is unfortunately not possible to determine if this style is that of the reporter rather than the author of the sentence, which would give some enlightenment on the character of the latter. Secondly, sadness is the cause of temptations because for Rodriguez, the devil uses two means: the despair in which he throws the soul or the pleasure, especially that of the flesh which he holds out as an antidote, while Brother John-Baptist limits himself to the first of these means, showing that the

spirit of darkness particularly likes the darkness of sadness. As for the third danger of sadness destroying fraternal charity, Brother John-Baptist puts the accent on community life whereas Rodriguez considers only the person by insisting that sadness “makes the person impatient, suspicious and unmanageable, sometimes, even it troubles the spirit in a way that it seems to take away all capability of judging properly. As for the 4<sup>th</sup> danger of provoking scandal, Rodriguez makes no mention of it; this preoccupation characterizes Champagnat particularly.

Without any transition, but certainly to illustrate the impact of sadness on the people around, a second example is proposed. Either because Father Champagnat did not understand the attitude of this Brother, or because he wanted to make him understand all the harmful effects of this attitude, he asks him all kind of questions of which none have any basis. And yet, even if this is a sad and closed nature, community life and the presence among children make it an obligation to replace these dark traits with a friendly and smiling face.

The example of St. Francis of Assisi serves as a transition from sadness to what the author will hereafter call, “*holy joy*.” Here the development which he gives it is opposite that of Rodriguez. The latter shows the positive effects of joy, namely that God loves being served with joy because it serves his honor and his glory; it edifies the neighbor because it creates esteem for virtue; and the acts done in joy are more exalting, more meritorious, and a better guarantee of perseverance in doing well. On the contrary, Brother John-Baptist, makes it a combat weapon against the devil whom the spiritual writers affirm that he can do nothing against joy; because he is cast into the dark torments, the envy of those who enjoy light annihilates him. From there comes the importance of preserving “*a holy joy of the soul*” which is nothing more than the intimate happiness of being in one’s right place.

The measure taken by the Founder to promote this holy joy among the Brothers, consisted in allowing them to play during recreations. To speak of permission in this case seems would seem very strange today, but this was at the time when recreations could be spent only while walking in groups because respect for the cassock and the clerical or religious dignity would have been profaned by violent physical exercises.

Brother John-Baptist is happy to emphasize that Father Champagnat did not hold to these values. However, the following example to illustrate this disposition leaves us wondering about the degrees of culture of some of our first Brothers. However, doesn’t the Founder have reason to excuse the little Brother and reprimand his confreres who never helped

him to become interested in more intellectual occupations because after all, it was the Brother's vocation that was at stake. Here, M. Champagnat who regarded "*cheerfulness and holy joy in a soul as a mark of vocation*" made no concessions on this point. That is why reading in his biography "*he neglected nothing to help the Brother to struggle against this temptation*" in no way surprises the reader, but that "*he had a particular gift and a talent for dispelling it*" requires more proof. That is the goal of the fourth example that follows two lines down.

Read too fast, it can appear as a stratagem: a young man is promised that he will be allowed to leave when he has overcome his crisis of loneliness, then when he will have found his happiness, he will no longer have reason to leave. But we must examine the scene a little closer. According to his brief biography, this episode takes place during the first days of the month of March 1840. The postulant, Marguet Pierre, age 22, became Brother Firmin and died in the Institute on May 10, 1893. In stating that "*he had excellent qualities*", his biographer notes that signs of vocation were found in him. The crisis of loneliness on the first days could have been homesickness often experienced when leaving home for the first time. In the contrary case of a characteristic pessimism, if the loneliness persisted, "*I will not keep you,*" Father Champagnat told him. In a few days, when the crisis will have abated, "*I will allow you to return to your parents, if you so wish it.*" No one pressured him; the money he had given for his admission remained his. But if his loneliness was only a passing crisis, a temptation, the best for him was to request a definitive admission since he had already thought of it. The two fears that he had expressed were perfectly acceptable: on the one part he was under the magnetic influence that the Founder had on the young and on the other, considering his age, he knew the value of money. It was therefore, not through some kind of trick that M. Champagnat knew how to heal sadness, but with the talent he had of putting everyone at ease and inspiring confidence in whoever consulted with him.

## THE EDUCATOR

These happy dispositions made him particularly suited for education which will be treated in the third part of this chapter. After having, with the help of citations from the Fathers of the Church, enumerated the qualities required to succeed in the education of children, Brother John-Baptist exposes the reason why M. Champagnat insisted that the Brothers possess

these qualities, that he then bases himself on the respect that the educator must have for the student to finally end with the recalling of fundamental rules to follow in this form of apostolate.

The required qualities are in fact character dispositions such that it does not appear to be superfluous to double highlight their importance by repeating them and by putting them under the authority of the Fathers of the Church. First, cheerfulness, holy joy, then kindness and friendliness, finally, prudence and modesty, are frequently recommended by Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Francis Xavier and Vincent de Paul. To be admitted into a society, and even more so, if one wants to exercise an educative influence, these qualities are obviously indispensable. Marcellin Champagnat has no trouble convincing the Brothers to do everything to acquire them because they must be apostles. The Trappist or the monk in his cell does not really need them to become holy, but the apostle cannot go without them to be faithful to his vocation, and of course to assure his salvation. Certainly, one must be pious and virtuous to do good among the children, but that is not sufficient if one does not have “*a character and manners that are pleasing and attractive.*” To do good, the most appropriate character Father Champagnat adds again, is “*the one who is at the same time cheerful, open, considerate, pleasant and constant.*” The same attributes describe his own character, which are said of him who was, “*uplifted by a profound humility and a great charity.*” But here, when it is about the children, the educator, besides being humble and charitable, must be full of respect for them without which his actions will not touch them. Is it because of its importance or is it its relationship with the character that in the remainder of the chapter, only this topic is treated? The fact is that Marcellin Champagnat testifies to a particular preoccupation in this area.

In other respects, Brother John Baptist treats the same point in two of his writings, almost identical with a few variations, one in his unedited work, entitled: “*The Education of the Marist Brother,*” in chapter 15, the other in “*Advice, Lessons, Sentences and Instructions,*” Chapter 38, under the title: “*Of the Holy Respect Due to a Child.*” This second version only vaguely resembles the first, as found in the Life. Conceived differently, it is presented in nine points: “*What the child is that must be respected.*” This child is: 1. The masterpiece of creation; 2. The image of God; 3. The Son of God; 4. The price of the blood of Jesus; 5. The heir of the celestial kingdom; 6. That which is most beautiful on this earth; 7. your brother, another yourself; 8. The field God has given you to cultivate; 9. The blessing of God, the hope of the world. On the theoretical plan where

one is placed, the child is presented as an object of great value in front of the educator who could not possibly dispute the esteem.

The first version is really the most realistic and familiar. The first part, like the preceding version gives the motives of respect that the educator owes the child, the second part enumerates the faults contrary to this respect, and finally the last paragraph speaks about the rules given by the Founder with regards to the relationships between students and Brothers.

The eight reasons for respecting the child flow from his status as a person affected by the rules to which the social relationships among humans are subjected. These motives can be summarized as follows: You must respect the child, because you demand that he respect you as well and that you must “*establish a claim to his respect and obedience;*” (Life, p. 538) because he is your equal and that he is innocent; because by respecting him you will avoid making your relationships too sentimental, even guilty; finally without this respect, your relationships would be but “*base flattery.*” As we see it, the talk here is simpler, more realistic, closer to the persons concerned because they are more spontaneous, less elaborate than in the preceding version, which is undoubtedly posterior to this one.

In the same direct and realistic style are then exposed “the faults most contrary to the respect that is owed to the child.” They number seven: rudeness and hardness; the lack of control and seriousness; all familiarity; particular friendships; inconstancy in the way of leading the children; weakness of will power; lack of dignity. According to Marcellin Champagnat the Brother then must be human, but firm, he must not lower himself to sentimentalism, but remain dignified and in self control. This text gives an idea of a passage of Cardinal de la Luzerne that Brother John-Baptist cites in the last chapter of “*Advice, Lessons, Sentences and Instructions*” on the virtues of the teacher. (op. cit. Edition 1868, pp. 509-510), without saying that the Founder had cited this text to the Brothers, he would have discouraged them.

More modestly, he ends the chapter by reminding them of certain rules prescribed to the Brothers “*to preserve them in a greater even-tempereness, preserve them from all outbursts and to divert everything that would serve to harm respect...*” These rules are not consigned in the Rule, or in a draft of the rule preserved in the archives. It is relates only to the few sentences that follow, for example: It is forbidden to the Brothers:

- to use familiarity with the children.
- and even to play with them,
- to “tutoyer” (The use of the second person singular “tu” which is used in more familiar relationships instead of the pronoun “vous” which

though plural is used in the singular to show respect, and never:

to give students nicknames;

to use offensive terms while speaking to them or reprimanding them.

and to use afflictive punishment;

Besides, it is prescribed to the Brothers:

To always be very honest with the children

and to form them more by example than by their lessons;

To delay punishments for serious offenses until the following day,

so as to be calm, fair, kind and indulgent;

to lift one's heart to God every time they must punish,

reprimand or give advice to someone.

Brother John-Baptist concludes this paragraph on the rules by indicating that they are not only for the purpose of preserving the Brothers, *“but also to make of their school a family through feelings of respect, love and reciprocal trust that must animate the teachers and the students.”*

## CONCLUSION

To install in our schools a family spirit is an ideal which the Founder certainly dreamed for his Brothers. One might ask why these “rules” through which he enjoins them to establish this spirit were not included in the book of the “Rules” of 1837? The answer is perhaps in the very concept of this work, which limits itself to the exterior conduct and prescribes nothing concerning interior life. Well, the considerations on education that are developed here are of the same order. It is about the interior, personal attitude in the rapports between student and teacher, while the theory on education finds its place elsewhere, in the last chapter of this work.

But all this does not justify the general conception of this first chapter. It is surprising, as was already noticed at the beginning of this study, to note the composite and fragmented form of this chapter, going from the portrait of the Founder to the education of children, passing by way of a substantial treatise on sadness and joy. How do these very different theses tie in to one another? Brother John-Baptist certainly had a reason to gather them, for he is not so awkward a writer that he composes a chapter with elements lacking in logical bonding among them. Even though it is not explicit, this bond is in fact present. All the elements are about the character. By describing the physical and moral picture of the one about whom he will present the details of facts and gestures, he wanted

to show that nature had endowed him with the competency he needed to accomplish his mission totally centered on social relationships. He was making him particularly capable of forming disciples, having them acquire, in turn, thanks to the improvement of their character, the fundamental and indispensable aptitudes for whomever wants to be an educator of youth. He must always radiate the joy of living and treating his students with respect, qualities that Marcellin Champagnat knew how to transmit because he possessed them himself. We must therefore keep all this in mind if we want to have a complete picture. Consequently, the whole chapter enlightens the different aspects of his personality, reveals how he was perceived by those who rubbed elbows with him, in his activities, his relationships, his manners of being with his entourage. And so, if this way of seeing is pertinent, it is possible to sketch the larger traits of his portrait by way of conclusion.

Always calm and serene, no fear ever shakes his natural disposition described at the beginning of the chapter: his cheerfulness, his openness, his courage, and his constancy. We must therefore add what the following teaches us: his tendency to going out of his way toward others and the respect, even the charity he has for everyone, the weak in particular. His altruism is limitless, stimulated by the need to give of himself, never to allow a known necessity to go without seeking a suitable remedy and apply it immediately. This can only be conceived of someone whose main characteristic is to be a man of action, with an intrepid courage who does not let himself be knocked down by difficulties. Sometimes rash, he knows however what he wants and when he has decided upon it, he pursues it relentlessly, well decided in advance to pay dearly for overcoming the obstacles that can present themselves through lack of foresight. However, nothing can take away the confidence he draws as much from his intimacy with God as in the familiarity that his condition as son of a peasant made him contract with nature and the things of the earth that do not deceive. He is gifted with a deep intelligence in a practical sense, but limited on the theoretical sense; interiorly solid in his convictions, even though exteriorly rather reserved. As for feelings, Marcellin Champagnat is not lacking in them as many of the letters he wrote to the Brothers testify. And yet, his openness of heart both serene and respectful does not make him less vigilant when it is time to defend the real interests, even if it means seeming to be intransigent at times. Far from being agitated by doubts and incertitude, he is strongly anchored in his convictions; from there comes this assurance and this certainty upon which the Brothers were happy to lean. In the Characterology of Le Senne, he would easily

be ranked among the emotional-active, with medium effect, primary as well as secondary, but with a predominant activity. He is not seen as dragging on prayer or contemplation, giving them however, appropriate time, but his moments of prayer had to be frequent and short, of a profound intimacy. Nothing could better give the worth of his character than the feeling of being incessantly in the presence of God to whom he had vowed all his existence.



## *Documents*

### *Brother François evokes Father Champagnat*

*Br. Paul SESTER, FMS*

On 16 July 1860, Brother François assembled the third General Chapter. Because of his failing health, he requested to be relieved of the administration of the Institute and proposed to entrust his Vicar with it. The chapter complied with his request. From then on, while remaining The Superior General in fact, he retired to Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage where he was the superior of the elder Brothers, the Brothers doing manual work and the young ones still in training.

Very soon, he started to meet the Brothers for Sunday instructions. He had written the outlines of these instructions into a notebook that we have been keeping in our archives. This notebook with its 262 hand-written pages allows us to perceive some aspects of the Hermitage Brothers' lives during the 1860-1875 years. Besides, this canvas completes our knowledge of Brother François, for example as regards the souvenir he kept of the Founder.

The excerpts have been grouped by themes in order to better show the importance of each one in the memory of a disciple deeply influenced by his master. Considering the importance of the date when we describe opinions, every quotation is preceded by its own. The footnotes will provide easy reference.

Finally, allow me to tell you: our secret intention is to discover new insights on Marcellin Champagnat out of the intimate conversations that he surely had with his nearest collaborator. But soon, we will be deceived. It is probable that out of respect towards his superior, Brother François did not wish to reveal words or attitudes that he judged intimate. Besides, his curiosity does not run that way. He was satisfied to observe Marcellin

as his model. Nevertheless, this compilation is not deprived of all interest for it exposes certain aspects of the Master's and the pupil's psychology.

## **The Hermitage House, Father Champagnat's Reliquary**

26.08.1860

-N.D. de l'Hermitage 1<sup>o</sup> Topographic location – 2<sup>o</sup> Its aspect 3<sup>o</sup> Its productions – 4<sup>o</sup> Father Champagnat's choice – Solitude, retreat

-Such dear and pious souvenirs! So many reflections, so many pious thoughts! Everything speaks of our blessed Founder here. Everything recalls his life, his works, his sufferings and his death.

02.07.1860

-La Valla: 1<sup>o</sup> Father Champagnat as a curate – 2<sup>o</sup> Birth, childhood of the Institute – 3<sup>o</sup> Zeal, works, piety, persecutions, our holy Founder's cares – 4<sup>o</sup> Lives of the first brothers.

-N.D. de l'Hermitage 1<sup>o</sup> youth, education, increase of the Institute – 2<sup>o</sup> Works to organise and develop the Institute – the Government's authorisation – 4<sup>o</sup> The Rules.

-St-Genis-Laval: 1<sup>o</sup> Building, extension, maturity of the Institute 2<sup>o</sup> Rome's approbation – 3<sup>o</sup> Considerable increase of Brothers, buildings and establishments.

-1<sup>o</sup>Bethleem's stable – 2<sup>o</sup> the house of Nazareth – 3<sup>o</sup> Jerusalem's Cenacle.

30.09.1860

Care of the temporal goods: furniture, buildings; Father Champagnat's inheritance consecrated to Mary. Poverty in his life 2<sup>o</sup> p.c. 9<sup>54</sup>

As if this good father saw us.

02.12.1860

The Hermitage House must be honoured:

1<sup>o</sup> as Father Champagnat great reliquary. We must respect it: he built it by his hard work; he taught his brothers here, he prayed, he suffered and he died.

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<sup>54</sup> Life, ed. 1989, pages 361-374, Chapter 9, His Love of Poverty.

2<sup>o</sup> as the Major Seminary of the Institute, we must look for perfection in everything.

3<sup>o</sup> as a School for Good Stewardship, to train ourselves to care for everything without wasting anything.

4<sup>o</sup> as the family spirit's kingdom; let us learn to obtain and spread it.

18.08.1861

Souvenir of Our Lady of the Hermitage and Fr. Champagnat's lessons.

It is a holy place: 1<sup>o</sup> because of the graces God spread from here 2<sup>o</sup> For all the prayers that were recited here and the virtues that were practised; something we hope will never cease.

23.03.1862

Respect for the House of Nazareth, carried by angels to Loreto; pilgrimages

Respect for our House, built by Fr. Champagnat, consecrated to Mary, under the patronage of S. Joseph and inhabited by Jesus in the Holy Sacrament.

## **1862 : Arrival of Novices and Postulants from St-Genis-Laval**

You have come with gladness, and it is our pleasure to welcome you into this House built by Father Champagnat, our venerable Founder. It is here where he worked and prayed so much for the good of our Society. It is also where he suffered so much and where he died. His grave is found in this community's cemetery.

He has his first room in this very hall. The first temporary chapel after the one under the trees was here. Later, he gave us his sound instructions during the year and during the annual retreats right here. In this place, he was given the last sacraments and made that touching last speech that was his spiritual testament.

Everything here speaks about Fr. Champagnat, everything reminds us of that good father. The walls, the partitions and the floors tell us that he has been at the same time a mason, a carpenter and that his hand could touch and direct everything. He did walk on these floors, he went around all these apartments. He prayed, sang, confessed, said mass in this chapel that he had built. He tilled the soil of the garden where he later strolled. He instructed the novices and dug the rock. You will eat fruit from the

trees that he planted, you will inhabit the place that he chose, that he inhabited himself.

You will then be in this house as in a grand reliquary of Father Champagnat. You will try to fill yourselves with his spirit, to imitate his virtues, to practise his advice, to recall his instructions. In short, you will try to live here as if the good Father were still here. In this way, you will be happy and you will progress in your religious perfection. You will visit his tomb with love and trust to ask for his blessing and to pray him to grant you the grace to be his worthy children.

16.10.1864

Respectful silence in Father Champagnat's house, our venerable Founder. In this house you will find:

1° his room where he received so many postulants, given so many pieces of advice to the Brothers, where he wrote so much, where he prayed so much, where he suffered and died.

2° The infirmary that Our Lord so often visits to give himself to the sick, where so many brothers died as saints, after long and painful diseases.

3° The recreation yard, the statues of Mary and of saint Joseph, the promenade that takes us to the cemetery. Our Lord is carried along this beautiful alley in our twice-a-year procession. Along the same way, the statue of Mary is carried in triumph on the feast of the Assumption.

- Father Champagnat celebrated mass successively :

1° in the little wooden shed

2° in the meditation hall

3° in room n° 1 of the first floor

4° in the first chapel built north east of this building

5° in the current chapel.

11.11.1866

This house was blessed by Mgr de Pins, archbishop of Amasie and the Administrator of the Lyon diocese, built thanks to his inspiration and for a great part his generosity. Father Champagnat founded this house, inhabited and sanctified it by his sacrifices, his prayers and his sufferings; collaborated in this foundation: the Brothers who lived with him and after him. Many of these are buried in our cemetery as in a great reliquary.

13.11.1870

The Hermitage house is holy: 1° it is a religious house consecrated to God; 2° It was built and inhabited by our venerable Founder; 3° because

it has been embellished, decorated and perfumed by the prayers and virtues of a great number of Brothers.

This house would cease to be a holy ground if it were inhabited, profaned by impious people, scandalous men; etc. used for criminal purposes. A reparation, a new consecration would then be needed.

Why are the Holy Land and other sacred places throughout the world so respected and so venerated that churches are built there for the many pilgrims? Because they have been sanctified by the mysteries of our Lord, the apparitions and the miracles of Mary or by the dwelling and the wonders of the saints.

And why do we honour and pray all the saints of heaven with so much confidence and love? Because they practised virtue at a high degree. Similarly, we honour and respect those on this earth who are pious and have consecrated themselves to God.

O Lord of all things, grant that this house may never be soiled! "That your tabernacles are lovable, God of virtues! Holiness is the decoration of your house." (2 Machab. 14:36; Psalms 83 and 92)

20.11.1870

Tomorrow, the Presentation of the Holy Virgin in the temple. Mary was in a holy house, she prayed and worked. She is our model in this peaceful retreat, this sweet solitude, where some start and where the others end their religious careers. O! how happy and how much good will they achieve if they train themselves according this model!

### **Words of the Founder**

05.10.1862

You know what is said in Fr. Champagnat's life about the angelic virtue. He said that the unclean spirit fears this house and that he does not dare enter it unless someone invites him and open the door for him. Many Brothers felt the healthy influences of their stay in this blessed solitude.

13.12.1863

Jesus came to us through the humility and obedience way; one must take the same way to go to him. (Fr. Champagnat)

History is a list of dead people. What feelings do we have by listening to all that these people did? Where are they now? Where shall we be ourselves one day? What legacy will we leave to our Brothers? (Fr. Champagnat)

19.02.1865

You have God, the rule, justice, charity, the superiors and all your brothers on your side; whom do you fear? A sentence that Fr. Champagnat liked to repeat, “If God is for us, who will be against us?” Rom. 8<sup>55</sup>

11.03.1866

What frightens the saints is the fear to abuse God’s graces. You know what the catechism says: Resistance to grace makes us lose it; it dries up the sources of grace for the future; it may lead to lack of faith, to the hardening of the heart and even damnation. (Fr. Champagnat)

28.10.1866

Our first rules were totally written by Father Champagnat. Here is an instruction that he used as preliminary to these rules, “Order comes from God and leads back to God. The one who lives according to the Rule lives according to God. The rule is the way, the ladder to Paradise.”<sup>56</sup>

10.02.1867

At carnival time, S. François de Sales wrote to St Chantal, “Here is a sad period! My heart is sunk in grief because of so many souls who grow lax in their faith.” Father Champagnat said that when one is abandoned by most of his friends, the few who come to see him really delight him.

13.10.1867

Father Champagnat said that his uncle daily recited a Pater and one Ave Maria for the ill-advised people who could not manage their businesses and went bankrupt. He wanted the brothers to be good stewards of the Institute’s property.

02.02.1868

Tell me who you hang around with, and I will tell you who you are.<sup>57</sup> Birds of a feather flock together... The religious person out of his house is like the fish outside of the water. (S. Antoine. Le Chartreux à la Côte)

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Lettres de M. Champagnat, Vol. 1, N° 16, 17, pages 56, 58

<sup>56</sup> We mean the ‘instruction on our necessary esteem of the rule’ that preceded the 1852 rule copied word for word from the 1837 rule that had been written by Fr. Champagnat.

<sup>57</sup> In fact the text of the Proverbs, 13:20 is, “The one who walks with the wise will become wise; the friend of the foolish people will eventually resemble them.”

10.01.1869

Fr. Champagnat said, "This thought, God sees me! Is sufficient to chase away the devil and keep the temptations away." And the Curé d'Ars, "With this thought – God sees me - I we will never sin. Let us remember this thought to walk generously and constantly in virtue's way."

11.07.1869

A hermit felt bored in his cell and was tempted to leave it. He consulted an Ancient who advised him to resist by saying, "It is out of love for God that I remain within the walls of this cell." Fr. Champagnat said, "Let us be like a little dog near his master."

04.09.1870

"The one who commits a venial sin, who lags in his duties and sows disorder in his community does us more harm than the Prussians and the revolution! The one who is in the state of grace has nothing to fear. God's friend is always happy." (Fr. Champagnat)

27.11.1870

Fr. Champagnat complained that he recognised the 'sick' brothers specially at the dining room. "It is not a good sign to be sick only during the prayers; besides, what does one gain by one more hour in bed?"

19.11.1871

We may consider ourselves like the Holy Virgin in rooms contiguous to the temple since our chapel is inside our house and that according the Founder's expression we lodge under the same roof as the Lord Jesus Christ.

31.12.1871

"Follow your rule well, teach the catechism properly: this is what will console you the most at the end of your days. Think only of what you are currently doing or of what you would have liked to do at the moment of your death." My Friend, what pains you most today will be your greatest joy when you die."<sup>58</sup> (Fr. Champagnat)

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<sup>58</sup> Life, edition 1989, page 241; 278

04.02.1872

“We can measure the value of our lives by the way we pray. Likewise, we can know the value of our prayer by the way we live. Who prays well, lives well, and who lives well prays well. Uprightness cannot be obtained without prayer.” (Fr. Champagnat)

02.06.1872

“Who are the religious persons who drag their feet on virtue’s path?” Fr. Champagnat asked. “These are the frivolous ones who have little care for their interior lives, who do not observe silence who talk a lot with men but little with God. - Beware of these people! That will be to our greatest advantage!”

09.06.1872

“The superior who knows how to make silence observed, who stimulates the Brothers to study, who insists that everyone does his part of the chores, preserves the Brothers from an infinity of perils and temptations; he helps his community most remarkably.”<sup>59</sup>

29.11.1874

“May a tender and filial devotion for our good Mother animate you in all times and circumstances! She is the first superior of our community.” How these words from our Founder’s spiritual testament are suitable to excite our fervour in this preparation time to the feast of the Immaculate Conception!

The rule says, <sup>60</sup> : All the Marial feasts will be family feasts for the Brothers. They will be celebrated with holy joy, respect and thanksgiving. The Brothers will honour in a special way the glorious privilege of her Immaculate Conception by celebrating the feast with much fervour and, often praying to Mary conceived without sin.

“I am confident,” our Founder said, “that Mary will not allow anyone who will persevere until death to perish.”<sup>61</sup> He has been proved right. All the Brothers who died in the Institute left us with the most Christian dispositions while many showed visible signs of predestination. Thus the devotion to Mary appeared to him as a sure sign of vocation.

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<sup>59</sup> Vie, ed. 1989, pages 441-442

<sup>60</sup> Rule 1852, first part, chapter 6, rule N° 4, page 14

<sup>61</sup> Life, ed. 1989, page 335



## The Founder's Models

07.04.1961

Similarities between Venerable J.B. de la Salle with V. Champagnat: Both were persecuted, mistrusted by the authorities, by the secular priests and by some Brothers.

14.07.1861

Friday, S. Vincent de Paul. Like Our Lord, he came by doing good. Similarities between this saint and Father Champagnat (Instructions 1499)<sup>62</sup>

04.05.1862

Similarities between M. Vianney, Curé d'Ars with Fr. Champagnat. Their ways of instructing, their advice, zeal, ascetic lives; etc. Church decorations, processions, fight against abuses e.g.: dances.

09.11.1862

Penance is the virtue of all saints. It is the secret to accumulate many merits without the others noticing it. S. François de Sales very much loved these little virtues that are born at the foot of the cross.<sup>63</sup>

30.08.1863

When reading the life of S. François de Sales, the founder of the Visitation Sisters and the life of Fr. Champagnat, the founder of the Little Brothers of Mary, how many comparisons one can make! The two societies have the same spirit and very similar rules. By the same reading, we honour God's Spirit who speaks to us through these saints.

11.06.1865

Father Champagnat showed a great devotion for S. Jean-François Régis, to whom he made pious novenas. He is our second patron.

30.07.1865

Monday, S. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits. His motto was, 'Everything for the greater glory of God.' And Fr. Champagnat liked to

<sup>62</sup> From 1415 the 'Instructions' were lost. Hence the one indicated here does not exist any longer.

<sup>63</sup> Life, ed. 1989, Chapter 12, Humility of F. Champagnat, pages 395 ss.

add, 'and for the honour of Mary, Mother of our Lord.' The Jesuit priests and the Little Brothers of Mary entertain good relationships.

01.12.1867

One day, Saint François de Sales on a pastoral visit was wondering how to solve so many difficulties that bothered him. As soon as he heard the bell call for Vespers, he walked to the chapel. Returning to his desk, everything was settled within fifteen minutes. Very amazed, he could not help exclaiming, 'God made all this!' In a similar circumstance, our Founder obtained the same result.<sup>64</sup>

23.08.1868

Thursday, feast of Saint Joseph Calasance, a Roman teacher. Like Fr. Champagnat, he showed a lot of zeal for the education of youth. He resembles our Founder by the purpose of his congregation and the favours he obtained from Mary.

18.07.1875

Monday: S. Vincent de Paul, our patron this month. What a magnificent model of piety, regularity, charity and humility! Similarities between Vincent de Paul and Champagnat:

-Both were born from parents who worked hard to earn their living. Both had a great devotion to Mary and instructed children.

-S. Vincent did a lot of apostolic work at Clichy by his charity, his preaching and his kindness. Champagnat did the same at La Valla.

-As he was hearing the confession of a sick person Vincent found out the needs of the country folks and decided to found a congregation to instruct them. Fr. Champagnat had heard the confession of a poor country youngster when he decided to found a congregation of teaching Brothers.

-Their occupations, their works, instructions, difficulties and sufferings were almost identical. They had the same way of governing, correcting, encouraging and leading religious people.

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<sup>64</sup> Id. page 325

## Facts that Remind us of Father Champagnat

06.01.1861

Vocation to religious life – The Magi’s gifts compared to the vows. A great feast for Fr. Champagnat.<sup>65</sup>

We pray for our Society and for good vocations.

03.02.1861

The parable of the sower applied to vocation (Instruction 795)<sup>66</sup>

Next Sunday, 40 hours; Exercises during the adoration 1<sup>o</sup> Penitential psalms; 2<sup>o</sup> Hour of adoration; 3<sup>o</sup> Lyon prayers; 4<sup>o</sup> Meditation; 5<sup>o</sup> Universal prayer; 6<sup>o</sup> Silence in front of the Lord (The Orleans soldier, the Ars peasant – Traits, comparisons, 420, 640)<sup>67</sup> S. John Fr. Régis in front of the Holy Sacrament or kneeling in front of the church (Br. Laurent – Life of Fr. Champagnat 2<sup>o</sup> p. c. 4 p. 66)<sup>68</sup>

01.06.1862

Pentecost eve - We remember the death of Fr. Champagnat. We read his spiritual testament.

04.10.1863

All the retreats are over and the schools are about to re-open. We must pray for the Brothers and for the children. Let us remember the zeal and the instructions of Fr. Champagnat. Let us fervently recite the Pater for the Brothers and children at the end of our night prayers.

29.11.1863

Saint Nicolas the Pilgrim kept repeating Kyrie eleison. He used to gather the children giving them sweets and making them repeat ‘Kyrie eleison.’ Fr. Champagnat wanted us to recite the Miserere mei daily.

31.07.1864

I thought you might be interested to read the pieces of advice that Fr. Champagnat used to give to the La Valla farmers at the fruit harvest

<sup>65</sup> Life, ed. 1989, p. 30

<sup>66</sup> Carnet N<sup>o</sup> 8, p. 97

<sup>67</sup> Note 420, in Carnet 310, p. 169; Note 640 does not exist any more.

<sup>68</sup> Life, ed. 1989, p. 310

time. (His life 1 p. C.5; p. 54)<sup>69</sup> That is the way he spoke to lay people but when he spoke to the Brothers, he was more severe. See : Second p. C.11. p. 168)<sup>70</sup>

08.10.1865

Linen, handkerchiefs and other items spread along the river will be driven away by the wind, the water or stolen by passers-by. Some clothes were even left in the river. Solicitude, good housekeeping of Fr. Champagnat.

02.06.1867

Father Champagnat's advice to the La Valla people during the fruit harvesting. (Vie: T. 1 p.54)<sup>71</sup> He spat out a cherry he had picked up. (p. 30)<sup>72</sup> His counsels to the Brothers on penance. (T. 2 p. 167)<sup>73</sup>

03.04.1870 Passion Sunday

The preface of the Cross will be sung; at Vespers we will choose the hymn to the cross. Let us always do the sign of the cross properly. We don't change position until it is finished.

05.02.1871

-The house is afflicted with an epidemic: many are sick with small-pox. Mr Préher, the parish priest of Tarentaise, friend of Fr. Champagnat visiting a house where the disease had been making its damages for sometimes had those remarkable words, "House of affliction, house of blessing."

-The rule says that we must consider the sick as our treasures, as blessings for the institute; hence, with these feelings we will lavish our sick with all the cares they need. (Common rule 3 p. C.13) The rule adds that diseases and afflictions are very meritorious stages of our lives.

31.12.1871

Fifty years ago, I was in Fr. Champagnat's room with Brother Louis and other Brothers. We had assembled to celebrate the last hour of one

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<sup>69</sup> id. p. 47

<sup>70</sup> id. p. 386

<sup>71</sup> Life, ed. 1989, p. 47

<sup>72</sup> id. p. 25

<sup>73</sup> id. p. 386

year and the first one of the following one.<sup>74</sup> When his room clock rang midnight, Father exclaimed, “Adieu, year 1819! Adieu for ever!” These words made a lasting impression on me.

21.01.1872

You heard what Fr. Champagnat said of a superior who was not zealous for the observance of the rule? (Vie 2 p. C. 16)<sup>75</sup> One was not allowed to bargain with the rule or with one’s duty; he did not hesitate to punish neither to send someone away when necessary; he needed Brothers but he wanted good ones.

01.09.1872

Mr Chapuis, our Chaplain left us a souvenir as a token of his generous affection for the Brothers, a holy picture with a set of prayers on the back.

He often told me how much he was attached to the Brothers. He was specially pleased at the Hermitage because this house reminded him of Fr. Champagnat whom he venerated.

However, he did not hide his attraction for religious life. Thus, he is joining the Missionaries of Our Lady of la Salette. He promised to remember the Little Brothers of Mary at each of his masses so that they may remain faithful.

09.02.1873

The Church dresses in its penance ornaments today and there is no Alleluia. Let us try to practise well what the rule indicates regarding the spirit of penance.

Oh! That we could understand well this doctrine of regular penance, daily, unseen but very worthy in the eyes of God as Fr. Champagnat said. (Instruct. prélim.)<sup>76</sup>

09.08.1874

A few more days and we will celebrate our great patronal feast, daily reminded to us by the large altar-piece painted by Mr Raveri at Fr. Champagnat’s request. May our bodies be clean, our souls holy, our hearts decorated and our minds clear for this celebration!

<sup>74</sup> Cf. “Avis, Leçons, Sentences” éd. 1868, p. 128

<sup>75</sup> Life, ed. 1989, p. 442

<sup>76</sup> Carnet N<sup>o</sup> 307, p.4

22.11.1874

The spiritual testament of our dear and venerated Founder and father reminds us of this touching and solemn ceremony that occurred in his room a few days before his death, when to the whole community assembled near his bed, the Reverend Brother Louis Marie, the then first Assistant read this testament after the good Father had received the 'In articulo mortis' indulgence.

-Try to imagine our attention and emotion as we listened to the reading! The good Father added a few words to confirm what had just been read. Then, every one knelt down and I prayed the Father to bless the Brothers present and the absent ones and all those who would join the Institute in the future. He gave it with much fervour and affection.

-After the recitation of three Ave Maria, the Memorare and the Sub tuum, the community affected by emotion retired. Then, the pious Founder expressed his satisfaction for what had just been done. He said, "I am very happy that the Brothers will know and read my last counsels and my last will: I owed them this consolation for their attachment."

-The good Father, before dying, clearly promised that he would not forget us and that he would use all the credit he could have in heaven in favour of the society. See! At the moment of his death, we were about two hundred and we had 43 houses running. Today, we are three thousand Brothers. Our dear Founder died thirty-four years ago.

-A father's will is always a sacred thing for a family: it makes it its duty to abide by it exactly and a child who would refuse to conform to it would be considered degenerated. Then, let us try to always live and act according to our Father's will.

-Happy shall we be if at the hour of our death we can say like our Father, "I die filled with respect and thanksgiving for my superior and in perfect union with all the members of the Society. I do not recall having voluntarily afflicted anyone."

13.12.1874

"I leave you all in the Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary, waiting for the day when we will be reunited in the blessed eternity." How tender, touching and affectionate these last words are! He preceded us, he entrusted us to Jesus and Mary; he is waiting for us in heaven.

At the beginning of the last paragraph, the good Father invites us to be faithful to our vocation, to love it and to persevere in it with courage. He said, "There are sufferings to live as good religious people but grace softens everything. Besides, life is very short, but eternity will never end."

Let us remember these words specially during this month that brings us a sad nature but that is so rich in grace.

31.01.1875

Fr. Champagnat's piety in the celebration of mass was admirable; he never missed to celebrate daily. When travelling he would spend whole mornings without eating, in the hope of being able to celebrate mass on arrival at his destination. (Vie 2<sup>e</sup>.P.C.6)<sup>77</sup>

### **Other Reminiscences**

01.01.1862

Happy effects of Brother Lawrence's penance in the refectory –  
(Life of Fr. Champagnat, 2<sup>e</sup> p. c. 16)

17.08.1862

“I recommend to always pay attention in everything and everywhere to piety, regularity, joy and charity. You have lived in the Father Champagnat's great reliquary: Bring with you his spirit, his zeal, his devotedness and all his virtues.”

12.10.1862

“Silence, God's presence, humility in God's and in the Brothers' relationships. Act as if Father Champagnat were present, hearing what we say and seeing what we do. He would not dare behave inappropriately.”

30.08.1862

“Let us often repeat to ourselves, ‘If Father Chamagnat saw me would I do this? Would I speak that way? How would I stand during prayers?’”

18.09.1864

Common rules, second part, chapter 7. On the spirit of penance. Life of Father Champagnat, second part, chapter 11. His love for penance. How to deal with the little details of life – A match, a spark can set a house and even a city on fire. Great fortunes were realised starting with a few cents.

<sup>77</sup> Life, ed. 1989, p. 328

28.07.1867

A Brother observed a Spiritual Combat, a Golden Book, a ‘pensez-y bien’ on a Marist Father’s desk. These books are closely related to our Institute’s foundation. Father Champagnat recommended them so much.

22.09.1867

If the young Brother who had withheld some money and had taken some books without permission had returned these things to Fr. Champagnat, would he have been sent away? No, because this move would have been the proof of his repentance. (Vie 2<sup>e</sup> p. C. 9) <sup>78</sup>

13.09.1868

We can say that the Hermitage is not the beginning and the end: i.e. the postulants begin their religious lives here whereas the elderly Brothers come at the end of their teaching career to prepare themselves for a happy death. Thus Fr. Champagnat can see the older Brothers and the Benjamins.

18.10.1868

You know what is mentioned in the Rodriguez’ book, ‘Christian Perfection’ (3 p. 1. Tr C.32),<sup>79</sup> and what Father Champagnat says (Vie 2. P.c.4)<sup>80</sup> about these obscure Brothers, busy in the humblest tasks; hidden to the world who by their prayers and their virtues, allow the schools to prosper and the missions to flourish.

20.12.1868

“Happy the Brother who practises well what is written in Fr. Champagnat’s book ‘Avis, Leçons, Sentences’! He leads a holy and edifying life: He makes the other people happy and he is preparing his eternal felicity!”

20.11.1870

“Following the hermits’ examples we join our work and study to prayer. Necessity, the fruit of work, the dangers, the evil consequences of idleness deserve our attention. You know what Fr. Champagnat thought of these items.”

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<sup>78</sup> Life, ed. 1989, p. 373

<sup>79</sup> Cf. 3<sup>ème</sup> partie, 1<sup>er</sup> Traité, Chapitre IX, Du second moyen de faire du fruit dans les âmes qui est celui de l’oraison

<sup>80</sup> Life, ed. 1989, p. 304



18.06.1871

“Father Bourdin who made his noviciate in this house wrote Father Chanel’s life. The theme of his sermon for the Corpus Christi procession at St Chamond was: ‘Who will receive what you prepared?’” (Luke 17)

19.07.1874

“I remember a parish priest who had reported that a Brother usually spent his time looking everywhere during the church ceremonies. That Brother was not edifying; here is what happens when one does not remain alert.”

30.07.1874

“Among all the means of perfection, our venerable Founder listed, the good use of recreation time. And he wanted that any wrong use of this time be mentioned at the chapter of faults exercise. The recreations were longer during the holiday times.”

01.01.1871

“When one reads the Desert Fathers’ lives he will be happy to notice the similarities between their rules and ours, between their mottoes and those of our pious Founder. Thus, as early as in the fourth century Religious people were trained in the same way as nowadays.”

12.05.1872

“See how much God loves us! Consider how he makes us taste of the twelve precious fruits of the Holy Spirit: charity, joy, peace; etc. (Galat. 5) Jesus and the Apostles stressed the first commandment of charity; our Founder did the same. How happy are we to see this virtue reign among us!”









