

# SUMMARY

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# *Marist Brothers and Maori in New Zealand 1838 -2003*

By Brother Edward CLISBY

The mission of Oceania was the first entrusted to the Society of Mary and the first to which St Marcellin Champagnat sent his brothers. Most of those he sent to the Pacific before his death in June 1840 served on the mission to the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. Among them was one of his own relations, Claude-Marie Bertrand, a second cousin. The New Zealand province, therefore, counts our founder among the founders of the Marist Maori mission.<sup>1</sup>

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## **ST MARCELLIN AND THE MAORI MISSION**

For Fr Champagnat, the mission of the brothers, like that of the Society itself, was a mission without frontiers.<sup>2</sup> When western Oceania was confided to the Society of Mary in 1836, he was among the first to volunteer. Fr Colin told him that his task was rather to prepare apostles for the evangelisation of the peoples there.<sup>3</sup> Champagnat took his work as formator of missionaries seriously. He returned to

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1 This article is an updated resume of a history of the relationship between Marists brothers and Maori commissioned by the New Zealand province in 1996 and completed in 1999. It was published in 2001 as *Marist Brothers and Maori 1838-1988*.

2 *Letters of M.B.J. Champagnat, Vol. 1.* Doc 43, p 106.

3 *Life of Champagnat* (1989), p 202.

the subject frequently in his conferences and letters.<sup>4</sup> He kept up correspondence with the missionary priests and brothers, and quoted their letters in his circulars. *I never approach the holy altar without thinking of our cherished mission and those who are sent there*, he informs Mgr Pompallier, now in New Zealand, in a letter of May 1838.<sup>5</sup> This attitude and spirit he succeeded in communicating to those around him, and through them to the congregation.<sup>6</sup>

Of the eight members of the first missionary group that set out at the end of 1836, five had received their initial formation as Marists from St Marcellin at the Hermitage: Mgr J.B.F. Pompallier (1829-1831), Fr C. Servant (1833-1836), and Brs Michel Colombon (1831-1832), Marie-Nizier Delorme (1833-1834), and Joseph-Xavier Luzy (1836). He was involved to a lesser extent with forming almost all the dozen or so brothers sent out subsequently between 1838 and 1842 for the Maori mission. Another of the priests, Fr J. Forest, was also to make much of his association with Champagnat and the Hermitage (1831-1832) when writing from New Zealand to France later in the century seeking brothers for his school at Napier.<sup>7</sup>

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## **THE MARIST MISSION TO MAORI 1838 – 1850**

The islands of New Zealand were among the last in the Pacific to be settled. The East Polynesian settlers of the land they were to call Aotearoa had almost a thousand years to develop a distinctive culture of their own before European explorers added the islands to their charts. Whalers and sealers began to exploit the waters around their coasts, and in 1814 Protestant missionaries introduced Christianity. By 1838 there were 2000 European settlers, most of them in the north and around the Bay of Islands.

By the time the Marists arrived, Maori society had undergone profound changes. The introduction of firearms into tribal warfare and exotic diseases had resulted in a decline and displacement of

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Life*, p 203.

<sup>5</sup> *Letters*, Doc 194, p 369.

<sup>6</sup> Refer the treatment of H. Juan-Jesus Moral, *Espiritualidad Misionera Marista* (1995), especially chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>7</sup> He had to wait 15 years to get them. Rf Mary Goulter, *Sons of France* (1958), pp 118-122.

population. Trade with Europeans was now a key element of Maori economy. With the introduction of the printing press, literacy was becoming widespread. By 1838 most villages had at least one person who could read and so act as a catechist for the missionaries or an agent for the traders. Christianity was firmly established, although by no means accepted uncritically. In the Bay of Islands the gap between preaching and practice among Europeans was only too evident. Maori moved from one Christian group to another or founded syncretistic movements of their own, combining elements of the new faith and traditional beliefs and practices.

Mgr Pompallier, Fr Servant, and Br Michel landed at Totara Point in Hokianga Harbour in January 1838. The first Mass celebrated on New Zealand soil on 13 January inaugurated the Catholic Church in the country. But it was not until June, when the little group took up residence among the Hikutu people that the mission to the New Zealanders can be said to have really begun. For the first year it remained centred on the Hokianga, but in June 1839, after the arrival of a second group of Marists, Pompallier set up a new station at Kororareka in the Bay of Islands. This became the administration and supply center of his vicariate. With the arrival of other groups between December 1839 and February 1843, he was able to found other stations in the north and elsewhere in the upper part of the North Island mainly. When he departed for Rome in 1846 to report on the state of the mission, he listed 5000 Maori baptized, with five or six times that number under instruction.<sup>8</sup>

By that time the general situation had changed considerably. When the bishop departed, he left his vicar, Fr J. B. Viard, with only 21 of the 38 men the Society had sent him. Of the rest, some had been transferred to stations in the tropics, others had returned to France, died, or left the Society. After the sack of Kororareka in 1845 by disaffected chiefs, the Marists suffered from the general loss of esteem for *Pakeha* (white men) and their institutions in Maori eyes. The loss of influence in the north was somewhat compensated by significant growth of the mission south of Auckland, but at the same

8 Pompallier, *Early History of the Catholic Church in Oceania* (1888), p 83. His figures are undoubtedly inflated. Cf Michael King, *God's Farthest Outpost. A History of Catholics in New Zealand* (1997), p 58. His lack of reliability in this area was one of the reasons for the conflict which had arisen between Pompallier and his Marist missionaries.

time, priests were already being diverted to serve the rapidly growing European settlements. Rome resolved the conflict between Pompallier and the Society of Mary in 1848 by dividing New Zealand into two dioceses. The Marists accompanied Mgr Viard to Wellington, the center of his southern one, leaving Pompallier in possession of the north.

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## MARIST BROTHERS ON MISSION

It is clear from Colin's instructions to Champagnat about the choice of brothers for the mission that he intended them to be more than simply coadjutors to the priests. *They must be good religious, grounded in virtue, reasonably well instructed in the faith as well as able to turn their hands to a variety of lesser occupations.*<sup>9</sup> Pompallier was equally clear about this at the beginning, as indeed were the authorities in Rome. In his report to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith as late as August 1842, Cardinal Mai observed of the brothers in Oceania: *And since these latter serve as catechists, they are hardly less efficient than [the priests] in propagating the faith.*<sup>10</sup>

In practice, it was not so simple. In the early years, the poverty of the Catholic missionaries, their lack of resources and support in a Protestant environment, their reliance on financial sources half a world away, meant that the brothers were chiefly engaged in laying the foundations of the material structure of the mission, clearing ground, erecting buildings, laying out gardens, organizing the base from which the priests could move out on their ministry. Even when this initial phase was over, many continued to find most of their time spent on manual tasks. Pompallier over-extended his resources, both of finance and personnel. Anxious to make a good impression on the chiefs, whom he considered the key to the conversion of the tribes, he made gifts and presentations at the expense of his missionaries, and exalted the status of the priests (and hence his own) at the expense of the brothers. The priests also differed in their expect-

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9 Letter of 11 April 1836, *Correspondance Passive du Pere Champagnat* (1993), p 79.

10 Ralph Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania 1825-1850* (1979), p 240. Cf also Edward Clisby fms, *Marist Brothers and Maori 1838-1988* (2001), p 7.

tations of the brothers. Some were happy to confide to them the evangelisation of the base area while they moved further afield, while for others the brothers were there simply to provide services for which they would otherwise have had to pay a Maori or European servant. Thus while Elie-Regis Marin could inform the brothers of the Hermitage in 1846 that he had performed the function of catechist for most of his time on the mission,<sup>11</sup> Florentin Francon's complaint to Br Francois is more typical of the missionary brothers' experience: *I believed I would be teaching and taking catechism here in helping the priests of the mission, but my occupation is reduced to that of a servant.*<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, while most had at least some opportunity to teach catechism, there are only scattered references to brothers teaching other subjects to Maori or European children in the Bay of Islands or Auckland at this period.<sup>13</sup>

Their other occupations were varied and time-consuming. At the Bay of Islands there were usually three or four engaged in building, cooking, gardening, tailoring, bootmaking, carpentry, storekeeping, printing, bookbinding, and doctoring. In the stations, however, a brother would have to be able to turn his hand to whatever task was required of him, as indeed would a priest if he had no brother with him.

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### THE MAORI MISSION 1850 – 1870

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When Viard and the Marists set up their base in Wellington in 1850, they found they were very much starting anew. Wellington was a colonial settlement where European Catholics were well established with a priest and a church of their own. Europeans were continually growing in numbers while the Maori population, smaller than in the north, was on the decline. In a report of May 1858 it was noted that the Maori population of the diocese was steadily diminishing due to epidemics and to emigration to the north.<sup>14</sup> The

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11 Letter of 30 June 1846, *Lettres d'Océanie 1836-1894*, No 62.

12 Letter of 9 March 1842, *ibid.* No 30.

13 For details see the article, 'Marist Educators in the Pacific 1836-1870', *Marist Notebooks* n 13, July 1998, pp 65-7, 70-1.

14 *Annales des Missions d'Océanie*, T 2, p 141.

Church developed accordingly. Four of the seven stations founded between 1850 and 1853 served settler communities, with only three continuing the mission to Maori. Already the emphasis had passed from mission and evangelisation to structure (essentially European) and consolidation.

Viard suffered from acute shortages of manpower and finance, both of which affected the Maori mission in particular. Between 1850 and 1860 about a third of his Marists left New Zealand, either transferring to other missions or returning to France. Health played a part in these departures, but dissatisfaction with their withdrawal from missionary work was a key factor also. One brother who returned to France had been so depressed by his change of occupation and status – he had become the bishop's cook and housekeeper – that he had to be admitted to an asylum soon after his return.<sup>15</sup> Other priests and brothers made unsuccessful requests to return. Viard did not help matters by visiting his stations only irregularly if at all. He had to wait until 1859 for reinforcements when three priests arrived from France, and another ten years before coadjutors arrived to relieve the overworked brothers.

Because of the shortage of funds, the stations had to become self-sufficient. The brothers' skills in building and farming were of more importance than their qualifications as catechists or teachers. Four were assigned to the Maori mission more or less fulltime during these years, Elie-Regis and Euloge Chabany at Wanganui, and Florentin and Basile Monchalin in Hawkes Bay. Thanks largely to their work, these stations were quickly able to look after themselves. In 1860, Otaki had 200 Catholic Maori, Ahuriri (Hawkes Bay) over 400, and the Whanganui River 500. There were schools at these stations which the brothers helped run, especially when the priest was away on visitation. These occasions also provided opportunities for catechizing, although this function had by now largely been taken over by native catechists.

By 1860, however, Maori and settlers were on the brink of war over issues of land and sovereignty. War actually broke out in parts of the North Island. The Marist missions were not directly affected by the warfare, except for the Whanganui River where Euloge culmi-

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<sup>15</sup> This was Justin Perret whose story is found in the *Life*, pp 336-7.

nated his mission service by laying down his life in May 1864. His loss and that of several leading chiefs and catechists weakened the Catholic mission on the river, and a few years later the missionaries withdrew to the town. In Hawkes Bay, its effects were more indirect, with some falling away of converts who felt that the Church had failed them, and a growing feeling among the Marists that Maori were becoming a lost cause. The departure of Florentin for Sydney in 1869 marked the end of an era for the mission. His confrere, Basile, lived to 1898 and continued to teach catechism in Maori into his old age. But between 1870 and 1883 there was no missionary working fulltime among Maori.

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### **MARISTS AND MAORI EDUCATION 1876 – 1946**

The first brothers to come to New Zealand specifically for schools arrived in Wellington in 1876. They were destined for parish schools in the colony, but some of the Marist fathers hoped they would also be available for the education of young Maori and particularly for the formation of catechists. Fr E. Reignier in Hawkes Bay had already founded a little college to provide an education for Maori catechists and attempt to develop vocations to the priesthood. He claimed he had been promised brothers for this project, and was very disappointed when Forest in Napier was given precedence in 1878.<sup>16</sup> Although the brothers were interested, they lacked the necessary personnel, and so negotiations lapsed in 1883. The college itself was forced to close three years later. In 1893, Fr C. Cognet, who had been working on the Whanganui river since 1885, placed an ambitious project before his superiors. He suggested that boarding schools for the sons of chiefs and promising candidates for catechists be attached to schools conducted by the brothers in such places as Wanganui and Napier. He thought Wanganui would be an ideal place to begin as several young Maori had already been placed at the brothers' school there.<sup>17</sup> When Br Theophane, superior general, visited Wanganui in December that year, he heard more about this propos-

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<sup>16</sup> Br John to Br Superior General, 31 August 1878, *Letters from Oceania 1878-1881*, p 141.

<sup>17</sup> Letter of 1 November 1893, Archives of Marist Brothers, Auckland.

al and commented favourably on it.<sup>18</sup> But this scheme did not eventuate either, both for want of support from Cognet's own confreres, and for lack of suitable brothers. By the turn of the century, the Society of Mary had decided that future catechists could just as well be trained at its own college, St Patrick's, in Wellington, or at the brothers' one in Auckland, Sacred Heart.

Until the 1930s very few Maori lived in urban areas, but from 1907 Maori boys were regularly enrolled as boarders at Sacred Heart College. They came from the government native schools, convent schools of the Maori mission, convent and state schools in areas with large Maori populations. In some cases, the bishop subsidized their education at the college. He did this especially for students preparing to enter the seminary, as for example, seven boys from the Maori mission's St Peter's Catechist School who did their secondary studies at Sacred Heart between 1836 and 1946. Close to 200 Maori youths attended the college between 1906 and 1954 when it moved to its present site at Glen Innes. Many of them went on to prominence in national and local politics, commerce and the professions, the armed forces and sport, as well as becoming influential in their tribal and church communities.

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### **ST PETER'S MAORI COLLEGE 1946 – 1969**

It had been government policy since the 1890s to assimilate Maori into European society. By the 1930s it was clear to many Maori and Pakeha that such policies would lead to the eventual disappearance of Maori as a separate people. Among them was Br Benignus O'Shea, principal of Sacred Heart College. In 1936, now provincial, Benignus proposed to do for Maori what the brothers were already doing successfully for Samoan, Fijian, and Indian students in their Pacific Island missions. Aware of the difficulties Maori students faced at schools such as Sacred Heart, he proposed to set up a boarding school on Auckland's North Shore where they could be trained and educated separately.<sup>19</sup> This project won the support of

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18 Circular of 24 May 1894, *Circulaires des Superieurs Generaux*, T VIII, p 146.

19 Letter to Archbishop O'Shea of Wellington, 14 November 1936, M.B. Archives, Auckland.

the bishop of Auckland and the Mill Hill fathers of the Auckland Maori Mission, and was favourably regarded by the new Labour government. But the financial situation, followed by the outbreak of war, meant that new initiatives in Maori education had to wait until the late 1940s. By that time, the brothers had adopted a different approach.

The Maori mission in the diocese of Auckland was conducted by members of the St Joseph's Missionary Society, popularly known as the Mill Hill Society. In 1928 they had opened a school for catechists on the North Shore, called St Peter's. By 1944 they felt that the school no longer fulfilled this aim and decided that it would serve Maori better as a secondary school. In 1945 it was agreed that the Marist brothers would provide the teaching staff while the boarding and overall direction would remain the responsibility of the Mill Hill fathers.

The new institution was opened in March 1946 as St Peter's Maori College. The founding Marist community consisted of two brothers, Patrick Butler and Edward Holmes. Despite initial problems, they soon began to achieve success. By the end of 1951, the school had achieved good passes in public examinations and ex-students had entered the teaching professions or taken up clerical work in government departments. A school photo of 1946 shows a future university professor, a future artist of international reputation, and a future Marist brother. Gregory Henare, who had started off at St Peter's as a student catechist, entered the juniorate after a year at the new college, and was admitted into the congregation as Br Ronald in 1951. He was the first of a number of students to enter the congregation but the only one to persevere.

The brothers were naturally expected to teach Maori and by 1950 they were preparing students for public exams in that language. In 1951, having introduced debating to encourage fluency in English, they established an annual competition in Maori oratory. Promotion of Maori culture became a significant feature of the school programme with the arrival of Br Reginald Edmonds in 1954. He introduced the performance of Maori opera and set up a Maori Cultural Club. These won the college a considerable reputation. But after Reginald's departure in 1959, a more conservative approach was adopted, and no brother had any direct involvement with language teaching or cultural activities for nearly twenty years.

The following decades saw further progress in academic and sporting achievements and in other activities, such as military cadets. As the school's reputation grew, so did its numbers. This placed great financial strains on the college and led to a public campaign for government assistance. In addition, the Mill Hill fathers found the cost of St Peter's to them in terms of finance and personnel increasingly burdensome. In 1969 they sounded out the brothers to see if they were prepared to take over the running of the establishment. At the beginning of 1970, the bishop of Auckland formally transferred the administration and management of St Peter's to the Marist brothers.

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### **HATO PETERA COLLEGE 1970 ONWARDS**

The changeover meant that the brothers now were more fully involved with the Maori mission, had much more contact with the families of their students, and were able to encourage former students to take an active part in helping the school through coaching sports, tutoring the culture club, and later in joining the teaching and hostel staffs. The man initially responsible for this was the first Marist principal, Br Majella Sherry. He also gave the college a high public profile by contributing to the debate on state aid and Maori private schools, and his criticism of the Church for failing to respond adequately to the pastoral and educational needs of Catholic Maori was widely reported. At the end of his term in 1972, Hato Petera College, as it was now known (from the Maori for St Peter), with a roll of 220 boarders, had become the largest and one of the best known Maori schools in the country.

Subsequent Marist principals continued the policy of more Maori involvement at all levels. The main preoccupations over the next decade were the preparations for integration and the installation of a Maori principal. Church and government both had good reasons to promote the integration of Catholic schools into the national education system, but the Church was also committed to safeguarding their special religious character, as well as allowing for the continuing community and religious life of the congregations who conducted them. Those in charge of Hato Petera had to ensure that the Catholic and Maori character was preserved when the college was integrated in 1981. It was hoped that a Maori principal would be in place

when this happened, but it was not until 1984 that a former student was able to fill this role. The present principal, since 1998, Rawiri Mc Donald, is a Maori Marist brother.

The changeover from religious to lay control was not an easy one. Apart from the normal problems of differing expectations and new procedures, the brothers had also to adjust to the introduction of a bilingual programme in both hostel and school. As this gradually became implemented throughout the college, they moved to make room for more Maori staff in both areas. The members of the community declined from eleven in 1986 to four in 1990. While they are still represented on the teaching staff, the brothers no longer have a presence in the boarding hostel.

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#### **PROVINCE AND MAORI 1968 ONWARD.**

Following the Second Vatican Council and the 16<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the congregation, successive provincial chapters reviewed all aspects of Marist mission apostolate. They affirmed the value of the work done at Hato Petera, while also focusing on the situation of Maori youth marginalized by the school system. From 1972 stress was placed on preparing and training brothers involved in mission work, and inculturating formation programmes. Schools were urged to promote Maori language and culture and to recruit more Maori students. Chapters and assemblies adopted a policy of biculturalism and recommended that brothers educate themselves in Maori culture. To help this process, the community at Hato Petera organized several *bui* (seminars) in 1987, and a *bikoi* (pilgrimage) to Hokianga in 1988 to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Marists in New Zealand. The chapter of 1986 had a Maori framework, while the 1993 one was actually held on the *marae* (ceremonial space) at Hato Petera. Following the appointment of the first Maori bishop in 1988 and the formulation of a Maori pastoral plan, the provincial arranged for a panel of Maori to review the Marist Maori apostolate in 1992.

During these years Maori language and culture became part of the programme in the brothers' schools. At the same time, the brothers became involved with primary and secondary schools in Maori areas, such as Te Puna in the Bay of Plenty (1980), Panguru in Hokianga (1983 on), Bluff (1983-4), Otara (1984-1996), and Tolaga Bay (1997-2002). In 1986 a community was set up in the northern

town of Moerewa to minister to the youth of this mainly Maori area. Transferred to nearby Kawakawa in 1989, it continued this work for the next ten years. The community at Kaitaia, set up in 1993, also has a general apostolate to Maori.

It must be admitted, however, that despite the efforts of chapters and provincial administrations, and promising initiatives such as Tarata (1989), the brothers' mission to Maori has never received the same support from the rank and file as the province's Pacific Island missions. There still remains a certain racism which hinders this work. For this reason, it is important that we have the regular reminders of the association between St Marcellin and Maori that we have in the annual celebration, since 1995, of the Founder's feast-day at Pompallier House at Russell in the Bay of Islands, and in such historic events as the recent transfer of the remains of his former confrere, Bishop Pompallier, from Paris to Hokianga in 2003.

# *Brother Basilio Rueda and his Thinking on Religious Obedience*

**By Brother Aureliano BRAMBILA**

Our Basilio historically is situated in the line of the successors of Marcellin: François, Louis Marie, Néstor, Théophane, Stratonique, Diogènes, Léonida, Charles Raphaël, BASILIORUEDA, Charles Howard, Benito Arbués and Seán Sammon. That series of men responsible for maintaining alive the charisma of the Founder, throughout the time and space in the Church and in the world, of agglutinating the Brothers in the following of Christ, Our Master, and around Mary, our Mother, on behalf of the children and the youths in any situation in which they be found. It occupied the ninth place inside that squad of disciples d'élite of Marcellin.

In 1967 it was in Rome, few days before the celebration of the XVI General Chapter, called, by its importance, of renewal. And because of its importance would last two years. Talking with a General Assistant Brother, who had been my superior in previous epochs, and who enjoyed all the sympathies to become elected as Superior General, about its almost sure designation, I remember that he told me with great Marist simplicity and prophetic insight: “No, Aure, you know me. I am someone very gifted for the government. Only that I need points of sure reference, something like well designed highways or rails well laid out upon which to be able to make advance smoothly and with great push the whole convoy of the Institute. But in these so difficult moments that the Church lives after the Council, a man is required that know to travel in the agitated sea of the ideas and conduct the embarkation to sure port without clear letters of navigation, without points of immovable reference.” After

the election, this clairvoyant Brother, presented to all the inhabitants of the General House, the newly elected General Superior: the “petit mexicain”, our Basilio Rueda.

Vatican II had finished just two years ago. That, such a transcendental Council in the Church of God. Raid of the Holy Spirit that surpassed every comprehension, in that moment and up to now. To such a degree that various bishops (even among some of the participants of the Council), many priests and religious, and infinity number of lay people have not yet been able, thirty years later, to assimilate everything that it was and everything it asked from us.

Among many things the Council asked the renewal of the religious life. But in depth, not a mere new look. Going to the essential things and leaving sideways what only was cultural dust adhered of contexts of passed epochs. This renewal is enunciated quickly, but its concrete implementation involves enormous difficulties. In general, we humans are quite good for accessory stuff, but not for the kernel of things. Then, that one was a crucial moment. There was great need to generate a paramount quantity of reflection. To think deeply on religious life. To understand the Church of today and its answer to our world of today. Examining the essentials of our Marist charisma. Grasping the original intuitions and attitudes of the Founder, to be able to answer to the problems of today.

In this great operation, Basilio would make use of all its genius. It would take advantage of all the gifts divine Providence has bestowed on him. His humanistic formation, his contact with the youth, his belonging to the Church Movement “for a better world”, his contact through spiritual direction with great amount of different people, his wonderful work for continuing education in the second novitiate. In one a word, his whole life would be directed to fulfill in a masterly way the great assignment: to renew the Marist life from the very roots of Marcellin’s charisma

He would push strongly, as never before the study of the Spiritual Patrimony Marist. It would establish centers *tad hoc*. It would dedicate Brothers full time to investigation and diffusion... He would be impelled in engendering an attentive movement to the sources, to generate a mystic that dynamizes and underlines fundamental things. .Within this area of the Marist patrimony favored the cordial, although not legal union, of the diverse branches of the Society of Mary: Marist Fathers, Marist Parents, Marist Sisters, Marist Laypeople, the Sisters Missionaries of the Society of Mary, (of Françoise

Perroton) and we the Marist Brothers. In combination with the general superiors of those branches established the Marist Family Feast, which commemorates the event of the promises of Fourvière of 1816.

He would dedicate himself, to the limits of his strength, to preach retreats and to grant interviews to thousands of Brothers, to give them a hand in the middle of so much confusion. The borders of the essential and the accidental things, without malice of anybody, had become vague. The Holy Spirit was coming to renew all the things, building them from their very essence. And there it would be Basilio, going from one side to the other, tireless: courses, congresses, encounters. And always departing from the concrete reality, by means of exhaustive and meticulous use of surveys: “we must let reality tell us what it has to tell us”, used to say frequently, paraphrasing a famous Spanish philosopher.

Marvelously he knew how to take advantage of the Circulars, that platform from which a Superior General can make his word hear. His Circulars were magisterial, large, full of ideas, as the difficult moment required it, when the customs and much more, the mentalities were collapsing

One of those Circulars was on religious obedience. Certainly was not the first one. It was written after 7 years of being top responsible for the Institute. Basilio’s real knowledge of the Brothers and of the Administrative Units had been increased in all its dimensions.

To obey to the Spirit by the Church, the religious Superiors. The importance of the mediation. The vital tool, the dialogue, in the exercise of the authority and in the practice of the obedience. The indispensable mediated mediation. That is, an obedient authority, since “to obey a disobedient one, specifically in the matters in which he is disobeying, is in reality disobedience.” Basilio used to say this especially in relation to ecclesiastical or religious superiors who ignored the Council and tried to make followers of this attitude, through apparently pious pretexts.

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**CIRCULAR ON RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE (1975)**

Brother Basilio says: “The title of this Circular could very well be: «FOR A NEW DISCOVERY OF THE CONSECRATED OBEDIENCE, AND ITS PRACTICE AT MAXIMUM DEGREE»

**The way as was elaborate:**

"This circular, like the one on prayer, has been edited taking as basic material a series of conferences of Brother Superior General<sup>1</sup>, who has revised personally, most carefully, the French original text." (p.003)

**Remote preparation in the mental elaboration of the author**

"These lines are the outcome of long years of personal thinking on the mystery of the obedience. Years lived, first as simple religious; then, in the Movement of a Better World, where I worked, at the service of the Church, in benefit of many countries and of quite a few religious families; finally, as Superior General of our dear Institute." (P.009)

**Personal evolution in the rounding up of the subject**

"Gradually, I have discovered the capital importance that obedience has in the mystery of salvation, and the need of a renewal not only in our structures and in our personal practice of it as a virtue, but above all in what it means something really charismatic." (p. 009)

**Close preparation in the mental elaboration of the author**

"I read some books and up-to-date articles concerning obedience before writing this prologue." (p.009)

**Preparing the way to deal with the subject**

"As a matter of fact, I wanted to publish it before to do it with the Circular on prayer; but I realized how difficult it was to try to deepen in the theme of obedience, without a previous preparation of the mind of the readers in the sense of renewal, thing that only prayer could bring about. It would have been daring, in fact, to pretend sowing a solid doctrine as the one I am about expose, without having prepared conveniently the fields." (p. 015)

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<sup>1</sup> Normally, who did that immense work of collection, editing and put in form was Brother Gabriel Michel

### **Purpose of the circular on obedience**

"Truly one desires to think about a new formulation of obedience and a new practice of it, also." (p. 023)

### **Someone put me the following objection**

"The vision that you [Brother Basilio] have on obedience is really exciting, but of an excessive verticality. Where, in fact, the role of the community appears?" on the other hand, my circular on common life had caused certain criticism, which already has been indicated: "It does not appear clearly the role of the Superior in the common life". I am going to try to respond to both objections, apparently contradictory. I begin by saying that I do not find the expression "vertical" very suitable in reference to obedience just as I understand it." (p. 147)

### **The role of the personal superior as mediator**

"The Superior belongs to the community; he is neither above it neither out of it; but he has a specific role of "mediation" that we are trying to define for the community, although without melting himself in the community, neither becoming totally subordinated to her. It is indispensable, therefore, that it be shown clearly what I want to say. This circular intends to demystify, in fact, the authority as if it were something magical and infallible. It is not possible to discover the will of God merely through the exercise of authority." (p. 151)

### **The role of the community as mediator**

"Of that role mediator of the community I want to speak afterwards, at the end of the circular, even though by means of an appendix. Because the community is, in fact, called not only to discover common good, but also to be vehicle of encounter, of mediation and of reconciliation with the will of the Father." (p. 014)

"One must react likewise against a new mythification that is gaining followers here and yonder and that comes to be as ingenuous as the previous one. It signifies that I should establish certain

limits when it is a matter of power of the community: The general assent (consensus) does not indicate, in and of itself, the will of God and even it could be a sign that the community is taking an easy path." (p. 152)

### **Foreseeing possible reactions among the readers**

"I guess that, in reading me certain progressive spirits, they are going to be surprised, even shocked, inasmuch as the wind of progress is not very much in favor of obedience. And also I foresee, on behalf of those who entrenched themselves behind obedience as a bulwark that they are going to utter in their deceit: "Truly, that is not the idea we have of obedience". May it be permitted to me to retort them: Could I really, and honestly, give to my Congregation a food that it is going to poison it? (p. 015)

I am conscious, therefore, of the multiplicity of reactions, at times contrasted, that my lines are going to stir up. Some they will extract of them all the good things they contain; others, maybe only few; will try to profit what is going to be said to their own personal and egoistic advantages; and finally there will be also those that are going to suffer a real indigestion of spiritual nature." (p. 015)

### ***Relation of obedience with the gospel***

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### **Predominant currents in the religious literature**

[From current religious literature] "I am taking a double impression: a) When speaking of a renewal of obedience, it points rather to a renewal of authority, which certainly doesn't lack importance. b) When they try to situate their position to charismatic obedience and compare it with the other evangelical counsels, they focus on an organised and coded obedience, instead of centring their interest on what the kernel of obedience should constitute. That kernel (or that nucleus, if you prefer this term), is nothing else but the passion to do the will of God and to always give pre-eminence to the divine will" (p. 009-010)

"Even more: they really sweat like a mad dog when they try to situate obedience in the rank of authentic evangelical counsel, and even when they manage to situate it, they are unable to offer it the same importance as virginity and as poverty. We must say that reason

is on their side. Inasmuch as the life of virginity and of detachment of all the goods in favor of the poor, by following Christ, are radical and tangible gestures. Gestures that make visible the reality of the Kingdom and that, concerning virginity, they are prefiguring the way of loving us in the life of eternity. It is awfully true. But if we are converting obedience in the poor relative, it is because we have not found all its truth and because appears only as submission to a superior inside the constitutional order. We forget that should be oriented, within human limitations, toward integral service of searching and of discovering divine will. Will that becomes the center and the kernel of our life." (p. 010)

"Obedience is really a sign that the Kingdom of God is present, from the moment in which one submits totally to the will of someone else, and precisely when that other one is God Himself. Similar deed of self-denial and of gift of oneself is not less radical than virginity or poverty. b) it could be said, on the other hand, that we are in face of something more than a counsel: something essential to Christian life and, therefore, to religious life." (p. 011)

### **Jesus' figure**

Jesus knows always at every moment what is the will of His Father, and He does that without any kind of mystery whatsoever. He does not need mediation: the will of God arrives in Christ in an immediate way. For us, nevertheless the will of the Father does not always appear that clearly. (p. 056)

Let us see some other differences between Jesus and us. Allow me to underline the fact that Jesus has no need of mediation as we do. It is possible to reproach with vehemence the Church after Vatican II (I do not refer myself to the texts, but to the life) the way how religious men and women live, and also the priests, the laymen, in a word the whole Church in general. Accusation that could be formulated this way: It has been said once and again that we must look at the Church as communion, but very little has been said to see the Church as mediation. We have finished for transforming us, as occurs in chemistry, losing an essential element of our human condition: the need to be saved. Void that carries us to commit acts of pride and of recklessness. At the moment of arriving to a cross-road, faith in us will be of no help. So we need to keep on with

vertical and horizontal sense, openness to the Spirit, and mediation of the Church. (p. 057)

### **Mary model of evangelical obedience**

"With that sense of clear contemplation in the Gospels of the infancy, and with that sense of initiative that showed in Caná and at the Golgotha, she is the extraordinary woman that receives the initiative of the Lord. What dynamism in her, from the Visit up to Pentecost! Strong Woman, impedes any excess of passiveness in the art of obeying." (p. 037)

### **Marcellin Champagnat, a model**

There are moments in which even a saint has to ask himself, haunted by uncertainty: "What should I do? What is God asking of me? " If we just read some of the letters of the Father Champagnat! Now, as regards to us things change, unfortunately. We do not always want what the Father wants, neither as the Father wants it; frequently we give him a "not". And whenever we reject the light from Above and we prefer "to seek counsels to Egypt" and "we cook to our flavor" the data of a problem to obtain the answer that we desire, we are just playing a comedy. (p. 056)

I can assure you that I have known Brothers - there are still some of them, although few in number - that were formed in a very strict obedience and that they considered really any article of the Rule as expression of the will of God, applicable always to their daily living. Will of God was also for them the smallest desire of the Superior. Such mentality had situated many them in a position (or a way, if you prefer) quite solid, full of serenity, realism and equilibrium. In that uninterrupted fidelity that does not despise even details, and of which Champagnat was a model, we could see to sprout, full of spirit, the plant of detachment of oneself, of humility and of the meekness. (p. 019)

### **Need of the mediation**

When we have read St. Augustine and afterward we hear some Christian saying with no repentance: "I suffice to myself, I can determine myself, I need no mediation whatsoever", then we are convinced

of the enormous need to be taught by the example of the saints. Holy men like Francisco d'Assisi, who called himself a great sinner. And, nevertheless, how similar to Jesus was he, and what a closeness with Christ! You do not need to be sharp-sighted to see Jesus through Francis. A man, whose life Christ will change all his inclinations. Who will be surprised, therefore, hearing him to sing a hymn to "sister death"? (p. 058)

### **Church's mediation**

"Anyone, therefore, that intends to receive some mediation, should obtain it from the Church. There is no other way. Getting away from the Church is the same thing as to getting deprived of mediation." (p. 065)

"A genuine broadcast of the message requires, on the part of the Church to be up height of the Word of God, the to see with the God's eyes all human events, the to be exempt of lack of liberty and to be free of prejudices, coming from interests, fashion, or any other contamination of worldliness." (p. 070)

There is no other valid mediation than that of the Church. The words of Christ are very clear: "Nobody knows the Father, except the Son and that to whom the Son wants to reveal it to him". (Mat. 11.27). to whom the Son wants to reveal it to him? We have the answer in St. John: "You are my friends... I do not call you servants, but friends, because everything I heard from the Father I have communicated it to you" (Jn 15. 14-15). "Even the Father loves you because you have believed that I come from the Father. I left the Father and I have come to the world" (Jn 16.27) (p. 062)

It is not my purpose to incite you to go back to the old refuge to remain you there as hidden. What we have to do is to think us more as part of the Church. Martelet tells us: "God, when espousing our flesh, becomes Christ. And Christ, espousing humanity becomes the Church". (p. 064)

Christ, when embracing all mankind, becomes the Church... And to that Church Christ transmits, his power as mediator. The Church comes to be, on the other hand, nothing less than the Human-

ity christified, incorporated to Christ, Priest like Him, Prophet and King. And such a specific gift like that of forgiving sins could very well not have been expressed by Jesus, inasmuch as already that gift was forming part of a Church mediator. (p. 064).

The mediation of the Church should be mediation in harmony with the person and of its same size. The Church is universal and, consequently, when we speak of a Church our mediator, we cannot leave the things as in the air, inasmuch as the Church is very vast. Certainly that the bishops are all successors of the Apostles; but in this case their mediation is not of our size. Each man has his own sphere and, out of exceptional cases, he should find the mediation in his sphere and not in another. (p. 066)

### **Obedience and discipline**

It has been frequent to reduce in the past the obedience to the limits of the detail: the hour to be raised, for example, being so was a vision of assembly the one that had to consider: positions of the Episcopate; options relating to the different forms of apostolic work; equilibrium between opening and identity; other thousand questions that gravitate around these that we have just indicated. (p. 068)

The Church can very well summarize its mediation through a point of ecclesiastical discipline. Doing this is its perfect right, provided that it does not trespass the just limits. And if it does not offer a true quality, there will not be neither true mediation; nor anything of value. (p. 070)

### **Desires of a nearby and denser mediation**

Now, when in the heart of a Christian there are an intense love to divine will and a deep sense of the problems and of the own limits (sin, weakness, darkness), then the moment arrives in which that Christian precipitates in search of a state of a denser and more qualified mediation. (p. 071)

### **Obstacles to mediation**

The major obstacle is not so much to deal with an exacting person, of a lap age between forty and fifty years, but it is to have

to deal with a type of man or woman that, instead of advancing, has installed himself or herself on the road. The less serious illness of the youth is that candor, a little stupid, which shows itself by a flood of words. In front of him it is a question of having a little patience in order to listen him! On the contrary, there are others, generally older and surely very selfish that are experts in manufacturing their “nest”, very discretely. They rest accommodate themselves softly in a faith that little or nothing compromises, in a prayer that does not cause troubles, even in a dialogue, but that implies no commitments. They know very well, as it is said in good Spanish, “to swim and to keep the clothes on”. They do not renounce neither to God neither the world. It could be said that they are trying to draw a circle perfectly square by serving to God and at the same time enjoying all the comforts of life. Pretty way to serve nobody! The grave of the thing is that only vaguely they realize the awkwardness of their situation and they have a continuous bad taste in the mouth and a diffuse dissatisfaction. Marvelous occasion for them to feel the need of a mediation of high quality. (p. 073)

A Christian should not be a man that seeks and lives passively the mediation. The position “perinde ac cadaver” it is not right here. Even the common interpretation of that phrase turns out to be inadequate. No. When somebody seeks the mediation, remains quite active, whether gathering all the necessary data, and defending himself not to be handled by the authority or by the mediator himself. (p. 073)

### **Mediation and vote of obedience**

The conscience of the need of mediation has to continue its normal process. We have started walking. The years of formation have shown us the nature of mediation. We have had our first intuitions of it, incomplete if you wish, but they have helped us in our options and we keep on progressing with that light. The moment has arrived in which we have discovered the obedience as the kernel of our existential project. Not the obedience as discipline of government, but a lively obedience; that one of a group of men that wants to live following the will of the God. This is the way in which should be presented the final commitment. Therefore I said further up: Among the diverse ways to live the Gospel, the religious life is one of those that demand the most exacting state of mediation. (p. 074 - 075)

Professing obedience, I do not only engage to live according to the will of God (thing that could remain just in words, but deprived of any practical value). In reality I am engaging to create those conditions that permit me to know the will of God, in my life and in my task. It would be against the spirit, the heart and the soul of the vow of obedience if, having professed such a vow, I did not create then the conditions that permit to discover the will of God in my life. Thus, therefore, the conditions that I put in doing the vow of obedience carry me to the following reflection: I engage myself not only to dialogue, not only at the acceptance of the mediation of a person in my life, in searching the will of the Father, but I carry things further: When we arrive to dialogue, when we have done sincerely and loyally our best in seeking the will of God regards to doing this or that, and my superior commands me to do it, I engage also, by vow, to obey. Not only the Superior can tell me, - within the human limitations, of course-, what wants the celestial Father, but to ask me also to do it. Truly, he is advised not to command by virtue of the vow, but nothing is said to me in that sense, so I can very well obey in virtue of my vow. (p. 076)

### **Ascetic obedience**

The founders knew the human cloth with its egotistical force, with that eagerness by arriving one alone, and they wanted to purify it teaching to the religious to obey in the difficult moments and even in absurd things. It was a healthy preventive gymnastics set against the blows that life has us reserved and training to leave winners in those trances in which obedience and rebellion dispute the heart of a religious man or woman. It was not the act, absurd in itself, what imported, but the disposition of spirit that would come forward. (p. 125-126)

It was an error in our formation to obedience not to delimit the fields, which permitted the principle of blind obedience to control fields that did not correspond to it, when its reason to be was only to form us to detachment of ourselves. (p. 126)

One must know to distinguish between an ascetic obedience and a professional or pastoral obedience. Dialogue should enter in this last type of obedience, in order to discover together the divine willing. Mixing up both orders will falsify the true meaning of things.

Blind obedience will take over annulling in men the capacity to think. They are so used to someone thinking for them! (p. 127)

### **Obedience and formation**

We regret today the serious error committed in the past, transferring to professional and pastoral affairs the laws blind obedience; but it so happens that we are falling in the opposite danger. We are preparing people for the obedience, without any practical exercise. It would be so absurd as to try having champions in athletics without allowing them to practice or asking them to do some exercise of gymnastics. (p. 127)

Why, therefore, so clear principles do not enlighten, as long ago, our eyes? From where that sudden lack of strength and lack of courage to exercise mediation, and that such a considerable number of religious reject the charge superior? It could be due, at least in part, to the lack of preparation? Men, in fact, that had never been obliged (neither perhaps authorized) to say a word to their Brothers to help them to seek in their lives the will of God, they are seen converted, just overnight, in mediators, without any practical study, with a training foreign to this new service they have to offer. Will not be this lacking duly taken into consideration?... And how not to see this subject as a clear invitation to the communities to assume themselves their own responsibility? (p. 150)\$

### **Risks in the obedience?**

I believe it that there are some... Then, somebody will say: why to vow obedience? Because, in the whole, if we pay attention to the danger of falling into human selfishness, of walking out from the dynamics of the history of the salvation, of not christening our own life, those risks are smaller in a state of obedience in which one collaborates in the application of the Gospel to his own life, than the risks implied in a self-running to make that application. (P.110)

Therefore, it seems me that we have to disdramatize the problem. Obedience does not imply necessarily infallibility; neither puts us safe from all the risks. We do not think either that all in obedience has to be positive, neither that it is going to eliminate all the problems. (p. 111)

## **Mediation and evolutionary process**

The mediator should grasp which is the state of interior health of a Brother, his spiritual age, and what is the Holy Spirit asking from him. (p. 105)

## **Mediation and sufficient information**

On the other hand, to seek the mediation without giving information is wholly absurd. I believe to have done enough emphasis on the role of the Superior. Badly we can offer to a community options that depend on a mediation, if does not facilitate the community elements for a reciprocal information and for a communication where the community get to know its members. (p. 140)

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## **TWO MEDIATION TYPES**

### **Individual Mediation**

God Himself, the tradition and the experience have conferred the Superior certain role in the Church and the communities. It is a matter of a role of coordination and of animation and of mediation. We are not going to suppress it; but we are trying to articulate it better and how to turn it more efficient, through the creative dialogue of the individual religious and of the role of mediation of the community itself. (p. 014)

It belongs to human condition the need of having mediators to discover the will of God. If somebody wants to be a mediator has to take the proper means. It is utterly insufficient just to wish it. I could live with somebody whom I love for a long time and not to being able, nevertheless, to say which the will of God on him is. (p. 035)

The religious that places himself under obedience should experience the next three demands: a) to find an authentic mediator... This supposes certain abhorrence of politics, play that consists in putting me on the side of whom I like, even if he is not precisely the best one. (p. 102) b) that he can exercise really the media-

tion. They existed and they continue perhaps existing situations of aberration. To nobody, for example, can be required to perform the function of Superior if it weighs on him an excessive professional work. How to be, at same time, director of a school of more than 1000 students, to give 15 ó 20 weekly hours of class and to be who helps the others to seek the will of God? (p. 103) c) But of whom we cannot ask to be perfect. The militant Church, to which we belong, is a wandering, imperfect and even sinful Church. (p. 103)

### **Three types of superiors**

Among those - scarce in number - that would be able to exercise the service of the authority, there are some that, simply, avoid the burden. Others have accepted the post and try to fulfill it loyally, without seeking an easy popularity, and surely they have lost, in fact, every popularity. The sad thing is that the Provincial Counsel had asked them to accept to be Superiors. And they had agreed in spirit of service and obedience. Now, later on they were pushed to sacrifice themselves once again by asking them to give their resignation, as a consequence of having proclaimed openly Gospel values face to their community. Another small group had accepted also the function, but they undertook an easy going politics, closing their eyes to the abuses, in order to avoid to them any trouble. There were, at last, those who accepted the post, and remained faithful to the evangelical duties that their post supposes, and that have been accepted by the community. (p. 012-013)

### **Prophetic roll of a superior**

We take very seriously not to annul in the Superior his prophetic capacity. Certainly that not all criticism against the superiors come from their faithfulness to Gospel (we are thinking also in their human mistakes), but it is not easy to find a truly evangelical Superior that has not suffered persecution and bitter contradiction. (p. 013)

### **Function of the Superior**

Performs the Superior in my community the role of an authentic coordinator? - Merely administrative stuff? What role we oblige

him to perform? Glows in him the evangelical demands and is he able to make them shine? When the Provinces send, for example, a deliberation to the General Council, what do they expect of it: an evangelical discernment, or only an answer of administrative type? (p. 022-023)

### **Continuous training of Superiors**

As a matter of fact, Superiors must face today not only an amount of new questions that stimulate their spirit and keeps them intellectually in shape, but also new positions (for example, the denial of a subject to obey, in practice), for which they should find also an evangelical, serious, and new answers, otherwise they risk to be seriously wounded physically and spiritually speaking.(p. 023)

### **Human maturity**

A mature man is self-sufficient in many aspects of the natural or human order. For instance, in a commercial business, if we dispose of a good planning, a good technician of programming, and a good analyst of the market, a convenient pedagogical preparation, then we could easily say that we are self-sufficient. In that case the help of the Superior can be put aside, unless he would be an expert in the matter. (p. 060)

### **Diversity in the mediations individual**

Role of spiritual director and of Superior. Naturally, that mediation itself is aimed at either through a Superior or through a spiritual director, whose zones of influence of both, I am going to try to establish. We suppose that I have a spiritual director for a long time. It knows me in depth. I have told him my personal history, my interior life, my Christian life with all that supposes: way to be inserted in the world and in the community; options; work of God in my soul. And referring myself to a very concrete point, I could tell him: "On this matter, I don't see clearly how I should proceed". We suppose that he will answer something like this: "Knowing you, as I do, it seems to me that the Lord is asking you. In short, we see. .., we talk.. There it is! I would say that.. And, consequently, I order him such and such a thing". I would answer back to him

immediately: “No, Father, you will give me any order at all. You are just my spiritual director, not my superior”. That was exactly the failure in past centuries: having spiritual directors that became dictators. Saint Juana of Chantal was free of such spiritual directors thanks to Saint Francis de la Sale, who knew how to act. The spiritual director is a guide, a companion that is with me to help me listen to God. But the freedom in decisions is entirely mine. (p. 075)

### **Active mediation**

The Superior is a companion that helps me to find, in certain cases, the communion with the will of God, in others, to verify if it is authentic what I think it is the will of God (p. 077)

### **Spiritual qualities of the Superior**

The more serious are our projects and commitments, the more we experience the need of anxious guides desire the Holy Spirit forges in them a psychology and a spirituality that do not allow them to go astray, because of the anguish, or of the nostalgic monarchical restorations neither by an idealistic vision of the past, in spite of its grandiosity. Men that accept, like Abraham, to leave behind house and country to start walking towards unknown lands. (p. 104)

### **Acceptance of becoming superior**

If a Brother that does not want to live according to the will of God should not make a vow of obedience, neither should accept becoming a superior someone that does not want above all receive the will of God. We, religious, cannot conceive the role of religious authority as a natural, humane, and purely disciplinary matter. For that purpose it would suffice stable, prudent, balanced men. But to exercise mediation, to be catalysers of groups in the search of God’s will, is something that demands much more that only psychological qualifications and that demands another type of men. (p. 105)

### **Doing mediation**

It is not enough wanting sincerely to search God’s will. As a matter of fact, I could be a man that honestly wants to obey God,

but if I am lacking some necessary conditions to be a mediator for others, things will not go. The capacity to be a mediator consists of assimilating the large principles of the history of the salvation, the Gospel, the charisma of the Congregation, the large orientation of the Institute, and to apply all those elements to the concrete and unique case of each Brother. (p. 105)

### **Yielding of the superior**

It is not correct in the Superior to take refuge in the facility of the structures and of the regulations, to say: “Already they know what have to do”, while he chickens out to guide each one of his Brothers in particular and to tell him what he has to tell him. (p. 105)

### **Spiritual quality of the Superior**

We must say nevertheless, that with difficulty will be able the Superior to have a conversation of that type, if he is not used to judge things with “the eyes of God”, if you understand what I want to mean with this expression. A superior should be at ease examining situations in the divine presence. (p. 106)

### **Superiors and the Holy Spirit**

We do not ask Superiors to be infallible. We know it very well, they are just men, liable to be mistaken. Nevertheless, a word of Christ is very soothing... “When they carry you to the synagogues, before the judges and the authorities, you do not worry how you are going to defend yourselves, or how you have to speak, because the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what must be said.”. This does not mean, of course, not to think what seems suitable to say, but one must remain likewise listening what the Spirit to wants tell us. I am fully convinced that a Superior has the right to include the aid of the Holy Spirit in the performance of his charge. If in front of a court that does not have the least interest in discerning the truth, the Spirit knows very well what one must say and teaches us to say it, why should He not enlighten the mind of a superior that tries very hard to find the light and the truth in behalf of his Brothers? (p. 107)

## **Dialogue with the Superior**

We do not mean to say that a Superior be in direct and immediate contact with the Holy Spirit. But that we seek together with an opened heart: We work in order the Superior know my ideals, my desires, my anxieties, as also my limitations and my difficulties. Dialogue that comes to be a spiritual objective information, that will permit, arrived the moment, to receive the appropriate orientation under the form of an order or of a counsel. (p. 109)

## **Superior and “the voice of God”**

I said before that certain traditional teaching relating to blind obedience was false if we considered it in his theological aspect. It was taught practically that every word of the Superior was a vehicle of the will of God. So we had to represent in our mind a God transmitting his orders through an infallible Superior, or giving him a blank check so that this one could fill it at pleasure. (p. 109)

## **Blockade with a Superior**

Leaving aside the respect that I owe him, a Superior is not in my life more than a bird in transit, a mediator of the will of God during 3 ó 6 years. And my life is longer than that. In marriage, even if the election was mistaken, one must endure forever, within the law of love, in unity and in fidelity. (p. 111)

## **The specific thing of the role of the superior**

I ask myself: ¿how many Superiors center their attention in that special thing? Because there quite a few, unfortunately, who channel 90% of their orders on administrative matters, economic affairs, or just purely natural things. In reality these levels can be very well attended to through delegation of powers. And that would be perfectly justified. The actual picture we get is Superiors leaving sideways the task of spiritual government that constitutes the base of their vow. I do not see any sense in such a position and comes to me the desire to repeat the words of St.Paul: “In hoc non laudo” (I Cor.11,22). Let us split the roll of religious leaders into two functions: school director and community Superior, if with this

system we help the correct functioning of religious obedience. (p. 123)

### ***Group mediation***

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Mediation of the community is a more utopian utopia (be allowed the word playing) than the mediation of the Superior. (p. 155)

In the sphere of supernatural things, it is quite utopian to find good quantity and quality in mediation. Now, we can imagine, after the observations that I have just made, the high degree of idealistic, utopian stuff that represents wanting to have real good mediation through the communities we know at present. The danger of falling into error and instrumentalization<sup>2</sup> is really at hand. The reason of it is very simple: every group of men counts with a select minority (elite) of well gifted individuals for such a task, with people of medium type, and with the "crowd". (p. 156)

Why propose, then, to the community mediator to embark herself upon that utopia, more utopian than the other? Very simple: A community in search and in mediation, makes herself more and more visible as sign of the Kingdom, than a search and a mediation purely in personal level; and religious life should be sign for the whole Church. (p. 157)

¿Why the religious life is more visible? Because supposing in both cases the same intensity of willingness to live according God's wishes, in the case of the common mediation the signs of this will be sought by a greater number of people. (p. 157)

A life of obedience, carried out by all together, causes a growing to each member in charity, in purity, in responsibility toward the others, seeking to help them and to find for the group the paths that lead to the Lord. And, at the same time, it trains gradually mediators and multiplies their number. Such mediation is more scatological than the simple superior-inferior relation. Eschatology should be here understood as something that gets us closer to fullness of times, though not quite, since in real Eschatology there will be no need of mediation. (p. 157)

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<sup>2</sup> It is to keep in mind that I am speaking of a mediation that refers to the Wisdom of God and not only to common sense.

Among the better means to begin with, we have shared prayer. A community that is not capable of having this type of prayer, with a lot of trouble could become a community of searching and of mediation. (p. 160)

### **Roles of the community**

As a matter of fact the community is not called only to discover common good, but also to be a means of encounter, of mediation and of reconciliation with the will of the Father. (p. 014)

Fraternally sharing the worries, action through which the Church backs a Brothers' mediation, brings upon a special amount of grace from God. Gift of light and of fortress, have as their main objective to make feel men the imperious reciprocal need in which they find themselves, evermore. With all this, therefore, fraternity flourishes up, showing the faithful in the Church as sacraments of communion. It is not the matter to deal only at the individual level, but consequently for building the Church. Here, there it is, the very basis of the role of the community as far as mediation is concerned. (p. 078)

If we have elected to live in community, then we must assume reciprocally our lives. Trying me to help my brother to improve his life of prayer, I am not defending any type of structures, but seeking solution to a problem of life or death. He is a sick man. His soul is hungry because of his spiritual reluctance to feed himself with prayer. It is absolutely necessary and urgent to obtain that the sick one want to be cured. (p. 124)

### **Agencies of group mediation**

In private cases, like that of a Provincial Chapter, that search in common of the will of God will serve of initiation to a same search, but to a higher level, where a technical preparation is needed already. (p. 131)

### **Common Mediation: vital**

We must put each thing in its due place. Do not ask ourselves: "What does the community want from us? ". That is the wrong question to put across in reference to the vow of obedience. It is senseless. Another thing would be if we presented it in the scope of pure-

ly natural order: the question would be then relevant. But dealing with in a supernatural level, one must formulate it this way: "Which seems to the community be the Will of God towards her?". Changing the question, makes to change also the sense of the dialogue. (p. 139)

### **Training in evangelical discernment**

A community should form herself to the spiritual discernment and go then carrying out progressively the role of mediation that is called to perform, in harmony with the individual mediation of the Superior. (p. 140)

It seems increasingly abnormal that a community of consecrated people, that has done of the Gospel the passion and objective of its life, could not directly help its members to find the will of the Lord; abnormality that turns out to be shocking to anyone able to reflect on things. Though in reality it is the inheritance of a past the responsible of this fact, in which the exercise of authority remained reduced to very individualistic dimensions. (p. 148)

### **Announcement and accusation evangelical**

It is not surprising, therefore, to encounter some religious, personally excellent, but incapable to pronounce a fraternal word about the behavior of a community that should walk, without any doubt, in the paths of the will of the Lord. They suffer because of that and they must endure seeing a Brother, and even at times the whole community, going astray, lacking fidelity and in quality, and losing fundamental values, with a huge amount of beautiful theories that justify everything. And many of our "good religious" do not dare to say a single word of reproach, because they imagine that any prophetic action, any type of mediation belongs to the Superiors only, as if they had the exclusivity in denouncing. This way of thinking as it can be easily probed, has nothing to do with the Gospel and its values. (p.148)

There is in many religious a kind of abdication as to personal quality and of personal behavior of the others. That means that there is no too much of a worry about the community as such, not even in thing that refer to consecrated life or to testimony to be given to the world. (p. 148)

**GENERAL SURVEY**

**Excellent qualities:**

- Very brave, courageous
- It is against an obedience that would mythify superiors
- It is a warning on the way to exercise religious authority.
- It establishes the no-identity between voice of God and voice of the Superior.
- Everything is centered in love: maximum motive of our obedience
- It introduces the theme of the group mediation.

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**OUTSTANDING IDEAS:**

- The theology of the mediation forms the pith of the theology of the obedience.
- The main role of the superior is that of lending the service of the mediation. It should be qualified for it, physical, psychological, and spiritually
- Impossible to exercise properly the mediation without the necessary information of first hand. The dialogue is the corner stone of obedience.
- Superiors should be men of prayer, dialogue and obedience. They should seek what God wants from each one of their Brothers.
- Without a climate of prayer, it is not possible to seek, honestly, the will of God; and therefore to be put into a situation of obedience.
- There are three levels of obedience: professional, domestic and "spiritual". Only this one deserves to be consecrated
- There are Brothers that have not realized that there has been a change in the form of exercising authority and of living obedience today. The virtues that serve that formed the humus of obedience have changed: transparency, expression of yearnings and fears, dialog
- One should have a good critical judgment in defense of the interests of the Kingdom, but not as mechanisms of self-defense.

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**INCIDENCES ON FORMATION:**

- To form in and for dialog
- To train to the obedience by means of commissions, refusals and commands.
- Avoiding being a training Brother that bases his whole life: “I like it, I don’t like it”.
- Not to give the same practical importance to all the orders.
- Create not psychological dependences
- Pushing towards a prayer of availability
- Obsess smoothly with the search of the will of God, in all the things.

# *Champagnat and Finances*

By Brother Paul SESTER

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## **THE ACCOUNT BOOKS**

The study of the financial management of the Institute during Father Champagnat's lifetime is not an easy task. The relevant written records have not been correctly kept. The account books still extant mix up finances with various other matters and have not been strictly followed, leaving gaps of sometimes more than a year.

For a start, it must be noted that no document exists concerning the keeping of accounts prior to 1822. For the first five years the maintenance of the primitive community, which never exceeded eight members, must have been assured by the scanty amounts each could contribute, by the curate's income, as far as Father Champagnat was concerned, by the few francs the making of nails brought in, and then when the Brothers were able to conduct schools, by a share in their salaries. But that was not sufficient since they had to take up collections in the La Valla parish. "For eight years," adds Brother Jean-Baptiste, "those collections were the principal standby of the community" ( Life [Eng. Ed] p 361 ).

But things would take another turn when, towards the end of March 1822, eight youths came together to ask to be admitted to the novitiate. When Father Champagnat consented to take them all in, although for the most part they did not have the necessary funds, he saw the need of noting down what each handed over that same day and what was necessary to complete the total of 400 francs required. For this purpose he opened on March 28 a register of 92

pages, 28 by 20 in format, of coarse, grayish paper. The last pages are cut in the form of an index; thus on the extreme right edge of page 83 are the letters A,B, on page 85 the letters C,D,E, then on page 87 the letters F,G,H, page 89 the letters I,L,M, and page 91 the letters N,P,Q,R,S,T,U,V. The pages are divided vertically into four columns of uneven width: the first for dates, the second for wording, the third for what each one "Owes" and the fourth for what he has "Paid". From the start the pages must each have been assigned to a different letter of the alphabet, consequently some pages have remained blank and others contain only a single entry. It did not take long for someone to feel the need to make use of these numerous blank spaces for drafts of letters and for other matters not exclusively financial. One finds the registration of postulants up to page 45, with intervals, and financial accounts from page 5 and several of the pages following, then on pages 72 to 90.

It appears that Father Champagnat's handwriting is not found beyond 1825, except perhaps for an expense entry on 8 July 1826 which is elsewhere recorded in the Account Book we will refer to later. Several pages contain an exposition on the advantages of prayer in a not very continuous text, apparently preparations for instructions. From the handwriting it is not unthinkable that it is from Father Champagnat's hand but of a later date. Other drafts of letters are probably from Brother François, even Brother Louis-Marie.

Before the end of 1825, for reasons it is not possible to determine, this register stopped being used for the enrolment of postulants. From then on its new purpose was to serve as an exercise book for drafts, and this is what finally gives it this somewhat neglected aspect which makes consulting it as an historical document that much more difficult. The 1825 entries which are still valid, that is to say, concerning persons still present in the Brothers' community, are sometimes transcribed textually in another register, without title, to which tradition gives the name "Register of Entries". This is a register of 296 pages of format 35 x 22.5. The first pages reproduce, without chronological order and mixed up with new entries, the ones from the preceding exercise book which remain valid, as stated above. The following pages up to 279 cover chronologically the years from 1826 as far as February 1848. On this last date, on page 279, 1,086 requests for entry are inscribed. On the last 16 pages, several of which have been left blank, one finds various notes obviously from the Founder's hand. As for the presentation of this regis-

ter, the pages are divided from top to bottom in three columns: the first for dates, the second, the most important, for the candidate's details, and the third for the amounts entered, whether on the day itself or later at various times, for after the entry the equivalent of several lines is left empty to note down later payments the candidate will make to complete what he owes. As a result, one finds between two entries of the same year the dates of payment from the years following more or less distant. In this way, what concerns the same subject is kept together. The original intention might have been to reserve this new register exclusively for the registration of postulants, and it is possible that such a resolution may have been adopted, but it was not held to, since many other matters have intruded and been mixed up with it. From page 4, in fact, one finds noted entries of money coming not from postulants, but from different sources, such as the sale of objects made in the house. This case is repeated, spread out, up to page 30 which even contains expenses, namely the end of "Account of Benoît Matricon, carpenter" which had already filled up all of page 20. Moreover, on this page 30 are noted the fees for having "indulged medals and other objects" in the years 1829 to 1834. It is clear that these passages have no connection with the reception of personnel. It is necessary to note in addition that these various gains are not reported in the account book set aside to record "receipts" and whose usage goes back to 1826.

In fact, from the beginning of January that year, Father Courveille judged it good to take in hand the finances Father Champagnat had been keeping up to then, on the grounds that he did not know how to do it properly; Champagnat as well was in the process of fighting a serious illness. To this end he opened two books of accounts: one for "Expenses", the other for "Receipts". The two exercise books resemble two brothers from their 200 pages of format 25 x 19 each. Their somewhat solemn title declares them: "Account Book of the House of the Hermitage of Our Lady for the expenses of the year 1826" for the one, "...for the products and receipts of the year 1826" for the other. According to the handwriting one sees that Father Courveille kept the expense account book up to 30 May, perhaps 1 June, and the receipts one up to 9 May. Forced to leave the Hermitage at this time, he passed them on to Father Champagnat who took control of the finances again and continued to keep the two books from the beginning of June 1826. He continued to

note down expenses regularly until October 1834. After this date he wrote almost nothing during the following two years except for some increases during April 1836, then began again seriously in January 1837, but did not go beyond the next year, 1838. He then confided the task to the Brothers who were successively in charge of the accounting. The recording of accounts stops at page 177, the end of December 1841, for one stumbles on pages already occupied, but in the opposite direction, by drafts of letters and by various notes of Father Champagnat who, according to his custom, has turned the register over and started again from the back page.

The book of receipts has not followed the same itinerary. Neglected from the start of 1827, its financial role ceased, as it in its turn became a draftbook for letters and especially for outlines of a rule. But on page 66 the title: "Receipts for 1832" announces the resumption of its original function, and this ceases only in 1842, on page 155, leaving the remaining pages for notes of a very diverse nature and drafts of letters, following the same procedure, that is reversing the book and starting again from the last page. The spaces left blank will be utilized by subsequent writers for matters of the same kind.

A fifth exercise book gives account, mainly though not exclusively, of the financial situation of the establishments conducted by the Brothers from 1825 to 1831. Of the 86 pages of this little exercise book of format 19.5 x 13, only the first 40 are used for this purpose, while leaving quite a few empty. Though there are gaps, one sees what the Brothers brought in, consumed in each establishment and what they contributed to the mother house during the years 1825 to 1831. The latter were not always transferred to the Account Book for Receipts so that the accounting lacks clarity, making any analysis of the accounts very problematic. The following 18 pages contain, in no apparent order, the list of novices who have not finished paying the total of their fees; accounts concerning the building of the infirmary, a reflection on Mary's assumption, and notes. After page 58 the exercise book must be read in reverse, with the page numbers 1 to 21 starting from the last page, for considerations on instruction, followed by drafts of the rule and of the prospectus, which, from the handwriting, can be attributed to Brother François.

This presentation of the documents gives some idea of the complexity one is faced with when wishing to examine the financial state of the Institute in Father Champagnat's time. The interest of such a study is all the greater in showing, in addition to the work

being done without cease at O.L. of the Hermitage, the enterprising character of Father Champagnat despite the financial difficulties with which his undertaking was strewn.

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### **THE YEAR 1826**

A particularly critical year is certainly 1826. It signals the taking in hand of the house accounting with the opening of two Account Books but collides with circumstances trying for the Founder. He recovers from an illness which had brought him to death's door, people from outside heap blame upon him, his closest aides abandon him and leave him alone faced with a pressing financial situation. He extracts himself from it but from now on his way of directing his work is going to take another turn. A more detailed study of this period through the financial situation throws light on the history of this period.

Once the school holidays and the retreat of 1825 were finished, that is, "after the feast of All Saints", according to Brother Jean-Baptiste, "Father Champagnat decided to visit all his establishments to see at first hand, the condition of the Houses, and to treat with the municipal authorities on a number of matters concerning the welfare of the schools, matters that could not be settled without his help. The Institute boasted ten schools at this time ( the biographer continues), namely: Saint-Sauveur, Bourg Argental, Vanosc, Boulieu, Chavanay, Saint-Symphorien-le-Chateau, Tarantaise, Lavalla, Charlieu and Ampuis. The good Father carried out all those visitations on foot..." ( Life, p. 136 ). One can imagine the number of kilometres he must have covered, seeing that Vanosc, the southernmost, is more than 40 kilometres from Lavalla, and that Charlieu, the northernmost, is almost 100 kilometres away. And the months of November and December are scarcely months favourable for such journeys. Moreover, if the happiness of meeting the Brothers at their place of work did something to sustain his courage, the irregularities he observed could only lessen the fraternal joy. Brother Avit makes a point on this occasion of piling them up ( Annals of the Institute, vol. 1, pp 58-59 ), but he is taking advantage of the opportunity here to group together facts which certainly happened at different times, perhaps even in different years.

What one can be sure of, however, is that this circuit of the

posts did not go beyond six weeks, for a notary act of 13 December 1825 attests that Father Champagnat was with Father Courveille at the home of Mr Chavassieux, innkeeper, in Bombarde Street, Lyon, to put their joint signature to a loan of 12,000 francs from Mme Justine de Divonne and to agree to repayment of the same with 4 % interest by 13 December 1829.

On reflection this seems to be a somewhat astonishing act. The situation in which the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary found itself then was not such as to encourage rich people to lend it money. The sole guarantee that the two priests could offer was a house that had just been built and was not completely finished, plus a thousand square metres of land. It was without doubt the intervention of influential people in the politico-religious entourage of the archbishop, very favourable to the work of the Brothers, which brought the affair to a successful conclusion. Brother Jean-Baptiste's report of a conversation between one of these people and some priests of the area leaves no doubt about that. "The news is, one said to him, that you have just lent twelve thousand francs to that fool of a Champagnat. – I haven't really lent it, but I procured it for him...- You have made a big mistake,... that man is reckless and stubborn; pride alone drives him... I hold Father Champagnat in high esteem, I have the utmost confidence in him and am convinced that this work will succeed." ( *Life*, pp 122-123 ).

One may well ask, from another point of view, how the two priests Courveille and Champagnat, whom the latter's biographer present as in deep disagreement up to this time, could so easily be associated together in carrying out this act which carried such big risks. Brother Jean-Baptiste reports in fact: "Thoroughly mortified by the preference shown to Father Champagnat in the elections held during the vacations, ( Courveille ) took advantage of his absence from the Hermitage, to show the Brothers how upset he was... ( On Father Champagnat's return ) Father Champagnat was not exempt from his display of pique: everything he did, was blamed. According to Father Courveille, the Brothers were badly directed; the novices were not sufficiently challenged, were not adequately educated and lacked satisfactory training in piety; the discipline of the House was neither strict enough nor sufficiently monastic; temporal affairs were neglected and money was squandered; in one word Father Champagnat was a poor administrator and so he relieved him of the purse strings..." ( *Life*, p. 137 ).

Courveille in fact took over the purse strings by opening the two account books as we have seen. But what are the real sentiments which guided him in this matter? Was it from a spirit of revenge as the biographer affirms? It is possible that this was how the Brothers saw it, but in reality his personal relations with Champagnat were certainly not as conflictual as they wanted to say. It is true that Courveille did not know how to direct the Brothers, nor win their affection. With the idea of making monks of them, he showed himself much too severe towards those who objected to the style of life he wished to impose on them. But with Champagnat who could not help seeing him as superior, the relationship preserved a shade of deference. It should not be forgotten either that the day Courveille opened the account books, Champagnat was in bed struggling with death. Who else could replace him? Moreover, if the sick man should succumb, as it was feared, Courveille was left alone with the responsibility for a loan of 12,000 francs which he had to repay in three years. Knowing the situation very well, he had reason to be alarmed at this daunting prospect. Apprehending such an eventuality, but not lacking a basic goodwill towards the sick man, he recommended the Brothers to pray for the cure of their esteemed Father.

The situation turned round completely: Champagnat recovered his health. The two priests who were helping him took no time in abandoning him, for different reasons, leaving him alone in charge of both temporal and spiritual affairs. Without bitterness, with a calm courage, he took affairs in hand once more, redoubling his confidence in his Masters, Jesus and Mary. Moreover, he could only congratulate himself for it, because seven years later, when he was better informed about Courveille, his opinion of him had certainly changed. In a letter of the end of summer 1833 he gave Father Cholleton, vicar general, an expose of this period. "What a disastrous step I took... when I went to get Father Courveille in Epercieux. What an ill-fated day, more than enough to destroy any work which the divine Mary was not upholding with all the strength of her arm. During a long and serious illness, I had major debts hanging over my head, and I wanted to make Father Terrailon my sole heir. He refused my legacy, saying that I had nothing, as he and Father Courveille kept telling the brothers. 'The creditors will soon be here to drive you out of the house; all we can do is take a parish and leave you to yourselves.' Finally, God in his mercy, and perhaps in his justice, restored me to health. I reassured my children; I told them

not to be afraid, that I would share all their misfortunes and share the last piece of bread with them. Under the circumstances, I could see that neither one nor the other had any fatherly feelings towards my young men” ( LPC [Eng], doc. 30, p 76).

In fact, Father Courveille, hoping doubtless from his financial management to recover some of the confidence of his entourage, succeeded no better in that than in the other things. From the writing one can say that he began the two account books at the beginning of January 1826 and kept the expense book up to 1<sup>st</sup> June and the receipt one up to 9 May, still leaving some big gaps, for nothing is entered for three quarters of March and all of April. First of all one notes that there is no mention at all of the loan from Mme de Divonne. He certainly did not forget it for he was free with expenses, which are far from being covered by receipts for the same period. In January expenses climbed to 2813.50 francs while receipts did not pass 382 francs; in February 1745.90 francs were expended against 305.04 banked, and in March 965.25 against 304.50, representing a total deficit for the three months of 4,530 francs, or more than one third of the amount borrowed.

Certainly one can say that during this period Father Courveille had some bad luck, for the Register of Entries notes the arrival on March 24 of two postulants but neither in the position to pay anything, and four establishments only would have contributed altogether the total sum of 234 francs and this besides does not figure in the receipts book. On the other hand, among the expenses one notices on the first of January the purchase of a cow worth 27 francs paid for by “a novena of masses for the person who sold the cow”. A week later, the 7<sup>th</sup>, another cow is bought for 28 francs and two pigs of 650 pounds at 34 francs a hundredweight, or 221 francs. The 25<sup>th</sup> of the same month “the tailor is given for the purchase of two pigs and a cow, three hundred and fifty francs.” Monastic frugality may not be in question, but one wonders all the same what was done with these animals and what Brother Jean-Baptiste means by saying that “In the first fifteen years or so of the Institute, wine and butcher’s meat were quite unheard of” ( Life, p. 362 ). Let us point out also expenses “for necessary items such as milk, eggs, meat, fruit taken to Saint-Chamond and elsewhere”, then those “for items necessary for Father Champagnat in his illness, two hundred Father.” and further on “to M. Rigolos, doctor at Saint-Etienne, thirty five Father.” These two amounts do not enter into the accounting; someone else, perhaps

the parish priest of Saint-Chamond, would have assumed responsibility for them. In another connection, corn is bought for 950 f., 1000 f. is paid to M. Finaz, notary, 3,500 to Montelier, iron merchant, and 100 to Lagier, merchant. Briefly, if, as Brother Jean-Baptiste insinuates, Father Courveille wanted to take over the finances because he found them poorly organized, great must have been his disappointment at the results of his management.

But there were reasons other than the impossibility of being able to redress the financial situation that forced him to leave the Hermitage and replace the finances in Father Champagnat's hands. The latter did not disown what his predecessor had done and simply continued keeping the two books from the beginning of June. Although he has just received the sum of 12,000 francs from Father Petitain, parish priest of Ampuis, the situation is anything but comfortable if one gives credence to the profound disappointment expressed in the letter to Father Cholleton quoted above. But that was five or six years later. When he found himself before the reality, did the situation seem so dramatic to him?

It has been seen that Father Courveille, instead of improving it, was only able to worsen it. During the remaining seven months of the year, Father Champagnat made a positive improvement, but was far from being able to balance his budget. By consulting the two account books, one sees on one side, that the contributions from the establishments and the entries of novices are not carried into the receipts book, and on the other, that the total of receipts rises to 9,100 francs received and that of expenses remains at 8,902 francs during the last 7 months of the year 1826. Unfortunately the some 198 francs in credit are largely absorbed by the deficit left by Father Courveille. Was this a year particularly ill-starred from a financial point of view? Only a more thorough analysis of the accounts can provide an answer.

To begin with, a glance at the results for each month cannot but raise questions about their disproportion. The total expenses for June is as high as 2,998 f. while those for the following month are no more than 157, and from 125 at the end of August they climb again to 1,692 in September and fall to 360 in October to climb again to 1,600 and 1,968 respectively the last two months. As for receipts, they are zero for the months of October and December. How can one not wonder why these anomalies? For the absence of receipts, it is not unthinkable that the Father forgot to enter them, for exer-

cise book No 8 containing the financial states of the establishments reveals in October an entry of 160 f. and this would not be the only omission of this kind. The differences in the monthly expenses are more difficult to justify. The large expense of June comes partially from finishing touches to the building which the Founder was in a hurry to see completed, since in this month 655 francs were spent for the work of a mason and a plasterer. Two other big expenses are: accounts of 1,000 francs to the baker and 600 to the wool merchant. But that the monthly expenses for the next two months does not exceed 150 francs is surprising considering the personnel of the house. It is certainly not possible to determine the exact number, but one can get an idea. The Brothers employed in the house certainly exceeded a dozen counting those in administration, those responsible for temporal affairs, and those in charge of the boarders and the various workshops. As for the youths in formation, Brother Avit counts 10 for the reception of 1825 and 4 for the one of 1826; with some who are kept waiting it may be supposed that they exceed fifteen. So it is not exaggerating to estimate at more than thirty the number of Brothers in the house, without counting the 16 young boarders who were there doubtless a good part of the year. So if one retains the number of 45 persons, the average monthly expense per person would only be 3.33 francs, which is hardly acceptable. On the other hand, the big expenses of the other months are no easier to justify for the Account Book inscribes only the name of the creditor without specifying the nature of the debt.

It is not possible therefore to gain an exact account of the financial management for this year 1826. Nevertheless the figures provided by the books allow an approximate general outline to become apparent. Starting with Father Champagnat himself and the costs of administration: the costs caused by his illness, the expenses of travelling and others total the sum of 2,309.50 francs, not counting the costs of correspondence, "carrying of mail" and postage which come to 111.75 francs. Foodstuffs such as milk, eggs, butter and cheese and others for this month total 780 francs, but if one adds to the meat article of more than 10 francs paid to the butcher the purchase price of 5 cows and 6 pigs the expense figures at more than 950 francs. Bran, hay, straw for the livestock and for the people, the large quantity of wheat necessary for the making of bread "which was liberally served" according to Brother Jean-Baptiste ( Life, p. 362 ), made an invoice of 3,557 francs. Other expenses for the needs

of ordinary life and payments whether in cash or on account for the daily wages of labourers, laundresses (16 f.), shoemakers (695 f.), carpenters (213 f.), tailors (100 f.) represent the normal upkeep of a house. The money entries by contrast except for the 2,269 f. contributed by the year's 17 novices, the 390 f. from the 16 little boarders and the 4,280 f. coming from the schools, the making of chairs (71 f.), nails ( 30 f.), Masses (71 f.) and donations ( 1,678 f.) are not much of a contribution, considering the debts and the needs of a large and generally youthful population.

Summing up, the receipts for the year 1826 come to 23,127 francs, while the expenses total 23,820, leaving a deficit of 693 francs. But a closer investigation leads to the foundation that year of two establishments, namely, Mornant and Neuville-sur-Saone.

In the Annals of Mornant, Brother Avit reports: "Only 1,300 f. was provided for the personal furniture of the 3 Brothers, instead of 1,500, and 1,200 for the prime", that is for taking responsibility. He adds a little further on: "the salary was fixed at 1,200 f." ( Annals of St Genis, vol. 2, p. 174). Now in the exercise book No 8 which gives the financial state of the establishments from 1825 to 1831, the first year at Mornant is presented as follows: "1826 (in fact the school year 1826-27),

12 Nov. received from Brother Michel,	200;
13 April, received from the M. Brs	100;
20 June, received	100.

Now these 400 f. are not recorded in the Account Book for receipts and are not included in the total given above.

On the other hand, on the subject of Neuville, Brother Avit makes this observation: "We cannot ... say anything for certain about the conditions made and accepted on one side or the other. We think that the conditions were the ones our venerable Founder generally made, that is to say: furniture of 500 f., a prime of 400 f... and an annual salary of like sum for each Brother ... there were only two Brothers for a start." ( Annals of St Genis, vol. 2, p. 222 ) Even leaving out the furniture, provided it seems in kind, the account book shows nothing of the 1,200 f. asked for. In exercise book No 8 one reads: "Received from the Brothers of Neuville, 1 100;

Further received	370;
Owed	170;
F. expended	560.

One is therefore calculating on a contribution of 1,200 f. but it

is not specified whether we are dealing with 1826 or 1827 for the following entry is from 2 September 1828. In any case the sum of 470 f. is not mentioned in the account book. Finally we are left in complete uncertainty as to the financial situation at the end of the year 1826. The three documents which have not yet been mentioned provide no more clarity.

Page 293 of the Register of Entries presents a financial statement for February 22 1826 without any doubt from the hand of Father Champagnat. Illness has not yet prevailed to deprive him of care for the financial situation, while Father Courveille is still there to occupy himself with it. The document in question carries no indication, but one cannot doubt that it concerns a review of the collective debts burdening the Institute, for a second document, in the Account Book for Expenses, entirely similar to the first, dated 7 August of the same year, has as title: "Statement of what we owe". The interpretation of both these documents is difficult. The names of the creditors are followed by two columns of figures with nothing to indicate their significance. Moreover, many figures from one column or the other are so crossed out or corrected that it is impossible to work out what the total at the bottom of one of them corresponds to. This total is 39,153 on the document of 26 February 1826 and 38,850 on that of 7 August of the same year. From this last sum is deducted 12,271 francs which represents the total of what the novices have still to pay, which would reduce the debt to 26,579. But at the bottom of the statement of 7 August the Father notes: "7 May 1827, I have 1,100 in cash – rest owing 39,700" and the following line rectifies: "7 May 1827, 38,400." The significance of these different data remains obscure and the existence of a third statement in the same Book of Accounts for Expenses, dated 22 February 1828, which has no more than one column where several figures are equally crossed out, throws no more light, since the addition not being exact, it is not known what the figures of 37,287 or 33,990 correspond to. All these statements contain the 12,000 Divonne loan and the 12,000 advanced by the parish priest of Ampuis of which nothing yet seems to have been repaid. However the Account Book for expenses mentions two payments of 240 francs each to Mr Marechal, a Lyons notary, one for 12 July 1826 and the other for the first of January 1827, which correspond to the 4% interest on the loan from Mme Divonne.

Despite everything, Father Champagnat does not show himself

crushed by the debts which “weigh upon his head” for he forges ahead. This is the year when he calls the Brothers to pronounce for the first time, although secretly, the three vows of religion, when he obtains authorization to create the first cemetery on the property, when he is authorized to set up a workshop for silk spinning “as a way of wiping out the debts of the establishment and keeping the Brothers occupied” (O.M. I, doc. 149, vol. 1, p. 387). On the other hand, he had the disappointment of seeing the departure of two Brothers, Jean-Marie and Roumesy, whom he thought he could rely on. Yet the will to persevere does not slacken as the letter to Father Cattet, one of the vicar generals of Lyons shows: “I am alone, but in spite of that, I have not lost courage, knowing how powerful God is and how hidden are his ways, even from the most clairvoyant of humans. He often reaches his goal when we think he is very far from it” (L.M.C. vol 1, doc. 4, p. 32 [Eng]).

It is not the finances in fact which constitute the major subject of his preoccupations. His disorderly manner of treating them shows this clearly enough. His aim is nothing other than the Christian education of the young and since he is convinced that this mission comes to him from God, it is from Him alone that he expects the means beyond his capacity in order to carry it out.

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**REGISTRE DES ENTRÉES, P. 293**


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22 fév. 1826	M. Maréchal à Lyon,		1.200	1.200
	M. Bonard de Rive de Gier		<del>3.500</del>	<del>3.000</del>
	M. le Curé de St. Pierre	journal	2.300	3.700
	<del>Monteiller de St. Chamon</del>	selier	<del>33</del>	<del>3.000</del>
	<del>M. Faivre de Lyon</del>	facture	<del>120</del>	<del>1.000</del>
	Domestique de M. Royer		<del>1.000</del>	1.000
	<del>M. Finas, notaire à St. Ch.</del>		200	<del>1.600</del>
	M. le curé d'Izieux		3.000	4.000
	M. Lagier		<del>1.100</del>	<del>600</del>
	Odras de Lavallas	Médecin	<del>160</del>	900
	<del>Crapanne de Lavallas</del>	principal	200	<del>300</del>
	<del>M. Journoux, vicai. St. Ch.</del>	Lopital	<del>400</del>	<del>400</del>
	<del>M. Tardy de St. Etienne</del>	laine	400	<del>200</del>
	<del>M. Grangier St. Eti.</del>	juveneton	60	<del>200</del>
	Ferblantier St. Ch.		200	300
	<del>Blaehon de St.</del>	Minard	<del>150</del>	<del>180</del>
	<del>Le Maréchal</del>			<del>200</del>
	à St. Etienne autre dépense	Giller f. fabres		<del>400</del>
	cordonnier de St. Ch.	Guyot	<del>1.000</del>	<del>280</del>
	cordonnier de Lavallas	Achard ( ? )	700	<del>400</del>
	curé d'Empuys		12.000	12.000
	la veuve Bridou	Chevalier	<del>100</del>	1.000
	Courbon	domestique	<del>1.000</del>	1.000
			400	
	marie		300	
4 avril 1827	Bridou		80	36300
			400	3.550
	indulgentié 12 chapellets jusqu'aux 9 <sup>Xbre</sup> 1827 reçu 498, 60 de M. Journou provenant d'une dite Ballard			
	de St. Chamond 12 7bre 1827			39.153
	reçu de Frécon de Lavallas à compte de ce qu'il me doit		33.380	
	qu'il promet payer à la St. Michel qui se monte		101, 50	

**LIVRE DE COMPTE POUR LES DÉPENSES, P. 196**

Août 1826, *Relevé de ce que nous devons*

1°	Mr. Marechal de Lyon	12000	12000
2°	Mr. le curé d'Empuis	12000	12000
3°	Mr. le curé de St. Pierre de St. Chamon	<del>3</del> 700	3700
4°	<del>M. Bonard de Rive de Gier</del> Courbon du Bachat	1000	<del>3</del> 000
5°	Mr. le curé d'Yzieux	4000	4000
6°	au domestique de Mr. Royer	1000	1000
7°	Odras de Lavallas	<del>1</del> 000	900
8°	Mr. Lagier de St. Chamon aîné et cadet	800	1135
9°	<del>Mr. Journon, vicaire de St. Ch.</del> Veuve Thibon	1000	<del>4</del> 00
10°	<del>au marchand de bois</del>		<del>3</del> 00
11°	au Marechal	100	<del>6</del> 23
12°	au ferblantier	400	300
13°	<del>a M. Courbon Lyonnais</del> Veuve Bridon		400
			1000
14°	<del>au marchand de laine</del> juvenetton	360	<del>5</del> 92
			200
15°	a M. Rusand	600	600
	<i>mot illisible</i>		1000
16°	<del>a Crapanne de Lavallas</del> Guyot	<del>2</del> 00	300
			200
17°	<del>M. le curé de Lavallas</del> Despinace	<del>6</del> 00	<del>3</del> 00
			38850
	Marie	300	<u>12271</u>
	domestique de Guyot	<u>400</u>	
			26579
	7 mai 1827	40000	
	j'ai 1100 en bourse		
			reste devoir 39.700
			7 mai 1827 38.400

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**LIVRE DE COMPTE POUR LES DÉPENSES, P. 194,**

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22 février 1828      Compte de tout ce que nous restons devoir.

1°	Monsieur Marechal	12000
2°	Curé d'Empuis	12000
3°	Curé d'Yzieux	4000
4°	Curé de St. Pierre a St. Chamond	1700
5°	domestique de Mr. Roye	<del>1000</del>
6°	Courbon	500
7°	à Mr. Lagier aîné et cadet	190
8°	à l'Hopital de St. Chamon	<del>162</del>
9°	au ferblantier Bertolin	150
10°	Mr. Finas	300
11°	Vélon	<del>159</del>
12°	à Mr. Journon	500
13°	au merechal	<del>140</del>
	à Mr. Brut	<del>190</del>
	à Mr. Rusand	500
	à Mr. Guyot	800
	à Mr. Chevalier	<del>150</del>
	à Mr. Juveneton	100
	au marchand de laine	200
		<hr/>
		37287
		<hr/>
		33990

**ANOMALIES DANS LES COMPTES FINANCIERS**

(caractères droit ce qui se trouve dans le Cahier de Compte ;  
en caractères penchés ce qui se trouve dans le Registre des Entrées)

**Les comptes de ROUSSIER :**

1825, avril 21 – Nous restons devoir à Etienne Roussier quatre cent francs  
du compte qui avait été arrêté le 25 mars 1825.

Commencement du compte de 1825 commencé  
le 5 avril jusques vingt trois

	<i>Quatre vingt deux journées</i>	82 journées
1825 juillet 9	donné à la fermière de Roussier cent f.	100
1825 août 20	j'ai donné à Roussier de Lavaricelle	25
1825 7bre	donné à Roussier deux cents francs	200
1826 juin 10	Roussier a reçu en tout 200 quatre vingt cinq f	285
1826 juillet 8	(donné) plus Roussier de Lavaricelle	50
1826 juillet 9	donné à Roussier	135
1827 mars	plus donné à Roussier de Lavaricelle	60
1827 août 4	donné à Roussier de Lavaricelle	60
1830 avril 23	les maçons de Roussier ont fait seize journées	
1830 nov. 4	donné à Etienne Roussier, maître maçon Lavallas convenu avec lui 4,50 centi... la toise courante.	300
1830 déc. 2	Je déclare avoir reçu de Mr. Champagnat la somme de 727 f. pour entier payement de tout compte jusques à ce jour 2 Xbre 1830.	
1833 déc. 20	donné à Etienne Roussier, maçon du Creux,	224
1834 nov. 14	donné à Etienne Roussier pour solde	755 .

– Il y a en plus Pierre Roussier :

1826 7bre 16	<i>Payé à Pierre Roussier, marchand de planches, le reste de ce que je lui devois. Signé : P. Roussier</i>	
	<i>Je dois à Pierre Roussier 6 pieds à 7 s(ous) le pied</i>	21 .
1833 juillet 25	donné à Roussier pour solde des planches et chevrons	614 .

### **Compte Melle BERTHOLET :**

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1831 janvi. 20 *J'ai reçu en dépôt mille francs de la demoiselle  
Bertholet de St. Chamond*

1832 8bre *donné à la demoiselle Bertholet* 800

1832 8bre 15 *donné à la demoiselle Bertholet a compte  
sur la somme de ~~mille francs~~ neuf cent cinquante* 50 .

### **Benoit MERCIER :**

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R.E. 1838 mars 20 – *J. Benoit Mercier de St. Laurent d Agny, fils légitime ...  
Est entré dans la maison en qualité de novice,  
a donné* 325

*Le père donnera dans un an* 200

R.C. 1838 avril 20 – *reçu de Jn. Benoit Mercier de St. Laurent d'Agny* 25

21– *reçu de Benoit Mercier de St. Laurent d'Agny  
pour son noviciat* 300

*il donnera encore 200 francs dans un an.*

### **Jean-Baptiste FAVIER**

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RE 1838 avril 30 – *J. Bap. Favier de Viriville, fils légitime  
Est entré dans la maison en qualité de novice ;  
a donné* 10,55

*Les parents donneront le reste ; 9 janvier 1840* 50

RC. 1838 avril 30 – *reçu de Jn. Baptiste Favier de Viriville  
pour son noviciat* 104, 90

### **Joseph PERENON**

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RE. 1838 avril 30 – *Joseph Perenon de Viriville, fils légitime ... Est entré  
dans la maison en qualité de novice ; a donné* 125

*Le reste est à convenir ;*

R C. 1838 avril 30 – *reçu de Joseph Perenon pour son noviciat* 126, 60

**Emprunt de Mme Justine DIVONNE.**

cf. Origines Maristes, vol. I, doc.142 ; Extraits, doc. 39, p.109.

Acte du 13 décembre 1825, d'après lequel :

Courveille et Champagnat déclarent devoir à Madame Justine Divonne,  
par l'intermédiaire de Mr. Louis Maréchal, agissant pour elle,  
la somme de douze mille francs (12.000)

Ils promettent et s'obligent à rendre et payer à Lyon, en l'étude de Maître Lecourt,  
cette somme le 13 décembre 1829, avec intérêt de 4% par année ;  
l'intérêt est payable par moitié de six en six mois,  
les treize juin et treize décembre.

Ils hypothèquent la totalité des immeubles qu'ils possèdent  
dans la commune de Saint-Martin-Acoailleux.

Le Livre de Compte pour les Recettes ne fait aucune mention de cet emprunt ;  
certes ce Livre est ouvert par Courveille le premier janvier 1826.

Le Livre de Compte pour les Dépenses note :

1826, 8 juillet	donné à Mr. Maréchal de Lyon	240
<i>donc la moitié des intérêts de l'année comme prévu</i>		
1827, janvier,	donné à Mr. Maréchal de Lyon	240
22 nov.	donné à Mr. Maréchal	120
1828,	rien n'est indiqué	
1829, 24 janv.	donné à Mr. Maréchal	200
2 juin	donné à Mr. Maréchal par Mr. Séon	1.000
1831, 27 juin,	— plus donné à Mr. Le Cours, avoué, pour entier paiement des intérêts de l'argent que Mr. Maréchal nous avoit fait prêter à quatre pour cent jusqu'à ce jour	700
1833, 22 fév.	donné à Mr. Lecourt à Lyon pour Madame Divonne	6.480
<i>suit une explication de ce versement :</i>		
1834, février,	donné en 1831, premier juillet, 700 pour entier paiement jusqu'à ce jour ; plus 22 février 1833, donné avec 6.000 de capital, 480 d'intérêt ; reste devoir : 1° pour 1 an et 7 mois de la somme totale : 740, plus pour le revenu d'un an de 6.000	

	à 4 pour cent : 240	
	Total au 22 février 1834 = 980	
1837, 26 décembre	à Mr. Cours, notaire à Lyon	1.000
1838, 09 novembre	donné à Mr. Lyonnet	450
1839, 18 novembre,	à Fourneron pour les intérêts de Mme Divonne	300
1840, 26 février,	pour les intérêts de Mme Divonne à Lyon	240

# *Documents Method of Reading*

By Brother Maurice BERGERET

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The reader of these lines will perhaps be like their writer. He has read and seriously studied the life of our founder Marcellin Champagnat. He has retained its spiritual and ascetical lessons of religious life in conformity with his Novitiate formation. And he will not have noticed, or he will not have paid too much importance to its educational or pedagogical values, judging them out of date and hardly suited to present day requirements.

Perhaps even, if he is of a certain age, he will have suffered, for the last thirty years since Vatican II, from a sort of loss of memory with regard to what constitutes the pedagogical dimension of the founding Marist project, even a slight scorn of it.

So, and he is not alone, during many years spent in teaching and education, he has not had the slightest recollection of the method of reading. Yet it is one of the elements that provoked what we can call the crisis of 1828, a crisis which could have been fatal for the future of the little Marist community.

All that is remembered of this crisis often are what concern the soutane ‘fastened with hooks and eyes to about halfway down, and sewn for the rest’,<sup>1</sup> and the famous cloth stockings proposed to

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<sup>1</sup> Life of Joseph Benedict Marcellin CHAMPAGNAT, ROME 1989 (English edition), page 161 (hereafter referred to as the Bicentenary edition).

replace the ones knitted by “*persons cf sex*”, that is to say, by women.

Now Jean-Baptiste Furet, Marcellin Champagnat’s first historian, makes it clear that the method of reading is one of the three elements inseparable from the fidelity of the first brothers to their vocation. But he underlines that “*it was less the new method than the matter of the cloth stockings which was on the Brothers’ minds.*”<sup>2</sup> However, in the course of the solemn ceremony in the chapel organised by Marcellin Champagnat and a group of brothers faithful to the founder, a formal request is read by one of “the senior brothers” and there we find: “*We also promise to follow in our teaching, the rules that you have laid down, and in particular, to use the new pronunciation of the consonants.*”<sup>3</sup>

This element appears so important to him that he comes back to it later in the biography in chapter 22, where he is outlining the Founder’s educational activity. There, after having synthesised all the work accomplished to improve the method of reading, he points out an element very important for us: “*He adopted for the schools of his Society a shorter and more intelligible system; the theory and practice of this he explained in a booklet entitled ‘Principles of Reading’; it had been composed by him in concert with his principal Brothers.*”<sup>4</sup>

This phrase, so long forgotten, did not pass unnoticed. The edition of the life of Marcellin Champagnat, called the Bicentenary because published in 1989, mentions in a footnote on page 522, “The circular of November 11, 1916, announces the 42<sup>nd</sup> edition of this volume.” And it is starting from this that, for a certain number of brothers, including your modest servant, the question of the reading method of our origins appears a subject worthy, not only of reflection, but also of research. And that is the reason for this first publication on the method of reading of the Marist Brothers. It is to be hoped that others will follow to throw light on a subject which is far from being perfectly explained.

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2 Bicentenary edition, page 163.

3 Bicentenary edition, page 168.

4 Bicentenary edition, page 522.

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**DISCOVERY OF THE FIRST EDITION OF 1838:**

I lack precise information to retrace in detail the whole history preceding this discovery. While waiting to find it, I think I can say the following.

In the course of meetings and seminars devoted to our origins, and without doubt following on the exactness about the numerous editions of the reading method mentioned above, brothers have tried to rediscover traces of it. Personally, while preparing for a presentation on Marist educational pedagogy at Notre Dame de l'Hermitage, I was able to proceed with making a photocopy of a copy borrowed from the library of the Provincial House of Saint-Genis-Laval. This is a copy of the 39<sup>th</sup> edition – by F.T.A. – from Emmanuel Vite in Lyons, in 1900. Other copies have been discovered but doubtless not very many. It is urgent to be able to proceed with an exact inventory, for they are in danger of disappearing for good. In fact, we can only deplore our lack of interest and respect for our old Marist works on reading as on many other subjects of teaching. We have passed through a period of iconoclasm concerning our ancient and recent past. It is high time to set up archives centralised, well classified, and easily consulted, concerning our ancient books.

There is the National Library of Paris, you will tell me. But I think I can say, from recent experience, that it is going to be more and more difficult to work with the copies of reading methods of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They are in very poor condition and consulting them is surrounded by a profusion of constraints which limit the use that can be made of them. Photocopying even a single page, for example, is impossible. Well then, should we have recourse to microfilm technique? But are we prepared to make the necessary investment, for microfilming is very expensive?

However, three years ago, Brother André Lanfrey succeeded, thanks to patient and discerning consultation by Internet of the information services of the National Library of France, in establishing lists of primers or methods of reading of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which were discovered notably the 1838 edition of Marcellin Champagnat's Principles of Reading, and also the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of 1844, as well as all those following in the years 1850 – 1900...

After difficult negotiations and subject to liabilities, Brothers Manuel ALVES and Pierre SARRAILLE (Brother Louis+) were able to obtain a photocopy of the two editions of 1838 and 1844 so as to

be able to present them to our whole religious family. They confided to me the work which I am doing my best to accomplish in the following pages, in expectation of being able to deepen our understanding of certain aspects of this question. These are the tentative beginnings of a study which should mobilize much energy and patience.

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## II. THE TIME WHEN MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT WANTED TO “LEARN TO READ”

(The end of the 18<sup>th</sup>, beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century)

In the life of Joseph Benedict Marcellin Champagnat by Brother Jean-Baptiste Furet we read: “*When he was a child, Father Champagnat found it very hard to learn to read; later on, trying to search out the reason for his difficulty in acquiring this basic skill, he concluded that the problem lay with the ineptitude of the teachers and the inefficiency of the method then being used for teaching to read.*”<sup>5</sup>

Can we have an idea, general though it may be, of some of these “*inefficiencies of the method...for teaching to read*” at the time when Marcellin Champagnat was learning to read?

Marcellin made his first communion at the age of eleven in 1800. At this time, his mother and aunt having been able to teach him only the elements of reading, he was sent to a schoolmaster to perfect his reading and to learn to write.<sup>6</sup>

And we know what happened next. The teacher, B. MOINE by name, was “*angered and vigorously boxed the ears*” of a classmate too keen to read before the timid Marcellin. Marcellin’s “*discerning mind was indignant at this cruel act and he vowed never to return to a school run by such a teacher.*”<sup>7</sup> Moine was using the so-called individual method widely used at the time and, since it easily encouraged disorder, corporal punishment was a regular practice.

The incapacity of the teachers was not the only factor involved. Apart from the individual method, there was the method of reading. What one might B. Moine have used?

After a very rapid and rather difficult research in the National Library of France on its François Mitterrand site in Paris, here are

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<sup>5</sup> Bicentenary edition, page 522.

<sup>6</sup> Idem page 5.

<sup>7</sup> Idem page 6.

some elements of an answer which will allow us to give a preliminary idea, although it needs to be made more exact.

**1. Latin:** It is not impossible that the point of departure for learning to read letters was Latin. In 1775, LAURENT Gabriel published: “*The principles of reading – 1<sup>st</sup> part containing: a little discourse on the necessity of starting with Latin. 2<sup>nd</sup>: a short treatment on the names of the letters and on spelling...*”<sup>8</sup>

This phrase by itself can provide a first idea of the line of teaching: “Do you not know that the secret of education consists in complicating (*sic in italics in the text*) as much as one can, the use of the exercises”<sup>9</sup>. And to illustrate the little “*discourse on the necessity of starting with Latin*”, numerous Latin texts occupy pages 21 to 47 of a work which consists at the most of about fifty. There are prayers in Latin: Pater, Ave, Common of the Mass and the psalms of Terce and Sext. It is not possible to say if this work inspired in a precise way the method used by Barthelemy Moine in Marlies in the years around 1800.

**2. The methods:** Another booklet more recent, since it appeared in 1797, whose author is LUNEAU DE BOISJERMAIN Pierre-Joseph-François, can give an idea of the methods used at the time when Marcellin Champagnat wanted to “learn to read.” It is a work of about 300 pages of a format 12cm x 20cm – a very scholarly work with numerous references to Latin and even Greek authors, interrupted by rare remarks on the procedures of reading.

For the teachers of this period, it seems to me unreadable and so of almost no pedagogical use. It is the work of a great scholar and without much concrete application for practitioners of the individual method. But we will see that this work appears again in a different form.

I cannot be more precise about everything which contributed to the almost insurmountable difficulties encountered by the young apprentice reader Marcellin Champagnat. But one can ask a question if not pose a hypothesis. Marcellin’s setback, before returning to the seminary of Verrières, after his stay in Saint-Sauveur with his

<sup>8</sup> LAURENT Gabriel.

<sup>9</sup> LUNEAU DE BOISJERMAIN, Pierre-Joseph-François. The true principles of reading, spelling, and pronouncing French, 1797.

brother-in-law Mr Arnaud, might it not have come from this link still too strong between the apprenticeship in reading French and Latin? We read in the life of Marcellin Champagnat (5): “*Nothing would have suited him better than immediate entry into the seminary, but his reading and writing skills were inadequate to begin studying Latin. So he asked his parents to let him stay a while with one of his uncles. This man was a teacher in the parish of Saint-Sauveur. He knew Latin and could teach Marcellin its elements while completing his primary schooling. After a year with that uncle, who spared no pains but had little success, he was against Marcellin’s entering the seminary. “Your child,” he advised the parents, “persists in his determination to study for the priesthood, but you would be mistaken to let him do so; for he hasn’t the ability to succeed.” He had made many efforts himself to divert Marcellin from the idea, telling him he wasn’t meant for such lengthy studies and predicting that he would eventually give up, bemoaning the lost money, the lost time, and perhaps even, the lost health.*”<sup>10</sup>

There is no question here of judging nor especially condemning Benoît Arnaud, one of whose grandsons, Brother Tharcise, who died as a missionary on the Island of Pines, New Caledonia, said of him that “*he had studied Latin, he was a model Christian and a competent teacher.*”<sup>11</sup>

But one may ask if the study of Latin, no doubt premature, by a student whose “*reading and writing skills were inadequate to begin studying Latin*” did not contribute to a setback which might have been irremediable. Was not Mr Arnaud himself too conditioned by what could be called a scholarly current whose fundamental principle was “*without Latin, no reading possible in French*”? But this current does not seem to have been predominant for numerous primers or methods or principles do not have recourse to it.

It seems to me useful to pass to a second stage, that of the years preceding what I will freely call the “*crisis over the method of reading*” among the Little Brothers of Mary in 1828.

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10 Bicentenary edition, page 11.

11 See footnote 12 on page 11 of the Bicentenary edition.

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### III. READING IN FRANCE FROM 1800 TO 1830.

Even if sketchy, a brief incursion seems of interest to me for a better understanding of these years of revival.

In fact, this period which goes from the beginnings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to about 1830 appears in France as a time of extreme preoccupation, if not of intensive research, concerning methods of reading. From the lists compiled from the information services of the National Library of France, one can estimate, at the lowest, at about thirty, the number of works variously entitled: table, method, theory, principles of reading, without counting the numerous anonymous “primers”. It cannot be denied that the French Revolution failed in its organisation of public primary teaching. It seems that following this setback, French society, if not the political regimes of the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, became preoccupied with the education of children, particularly in the areas of reading and writing. Two currents of thought are in confrontation: the supporters of Latin and the innovators.

**The supporters of Latin:** They do not lower their guard. The proof: the appearance of two works, one in 1824 and the other in 1829.

Chamaret (teacher) publishes in 1824 the *“Theory of the true principles of reading”* drawn from good authors: Domergue, Noel Dubroca, Lemare, etc... followed by the principles of reading for the Latin language.

In 1829, he announces much more directly the necessary link between the apprenticeship in reading of French and Latin, relying on an illustrious example. The title is clear: *“Double method for learning to read French and Latin or Principles of reading drawn up according to the method of Port-Royal by François Quenin.”* And this work which appeared in 1829, with Aubanel in Avignon, impresses by its erudition and its volume (139 pages) as opposed to the little primers of 12, 16, or 24 pages. The erudition, as with Luneau de Boisjermain before it, seems to have precedence over the practical teaching. The reference to Port-Royal is obviously misleading.

In fact, historical works on teaching and education make clear two important aspects of the Port-Royal method partially inspired by Pascal in his correspondence with his sister Jacqueline.

The first concerns phonetics. The spelling of words consists

*“in beginning with the sound and the name of the letter and giving to the consonants, pronounced separately, a sound as close as possible to the one they have when united to a vowel in the body of a word.”*

The second concerns Latin. It passes to the second rank behind French. Does not Rollier, a disciple of the Jansenists, say: *“It is by the mother tongue that one should begin studying.”* Doubtless he was aware of Comenius’ principle: *“To learn Latin before the mother language is to want to ride before knowing how to walk.”*<sup>12</sup>

So it seems certain that François Quenin, and without doubt his contemporaries, has abandoned the position of the end of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century concerning the priority of Latin with reference to the learning of reading in French, but not the joint apprenticeship of the two. And the reference to Port-Royal is misleading, for Port-Royal clearly distinguishes the two apprenticeships. Latin succeeds French. Quenin appears to preserve the connection of the two doubtless as a serious guarantee for a good apprenticeship in French.

**The innovators:** This is what one could well call the collection of authors who edit the principles, systems, or primers. For with the noun there often appear the adjectives true or new.

So LESTIVANT (17...18...), master of a boarding school or master of reading, is an author much published at this time. For example, in 1812-1813-1814, he issues a “new edition” of his “new principles of reading”... and he repeats this in 1821-1824-1828-1832... And we are still finding his works in 1865 (enlarged edition). He seems not to be the only one. VIARD Nicolas Antoine publishes a new edition, corrected and enlarged, of his *“True principles of reading”* in 1810-1811-1812-1817-1819-1829-1830-1835. The list could be added to, but these two authors are the most published and republished. We will discover in what follows several aspects of their works.

For the moment, we record that between 1820 and 1830 Marcellin Champagnat is not alone in trying to improve the ways of teaching children to read. His reflections during the years preceding the crisis of 1828 are doubtless influenced by the current of innovators. His

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<sup>12</sup> Quotations and concrete examples taken from a history of Teaching and Education by a group of authors. The work’s condition did not allow us to find either the date or the name of the editor.

originality is manifest in a milieu rather resistant which finds expression in a method sometimes called ancient and ordinary and to which his brothers are very attached. It is a question, not of offering resistance and keeping to routine, but of getting involved in this current clearly, prudently, and tenaciously. As we will see, he will not have his primer (French) published until 1838, after 10 years of teamwork with his brothers.

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#### IV. THE CRISIS OF 1828

From the foundation up to 1828, if we are to believe Brother Jean-Baptiste Furet, “*in teaching the children to read, the Brothers had followed the system in vogue.*”<sup>13</sup>

The current state of my research does not permit me to state what the origins of this were nor whether one or the other of the published works mentioned above, as also such and such a primer, were made use of by the Brothers of Marcellin Champagnat before 1828.

One can only offer the hypothesis that John Maisonneuve, the former Brother of the Christian Schools, formator of the first Brothers at La Valla, succeeded in introducing a method inspired by those of the Brothers of Jean-Baptiste de la Salle. But more research is needed to prove that.

The consequences of that event are familiar to us... The reading method is not the only element in the crisis, for there is also the evolution of the habit and the adoption of the cloth stockings in place of the knitted ones. Despite appearances, the reading method was something very close to Champagnat’s heart.

*“When he was a child, Father Champagnat found it very hard to learn to read; later on, trying to search out the reason for his difficulty in acquiring this basic skill, he concluded that the problem lay with the ineptitude of the teachers and the inefficiency of the method then being used for teaching to read. After studying and examining this question for several years, and having made trials and experiments with different ways of teaching a child to read, he became convinced that the old way of naming the consonants and the spelling*

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<sup>13</sup> Bicentenary edition, page 162.

*which resulted, multiplied reading difficulties and retarded pupil progress. In the light of his finding, he might well have abandoned immediately, a method that had proved so ineffectual; but distrustful of his own wisdom, before introducing such a basic change, he insisted on consulting the most capable people and the wisest judges. All of these, after close examination, shared his views.*

*Thenceforward, his mind was made up; in spite of numerous objections from a certain number of Brothers, Father Champagnat did not hesitate to break with custom. He adopted for the schools of his Society a shorter and more intelligible system; the theory and practice of this, he explained in a booklet entitled, *Principles of Reading*; it had been composed by him in concert with his principal Brothers.”<sup>14</sup>*

We possess the 1838 edition of the little book called “*Principles of reading*” (see appendix) and we will examine it in detail. Beforehand, it seems to me important to know:

Which persons Marcellin Champagnat might have consulted?

What naming of consonants was proposed to him?

Why he decided to abolish spelling?

### **The persons consulted:**

Should one think of a certain LESTIVANT, who published in 1812 a work presented in this way:

#### **“LESTIVANT (master of reading)**

*New Principles of reading...*

*Successfully tested and put into practice by Lestivant, new edition.”*

I have been unable to find the first edition. On the other hand, we have precise information about its numerous republications up to 1865.

In 1813 and 1814 new editions appeared identical in presentation to the 1812 one.

During the period when Marcellin Champagnat was labouring to evolve the method of reading used by his brothers, there contin-

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<sup>14</sup> Bicentenary edition, page 522.

ued to appear, as I have already indicated, his “new principles of reading” in 1821-1824-1826-1829-1832.

According to the year and alternately, he adopted a different presentation. In 1821 and 1829, it was published thus:

**Lestivant (17...18...; boarding school master)**

*[Primer (French). 1821]*

*New principles of reading, by which one can learn to read French and Latin in much less time, and much more easily than by the ancient and customary method. Successfully tried and put into practice by Lestivant, former boarding school master of Lyon. Corrected and enlarged edition.*

By contrast, in 1824, 1826, 1832, the presentation is as follows:

**Lestivant (17...18...; boarding school master)**

*[Primer (French). 1826]*

*New principles of reading, by which one can learn to read French and Latin in much less time and much more easily than by the ancient and customary method. Successfully tried and put into practice by Lestivant, former boarding school master of Lyon. Corrected and enlarged edition of the principles of French writing, for children of both sexes, by question and answer, from the moment they move beyond the primers. These principles are suited to all schools by their exactness and by the brevity with which they can be put into practice.*

In 1865, he reappears with a much shorter presentation:

**“LESTIVANT (master of reading)**

*New principles of reading... successfully tried and put into practice by Lestivant (Editions of phrases for spelling and various readings)”.*

What should we keep in mind as essential characteristics of the works of Lestivant?

Up to 1832 he holds to helping “teach to read French and Latin”.

Marcellin Champagnat does not follow him in this. Only French concerns him.

He insists on the ease in 1824 and in 1829, and on “the exact-

ness and the brevity with which they can be put into practice” in 1824, 1826, and 1832.

Like Lestivant, Marcellin Champagnat finds that the ancient and customary method “*multiplied reading difficulties and retarded pupil progress.*”<sup>15</sup>

Marcellin Champagnat’s reflections and experience fitted in with Lestivant’s theories except for the place of Latin.

It is possible that Champagnat consulted in Lyon the man who presented himself in the publications as a “former boarding school master of Lyon” or “master of reading” as much in 1812 as in 1865, but he did not follow his advice about joining the reading of French and Latin.

As far as Latin is concerned, I can state that it continued to be joined to French in the apprenticeship of reading well after 1828 right up to 1875. It is not therefore an exaggeration to say that, on this point, and doubtless on others, Marcellin Champagnat was a true pioneer, but with great prudence and with perseverance, as the succession of events shows us.

### ***Naming the consonants***

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Complementing the studies already made by Brothers Paul Boyat and Pierre Zind<sup>16</sup>, it seems to me possible to be precise that the “new naming of the consonants” Jean-Baptiste Furet speaks about is no longer **be, ce, de ...** visibly inspired by Latin.

In the life of Marcellin Champagnat, it is said that the persons consulted advised him to adopt “the new pronunciation of consonants as being more rational and better calculated to speed up the progress of the children.”<sup>17</sup>

The unanimity shown by these persons indicates the presence of a majority current in favour of this evolution of the reading method.

I have discovered written proof of this in the new edition of Luneau de Boisjermain’s work in 1830 where I read: “*It is not necessary to spell in pronouncing the sounds and syllables, nor to make*

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<sup>15</sup> Bicentenary edition, page 522.

<sup>16</sup> Brother Paul Boyat. Some aspects of the pedagogy of the Little Brothers. Bulletin of the Institute, XXIX pages 101, 103, and Pierre Zind, In the footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat, vol. 2 pages 76-79.

<sup>17</sup> Bicentenary edition, page 163.

*the pupil say a, be, abbe; a, c, acque...but immediately and in one breath: abbe, acque, adde, etc...demonstrating ab, ac, ad...*<sup>18</sup>

The process indicated seems clear. The teacher points out the letter ab, ac, ad...and has it pronounced directly, “in a single breath, insisting on the pronunciation of the consonant, abbe, acque, adde, (deliberate redoubling), the vowel e being unsounded. One is a long way certainly from the Latin e accented. And the necessity for spelling is put under serious revision.

### **The proscription of spelling**

This is an old problem. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Port-Royal also objected to the separate reading of each letter, vowel as much as consonant. “*For another mistake is made in the common method of teaching children to read and this is the way in which they are taught to spell **the letters separately** (in italics in the text) for the consonants as well as for the vowels...*”<sup>19</sup> According to Paul Boyat, it seems that Jean-Baptiste de la Salle also tried to struggle against this method of teaching to read by spelling.

In 1775, Laurent Gabriel seems still concerned with spelling based on a naming of the letters with Latin as the starting point. But it seems to be evolving towards a pronunciation of syllables, that is to say, taking groups of letters into consideration

A little booklet called Primer (French), which appeared in [no date included], proposes the following table on page 3.

*Manner of pronouncing the consonants:*

B, b, b(italic)		be
C, c, c(italic)	}	ke
K, k, k(italic)		
Q, q, q(italic)		

<sup>18</sup> Guyot's letter – quoted in the History of teaching and education.

<sup>19</sup> Luneau de Boisjermain – 1830 – in association with Mr Viard.

L, l, l (italic)	le
M, m, m(italic)	me
N, n, n(italic)	ne

Gn, gn, gn(italic)	nie (as in signs)
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On page 5, it proposes simple syllables:

Ba, be [with accented forms], bi, bo, ba[accented], bu.

One can state that the point of departure is certainly an exercise in spelling consonants but it quickly extends to a combination of syllables with vowels.

In 1828, there appears the Primer (French) which is presented thus: “New Primer” or “Syllabicalphabet, containing the basic elements of reading...”

On page 6 you can read the following exercise: “Ba, be, bi, bo, bu” which is taken up again on page 7 with the accented vowels.

On page 8, we read: “Words of two syllables formed from the preceding sounds:

Ex: “bale, beca, beni, bete”

And on page 9:

“Mari, mena, meco, mere, midi, mode, mule”.

We are a long way from the spelling of the separate letters, ones which can be pronounced in different ways according to their position in the word like the c of cavalier which gives **ch** in cheval, without counting the different written forms for the sound **K**: c, k, q...

In 1829, we can read in the Primer (French) of LESTIVANT (17...18...)(Boarding school master) the following lines which propose a spelling of a syllabic type:

*“In order to spell in conformity with this alphabet, it will be sufficient to name the letters as they appear in the words. For example, if I want to spell these words: mon Dieu, soyez-moi preceptice, I say: me, on, Die-eu, se-o-yez me-oi pre-o-pice; and consequently it is almost useless to make someone say b, a, ba... When the children are good at spelling in this way, they should be taught to read, and to take care that they remove from the end of each consonant the*

*mute e which they put there in spelling.*"<sup>20</sup>

A certain progress has been made since the 1820 Primer (French), published anonymously, but we are not faced with the radical proscription of spelling Marcellin Champagnat decided on. Here, it appears, he was a real pioneer. For in 1832, one finds a French Primer, anonymous, of sixteen pages, which proposes in its first pages the reading of the alphabet in capital letters, Arabic numerals, Roman numerals, then double letters (3,4,5). Then comes an exercise: ba be bi bo bu (page 7), and on page 9 the words: papa, maman, fanfan, divided into syllables. Finally there are some common words (pages 10 to 12) and phrases more and more complex for breaking up into syllables (pages 13 to 16).

One will have to wait until 1849 to find a French Primer, anonymous, which is presented thus:

**“Principles of reading, method without spelling...”**

But during this time, from 1828 to 1838, Marcellin Champagnat worked with his brothers. Jean-Baptiste Furet makes it clear that he *“did not hesitate to break with custom. He adopted for the schools of his Society a shorter and more intelligible system; the theory and practice of this, he explained in a booklet entitled, Principles of Reading; it had been composed by him in concert with his principal Brothers.”*<sup>21</sup>

This work whose existence has been discovered by Brother André LANFREY is reproduced in the appendix. It is high time a preliminary study was started.

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## **VTHE PRINTED EDITION OF THE 1838 PRINCIPLES OF READING.**

### **Ten years of experimentation.**

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The date 1838 may surprise us. Marcellin Champagnat, with his brothers, has taken ten years to clarify his method of reading and publish a very modest little work of thirty-six pages, fourteen centimetres in its largest dimension.

<sup>20</sup> LESTIVANT – (Primer (French))

<sup>21</sup> Bicentenary edition, page 522.

There we can see at the same time both the difficulty of the task to be accomplished in a satisfactory way, and also the prudence in seeking certain principles proved by the concrete, daily experimentation of the members of Marcellin's team. Numerous handwritten editions must have circulated around the classrooms of the mountains of Pilat before the arrival of this first edition printed in Lyons by Father Guyot, printer and bookseller.

### **General presentation**

Before opening this little book, let us notice two interesting details on its cover. The first is the use of the adjective "**New**" before the noun **Principles**, to indicate the break with the customary long-established methods. The second concerns the name of our religious family: **Brothers of Mary** and not **Little Brothers of Mary** as in the title of Jean-Baptiste Furet's life of Marcellin Champagnat published in 1856.

The text commences (page 3) with a page presenting the alphabet in capital and minor letters, and the vowels in minor case with a mention of the four ways of pronouncing the vowel E.

The two pages following (pages 4, 5) offer a series of exercises of the pronunciation of syllables, where all the consonants are combined with the vowels. On pages 6 and 7, the children are invited to read some words where the syllables learned previously are to be found again forming a meaningful combination: *badinage*, *camarade*. Then one goes on as quickly as possible from the stage of mechanical repetition to the stage of vivid and practical understanding. From page 12 up to page 36, texts markedly religious in nature and of increasing difficulty are proposed for the continuous reading of the pupils.

As one may imagine, there is no reference to Latin as the point of departure, nor spelling of separate letters.

There is, very quickly, recourse to the words and the texts. This is certainly what Marcellin Champagnat was desirous of from 1828: a new naming of consonants, no spelling, and in particular no multiplication of the difficulties of reading or slowing down the progress of the pupils.

### **The edition of 1844**

Let us note that this is already the third edition and that we have as yet found no traces of the second.

On the cover page, we can observe that the expression "**of**

**Christian Instruction**” has been added on the end of the name of the Congregation of the Brothers of Mary. The adjective “**New**”, of course, precedes the noun “**Principles**” as in 1838 to clearly indicate that the work forms part of the current of innovation.

But the great novelty is the addition of a sort of introduction headed “Foreword”. On this single page, the teacher can discover the spirit behind the method.

It consists of thirty-six lessons with “the explanation of the four general principles of reading and the solution of the main difficulties it presents.”

The first edition of 1838 contained nothing of this and the work was not divided into parts and lessons...

And in leafing through the different pages, one can see other innovations in the series of exercises or the typographical presentation. The reader will be able to continue his own discoveries for himself.

For me personally, it is the content of the foreword which has caught my attention. What seems remarkable to me in this finished work is the progress achieved by the brothers after Champagnat’s death in laying down the theory of their teaching practice.

In this foreword, the presentation of each part of the method explains the principle which is embodied in the development of the practical exercises suggested.

And the last two paragraphs present the general principles guiding the organisation of the work: simple and graduated approach, advancing from the known to the unknown, the logical linking of the lessons, a perfect knowledge of prerequisites before going on to the next step. And a last piece of advice which may surprise us: possible recourse to the spelling under certain conditions: *“that, in spelling, if one has recourse to it, it may be remembered that the elements of each syllable are not the letters precisely, but the sounds and their articulation. Thus, instead of having the words pain and loi spelt in this way: p-a-i-n, pain; l-o-i, loi, have them spelt p-ain, pain; l-oi, loi, etc. Experience has shown that with this method and these means, success in forming students in reading is achieved promptly and easily.”* Again and always, facility for the children and rapidity in acquiring the skills of reading.

#### **Numerous subsequent editions.**

The edition of 1844, which, let us remember, is already the third, was followed by a very numerous posterity. The informative

lists established allow us to follow their appearance. For the period from 1850 to 1870, we can number eight of them. In 1900 we were on the 39<sup>th</sup> edition and in 1920 the 48<sup>th</sup> appeared.

The list known at present stops there. It remains to search for other editions after 1920 and especially to ascertain if these Principles of Reading were translated and adapted notably in those countries where F.T.D. collections were adopted and still continue under other names.

Marist researchers still have a lot on their plate with regard to this question as with so many others.

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## **CONCLUSION**

There can be no question of proposing this method of reading as it is for the children of our current classes. That is obvious. So, what use is it to us, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the discovery of this work forgotten for so many years? This type of return to the sources, can it help us take up today's pedagogical challenges? Without a doubt, if ever we would discover the profound value of this patrimony for giving life.

Marcellin Champagnat and his first brothers remind us that education and teaching should be based on an unceasing pedagogical vigilance to avoid the ever-present danger of sclerosis and conservatism.

This attitude engenders putting into operation a constant work of pedagogical updating in order to take account of the needs of each child (or young person) as he is present to us today and not as we would wish him to be. Marcellin Champagnat and his brothers show us the fundamental principles of Marist educational pedagogy for today.

Teamwork and regular dialogue.

Engagement in depth: ten years to establish a method printed in a little work of thirty-six pages and fourteen centimetres in dimension!

Careful and persistent observation of the students.

Patient and painstaking experimentation.

Evaluation of effects and results.

Finding remedies for any gaps found in putting a scheme into operation.

Focus on a renewed and improved system.

In brief, the pioneers of Marist pedagogy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century put into operation, without knowing it and as if instinctively, a method of educational research which the theoreticians of the educational sciences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have called research-action which supposes a continuous coming and going between theory and practice.

Is it utopian to believe that in our time, the members of educational teams are capable of putting into practice in their daily activity a work of observation, listening and evaluation pragmatically adjusted to the needs of the students in their charge? My answer is: **YES**. It is hope in action.

That should also encourage researchers to carry out their work of investigation in order to make our **SOURCES** always more refreshing for the workers in the Marist educational work of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Brother Maurice BERGERET  
TOULOUSE 25<sup>th</sup> March 2004,  
Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord.*

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