

# MARIST notebooks



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**Cover photos:** Fourvière chapel in the 19th Century and  
in 2016. Pictures by Br Giorgio Diamanti.

**Marist Notebooks:**

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**Br André Lanfrey**

## EDITORIAL

It is not without good reason that we should focus on Fourvière in 2016; it was there that the Society of Mary was founded on July 23, 1816. Although the Marist Brothers have long designated the January 2 1817 as the date of their foundation, it is only a matter of months separates the dates of their foundations. This is, therefore, an opportune moment for us to re-examine what took place Fourvière and how it might relate to the Marist Brothers.

In a critical review of the event at Fourvière, Marist scholar, Fr. Justin Taylor, brings together some of the basic facts behind the pledge of July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Although many of the factors are already known, there are still many issues relating to the inspirations and influences of the first Marists that remain yet to be resolved. Among the under-treated details in this article, I would mention the parallels between the context of 1916 and St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. I would also suggest a reference to María of Ágreda and her contributions to our understanding of who we are. I would include a reference to the presence and role of the AAs (As-

*semblées des Amis*) and also not omit references to *les petites sociétés*, those little prayer groups that could be found in all seminaries. It is also my belief that the Brothers of the Christian Schools had little influence on the vision of Marcellin Champagnat when he founded the Marist Brothers. I have had some dialogue with Fr. Justin Taylor about these issues but much more time would be needed to deal adequately with all of them. That being said, Fr. Taylor's article has the benefit of being based on sound Marist research and it provides new information about the formative factors behind the pledge taken at Fourvière and the founding of the Society of Mary.

Brother Aureliano Brambila's article dealing with "re-foundation" provides an appropriate background to the preceding article for it suggests a context for the bringing together of various factors of our origins and traditions which lie at the very heart of who we are. By having the laity play a vital role in the "re-foundation", he brings us to the main theme of this issue of Marist Notebooks for it has been particularly dedicated to the laity.

The topic of the laity has certainly generated much discussion. In the past, however, Marist Notebooks has mostly been silent in treating it. The year 2016 offers us a fresh opportunity for renewed discussion by providing time to look at various reflections on issues with authors who approach the topic from different perspectives, and reveal a unity in diversity.

In his article on Marist laity, Brother Javier Espinosa approaches the topic in a comprehensive manner, suggesting that our future should be based on a model of the Church as a community of believers. This model would place our Institute as one part of a community of believers. In such a model the Brothers no longer see themselves as the sole owners of their charism. The sharing of their charism becomes, not an expression of diminishment, but rather an opportunity of renewal. The image is no longer one of “widening your tent”, but rather of “pitching a new tent”. There is a need to re-think the institutional model with which we have become so familiar, and perhaps to consider using a better model, one that is more inclusive, and in which there is a place for Marist lay people.

Heloisa Afonso de Almeida Sousa invites the Marist Brothers to consider the difficult questions that are asked, or often implied about lay Marists such as: “What is the motivation behind the quest of our lay colleagues for more

Marist spirituality?” “Is it because they seek greater involvement in our missionary efforts?” “Is it because they have lived with the Brothers and have experienced their spirituality?” “Is it because they have experienced a special call from God?” The article brings together four lay Marists, two men and two women. They provide us with a number of responses to the questions being asked. Some speak from their own personal experiences, while others offer responses that are also valid but are more speculative. Readers will find in these four presentations some concurrence of thought.

Marcellin Champagnat is seen by Rosangela Florczak as someone atypical of the model of religious leader. She sees him in the role of a kind of chief executive officer who is gifted with outstanding communication skills. While reading her article the thought of Brother Sean Sammon’s convocation letter of October 7th, 2004 leading to the General Conference in Sri Lanka came to mind. It was published in the form of a booklet entitled: “Life-giving Leadership”. There is a harmonious and enriching blend of ideas in both documents.

I will note nothing further about the articles or the documents being suggested. They are works that stand for themselves and they can be used as models whose value is universally recognized. What remains is simply for us to enjoy them.

# FOURVIÈRE, JULY 23, 1816



Fr Justin Taylor, SM

Lyons, France, 23 July 1816. It is early morning, and twelve young men are climbing the 800 steps leading up to the ancient Marian shrine of Fourvière on top of the hill that dominates the city. Five of them had been ordained priests the day before; the others had not yet completed their studies for the priesthood. During the preceding months, they had formed a group and made a commitment. Now, they were about to separate. But, before they broke up, they wanted to seal their act of commitment before the venerated statue of Our Lady of Fourvière.

## 1. THE PROJECT OF THE SOCIETY OF MARY

Their story began at the major seminary of the archdiocese of Lyons, named after one of its earliest bishops, Saint Irenaeus. One Wednesday during the school year 1814-1815, a seminarian called Étienne Déclas was cutting the hair of a fellow-student called Jean-Claude Courveille at the seminary's holiday house, just outside

the city, where they all used to go on days off. They were reading in the refectory the Life of Saint Francis Régis (1597-1640), the great Jesuit missionary who re-evangelised the country regions of south-central France. Courveille, who came from those parts, confided to Déclas that when he became a priest he would imitate St Francis Régis and go through the countryside to the aid of the poor people, who had more need of visiting priests than those in cities and big towns. 'We would go on foot, simply, eating the same food as the peasants. We would live on the milk and bread of the country folk. We would instruct them, and hear their confessions.' He asked Déclas if he wanted to do likewise, and Déclas replied: Yes.

Nothing more was said for the moment, but from time to time during the rest of the year at the seminary Courveille would say to Déclas: 'We will do like Saint Francis Régis', and that was all. Then, just before everyone left for the summer vacation, Courveille took him aside and said: 'You know,

what we were talking about during the year, that's serious. There's going to be an order that will do more or less the same as that of the Jesuits. Only, those who will be its members will be called Marists, instead of calling themselves Jesuits.' The two seminarians promised to write to one another during the vacation, and they kept their word.

This was a period of ferment in the Church in France. Courveille, Déclas and their companions had been born just before or in the early years of the French Revolution that began in 1789. While they were seminarians, Napoleon was ruling France and much of Europe. But, since 1813, his empire had begun to crumble. He was finally defeated at the Battle of Waterloo on 18 June 1815. France once again had a legitimate king, Louis XVIII, brother of the executed (many would have said martyred) Louis XVI. Despite, or perhaps because of, persecution and difficulties, the Church in Europe was experiencing a new age of vigour and creativity. This was expressing itself in the foundation or re-foundation of religious congregations and a renewed missionary spirit, which was aimed in part at winning back those who had become hostile or indifferent to Christianity.

A key moment was the re-establishment of the Society of Jesus by Pope Pius VII on 7 August 1814. Other societies also revived, notably the Sulpicians and the Vincentians. There were also new foundations in France,

many of which had already begun unofficially: the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (Coudrin, 1800); the Society of the Missions of France (Rauzan, 1815); the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Mazened, 1816); the Daughters of Mary (Chaminade, 1816). Later came the revival of older orders: Benedictines (Guéranger at Solesmes, 1836), Dominicans (Lacordaire, 1840).

An obvious recruiting ground for revived or new congregations was a seminary such as Saint-Irénée at Lyons. During the school year of 1814-1815, the vicar general of the diocese, Claude-Marie Bochard, circulated among the seminarians a manifesto with the heading '*Pensée pieuse* (Pious Thought)' seeking recruits among the seminarians for his project of a Society of the Cross of Jesus.

Bochard knew his men and how to touch their youthful generosity and aspirations. He also cleverly excluded potential competitors. He sketched the woeful state of religion in France. God surely meant to raise up those who would respond to the needs of the times, as he had done in every age since the Apostles, men like Ignatius at the time when Luther appeared on the scene, or Vincent de Paul after the Wars of Religion in France. So much for the past. What about the present age? Was no remedy for the human race kept in store for 'our times, when it is so corrupt, so depraved, so lost?' He addressed the individual seminarian ('O my brother'). If the Lord chose him at this

time to do his work, how would he respond? If the angel of God knocked at his door, he should follow the example of the 'Queen of Saints' and answer with humility and obedience. He would thus be joining forces with 'so many fervent brothers whom zeal for God's house is already devouring for this great work.' Bochard sketched the 'harvest' that offered itself: preaching, retreats, missions, spiritual direction, seminaries, colleges, schools – enough to engage the zeal of every heart, every kind of spirit and talents. He raised the prospect of an 'association' of zealous priests to undertake all these works and contrasts it with religious orders, which were, he held, inappropriate to the needs of the times.

Bochard's manifesto gives an idea of the spiritual atmosphere prevailing in the major seminary of Lyons when Courveille began to speak to Déclas of his plans for a Society of Mary as a counterpart of the Society of Jesus. After the vacation, at the beginning of the school year 1815-1816, they both began to recruit among their fellow-seminarians. Courveille spoke to Marcellin Champagnat. Déclas spoke to Étienne Terraillon and Jean-Claude Colin. Terraillon remembered what Déclas told them, quoting Courveille: 'Everywhere that Jesus has altars, Mary too has her little altar alongside. Jesus has his Society, Mary should have hers too.' They were 'amazed' by these words and 'left quite dumb-founded'. In the end about fifteen or sixteen seminarians were at least interested in the project.

Jean-Claude Colin already had his own 'idea' of a society, which so far remained with him alone. He must have recognised sufficient similarity between it and the Society of Mary to which Jean-Claude Courveille was recruiting. In any case, he decided that the best way of realising his own project was to join forces with Courveille. As he was later to say, with remarkable insight into his own character: 'Never would I have had the courage to noise this idea abroad. And later, when the thing was known, I was able get involved in it, without having the appearance of being its creator.' At the same time, his adherence to the Society of Mary did not represent for him the abandonment of his own project but its federation with Courveille's.

The little group found a patron in Jean Cholleton, professor of moral theology in the seminary. They used to meet in his room, no. 34 on the third floor. At the country house, they met in Cholleton's room there, or else, weather permitting, in the garden, among the trees. The tradition of the place continued to associate the groves of trees, and in particular a mulberry tree capable of sheltering about a hundred persons, not only with the beginnings of the Marist project but with many other ardent reflections and discussions of seminarians.

Courveille later remembered that they spoke as often as they could about the Society of Mary. Terraillon too recalled the early meetings of the

first recruits. They would 'fire one another with enthusiasm' about how lucky they were to dedicate themselves to the 'success of such a fine work'. Two themes recurred in their discussions: their happiness to be the 'first children of Mary', and the 'great need of the peoples'. They would also have discussed the ways in which, as Mary's sons, they proposed to meet that need. Now and again, Courveille would speak to them, most often about the 'need to imitate Mary, above all in her indescribable humility'. They resolved from the start not to advertise their project, but to give serious thought to the best means to adopt in order to bring it to a successful outcome. So each one reflected on who might be asked to join; but before speaking to possible candidates, the whole group discussed their suitability.

Jean-Claude Colin was not the only recruit who came to the Society of Mary with his own project. Another was Marcellin Champagnat. He, it appears, had already given thought to establishing a group of teaching brothers for catechising and instructing children of the country districts, such as he himself had been, and of whose religious and educational needs he was personally so well aware. Like Colin, he had so far done nothing about his project; unlike Colin, he spoke openly of it in the group and insisted that teaching brothers should form part of the Society of Mary. Champagnat's response to the invitation to join the Society was to say: 'I have always felt in myself an at-

traction for an establishment of brothers; I willingly join you and, if you see fit, I will be responsible for this part'. According to Champagnat's first biographer among the Little Brothers of Mary, Brother Jean-Baptiste, he often told the group at Saint-Irénée: '*We must have brothers, we must have brothers*, to teach the Catechism, to help the Missionaries, to run Schools for children'. They replied: 'Well then, you take responsibility for the brothers since you have had the idea.'

The introduction of the brothers' branch represented a significant new departure. So far, the historical model for the Society of Mary had been the Society of Jesus. However, the model for a company of teaching brothers was not, of course, the Jesuits but the Brothers of the Christian Schools founded in France by Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651-1719).

There are other indications that the Jesuit model was not the only one for the Marists. By the 1830s the Society of Mary was representing itself in official documents as consisting of several branches – male and female religious and lay tertiaries – united under a common superior general. This complex composition was not, however, simply the result of piecemeal historical developments. Rather, it was said to be a feature of the original project since its inception, so must go back to the discussions among the seminarians at Saint-Irénée. This three-part scheme recalls the great medieval orders, such as the Franciscans and the Dominicans,

which brought together friars engaged in apostolic activities, contemplative sisters and dedicated laypeople. That all gives a plan for an institute whose overall shape was modelled on the 'great orders', but whose branch of priests was modelled on the Jesuits, while the branch of teaching brothers was to be modelled on the Christian Brothers of La Salle. What would be the particular model for an eventual branch of sisters or for a lay confraternity or third order? Such complexity was to prove unacceptable to Rome.

To speak of 'branches' does not necessarily entail being aware of the image of a tree. In Colin's own mind, however, this image was vivid and effective. In 1838 he said at table: 'The Society was presented to someone (words said with embarrassment, reserve and mystery) under the emblem of a trunk with three branches'. Colin often came back to the image of the tree with three branches. In fact, such mysterious sayings, often expressed with embarrassment, were typical of the way he would refer to the origins of the Society. Was Colin the one to whom the Society was presented under this emblem and to whom these prophetic words were spoken? That is not certain. In any case, the origins of the Society of Mary were accompanied by many 'revelations and prophecies'.

What was the source of Courveille's own inspiration? On 18 July 1851, Jean-Claude Courveille, who since 1836 had been a Benedictine

monk at Solesmes, wrote as follows to the Marist Father Gabriel-Claude Mayet:

"The first inspiration of the Society of Mary or of the Marists was given in the cathedral of Le Puy, at the foot of the big altar where there is the miraculous statue of the divine Mary, on 15 August 1812, and it was repeated several times until 1814".

Mayet's further questioning elicited a fuller account in February 1852. At the age of ten Jean-Claude Courveille, who was born not far from the ancient cathedral city of Le Puy, caught smallpox, which left him almost blind (probably through scarring of the corneas), a condition that the doctors pronounced incurable. This made it impossible for him to pursue his desire of becoming a priest. In 1809 he went on pilgrimage to Our Lady of Le Puy and rubbed his eyes with oil from a lamp that burned in front of her statue. Immediately he could see perfectly even the smallest objects in the cathedral and since then had no further trouble with his eyesight. In 1810, before the same miraculous statue, he promised the Blessed Virgin to 'devote himself entirely to her, to do all that she wanted for the glory of Our Lord, for her honour, for the salvation of souls.' All his thought was to become a priest so that he could fulfil this threefold vow through his priestly zeal.

In 1812, renewing the same promise to Mary at the foot of the same altar, 'he heard, not with the ears of the body, but with those of the heart, in-

teriorly but very distinctly' the following words:

"Behold . . . what I desire.  
I have always imitated my divine Son  
in everything and followed him right to Calvary,  
standing at the foot of the cross  
when he was giving his life for the salvation  
of men.  
Now that I am in glory with him,  
I imitate him in all that he does on earth  
for his Church, of which I am the protector  
and like a mighty army for  
the defence and the salvation of souls.  
In the time of a frightful heresy which was  
on the way to overthrowing the whole of Europe,  
he raised up his servant Ignatius to form  
a society that bore his name in calling itself  
the Society of Jesus and those  
who composed it Jesuits, in order to fight  
against the hell that was breaking out  
against the Church and my divine Son.  
So I want, and it is the will of my adorable Son,  
that, in these last times of impiety and unbelief,  
there should also be a society  
that is consecrated to me,  
which bears my name and is called  
the Society of Mary, and that those  
who compose it should be called Marists,  
to fight against hell" . . .

When Courveille wrote to Mayet, he was recalling an experience that had occurred to him forty years previously. This experience had been powerful and unforgettable. On the other hand, we should not be surprised if what he wrote for Mayet was in part composed rather than simply remembered. In the mean time, his reading of Saint Teresa supplied him with apt expressions to describe the

experience as something 'heard interiorly but distinctly'. Something similar may also be true of the content and structure of what he 'heard'. In his report to Mayet we find the parallel between the Society of Jesus and the Society of Mary that had struck Terrailon. As the latter told it, however, the parallel was symbolised by the two altars, to Jesus and to Mary, side by side. The parallel in what Courveille wrote in 1852 recalls Bochard's 'Pious Thought', with its reference to Saint Ignatius and the Jesuits at the time of the Reformation, and its conviction that, in a new situation just as dramatic for the Church, God would raise up a new society. Courveille introduced a further note. Behind the parallel between the two societies was Mary's 'constant imitation' of Jesus in everything. Mary was with Jesus on Calvary, as he gave his life for the human race; she is with him now in glory, imitating everything he does on earth for his Church. So of course, as well as the Society of Jesus, there would be a Society of Mary, whose providential hour was 'these last times of impiety and unbelief.'

Eschatology is therefore present, though not prominent, in Courveille's account of what he had 'heard' from Mary. Eschatology was also one pole of a mysterious saying that Jean-Claude Colin frequently repeated in the years to come. At the end of 1837 – so more than twenty years after Colin left Saint-Irénée – Mayet records that he quoted the following words:

"The Blessed Virgin said:  
 «I was the support of the Church at its birth;  
 I will be also at the end of time»".

He repeated these or similar words several times and on one occasion added: 'These words presided over the first beginnings of the Society.' He rather mysteriously attributed them to 'a priest', undoubtedly Jean-Claude Courveille (who, by now, was never named in the Society that he had begun). These words so often repeated by Colin were the way he remembered what Courveille told the group at Saint-Irénée about the revelation he had received at Le Puy. Colin had reduced a longer and more diffuse utterance into one that is simple, pointed, almost poetic – and memorable. In other words, he has shaped it into a 'saying', a unit of tradition.

One important element of the saying quoted by Colin is still, however, unexplained, and that is the role of Mary in the Church at its birth. It is very difficult to relate this to anything in Courveille's account of the locution of 1812 – unless we suppose that Colin understood that Calvary, at which Mary was present, was the birthplace of the Church. That the Church was born on Calvary is in fact an idea found among certain Fathers of the Church; and Colin could have known it. But nowhere does he refer explicitly to this notion. On the other hand, the role of Mary in the newborn Church after the Ascension of Christ became a major source of inspiration for Colin in contemplating the Society of Mary.

## 2. THE ACT OF COMMITMENT

The school year 1815–1816 was wearing on towards its close. This brought before a number of the aspiring Marists not only the goal of priestly ordination, but also the prospect of dispersal as each went to his first pastoral appointment. They encouraged one another with the thought that they would eventually reunite and establish the Society of Mary at Le Puy, where the first idea of the Society had been given and where they expected to be well received.

The group also decided to draw up an act of commitment, which they would sign, promising to 'pursue this work with all one's power'. Not all those who had hitherto belonged to the group signed the document. Three dropped out at this point. Unfortunately there is no record of the names of the signatories. They included, of course, Courveille himself and his earliest recruits, Déclas, Terrailon, Champagnat and Jean-Claude Colin. Colin recalled that the number of signatories was twelve. Even if it was in fact fortuitous that this was the final number, it probably did not escape his notice that it was the number of the apostles: he was to draw attention in the future to the similarities between the beginnings of the Society and the beginnings of the Church.

Four copies exist of this pledge. They seem to be 'blanks', bearing neither date nor signatures, which new

members would presumably fill in when they joined the original group. The act is couched in the first person plural, 'We'. Its authors formally identify themselves as 'We the undersigned' – which would indicate that our text is a document to be signed rather than read out (when one would expect something like 'We assembled here'). The fact that it is drawn up in Latin, together with the use of a number of formal and emphatic expressions, testify to the desire of the aspiring Marists to invest it with the highest degree of solemnity of which they were capable. At the same time, the document betrays – even in its insistence that its authors were not acting 'out of some whim of callow youth' but 'seriously, after mature consideration, and listening to the advice of others' – that they were still young and liable to be suspected of rashness and imprudence. Their self-dedication was not, however, a vow or even, properly speaking, an act of consecration, but a declaration of intent.

The act begins 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' and continues: *Omnia ad majorem Dei gloriam et Mariae Genetricis Domini Jesu honorem* – 'All for the greater glory of God and the honour of Mary the Mother of the Lord Jesus'. Its authors declare their 'sincere intention and firm purpose of consecrating ourselves at the first opportunity to founding a congregation of Mary-ists (the original form of the name)'. The use of the term 'congregation' implied that they had in

mind something more than a simple association or a diocesan society. This intention was confirmed by their promise of fidelity to Christ 'in Our Most Holy Mother the Roman Catholic Church, pledging our wholehearted loyalty to its supreme head the Roman Pontiff, as also to His Lordship our Bishop.' Rather than simply an affirmation of papal primacy, this probably implies an intention to seek the approval of Rome for the 'congregation of Mary-ists', which was therefore to have a large sphere of operation. Their self-dedication was total and envisaged even martyrdom. They were confident that 'under the government of the Most Christian King, favourable to peace and religion', the Society would shortly come into being. In the context of 1816, this expressed the hope that the Society would soon be established during the reign of the recently restored Louis XVIII, who was referred to by the title Most Christian King traditionally borne by the kings of France. The allusions to peace and religion made a pointed contrast with the latter years of Napoleon, marked by constant wars and by ill-treatment of the pope. There had also been a prophecy that encouraged them to expect that the Society would see the light of day under 'the Most Christian King'; it was often mentioned or alluded to in the years to come. The young men did not specify any apostolic work or works to which they would devote themselves but promised to 'spend ourselves and all we possess in saving souls by every kind of apostolate under the sacred name of the Virgin

Mary and with her protection and help'. They conclude with a clause, suggested perhaps by their protector Cholleton, that they leave all to the better judgment of their Superiors.

### 3. AT FOURVIÈRE AND AFTERWARDS

On Monday 22 July 1816, Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene, in the chapel at Saint-Irénée, Louis-Guillaume Dubourg, Bishop of New Orleans, with dimissory letters issued in the name of the Archbishop of Lyons, Cardinal Fesch, now exiled in Rome (he was Napoleon's uncle), conferred priestly ordination on fifty two candidates, including Marcellin Champagnat, Jean-Claude Colin, Jean-Claude Courveille, Étienne Déclas and Étienne Terraillon. They had now arrived at the goal of many years of study and formation. Colin's elder brother Pierre, a priest since 1810, was at Saint-Irénée for a few days before his ordination, but had already left on 20 July, a Saturday, to be back in his parish for the Sunday.

Tuesday 23 July 1816, saw the twelve Marist aspirants at Fourvière (*Forum Vetus*), the site of the Roman and pre-Roman Celtic town of Lugdunum. Here stood a little chapel that was an ancient shrine of Our Lady recently restored as a place of pilgrimage. This sanctuary has been the scene of many acts of dedication, on the part of religious founders, departing missionaries and individuals, as witnessed by the plaques and vo-

tive offerings that cover its walls. Today it is overshadowed by the huge basilica built between 1872 and 1884. At the altar before the venerated statue of the Blessed Virgin, Courveille alone celebrated Mass – the other newly ordained were intending to celebrate their first Mass in their parishes. Terraillon, who had the best knowledge of ceremonies, assisted him. All received Holy Communion from Courveille. They brought with them the act of commitment, which they had all signed. (This original document, with its signatures, has unfortunately disappeared.) During the Mass it was placed on the altar under the corporal, thus uniting their commitment with the sacrifice of Christ. Did they read the act of commitment after Mass? They may have done, but that is not recorded in the contemporary accounts that describe what they did.

Then they went their separate ways. Marcellin Champagnat was appointed as curate at La Valla, where, in 1817, he gathered the first Marist Brothers. Jean-Claude Colin was made curate at Cerdon, where his brother Pierre had been appointed parish priest. Pierre adhered to the Marist project and brought to Cerdon Jeanne-Marie Chavoin and her first companion Marie Jotillon, who laid the foundations of the Marist Sisters. They would soon have learnt about the wider Marist project and about the promise so solemnly reaffirmed at Fourvière. In 1824, Étienne Déclas was allowed to join the Colin brothers at Cerdon, thus forming the first com-

munity of Marist Fathers. From Cerdon, Jean-Claude Colin and Déclas began to preach parish missions. Groups of lay tertiaries, from whom the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary later took their origin, were formed in subsequent years.

Thus the multi-branched Society of Mary, envisaged by the seminarians at Saint-Irénée and the object of their act of commitment consecrated at Fourvière on 23 July 1816, gradually took shape. Time would tell how it would fare.

# REFOUNDING:

## Champagnat's founding intuitions and their challenges for today's world



Br Aureliano Brambila

### 1. NATURE OF REFOUNDING

It is quite clear that religious life today is going through profound change, touching on its very identity. It is a crisis of meaning or, rather, of want of meaning, and this has led to some personal and institutional insecurity.

We consecrated people are passing through an uncomfortable time. We cannot hide our heads in the sand; we need to face reality openly. Every crisis is an opportunity to grow. Regarding this crisis, various religious institutes and many thinkers within religious life are speaking about a 'refounding' process. This is also taking place in the Institute of the Marist Brothers. The Circular of our Superior General is concrete proof of this.

To talk of the refounding of our Institute when there is a pervading mindset of a charism in continual flux will not have much impact. On the other hand, if we were to do so when a static and non-changing under-

standing of the charism prevails, we run the risk of provoking greater restlessness, which can result in reactive attitudes and a deepening of the identity crisis.

We are obviously not speaking about founding a different Institute as an alternative to Marcellin's, but of refounding the existing Institute, leading it to transform itself into a new configuration. With this definition, the term *refounding* is as beautiful and precise as that of *re-evangelizing*. John Paul II asked for a new evangelization or re-evangelization of Latin America, "new in its ardor, in its zeal, in its methods", as he said. Refounding the Institute is similar to the path of re-evangelization. There is no need to crusade against it. We would run the risk of fighting God.

### 2. THE NEED FOR REFOUNDING

It seems there are two ways to understand what happens to a religious institute: gradual diminishment

or ongoing evolution. The former restricts the influence of the Spirit to the founding time while the latter conceives of a path where the founder is just the initiator. The choice for one of these concepts will determine all subsequent reflection. Clearly, we are going with the second one. The founding of an institute is a process. When Marcellin died, he was still “founding” the Institute. Actually, a foundation process should never stop. Moreover, the Founder – as a normal human being limited by time and space – was unable to develop fully the charism he received.

The Institute’s expansion has been somewhat similar to the growth of the Church in the Acts of the Apostles. At each stage of our history there have been alternate viewpoints taken by the brothers as they ask: should we rigidly maintain the *status quo* (confusing the essential and the contextual), or adapt things to suit different cultural contexts? As in the Church, the Spirit has also been present in the Institute, wonderfully bringing about unity in diversity. In fact, General Chapters are re-founding processes, because their purpose is to make sure the charism remains relevant for its time. However, the cultural changes worldwide in recent years are of such magnitude that the usual scope of adaptation has become insufficient.

In our life within the Institute today, we must avoid any paralyzing nostalgia and crippling inertia. If the past seizes our mind and stops us from

moving on in history, it will destroy its own vitality and compromise its own purpose.

### 3. MARIST SPIRITUAL PATRIMONY: A SAFE INSTRUMENT

Our spiritual patrimony can guide us. We have our special treasure, our Marist heritage, and we need to mine its potential. We need an in-depth reflection – in the light of the original insight and the healthy traditions of our Institute – about different topics, such as the poor, Marist pedagogy, catechesis, prayer, community, and superiors.

Simplistic and uncritical reading of the Bible brought about fundamentalism. It is a typically superficial and pragmatic position that keeps the bath water and throws out the baby. Are we not doing the same when we interpret our Marist origins too literally? We must rediscover Marcellin, translating him into our present language, not simply replicating the past.

“Father Champagnat was alive with a zeal born of the Gospels and knew how to respond effectively to specific problems” (Constitutions 81).

What were these specific problems and responses? We cannot replicate Marcellin’s actions uncritically. Oftentimes, his decisions on specific issues were a response to particular circumstances. We have

to identify his deep and abiding aspirations and desires.

The Holy Spirit is “the author” of consecrated life. The actual life of a founder is the space through which the Spirit allows a charism to emerge, but the life itself is not its cause; it is the Spirit. Therefore, we cannot reduce the updating of our charism to a simplistic study of the lives Founder and his first disciples. The brothers in each generation inherit the charism, enabling them to discern what is authentic for the Institute, and allowing the Spirit to keep acting through them. If the charism is focused exclusively on the life of Founder who has died, the work of the Institute becomes impossible. Institutional survival is limited to the group’s capacity for historical memory.

“Whether we be Superiors or not, we are all heirs to the Founder’s charism, and hence it follows that we must all be mediators for one another, according to the grace and the role given us” (Constitutions 40).

Marcellin was convinced that God wanted his work. Can we say the same? Has all the *ad intra* and *ad extra* questioning harmed us? Doubt seems to have settled in within our squares and streets. The charism of our Institute was a gift from the Spirit to the Church. That is why we love Marcellin’s work. Our fidelity to the Institute is precisely our way of being faithful to God.

#### 4. THE ELEMENTS OF CHAMPAGNAT’S FOUNDATIONAL INTUITION

The young curate of Lavalla empathized with the anguish of young Montagne. It was a shared anguish. From the boy’s pain, Marcellin heeded the unending cry of abandoned young people throughout the world. He got down to work as soon as he returned to the parish. He had to address that cry no matter the price. The Little Brothers of Mary were Marcellin Champagnat’s response to young people in need.

From the time he was quite young, Marcellin recognized the loving way in which Jesus looked at children and young people, and then tried to incarnate this through the Brothers he founded.

“Led by the Spirit, Marcellin was seized by the love that Jesus and Mary had for him and for others.

His experience of this, as well as his openness to events and to people, is the wellspring of his spirituality and of his apostolic zeal.

It made him sensitive to the needs of his times, especially to the ignorance concerning religion among young people and the poor circumstances in which they were placed” (Constitutions 2).

All the energy lines in Marcellin’s life tended towards a single goal: founding an Institute to serve the children and young people whom other ecclesial institutions were not serving.

If there was a need for catechists and teachers, why did Marcellin found a religious congregation? Probably because he perceived the need for another dimension of catechists-teachers, that is, living witnesses of God's presence, prayerful men who could continually pray for children and young people, and who could become signs for them of a different future.

The first brothers were ordinary people serving ordinary people. They lived like everybody else, in down-to-earth ways, without pretense or power. This was one of the keys to their success. Balance was also one of the characteristic features of Marcellin's personality. How well he kept his feet on earth in every situation!

Very soon, Marcellin and the first brothers realized they could not limit their educational services only to children from poor and peasant situations. What they were offering was too important, and they could not deprive other children from it. While such children were shown preference, no-one was excluded.

## **5. CHALLENGES AND ELEMENTS TO KEEP IN MIND REGARDING THE REFOUNDING PROCESS**

We must avoid the fear of being critical, but we should also resist a morbid and endlessly obsessive self-analysis. It is wrong to rip out gar-

dens and orchards just because they are unproductive during the winter! This would be like leaving a ministry, for example a school, because of its poor profitability.

The Holy Spirit has not abandoned us. Today we must and we can continue to respond to the world and to the Church according to our charism. We must believe in the omnipotence of God's power. What would Marcellin do if he were physically here today? That is exactly what we must do!

*"As Marist Brothers, animated by the same zeal, we continue the charism of the Founder by responding to the expectations and needs of today's young people"*  
(Constitutions 81).

The Marian dimension of our charism is another important element. The richness of Mary of Nazareth in our spirituality invites us to develop a healthy anthropology.

Living community life in a transparent way, sharing our life experience with one another, is also important. We are men who allow the mystery of God to touch us ever more deeply, attentive to the Spirit who is constantly part of our lives.

What degree and what form of separation from the world and its culture should a religious educator observe so that he can really educate? Would it not be better to insist on incarnation rather than on separation?

The fact of not being clerics is fundamental, not tangential, to our vocation. Our being religious brothers is a form of evangelical life that is complete in itself. It stems from the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, bringing about and expressing our primary Christian holiness. In other words, it represents a concrete development of our “belonging to God”, and makes the “I am yours” of our Baptism become radically true.

Our ministry, community life, and relationship with the world should reflect always more clearly that we are signs of transcendence.

## 6. SOME KEY EMERGING PARAMETERS

We are going through a change of mindset regarding lay people, and discovering the role of the laity in Marist mission and spirituality. There is also a change of attitude towards women. We are also witnessing a growing interrelation between the branches of the Society of Mary – the Brothers, the Fathers, the Sisters and the Marist Laity – that goes beyond what could have been envisaged in the founding period.

A community of brothers is a place where people of all ages, cultures, languages, mindsets, nationalities, and races can meet and live together. If love among us is real and visible, our community can be very attractive for today’s world, which is extremely fractured precisely be-

cause of these differences. Would it be wrong to say that a lack of compassion and benevolence, that is, of fraternity, is the basis for almost all the current problems of society? We should write ‘brother’ in lowercase to signify equality, proximity, care, kindness, affection, accompaniment, and participation. There is obviously no need for a loud and solemn “Reverend” before our name. Is the brother not a fellow traveler for every person? Yes, a companion, with nothing else than an experience of God he wishes to fraternally share. It is imperative that non-clerical male religious life continues to exist. It is a prophetic sign of the value of Baptism, which nobody can sacrifice for pragmatic reasons.

Material poverty is never a single issue. It brings with it other hardships, giving poor people needs of every kind. Peace actually begins before signing a “treaty”, which is only the endpoint of an abiding kindness in everything and with everyone. Marcellin found Jesus Christ particularly captivating because of his compassion for the misery of unimportant people: those who are afflicted and marginalized, children, and those who count for little.

“It was this attitude that led him to found our Institute for the Christian education of the young, especially those most in need” (Constitutions 2).

Catholic schools do not exist because there are insufficient public schools; they are an alternative. If

this is true, we must accept the consequences. Being alternative to public schools requires that Catholic schools must be marked by such qualities as competence and good management. We must direct our Marist schools well. They should stand out for the quality of their academic programs, discipline, and sports. The Gospel is not a separate chapter, for it builds on and promotes true humanism. We should say a resounding “no” to any kind of mediocrity in our schools under the pretext of favoring “Gospel values”.

Apostolic spirituality is a particular way of approaching life as a whole. It is about experiencing God in day-to-day life. The world is the place to worship God. The Lord comes to us in the density of things, people and events, and those who live an apostolic spirituality feel that God wants them to hear, serve and love Him right there. The world, history, and ministry are not obstacles to find God, but necessary mediations.

## 7. BACK TO THE BASICS

Refounding is a problem that has to do with spirituality, not with mere structural reforms, although these are also necessary. The ultimate foundation of our life-project is a deeply rooted faith that brings about a wholehearted following of Jesus Christ. We need to go back to the basics in order to find Christ as the source of all holiness, and become like the Founder in his spirituality, ho-

liness, and passion. We must live together looking in the same direction towards Christ.

I wonder if Marist works have swallowed the brothers. Is it not true that our communities have the right to and the need for a certain degree of inner life, which requires group privacy and closeness to God? Can we do this authentically if we are always caught up in apostolic activity?

People call us “brother”. We are agents of the civilization of love, and this mission is appealing to young people today. Our communities are centers of Christian brotherhood because fraternal experience truly characterizes us. “You are all brothers” (Matthew 23:8). We must live this evangelical gift fully and visibly. Our celibacy generates fraternal relations not based on flesh and blood, allowing us to live entirely for God and for others. This experience gradually turns us into “weavers of fraternity”. Our mission is to tell people what they really are: beings made in the image and likeness of God, destined to live in God.

“You are greater than you imagine!”

We follow Jesus in the way of Mary, according to the charism granted to us through Marcellin Champagnat.

“The love which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts gives us a share in the charism of Marcellin Champagnat and directs all our energies to this one aim:

to follow Christ as Mary did, In His life of love  
for the Father and for people.  
We live out this ideal in community”  
(Constitutions 3).

## 8. CONCLUSION

Is this the time for historians or for mystics? From which group will the much-needed reform (refounding) of religious life come? Will it be a

matter of historical methodology or of greater fidelity to the Spirit? In other words, do we need archaeologists who can scrutinize the traces of past times or supersensitive detectors of the Spirit’s breath yesterday and today? Reforming or renewing religious life has never been a simplistic return to the past. It is rather an institute’s living out the original charismatic intuition in today’s context, as the Spirit calls it.



# THE FUTURE WILL HAVE OUR EYES



Br Javier Espinosa

"In this present time, are we able to think outside the box? We are invited to move out of our comfort zone, outside the frameworks we know" (Br Emili Turú)<sup>1</sup>.

## I. INTRODUCTION

I commence writing these lines in the peace of a few retreat days in Central America, after having the opportunity to admire the volcanoes in El Salvador and Guatemala, so majestic, pointing straight up to the sky. I have shared the beautiful sightseeing with the lay people and brothers who are taking part in the retreat session. In the silence of these days, I have recalled the faces, places, and experiences from more than three years now in the Secretariat of Laity.

I write these pages in this quiet setting. The volcanoes remind me of how the son of the Indian chief climbed the mountain and brought to his father the

vision of a better future for the tribe. The lay people and brothers with whom I share these days bring to mind the wonderful processes of communion that are underway in some Provinces of the Institute. In the silence of the retreat house, the God who makes us keep moving on quietly speaks to me. These days of peace help me revisit the experiences I have lived in the Secretariat, which include fragments of hope and vitality, search and discernment processes, uncertainties and many questions. This is where I come from when I write these lines.

*Tomorrow will have your eyes, Brother Emili told us*<sup>2</sup>. Our eyes generate new horizons. The future is in our eyesight<sup>3</sup>. We are the ones who

<sup>1</sup> Turú, Emili. *Second Inter-American Conference of Provincials*. Luján, Argentina, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Turú, Emili. *Idem*.

<sup>3</sup> The Religious Conference of France gathered in Lourdes in 2012 stated: "*Religious Congregations must invent their future*". José Rodríguez Carballo once said: "*Dream, dear brothers, a different Franciscan religious life*" (cf. *Avere gli occhi rivolti al futuro*, Rivista Testimoni, 13, 2012, p. 27). I am also encouraged by José María Vigil's thinking: "*If religious life had a vision for the future, then it would invest its primary energies and best human resources in re-inventing the future*" (cf. *Llamado a la vida religiosa mundial*, ADITAL, January 2014).

construct the future, together with the Lord.

## II. FOCUS OF THE REFLECTION

These pages aim at reflecting on the second horizon of the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter, keeping our eyes on the future. The Chapter's fundamental call regarded the urgent need of developing "*a new relationship between Brothers and Lay Marists, based on communion, searching together for a greater vitality of the Marist charism for our world*". This is part of the dream that God has for the Marist brothers and laity, and for our Institute as such<sup>4</sup>, a dream inviting us to move on and, in accordance with the Chapter, to undertake "*a journey of both institutional and personal conversion*".

### 1. Pieces of a puzzle

The Message of the Chapter makes decisive statements as it tries to explain the second horizon of the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter. They are like pieces of a puzzle for our Marist future, which I would like to reflect about here.

These are some of the statements:

1. "We feel driven by the Spirit of God to go into a new land, to facilitate the birth of *a new epoch of Marist charism*"<sup>5</sup>.
2. "We see *our Marist future as a communion of people* in the charism of Champagnat, where our specific vocations will be mutually enriching"<sup>6</sup>.
3. "A new consecrated life, with a strong Gospel identity, that will promote *a new way of being Brothers*"<sup>7</sup>.
4. "To propose *new styles of community*"<sup>8</sup>.
5. "To work actively with other people attracted to our charism in *exploring new ways* through which their vocations can be recognized and supported in the life of the Church"<sup>9</sup>.
6. "To support the developing of *local communities of Brothers and Lay people* to share Marist life, spirituality and mission"<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Marist Brothers, *Document of the 21st General Chapter*, Rome, 2009, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Hermanos Maristas, *idem* p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Idem*, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> *Idem*, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem*, p. 37.

## 2. Implicit Convictions

The second horizon of the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter, together with the preceding statements, emerges from deep convictions, among which we can identify the following:

### **A. We complement each other through communion within the Church**

All states of life are at the service of the upbuilding of the Church; they are different expressions that find deep unity in the “mystery of communion” of the Church, and are dynamically coordinated within her single mission<sup>11</sup>.

We are all born to the faith and enter the Church as lay persons, as members of the People of God, and within that common framework we are all called to carry on the same mission, through different vocational calls that are part of the Church’s tradition. We all stand on a common ground. All of us share the one and single mission of the Church with equal dignity, which comes from Baptism. The call to holiness is equal for all. We all have leading roles at the service of each other,

and no one prevails over the rest. We become signs for one another.

Therefore, religious life does not monopolize evangelical ‘radicalism’ and prophetic ‘intensity’. There are people in the lay state who live these attitudes in day-to-day life<sup>12</sup>. The Assembly of Mendes stated that “*as Marists, we are called to passionately center our lives on Jesus Christ, developing a spirituality of discipleship*”. All Christians are called to follow Jesus in a fully committed way. We achieve neither the fruitfulness of God’s plan for the world, nor the fullness of the Gospel and the Marist charism in isolation, but through complementarity and communion.

### **B. Laity and Brothers share the same charism**

The Marist charism is a gift from God to the Church. Some people are called to express the charism through a lay way of life, and they contribute authentically to the development of Marist spirituality and mission<sup>13</sup>.

“*We must liberate the founders*”, Brother Genaro Sáenz FSC says in his

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Christifideles laici* 55, where we also read: “In Church Communion the states of life [...] are different yet complementary, in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other’s service”. Cf. Sáenz de Ugarte, Genaro, FSC: “Mutuas relaciones” entre religiosos y seglares. *Revista Testimonio*, Chile.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Arnaiz, José María: *La vida religiosa al interior de una familia espiritual*, *Revista Vida Nueva*, 1996. Antonio Botana stated: “Each of us, according to his or her vocation, becomes a sign for everybody else; we are all equally called to holiness, and the call to a full evangelical commitment is a baptismal feature we live through a variety of Christian vocations” (cf. *Charismatic Families and the Church as Communion*, photocopied article).

<sup>13</sup> The Marist laity of Venezuela tell us: “Children of Marcellin Champagnat, committed to following Jesus in the style of Mary, we are called by God to build a better world; we are convinced that being a Marist lay person is a vocation and, therefore, a gift from God” (cf. *Letter from the Marist Laity of Venezuela*, Los Teques, 2009, photocopied).

article. For a long time we considered them as an exclusive property of religious life, losing sight of its ecclesial dimension. The Founders are a gift for the entire Church. Religious life does not own them, although religious are their first children historically speaking. Today we acknowledge the creative and generous parenthood of our Founders, and we realize they are bigger than the framework of the Institutes they founded<sup>14</sup>.

The Marist charism thus belongs to the global ecclesial community, and consequently Marist brothers and laity share it on equal ground. Furthermore, we realize that our charism finds full expression precisely when different communities, groups, and Marist associations live it together. This gift goes beyond the brothers' life<sup>15</sup>.

### ***C. Each vocation defines itself better when it encounters the other***

When brothers and lay people share the same path, both the lay Marist identity and the identity of the

Marist religious brother become clearer. Specific identities become richer through communion; they do not diminish or disappear. Communion helps us understand the specificity and beauty of each state of life. This was Charles Howard's insight when he said: "*We need the laity, and spiritual sharing with them will reveal new depths of our vocation as Brothers*"<sup>16</sup>.

The fact that the laity are sharing the Marist charism indicates the new possibilities of this gift. Thanks to the new concrete expressions of the charism that the Marist laity are promoting, the brothers get in touch with other expressions of Marist life and realize better the richness of their own charismatic gift. Lay Marists offer a new way of living the Marist charism in a secular setting<sup>17</sup>, a contrast that allows us to strengthen our specific identities and enrich them thanks to vocational complementarity. Lay people and brothers become fully aware of their specific vocations through their encounter of one another<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Sáenz de Ugarte, Genaro FSC, "Mutuas relaciones" entre religiosos y seglares. Revista Testimonio, Chile.

<sup>15</sup> "The charism of a religious Institute develops and multiplies in a special way when we live it both as religious and laity" (cf. Arnaz, José María. *Con ellos y con ellas. La vida religiosa al interior de una familia espiritual*. Revista Testimonio, Chile).

<sup>16</sup> Br. Charles Howard, Circular 402, 10/07/1993, Vol. XXX, n. 1. "Spirituality will have to be built on complementarity, recognizing a plurality of identities, which allows us to delve into our own, by contrast with that of others" (Estrada, Juan Antonio. *Religiosos en una sociedad secularizada*, Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 2008, p. 103).

<sup>17</sup> According to Benito Arbués, "it is a mutuality of friendship, confidence, aid and challenge – with a new awareness of Church, where there is a complementarity of vocations, a spirit of unity and participation" (*Walk Peacefully, Yet with a Sense of Urgency*, Rome, 1997, p. 40).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. GAST 26. "There is not only a place for both at the table, but we need each other at our side" (GAST 79).

#### **D. We must revisit our institutional model**

*Gathered Around the Same Table* states this view very clearly: “*The experience of sharing the charism directs us to rethink the institutional model that until now has embodied the Marist charism in the Church. Experience seems to indicate that we not only need to widen the tent of the Institute, but also to build together a new tent where everyone, Brothers and Lay People, may find our place*”<sup>19</sup>. It requires a new mindset from the brothers, one that implies conquering our fears, leaving paternalistic and self-sufficient attitudes behind, trusting the laity, not considering them as tolerated guests, moving out of our comfort zones and routines, developing attitudes of dialogue and respect, accepting an egalitarian interaction with them, and finding a new legal and governance structures.

This new model depends on the Marist lay men and women. Thanks to them, new ways of understanding and living the charism are possible. Their presence has to do with the discernment of our apostolic services,

the use of a new religious language, the discovery of new paradigms for our spirituality, and with a better expression of our Marist fraternity in the world. “*The future of religious congregations – according to Juan Antonio Estrada – largely depends on their capacity to incorporate the laity into their institutions and to be transformed by their experience*”<sup>20</sup>.

Revisiting the institutional model requires willingness to renew our ways of living, praying, and working<sup>21</sup>, changing and clarifying the theological understanding of religious and lay vocations<sup>22</sup>, being open to new forms of religious life, and letting the laity have an active role in these changes<sup>23</sup>.

In the following pages, I would like to explore some of these convictions further, to show how they can become benchmarks for the future of our Marist charism.

### **3. Imagining the future**

*Appreciative Theory*<sup>24</sup> is a tool allowing us to discover the best we are

<sup>19</sup> GAST 145.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Estrada, Juan Antonio. *Religiosos en una sociedad secularizada. Por un cambio de modelo*. Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 2008, p. 116.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Turú, Emili, Video message for the lay commissions' regional meetings 2012, which also says: “Sharing the charism offers a new possibility for Marist consecrated life, which consists in showing how to establish a genuine dialogue of life and friendship, on equal ground, with the lay men and women who want to share the charism with us”.

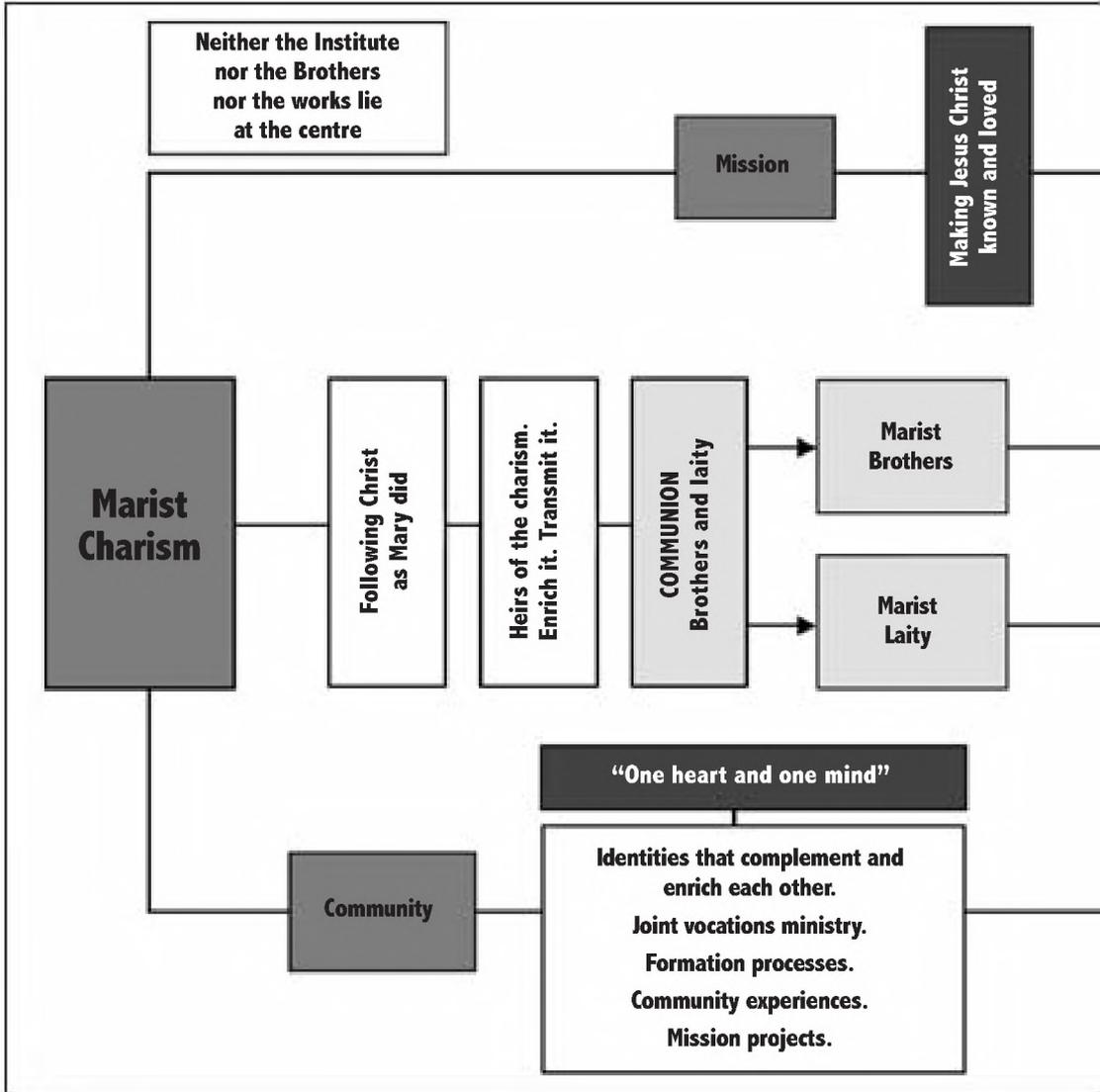
<sup>22</sup> Cf. Arnaiz, José María, *Con ellos y con ellas*, Revista Testimonio, Chile.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Estrada, Juan Antonio, *idem*, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Varona, Federico in “*Todavía es posible soñar*”. *Teoría apreciativa y comunicación empresarial*, San Jose, California, September 2003 (manuscript).

presently doing and imagine what it can become, in order to start building new possibilities. After looking at a number of experiences that are taking place in the Institute, and try-

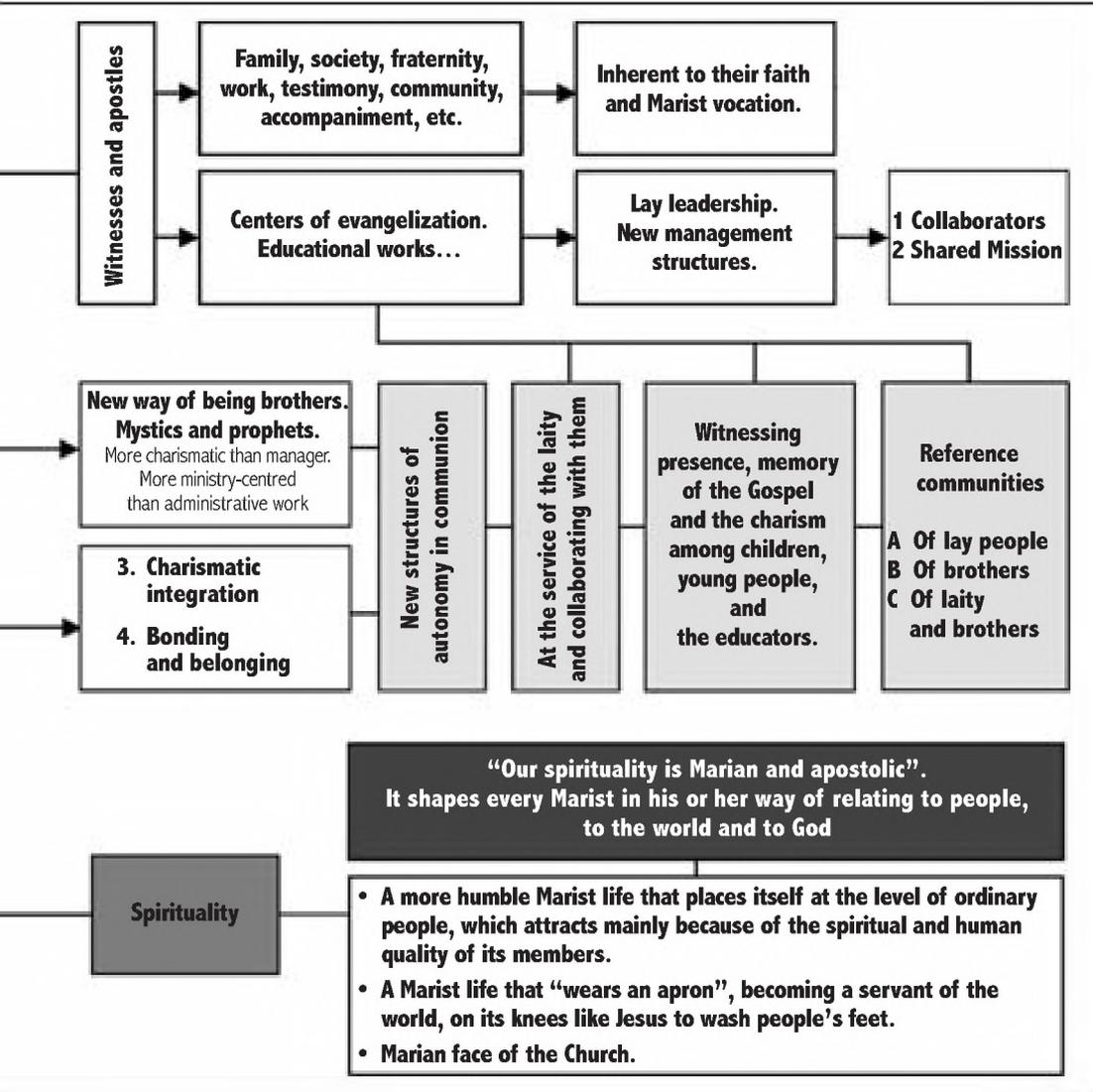
ing to imagine what the new era for the Marist charism can look like, I would propose the following conceptual map:



Let me highlight some aspects of this map:

perience of discipleship and from the same charism we all, brothers and lay people, receive and promote.

1. Communion is the basis of the new relationship; it stems from our ex-
2. Our specific vocations complement



- and enrich each other through communion.
3. The path of vocational complementarity leads us to search for a new way of being brothers, in accordance with the Chapter's fundamental call.
  4. The lay vocation emerges with a new strength, and it reaffirms that God is calling the laity to follow Jesus within the Marist spirit in a fully committed way.
  5. The brothers, the Institute, and the works are not the heart of the Marist project. Our being and doing revolve around the charism, as a distinctive way of living out the Gospel.
  6. The Marist charism comprises three fundamental dimensions: mission, shared life and spirituality.
  7. The path of communion rests on shared formation processes, inclusive community experiences, and shared projects in mission.
  8. The lay vocation is a faith process that culminates in formal expressions of bonding and belonging to the charism within a particular group. Therefore, we cannot say that all the people working in our centers are lay Marists.
  9. Marist schools, as an expression of our mission, implement management structures that foster shared responsibility, and in which the brothers do not appear as bosses and owners.
  10. The mission carried out by the brothers and some lay people does not depend any more on the tasks of directing and administering the works, but on their being present as witnesses, as a living memory of the Gospel and the charism among young people and staff members.
  11. The process of this new relationship, based on communion, leads us to search for new institutional structures that promote lay people's autonomy and leadership, a process that goes hand in hand with the new way of being brother.

### III. SEARCHING AND EXPLORING WITHIN OUR INSTITUTE

Some experiences across the Institute, promoted by lay people and the brothers, are already offering hope for the future, touching God's dream for our charism. The process of searching and exploring that gave birth to these experiences of communion aims precisely at responding to God's dream<sup>25</sup>. All these experi-

<sup>25</sup> "We desire to carry on his dream", the 21st General Chapter told us (Rome 2009, p. 15). José Antonio García SJ has a beautiful statement in this regard: "God loves us as we are but dreams of what we can become".

ences indicate the growing presence of a Marist laity, which makes for a new way for the brothers both to understand themselves and to relate to the lay vocation<sup>26</sup>.

## 1. The historical process we have lived in the Institute

### 1.1. Lay people as collaborators

Reference: before Vatican II (1962)

Lay men (there were hardly any women) shared the school work without having much to do with our mission of evangelization. We invited them to collaborate with our educational activity, as part of the purposes of the Institute. They offered their work, but the ultimate responsibility rested with the brothers. Laymen were necessary collaborators.

The brothers showed great heroism and boldness in those days, investing great energy and making strenuous efforts to establish the schools. This effort to build the works resulted in a certain isolation from social and political movements. The kind of lay presence in the Marist centers had no significant impact on the brothers' style of religious life which was marked by an apostolic self-sufficiency. Ministry *per se* was in the hands of the brothers, and the charism appeared as their private property.

### 1.2. Sense of "Marist Family"

Reference: 17th General Chapter (1976)

The 17<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, in one of its proposals, started speaking about the "*Great Marist Family, conceived as a community of people who share an ideal, an identical spirituality, and the same way of acting in line with Blessed Marcellin Champagnat*".

Members of the Marist Family, therefore, become participants in the Marist spirit. In this Post-Conciliar milieu, the brothers felt more involved in the world and engaged with it in dialogue. Religious life became both more human and more evangelical. The brothers took up numerous causes: presence among people, preferential option for the poor, insertion communities, commitment to justice and peace, defending human rights, promoting women's issues, ecology, etc. In various forms, a new religious profile was crystalizing among the Brothers.

### 1.3. Shared mission

Reference: In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat (1993)

In this period, the Marist mission came to be shared with the laity. Both lay people and brothers felt that God was calling them to the same mission. They began to exercise co-responsibility for animating educational centers.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the document of the Secretariat of Laity entitled "Growing openness to the Laity and the process of coming to a new understanding of the meaning of our Brotherhood" (photocopied edition, Rome 2012).

During these years, there was talk of the *Marist Educational Community* in which everyone had a part to play in the school's efforts to evangelize. Brothers, teachers, staff members – all became transmitters of values and contributed to create an evangelizing milieu. Educational activities were not just something to talk about but rather opportunities to offer witness. The document *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat* captured the thinking of this period<sup>27</sup>.

This era – noteworthy for its significant opening to the presence of lay people in educational programs for evangelization and in the dynamic of the Marist charism – brought the brothers into a closer communion with the Church, which strengthened the common ground of the Gospel, and invited us to define the specificity of the Brother's vocation more clearly. Lay people, as companions on the journey, helped to shape new forms of consecrated life.

#### **1.4. Widening the space of the tent**

Reference: 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (2001)

For the 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, this phrase indicated the richness of a shared path for brothers and laity. Therefore “*we feel called to deepen our understanding of the specific*

*identities of Brothers and Lay Marists*”, as the Chapter said<sup>28</sup>. In a widened tent, the Institute did not see itself as the center of government and management but allowed for a shared responsibility and leadership. We knew for sure that our vocations mutually enlighten each other, and become richer thanks to this new relationship. At the same time, we benefited from a better understanding of our vocations and seeing the beauty in each of them<sup>29</sup>. We inspired one another to grow in fidelity to our charism, discovering new aspects of its spiritual richness and its dynamism in our apostolic activities<sup>30</sup>.

A model for religious life was coming into view. It sought to be rooted more deeply in the Gospel, bringing about a fully-committed following of Jesus. It is crystal clear that love of neighbor comes before all our other church-related commitments and pious devotions. We strove to harmonize religion and happiness, Gospel and bliss, a fully-committed following of Jesus and self-realization.

#### **1.5. A new tent**

Reference: around the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter (2009)

It became more and more evident that the major problem is not that our tent is too small; rather, it is no longer suitable. It could very well be that all

<sup>27</sup> Marist Brothers. *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat. A Vision for Marist Education Today*. Rome 1993.

<sup>28</sup> Marist Brothers, 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter Documents, 2001, Rome, n. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Congregation for institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life. *Starting Afresh from Christ*. Rome, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Marist Brothers. *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat*, 41.

of us working together need to design a new tent, or perhaps several, each one alongside others<sup>31</sup>. The *new tent* would indicate a new understanding of the vocation of laity and brothers.

This new tent or structure was in the spirit of the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter when it spoke of a new consecrated life, a new way of being brother, a new relationship between brothers and lay people, and a future of communion for the Marist charism. We seemed to be moving towards a new expression of the charism that integrates brothers and lay people in new paradigms, promoting new styles both in the way of being brothers and of living the Marist lay vocation. At the same time, the new tent challenged us to learn through trial and error, progressively evolving ways of understanding our specific vocations<sup>32</sup>.

In summary, we can say that there has been over time in the church a shift in the balance of power between laity and religious. There was a time when the religious had the monopoly of evangelical commitment, holiness, and mission. They were self-sufficient and saw the laity only as recipients of their pastoral service. Later, they began to delegate to lay people the tasks they could no longer perform themselves. Then came a period in which religious life started ded-

icating themselves to lay people and taking care of their formation, and some lay people started dedicating themselves to and working with the religious. It was the onset of an ecclesiology of communion which eventually led them to join forces in a closer collaboration and exchange of spiritual gifts. During this stage, brothers and lay people became aware of the fact that there was a co-relation in their identities. We have now begun to look at the future as a common horizon, envisioning the possibility of new structures through which we can jointly undertake our tasks, works, mission and charismatic presence.

## 2. Experiences that are underway

The process of communion we have lived in the Institute has crystallized in different ways of expressing the relationship between brothers and lay Marists<sup>33</sup>. In the following experiences, the brothers bring the gift of religious vocation and the charism embedded in their spiritual journey, plus their own experience in community; and lay people bring the gift of their lay vocation, their domestic and family way of doing things, their experience as Christian community, and their particular experience of the charism.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Green, Michael. *New Tents*. Marist Notebooks, Rome, March 2009.

<sup>32</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter speaks of "searching together for a greater vitality of the Marist charism for our world" (cf. p. 27). Some authors speak of refounding the charism and the institution that bears it.

<sup>33</sup> The Secretariat of Laity has collected some of these experiences in three small publications: *Living the Marist Charism with Others*; *Marist Group Life*; and *Adding lives, multiplying horizons*. Rome, 2013.

The new communities of brothers and lay people deserve a special mention. In 1991, Brother Charles stated that *“the mutual encouragement in following our vocation must eventually entail a greater association in different forms including a greater number of volunteers in our missions, and the creation of mixed communities”*<sup>34</sup>. Ten years later, at the General Chapter of 2001, the lay observers affirmed: *“We have been discovering the challenge of creating inspiring communities through the collaboration and experience of new ways of being Marist in order to create together new ways of being community”*.

Globally, we can say that these experiences are forms of new institutional structures that are taking shape, which give priority to the communion between laity and brothers within the Marist charism:

### **2.1. Extended communities**

They are also called mixed or shared communities. Their members, brothers and lay people, sometimes live under the same roof. These communities emphasize the day-to-day living of the Marist charism by sharing work, prayer and reflection. They stress the importance of maintaining open lines of communication, dialogue and listening. They live the challenge of welcoming pluralism and building togetherness. Having equal

standing, brothers and lay people outline the spiritual path for the experience, the way they live in community, sharing their goods, setting their schedules, animating the community, and developing each member’s own identity.

There are 25 communities with these characteristics in the Institute. Twelve of them – which include 28 lay people and 33 brothers – belong to a single Province. These communities are located in eleven Provinces of the Institute, and in twelve countries: Canada, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Spain, France, Italy, Thailand and Cambodia. Two communities deserve special mention: that of Mulhouse, given that the brothers are living in a house belonging to the lay members, and the mixed community of the Hermitage because of its international and interprovincial character.

### **2.2. Marist groups<sup>35</sup>**

They are also called *Marist Life Groups, Marist Meeting Groups, and Marist Spirituality Groups*. They have emerged in recent years in five Provinces of the Institute. There are 17 groups in one Province alone.

These groups express their identity in the fields of fraternal life, spirituality and mission. Lay people and brothers participate in them, and perceive them as privileged spaces of

<sup>34</sup> Howard, Charles. *The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family*, Rome 1991.

<sup>35</sup> A publication of the Secretariat of Laity presents these groups: *Marist Group Life*, Rome 2013.

human, Christian and Marist development. Each group decides its own schedules and styles.

### **2.3. An international mixed community with young adults**

The Marist community of Willowdale, Canada, is an international, intercultural and interfaith mixed community with young adults. Three Brothers share their everyday community life with twelve young university students from 18 to 35 years of age, who are “open to the religious dimension” but with few Christian references.

They attempt to form a single community, placing everything in common and following an open schedule. They all share the household chores. The young members of the community can freely join the community for a daily time of prayer. There is a community time they spend together every two weeks. They fundamentally commit to living “a family spirit” with others. The presence of young people has enriched the brothers’ community very much. Willowdale lives the newness of responding to the horizons of the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter: it represents a new way of being brothers, a new spirit of communion between Brothers and laity, and a presence that is strongly significant among young people.

### **2.4. Lay groups or communities<sup>36</sup>**

As examples of these groups, we can mention the *Marist Missionaries of Ciudad Juarez* (Mexico), the mission groups of Australia, and the Lay Communities of Santa María de los Andes. The *Marist Missionaries of Ciudad Juarez* are a private association of the faithful who dream about being able to tell everyone that God loves them very much, especially the children and youngsters who are in rural and peripheral areas of the city, by means of a relationship based on the Marist traits: family spirit, love for work, simplicity, presence and, above all, the devotion to our Good Mother. The *mission groups* in Australia consist of teachers who want to develop their Marist identity through meetings that promote the community dimension and a deeper spirituality. They have discovered that in order to live their Marist charism more fully they need to share it with others. The *lay communities* of Santa María de los Andes follow an accompaniment and formation process aimed at vocational discernment.

### **2.5. Fraternities of the Champagnat Movement**

The Fraternities formed by lay people who have made the choice to live their vocation according to Marcellin Champagnat’s spirituality are the basic unit of the Champagnat Move-

<sup>36</sup> Marist Brothers, Rome 2009, GAST 93: “The Lay shared life, encouraged by the Spirit, is growing and will acquire new forms of expression in the future”.

ment. Presently, there are around 270 fraternities in the Institute.

The fraternities of the Champagnat Movement offer a community proposal, inviting people to live in love and unity, welcoming with joy those who wish to join in, and promoting communion in the family, at work and in society. The proposal essentially follows a lay approach. It involves around 3300 members.

### **2.6. Little Sisters of Champagnat**

This community presently lives in Guatemala. They have deeply identified themselves with the charism of Saint Marcellin Champagnat as women, and sensed the call to experience it in consecrated life. They live in community, sharing mission, prayer, household chores, and formation experiences. So far, they have expressed their life commitment through private vows.

This is how they define themselves: *“Following Marcellin’s intuition, we devote our energy to being present in the midst of the children and young people who need it most, whom we try to accompany in all dimensions. We especially try to be witnesses of God’s deep love for them. Mary, our Good Mother, has a very important place in our lives and mission. It is truly from her that we con-*

*tinue learning to be women who are totally devoted to God, amidst the brothers and sisters”*<sup>37</sup>.

### **2.7. Inter-congregational community**

Three Brothers of the Sacred Heart are living a community experience together with the Marist Brothers in Quebec, trying to share and support each other in the mission. The brothers from the two Institutes live in the same house of Valcartier and share fraternal life, prayer, and their mission with the young people of Vallée Jeunesse.

They find the charism and spirit of both congregations to be so similar and close that their everyday life flows very naturally. They design the community project together. Community meetings focused on different themes allow them to grow and nourish their hope. Their mission project is *“to ensure a significant presence among the more vulnerable children and young people”*. They offer support to youngsters who have problems in school, possibilities of socio-professional integration, day-care, and weekend camps.

### **2.8. Joint formation experiences**<sup>38</sup>

Joint formation is a growth process that laity and brothers live together. It aims at creatively promoting paths of

<sup>37</sup> Excerpt of the text written by Soto, María Laura, in *Adding Lives, Multiplying Horizons*. Secretariat of Laity, Rome, 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Document of the Secretariat of Laity: Some guidelines for a joint formation experience, Rome 2012.

renewal and charismatic vitality for our complementary vocations. The 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter referred to it openly. After two significant experiences at the international level in Quito and Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, several Provinces decided to implement this formation process locally. Two Provinces are now offering joint formation through *weekend meetings*.

Joint formation is a community process. It is more experiential than theoretical. The fact of carrying it out jointly indicates that laity and brothers feel they need each other in order to recreate a common Marist identity as the basis of their specific identities.

### **2.9. Retreat sessions for brothers and lay people**

Opening one of the Provincial retreats to lay people is already an established practice in some Provinces. Others share their Provincial retreats with the laity all year-round. It is very significant that brothers and lay people animate these activities together.

Sharing this Marist spiritual journey is an occasion for communion that brings about a deeper experience of the Gospel, the following of Jesus, and the vitality of the charism.

### **2.10. Associations**

Some Provinces are considering the possibility of establishing an Association of brothers and lay people to express their shared responsibility in animating the educational works, and their communion in living the charism. The Province of Canada has already defined their legal status as *Marist Lay Association*. The Province of Australia is in the process of creating a *public association of the faithful* with the participation of brothers and lay people. The community of Mulhouse is now a *private association of the faithful*. All these forms of association imply bonding and belonging for lay people.

### **2.11. Private commitments**

After a process of discernment, some lay men and women – mainly in the fraternities of the Champagnat Movement and primarily in France – have expressed at a personal level through promises or commitments before the parish community their desire to live the Marist charism in their family and work.

The 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter and the Mendes Assembly spoke about these different forms of Marist commitment, which can be expressed either privately or as part of an association<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter stated: "That the General Council (...) study various forms of belonging to our Institute, and to allow lay persons, in consultation with the Provincial and his Council, to live various types of Marist commitment ad experimentum. Based on these trial experiences, the General Council will make provision for a juridical structure, which will enable a decision on this matter to be taken at the 21st General Chapter" (Marist Brothers, Acts of the 20th General Chapter, 2001, p. 37). The Assembly of Mendes in 2007 also stated: "We wish to promote forms of association and ways of belonging to the Marist charism, so lay and brothers may hear the call to live their identity" (Mendes 2.3). 40 Cf. Document of the Secretariat of Laity: Some guidelines for a joint formation experience, Rome 2012.

## IV. REFERENCE TO OTHER INSTITUTES

We can say that all religious institutes have started processes of association with the lay people who feel called to live the institute's charism in the midst of the world. I would like to refer specifically to some of these experiences of association, bonding or institutional belonging.

### 1. Marianist Lay Communities

The Marianist Lay Communities became a *private association of the faithful* in 2006. They are communities of lay people at the service of the Church's mission in the world, according to the Marianist charism, implying a fundamental choice of life for the laity. These communities are part of the Marianist family, in which they share the charism consistent with their lay identity. They are autonomous communities. They follow the structure of local, national and regional groups. Organization and operation costs are borne by its members.

### 2. Signum Fidei Fraternity (Lasallian)

In the 1970s, a group of lay people who looked for a more committed Christian life asked the Brothers of the Christian Schools for a closer sharing not only of their educational work, but also of their spirit. This is how the *Signum Fidei* fraternity was born. The

43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter decided to acknowledge *Signum Fidei* as a group of Associates in the Lasallian Mission. They are part of the Lasallian family, and their members are associated in small communities belonging to a Lasallian district, sub-district or delegation. There are around 900 in about 30 countries. Their members follow a formation process.

### 3. Lay Piarists (Order of the Pious Schools)

The Order offers four modalities of lay participation: *cooperation* with the Piarist pastoral activity, for all the people who collaborate with projects or works; *participation*, for those who feel personally involved, and share the responsibility of the Piarist schools' mission; *charismatic integration* for those who want to live the charism of Calasanz as part of an association; and *legal integration*, for the people and groups who belong to a Church community within the Piarist charism and want an official link with the Order.

The *legal integration* mode, therefore, regards the people who live a Piarist charismatic experience and acquire a legal and even canonical link with the Order. This legal integration has four objectives. First, a person becomes part of the Pious Schools through a temporary legal bond that gives deeper expression to the lay option, one which can be renewed indefinitely if the conditions persist, before making a permanent commit-

ment. Second, this commitment is lived with an emphasis on the option for poverty and availability according to the lay state of life. Third, the person participates in a Piarist work or project on a long-term commitment basis<sup>40</sup>. Fourth, is to be part of a Piarist Fraternity.

Across religious institutes there are various forms of belonging for lay people, and for their formation, their autonomy, their communion with the consecrated members of the institute, and their identification with the charism<sup>41</sup>.

## V. APPROACHES TO THE NEW RELATIONSHIP

*“Let us heed the call to fine-tune our sensitivity in order to perceive the signs coming from Marist life as a whole. What insights for the future are they offering? What signs of death should we leave behind? What*

*is the Lord telling us through this overall message?”*<sup>42</sup> These words from Bother Emili inspire the last part of the present article, which offers an approach to the *new relationship* between lay people and brothers based on the experiences of communion that are underway in our Institute<sup>43</sup>.

As a premise, we must say that the growing awareness of *our common baptismal vocation* is at the basis of this new relationship. In the spirit of Vatican II, brothers and lay people feel a common vocation to holiness and enjoy the dignity of being children of God: one Lord, one faith, and one baptism<sup>44</sup>. Baptism is the root of all vocations, and the source of the fundamental dignity of all members of the People of God. The following of Jesus and the reference to the Kingdom motivate both religious and lay people. We all meet there as People of God. It is our great common treasure and horizon.

<sup>40</sup> They have formulas for the temporary and permanent promises. The Provincial Superior, with the consent of the Provincial Council, accepts the promise. This process involves formation time, personal accompaniment, being available to the requirements of the Order, keeping an open dialogue with their reference community, a close relationship with the Piarists and with the Major Superior in a special way, following a clear and defined life and mission project, and signing a mutual agreement, with rights and duties, approved by the Congregation.

<sup>41</sup> The Viatorian Associates are men and women who share the mission, and the spiritual and community life of the Clercs of Saint Viator. They are ‘called’ to form the Viatorian Community together with the Clercs. The Salesian Cooperators emphasize three pillars of their identity: vocation, lay character, and Salesian spirituality. After a formation process usually lasting between three and five years, they make a promise for life to follow John Bosco’s ideals. Members of the Secular Discalced Carmelite Order (OCDS) take no public vows, but promise poverty, chastity, obedience, and a life in the spirit of the Beatitudes.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Turú, Emili. Second Inter-American Conference of Provincials. Luján, Argentina, 2011. In this same meeting, he stated: “We must shake off any inertia. Einstein said: ‘If you want different results, you cannot go on doing the same’”.

<sup>43</sup> The section on ‘Searching and Exploring Within Our Institute’ in this same article describes some of these experiences.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Lumen gentium 32.

## 1. The new relationship based on communion strengthens our vocational identities

Not all brothers and lay people are ready to accept this new relationship. A lay woman recently told me that in the case of the brothers she believes this is due to a lack of awareness of their own identity. That this why expressing communion is really about expressing our specific identities. In other words, the path of communion is leading us to clarify and refine our respective identities<sup>45</sup>, or according to José María Arnaiz, it is an *identity supplement*. The new relationship points to a stronger identity allowing in-depth sharing and a healthy openness to others.

The new relationship is inviting us to acknowledge the specific way in which lay people live the Marist charism. They discover God's call to live Marcellin's charism according to their lay state of life as a particular way to develop the Christian identity all the faithful share. It is a personal call to a specific way of being disciples of Je-

sus<sup>46</sup>. *"God has touched some of us and has given us a Marist heart. Certainly, more than our decision, it has been God taking the initiative"*<sup>47</sup>.

The path of the new relationship becomes a challenge also for the brother's identity. As we already mentioned, Brother Charles stated in this regard: *"We need the laity, and spiritual sharing with them will reveal new depths of our vocation as Brothers"*. According to Brother Emili, *"this entails readiness to change our ways of living, praying, and acting"*. Brother Seán spoke to the laity in the same way: *"I ask you to please never stop challenging us with your experience of Saint Marcellin's charism"*<sup>48</sup>. The 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter told us that sharing the same heritage implies the beginning of a new consecrated life and a new way of being brothers<sup>49</sup>. This call to something new indicates that the traditional model of religious life is unable to meet the current problems of society, and that the search for new answers cannot come only from the laity, but will hardly happen aside from them<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> Octavio Balderas applies this to the psychological dimension and says: "The growing partnership of religious and laity in the same charism necessarily involves some changes in the way of living religious life and carrying out the mission. Indeed, the very fact of encouraging – or at least accepting – the growth of the person I am in dialogue with others requires a certain human maturity that supposes an awareness of my own identity and emotional security" (*Compartir los carismas y la espiritualidad. Una vida consagrada abierta a los laicos*, USG, Rome 1999, p. 52).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. GAST 13.

<sup>47</sup> GAST 4.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. 10th Latin-American Conference of Provincials, Los Teques, Venezuela, 2004.

<sup>49</sup> One of the goals of the 21st General Chapter stated in the Acts reads as follows: "To generate a new way of being brothers with a strong experience of God; a simple and poor lifestyle; with a meaningful community life open to lay people; and radical availability and a bolder mission to the marginalized".

<sup>50</sup> Juan Antonio Estrada believes that "openness to the laity, together with an internal restructuring of the Congregations, can be the seed of new forms of religious life, as in the past, but this time giving a leading role to the laity when it comes to change, and having them participate in the decision-making process" (cf. *Religiosos en una sociedad secularizada*, Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 2008, p. 116-118).

## 2. We need each other

We realize we are complementary and need each other when we promote the common inheritance of our charism, developing our identities, being prophets of fraternity, and constructing a Church-communion<sup>51</sup>. The new relationship brings about the strength of mutual support, and the richness of brothers and lay people walking together<sup>52</sup>. The charism bears more fruit thanks to this interdependence and reciprocity.

The experiences we are living in the Institute assure us that our respective vocations illuminate, require and enrich each other when we share spirituality, mission and formation<sup>53</sup>. Through this interdependence, lay people are inspiring and supporting a renewed Marist religious life. Claude Maréchal says that lay people are waking up a lethargic religious life and bringing a healthy freshness to it<sup>54</sup>. We need each other because our identities are reborn, grow and develop through this correlation.

Nowadays we can hardly understand the life of the brothers without the laity and vice versa<sup>55</sup>. Lay Marists and brothers discover themselves as a gift from the Spirit to the Church, and they are responsible for promoting and carrying on this gift of God into the future together<sup>56</sup>. According to José Cristo-Rey García, this path of communion is a genuine prompting of the Spirit, and somehow entails an unplanned – and therefore more authentic – refounding process<sup>57</sup>.

## 3. Our Marist future is a future of communion

Thanks to the new relationship, brothers and lay people are heading for a future of communion. The 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter puts it this way: *“We see our Marist future as a communion of people in the charism of Champagnat, where our specific vocations will be mutually enriching”*<sup>58</sup>. According to Brother Benito, it is a friendship that implies mutual challenge and support, which stems from a new sense of Church that includes

<sup>51</sup> GAST 79: “There is not only a place for both at the table, but we need each other at our side”.

<sup>52</sup> Brother Charles said in the abovementioned Circular: “It is a blessing and a joy for us, Brothers and lay persons together, to share our common richness and to live together an exciting spiritual and apostolic venture” (The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family, 1991, p. 34).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. GAST 17.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Maréchal, Claude, *Compartir los carismas y la espiritualidad*, USG, Rome 1999, p. 53.

<sup>55</sup> Ben Brevoort says: “I have personally learned a lot about my religious life following the ways of the Lord with my lay brothers and sisters. They are Franciscans just like me, not more so, but differently. And only together – ‘in different ways and forms but in a vital and reciprocal communion’ – we are able to update the Franciscan charism in the life and mission of the Church” (cf. *Compartir los carismas y la espiritualidad*, USG, Rome 1999, p. 35).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. GAST 29.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. García Paredes, José Cristo-Rey: *Espiritualidad compartida, conciencia, perspectiva y praxis*, 2008. According to Octavio Balderas, lay people have other schemes and codes that give rise to new expressions of the charism (idem, USG, Rome 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Marist Brothers, Document of the 21st General Chapter, Rome 2009, p. 36.

complementary vocations, communion and participation<sup>59</sup>. For brothers and lay people, walking together in this new relationship entails attitudes of trust, not of suspicion; shared responsibility and service, not arrogance; realizing we are all apprentices of life, not know-all and proud people; and feeling like a family, transcending frictions and misunderstandings.

The new relationship helps us make an *ecclesiology of communion* possible, with its implications of equal dignity for all Christian vocations, seeing the Church as the People of God living in communion<sup>60</sup>. “*We are called – Charles Howard said – to assist and complement each other, appreciating and promoting each other’s vocation in collaborative communion [...]. And our generations are called to build this new model of the Church*”<sup>61</sup>. The Mendes Assembly invited us to promote a welcoming, participative, evangelical, prophetic, and fraternal Church.

This communion process leads us to revisit the *institutional model* we have implemented until now. “*Expe-*

*rience seems to indicate that we not only need to widen the tent of the Institute, but to build together a new tent where everyone, brothers and lay people, may find our place*”<sup>62</sup>. As we walk together, there is no doubt that new forms of relationship will arise, which will always be deeper, and require new structures that can welcome and promote vitality<sup>63</sup>. Our future of communion requires creativity.

The new institutional model is also asking for a *better organization of the laity* at the Institute level in order to develop their responsibility, autonomy and communion. The Mendes Assembly stated: “*We need to articulate the vision for lay Marist vocation and its organizational structure*”. It seems normal to think about integrating the laity in our governing bodies<sup>64</sup>, especially in those affecting the mission, but also the charism and the institution as such, for example, Provincial Chapters, assemblies to set the Province’s priorities, and formation teams.

In this future of communion – which touches our life-structure,

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Arbués, Benito, General Conference of 1997, Rome.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. GAST 144. In this regard, Brother Seán said at the closing of 20th General Chapter: “This sharing between the laity who are attracted by Marcellin’s charism and us testifies that our Church is able to live an ecclesiology of communion”.

<sup>61</sup> Howard, Charles. Final Message to the 19th General Chapter. Rome, 1993.

<sup>62</sup> GAST 145.

<sup>63</sup> According to Claude Maréchal, we must incarnate the new relationship between religious and laity in new and egalitarian institutions we must imagine and invent (cf. *Compartir los carismas y la espiritualidad*, USG, Rome, 1999, p. 57).

<sup>64</sup> When we dreamed about the future of communion during the 19th General Chapter, we mentioned different possibilities: a lay autonomous organizational structure in communion with the Institute, a lay Provincial Councilor, that one-third of the General Chapter members were lay people, etc.

charism, and identities – it will be easy to speak about joint vocations ministry<sup>65</sup>, lay communities, shared experiences of brothers and lay people, joint formation, vocational discernment itineraries for the laity, lay missionary availability, lay formators<sup>66</sup> to help both other lay people and the brothers, lay international assemblies, and shared formation centers. In the future, perhaps we will speak of *two* well-constructed tents within the same communion, or maybe *a large tent* sheltering all Marists. Both options will ask us to face the issue of how lay people are juridically associated<sup>67</sup>.

#### 4. The new relationship in our works

An interesting article from the Italian magazine *Testimoni*<sup>68</sup> prompts this section of the article. The author says that *our answer to the relationship between religious communities and apostolic works inevitably conditions the future of apostolic religious life*. The author goes on to say that almost all religious institutes of apostolic life follow a strongly structured *com-*

*munity-work* model, in which relationships are based more on roles than on personal interaction. An excessive emphasis on efficacy and efficiency makes the apostolic work continue over time but without actually responding to its fundamental sense. People pay excessive attention to functional and operational matters (which absorb most of their energy), losing sight of the work's *raison d'être*. Consequently, apostolic works require a type of religious whose main function is maintaining and developing them. Instead of being means of apostolate, the works become an end in themselves.

The impact of the *community-work* model on community life is clear. The religious involved feel they belong more to the work than to the community. The apostolic work becomes the source of meaning not only of their apostolate but also of the institute as such. People's sympathy is with the apostolic work rather than revolving around the community and what it offers. Little by little, due to professional necessity, the Institute's works come to parallel those of public institutions. Religious become the

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Marist Brothers, *idem*, p. 39. Simón Pedro Arnold offers a beautiful insight: "In a pluralistic perspective, would it not be time to consider several access doors to the initiation in a Congregation's spirituality, with the possibility of moving between the lay and religious options, but living a shared family experience?" (cf. *Un Concilio para refundar la vida religiosa*, XIV Asamblea de la CLAR, 2004, p. 11).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Lay people in Veranópolis, Letter from the lay people to the 3rd Provincial Chapter, 2009: "We understand that, by virtue of our lay ministry, we could effectively contribute to the formation of the Brothers".

<sup>67</sup> Marist Brothers, Document of the 21st General Chapter, Rome 2009, p. 36.

<sup>68</sup> Note: I only have a photocopied summary of the article. *Testimoni* is a magazine published by the Dehonians in Bologna.

management staff of the work. When they reach retirement age, they lose contact with children and young people. Their mission focuses on the task of teaching, without an appreciation of their sense of apostolic witness which should never retire.

The model we have just described conditions the way we manage our apostolic works, our capacity to deal with numerical decline, an evangelical regarding the promotion of lay leadership, and the possibility of being brother in a different way. If we go on following this model, institutional growth may hinder our ability to attract new vocations; managers may prevail over charismatic people; and we may improve our organizational capacity at the cost of innovation and care for people. As a result, the charismatic and spiritual dynamic of the institute suffers, as well as its capacity for innovation and creativity<sup>69</sup>.

In face of the danger that *Testimoni* magazine points out, I would like to mention one of the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter's dreams: "*The brothers offer continual support to lay people's service in management in various Marist works*". This dream recalls

the secular character of lay people's life, with whom we share the Marist mission. The Council describes the secular status of the laity as the particular place where God calls them. Church documents present this 'place' in dynamic terms: "*The lay faithful live in the world, that is, in every one of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very fabric of their existence is woven*"<sup>70</sup>. Brother Charles clarifies the situation: "*We are at a very important moment in the history of the Church – a moment of rebirth, a return to the practice of the early Church when lay people played a full role in the mission of the Church. One of our most urgent calls now is to promote that rebirth, with sensitivity, courage and vision. If we do not do this, then we will have diminished the Church of the future*"<sup>71</sup>. Let us do all we can to assure that the laity can accept this challenge of playing a lead role in the mission of the Church.

The *new relationship* requires a *new way of being brother* that comes about in the way of living in communion with the laity in our apostolic

<sup>69</sup> Juan Antonio Estrada states: "The process of institutionalization results in a functional vision of the charism, which is increasingly supplanted by institutional regulations. The 'officials' representing the Order prevail over innovative personalities who seek new ways forward" (cf. op. cit. p. 97).

<sup>70</sup> Christifideles laici, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Howard, Charles. *The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family*, Rome 1991. The laity gathered in Veranópolis in 2009 stated: "We care about the life of the brothers and the mission. We suggest a stronger delegation of administrative issues to the Marist laity, so that religious life can concentrate itself on giving witness and being present among children and young people".

works. An interesting article by Víctor Codina sheds light on this issue<sup>72</sup>. It entails a radical step for the brothers.

Is it no longer a matter of having lay people collaborating with us and joining our charism, but of being at their service as we work together, or even under their leadership, in the common Marist mission: *“We go from holding the leading role in mission and evangelization to passing it on to the laity and becoming their collaborators and servers”*, according to Codina<sup>73</sup>.

This new attitude does not mean our works will disappear but will certainly require a new kind of presence from the brothers. It brings about a much more committed and community-oriented *way of being brother*, a more prophetic attitude in line with the incarnation and kenosis of Jesus. In other words, it implies a more God-centered and missionary religious life, in which brothers become a spiritual and charismatic memory instead of guaranteeing efficient management and administration.

The *new relationship* in our works is asking the brothers to move from prominence to evangelical concealment, from centralism to shared responsibility, from management roles

to accompaniment and encouragement attitudes. Brother Álvaro Rodríguez FSC believes that in this new context the brothers must become *spiritual companions*, which means *“becoming God-seekers that can offer clues to people in their own search, humble and unpretentious guides, certainly aware of our own inconsistencies, but able to accompany our contemporaries in their journey of faith, assuming their weaknesses, doubts and fragility”*<sup>74</sup>.

## 5. Embracing our itinerant vocation

The following of Jesus that brothers and lay Marists share implies constantly *“moving on, leaving attachments behind, undertaking a journey of conversion”*, as the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter tells us. This is Mary’s and Marcellin’s itinerant attitude. It means “putting out into deep” and “crossing over to the other side”, as the Gospel says. In Brother Emili’s words: *“With the celebration of the 200 years of the Institute on the horizon, we are stimulated to embrace our vocation as itinerants in Mary’s footsteps”*<sup>75</sup>. It is *God prompting us to move on*, according to our last General Chapter.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Codina, Víctor. ‘Mutuas relaciones’ entre religiosos y laicos, Revista Vida Religiosa, febrero 1997.

<sup>73</sup> Codina, Víctor, idem.

<sup>74</sup> Rodríguez, Alvaro. Fraternity as a gift for the Church and society, Third Symposium of the Religious Life Institute, Madrid, 2012. Among the dreams we expressed during the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter we can mention the following: “The Brothers have left management positions in educational works in order to be more present among young people [...]. Some Brothers have become masters of spiritual life”.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Turú, Emili, To the Ends of the Earth, Rome, January 2013.

We must face the need for change. We share it with other institutes and with the Church herself. According to some authors, we are moving beyond the simple *aggiornamento* or updating required by the Second Vatican Council towards a real *mutation* and *recasting* into new forms<sup>76</sup>. Others speak of the need to change the sociological image of religious life<sup>77</sup>. Still others see us at the crossroads between “the future of our institutions” and “the institutions of the future”<sup>78</sup>. The Lord is demanding from us, brothers and lay people, true willingness to undertake a *conversion path*.

The newness of the last General Chapter, which the present article centered on the *new relationship*, implies a change of mentality, much discernment, true availability, leaving our securities behind, accepting risks, and deeply trusting God. Lay people and brothers share the same itinerant vocation<sup>79</sup>.

I fully agree with what the laity of Venezuela said in one of their meetings: “*Lay Marists of Champagnat – men and women – we commit ourselves with the brothers in this challenge: to strengthen today’s Marist life and help bring about the dawning of a new one, making it more creative, faithful, dynamic and prophetic*”<sup>80</sup>. The new dawn, in the spirit of Pope Francis, would point to the Marist life “of the apron”, as servants of the world, throwing ourselves on the ground as Jesus did to wash people’s feet. Awakening the dawn of a new Marist life, according to Brother Emili, implies “*accepting that death is part of life*”, and asks us to go on searching because “*we have not yet begun to see clearly what newness entails*”<sup>81</sup>.

The future will have our eyes. The new era for the Marist charism, the new relationship between brothers and laity, the new way of being brother, and the highly significant presence

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Vigil, José María. *Llamado a la Vida religiosa mundial*: “The Titanic is sinking. The problem is no longer the need for reform, reorientation, updating, or ‘refounding’, but for mutation, metamorphosis, and recasting”. In the same line, José María Guerrero states: “Some people think that religious life today is much more of a museum than a tent. Sometimes it is painful to see religious life bending on itself, more concerned with survival than with extending the Kingdom of God” (*En busca de la identidad perdida. Radiografía de una vida religiosa mística y profética para hoy, Vida Nueva*, 2013, p. 24).

<sup>77</sup> “It is a matter of moving from an image of security to an image of insecurity; from religious life perceived as separate to an integrated religious life that is a sign of communion; of denouncing our elitist reputation to bear witness to the ‘kenosis’ and annihilation of Jesus Christ” (Arnold, Simón Pedro. *Un Concilio para refundar la vida religiosa*, 2004, p. 11).

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Pujol i Bardolet, Jaume (photocopied text).

<sup>79</sup> For a Congregation, according to Antonio Botana, this entails major changes in mentality and ways of proceeding (cf. *Las familias carismáticas en la Iglesia comunión*, photocopied text).

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Communique from the lay Marists of Venezuela, Los Teques, Venezuela*, 2009.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Turú, Emili, *He Gave us the Name of Mary*, Rome 2012, p. 21.

among poor children and young people, become concrete possibilities when we see the world with our heart, a Marist heart. We will then be

able to discover the vision of a better future for “our tribe”, like the son of the Indian Chief. We will then embrace our itinerant vocation.



# MARIST SPIRITUALITY

## Its possibility for lay men and women



**Heloisa Afonso de  
Almeida Sousa<sup>1</sup>**

Speaking to a teacher during a visit to a Marist school at the beginning of 1998, I was intrigued by a comment she made. The previous year she had participated in a month-long training program for lay Marists. She was very committed to her job as pastoral animator of a Marist school, and actively participated in the educational community. At the time, I was the pastoral coordinator of the Province, and we were trying to organize more fraternities of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. When I asked this teacher if she would like to participate in the Movement, she answered very straightforwardly: *“That is not the spirituality I want for my life”*. I was taken aback. How was that possible?

I have wondered, since then, what attracts a lay person to Marist spirituality? What draws them to commit themselves to the Gospel,

following Jesus Christ at the service of the Church, in tune with Marcellin Champagnat’s spiritual heritage? Is it the passion for the mission? The knowledge of our Marist spirituality and history? Conviviality with Marist Brothers? Maybe a special call from God to a person, which calls for an ongoing response throughout life?

We know that living Christian spirituality with a specific charismatic nuance has many personal, institutional, communicational, social, intercultural, community-related dimensions. Above all, spirituality pervades the entire life of the person who wants to answer God’s call in a concrete context.

The presence of lay men and women in Marist works is taken for granted today. Especially since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Marist Brothers started employing non-Brother professionals in their

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schools. Over time, the laity began to take on positions traditionally reserved to the Brothers.

The lay professionals' gratitude for the fraternal, nurturing and supportive reception on the part of the Brothers is undeniable. There are many grateful testimonies regarding the positive influence of the Brothers in the life of students, family members, and present or past staff members of the Marist works in every continent.

The progressive opening of the Marist Institute to the laity is clear in the documents of recent General Chapters, and in other official publications of the Institute, such as the *Life Project of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family* (1985), *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat* (1998), and *Gathered Around the Same Table* (2009). The creation of the Secretariat of Laity (2006), as part of the General Administration of the Institute, was an important step for the construction of "new tents" for the brothers and lay people.

Given this background, we can now pose several questions. Are all the professionals in the Marist works imbued with the "Marist spirit"? Do they all know the "Marist charism"? Do they live a "Marist spirituality"? On the other hand, what motivates a group to live "in a Marist way"? What

elements of the Brothers' religious life inspire the staff, alumni, parents, benefactors and so many other people who are in touch with the Marist Institute, prompting them to live as Marists, to the point of considering themselves as "Lay Marists of Marcellin Champagnat"?

The founding purpose for Champagnat was to "make Jesus known and loved". He also recommended in his Spiritual Testament: "*A tender and filial love for our Good Mother never fail you in all the changes of time and circumstance. Proclaim her love in every place, as far as lies in your power. She is the first Superior of the whole Society*"<sup>2</sup>.

Being in touch with the Marist Brothers certainly evokes many questions. What makes these men so sensitive to the needs of others? What motivates young brothers to leave their own family, and often their culture, to dedicate themselves to children and young people? Where does the joy and availability of these men come from? Marist religious communities help us get in touch with a Christian life that finds meaning in the following Jesus Christ, with the particular nuances left by Marcellin Champagnat.

Leonardo Boff (2013), in one of his Chronicles, says "*it is for the human being, a spirit bearer, to perceive values and meanings and not*

<sup>2</sup> Constitutions of the Marist Brothers.

*just list facts and acts. Indeed, what really matters to people is not so much the things that happen to them but what they mean for their lives and what kind of marking experiences they provided them*<sup>3</sup>.

Lay people are attracted to Marist life when they are “touched” or affected by experiences such as hospitality, dedicating themselves to the causes that promote life, becoming selfless in order to help others, nurturing devotion for Mary, and dedicating themselves to work in order to bring about changes.

A number of Marist lay men and women have contributed with their thought to this article according to their own life experience, trying to share some aspects of Marcellin Champagnat’s spiritual heritage that we, his followers, carry on, and which the Marist laity try to assume consciously, actively, and experientially.

## 1. MARIST APOSTOLIC SPIRITUALITY BASICS

*Gustavo Balbinot*<sup>4</sup>

Marist spirituality is a result of God’s grace, and of a heart that is open to Champagnat’s intuitions. It is

impossible to separate Marist spirituality from the Marist mission of “*making Jesus known and loved*”. They emerge together and exist for one another. It is also important to note that, from its birth until now, Marist spirituality has never lost its charm or its strength. At the beginning, it faced a number of challenges and setbacks, including its relationship with the local Church, but nowadays it is still a life-giving pathway for brothers and lay people because of its freshness and vitality.

Marist spirituality was born in France, at a time when many other religious foundations emerged, all of them concerned about the education of children who had no access to school or catechesis programs.

“Marist spirituality has been able to shake off so easily many of the cultural, theological and institutional trappings of its founding time without compromising its essential intuitions [...]”.

It is today being adopted so fruitfully and integrally not only by Brothers but also by a broad range of men and women as their intuitive and preferred way of the Gospel<sup>5</sup>.

Marist spirituality, as well as other apostolic forms of Christian spiritual-

<sup>3</sup> Boff, Leonardo. The depth dimension: spirit and spirituality. <http://iglesiadescalza.blogspot.it/2012/08/the-depth-dimension-spirit-and.html> (last access date: July 20, 2015).

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<sup>5</sup> GREEN, Michael. The Memoirs of Little Brother Sylvestre. 2007, p. 19.

ity, integrates three fundamental dimensions: faith as an expression of discipleship, community understood as shared life, and mission through an apostolic ministry<sup>6</sup>. The three dimensions go hand in hand and besides being complementary, they need each other to exist.

Article 7 of the Constitutions and Statutes of the Marist Brothers reads: *“The spirituality bequeathed to us by Marcellin Champagnat is Marial and apostolic”*. Of these terms, perhaps ‘Marial’ is easier to understand than ‘apostolic’ which has had various connotations through the history of the Church. Brother Mariano Varona – who, for almost twenty years, animated the *Latin American Marist Apostolic Spirituality Network* (RED-EAM) which eventually became the *Inter-American Spirituality Network* – offers a good definition of what he understands by ‘Apostolic Spirituality’:

“Apostolic spirituality finds and experiences God in daily life; it finds the essence of the sacred in the most human things, in the life of the person who listens, serves and loves, in the events of history and in apostolic action. It is the spirituality of those who ‘read’ reality with the eyes of faith, who looks at events until they reveal a message from God. It is the spirituality of the person who perceives

God’s loving proximity in all things, thanks to a faith experience that integrates and unifies everything”<sup>7</sup>.

We must understand the meaning of the word ‘apostolic’ and its derivations, for example, the term ‘apostolate’. We misunderstand the word when we focus narrowly on the specific approaches of Apostles rather taking a more holistic view of their evangelizing mission. Gonzáles Silva (SIMAR 1999) believes that the word ‘apostolic’ should indicate the apostolate carried out as a response to ‘reality’. In other words, we must carry on with what the Apostles did when Jesus sent them, that is, preaching and miracles, or in a language closer to ours, proclamation and transformation. According to this author:

“Recent history, through too narrow a focus, has obscured the most obvious things. For example, we can understand the apostolate of prayer correctly as the awareness of an intercessory effectiveness when it is complemented by ministerial action. However, to say that prayer is the first apostolate is a manipulation of words. It is a rhetorical exercise, without logical consistency or practical value for people’s existence [...]. Apostolic works involve an ‘exteriority’ that should not be taken as a necessary evil or as a loss of spiritual depth. If we actually want to communicate with the men and women to whom we are sent,

<sup>6</sup> GREEN, Michael. *Marist Education Since 1993: its Vitality and its Potential for Creating a New Reality*. Text for post-graduate course in Marist Educational Principles. Curitiba, Brazil: Pontifical University of Parana (2013).

<sup>7</sup> VARONA, SIMAR, 1999, p. 8.

we must turn to the language, tasks, and areas that regard our day-to-day life”<sup>8</sup>.

Another danger is to confuse activism with apostolic spirituality. The problem of activism has nothing to do with the way we live our spirituality, but consists in carrying out tasks with no spiritual meaning, or simply in order to overcome a sense of anxiety. In the days of the Institute’s foundation, Champagnat’s fear of the possibility that the Brothers could lose the “religious” sense of their life challenges each of us who are involved in so many commitments and activities. Sometimes we say that “the mission guides our time”. However, we do not realize that the concrete tasks are oftentimes guiding our time and not the mission, which is strictly connected to spirituality, and only makes sense within this connection.

Apostolic spirituality feeds on God’s presence through the situations we face and experience. Unity of life and the exercise of contemplation in action are essential and vital. Moments of personal prayer echoing the situations we have witnessed and lived, the wonder of God’s presence in the world, the gift of personal encounters and life-giving experiences all have a special

source: Jesus Christ as the center of our life. Marist spirituality is

“centered in love, grounded in a deep love for Jesus, and a concrete answer to him through an apostolic practice and action”<sup>9</sup>.

When we ground ourselves on real life, prayer becomes heartfelt, alive, and committed to the situations we live and contemplate. It is impossible to live an apostolic experience outside this framework.

We can contemplate life in a deeper way through the technique of *Lectio Divina*, also known as *Prayerful Reading of the Word*:

“As the Church’s spiritual tradition teaches, meditation on God’s Word, and on the mysteries of Christ in particular, gives rise to fervor in contemplation and the ardor of apostolic activity”<sup>10</sup>.

In this sense, apostolic activity transcends a simple social mission, and acquires a clearer spiritual meaning, a sense of love, and consequently the moments of meditation, prayer and celebration become livelier<sup>11</sup>.

It is not possible to live and feel God with an arrogant heart, trusting our own skills, or investing all our en-

<sup>8</sup> GONZÁLES SILVA. *Renascer no Espírito: Encontrar Deus em todas as coisas*. São Paulo: SIMAR, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> GREEN, Michael. *Idem*, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II. *Vita Consecrata*, 94.

<sup>11</sup> GONZÁLES SILVA. *Renascer no Espírito: Encontrar Deus em todas as coisas*. São Paulo: SIMAR, 1999.

ergy in living “righteously”, following the rules of an austere, blind and compliant life. Jesus himself fought against the rules when they undermined life, and taught his followers, the ordinary people from the street, to do the same. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law, however, were annoyed at Jesus when he defended life this way.

Apostolic spirituality does not normally provide larger-than-life characters. Those who live it out usually consume their life in service to the Kingdom. Few people appreciate them, but their Christian dedication to others is as authentic as their commitment to work. They know it is enough to say:

“The Lord will do all things for me.  
Lord, your faithful love endures forever;  
do not abandon what you have made”  
(Psalm 138:8)<sup>12</sup>.

Palmes (SIMAR 1999), reminds us that apostolic spirituality is a form of Christian spirituality and therefore it cannot embrace only some aspects of Jesus’ experience and action, but his entire life, and discipleship as a whole. Having said that, emphasizing particular aspects of the Gospel is what characterizes the spiritual paths and ways of living Christian spirituality:

“Apostolic spirituality should encompass the whole person of Jesus Christ and, from a mission perspective, all the important aspects of discipleship. Each element then develops new senses: the experience of God no longer centers on vocal prayer and pious practices, but personal prayer and encountering God in life”<sup>13</sup>.

This author emphasizes the importance of being contemplatives in action, extending the attitude of silence and personal prayer to daily situations. José Antonio García presents this movement in a text entitled *Horizontal Mystics: towards an Apostolic Spirituality*<sup>14</sup>. He finds three stages in this movement: “outward trip, encounter, and return trip”. García states:

“For horizontal mystics,  
the world is the place to worship God”.

This is in contrast with the monastic life style that needs distance from the world. He also quotes the famous aphorism of Saint Ignatius:

“We must find God in all things,  
and all things in God”.

Understanding apostolic spirituality as beginning with an encounter with God in the concrete situations of life transforms our perception and

<sup>12</sup> Idem, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> PALMES, SIMAR, 1999, p 72.

<sup>14</sup> You can find the original text in Spanish at: [http://maristas.org.br/drive/cvcl/2014/Textos%20em%20PDF%20Espiritualidade%20Apost%C3%B3lica/M%C3%ADsticos%20horizontales%20\(texto%20original%20completo\)\\_Jos%C3%A9%20Antonio%20Garc%C3%ADa.pdf](http://maristas.org.br/drive/cvcl/2014/Textos%20em%20PDF%20Espiritualidade%20Apost%C3%B3lica/M%C3%ADsticos%20horizontales%20(texto%20original%20completo)_Jos%C3%A9%20Antonio%20Garc%C3%ADa.pdf) (last access date: July 20, 2015).

the way we grasp the events of the world. The question is: What does God wants from me after the events I have experienced or witnessed? What is he telling me through the situations I have lived and contemplated? Ultimately, it is a matter of love and responsibility.

García (1999) presents the *outward trip* as a deep encounter with things and events. We must notice he is not speaking of a 'flat reading of reality' but of 'going beyond' in the deepest way. The second stage, according to him, is already contained in the first, when it takes place deeply and not only as a 'flat vision' of things:

"The essence of our 'outward trip', in the final analysis and sense of things, is God in his capacity as Creator, Mystery, Father, and Liberator. It is an 'encounter' that elicits adoration as first attitude"<sup>15</sup>.

It is an attitude of true recognition and worship of God, who is present in every circumstance. Without this attitude, according to García, any encounter with God runs the risk of becoming trivial.

The third and consequent stage is the 'return trip'. It is not a trip back home, but to reality: after encountering and recognizing God in reality, a confession of his presence and love spontaneously comes about: "*You are my Lord!*" Apostolic spiritu-

ality invites the person to revisit reality and have an even deeper experience of God through new encounters. According to Jon Sobrino, the quality of the encounter and of the confession it elicits shape the return trip.

Here we can draw a parallel with Champagnat's spirituality, which is a model for us, since the different encounters he had transformed his way of being and acting in the world. It began with a plan in the major seminary, and with the Montagne incident which triggered his decision to begin, but his other encounters with children and his brothers enabled him to develop more deeply the Marist spirituality he was called to live. In his quality of Founder, on several occasions he used the expressions "This work is yours, O Mother!" and "How precious to God are these souls", speaking about the children they served in the schools. Before attaining this attitude and being able to recognize God's present in the children, especially those who were in situations of social neglect, he underwent a spiritual journey beginning at the door of his heart, which strengthened his conscious belief that God was alive and constantly present, and that the project belonged to Him.

Bremer (1999, SIMAR 2000) challenges us to find God in the life-situations of poor people. In one way or

<sup>15</sup> Idem.

another, the apostolic call of a charism is a response to poverty of one kind or another. In the case of our Founder, his seeing first-hand the ignorance of God in children and young people, and their social deprivation and lack of education, made him establish the Institute without delay. One of the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter's horizons challenges us in this sense:

"Look at the world  
through the eyes of poor children".

**Bremer says:**

"Looking at reality with the eyes of God means being a contemplative, something those who put their trust in God and his life-giving project desire, but finding God's eyes in poor people seems a bit too daring"<sup>16</sup>.

Unlike contemplative spirituality, apostolic spirituality cannot live in a cocooned isolation, but in community and fraternity. Apostolic practice was born when Jesus sent his disciples on mission. He sent them out two by two, and when they returned to the community, they told their experiences (Lk 10:1-12.17). Cencini stresses this community aspect of apostolic spirituality:

"Spirituality, of course, but in what sense? What kind of spirituality? If we tried to identify

some guidelines in the development of spirituality, I think we would find community experience among them. This community dimension, let us not be mistaken, concerns not only the way we experience spirituality interiorly, but also exteriorly in fraternity.

In the first place, the community dimension refers to the way and style with which we live our spirituality; second, it presents the goal it seeks.

We should live and witness our spirituality 'together' more and more, but also share it outside our group with the Church and society".

**A master and prophet, Karl Rahner, states this explicitly:**

"In the spirituality of the future, I believe it could play a more decisive role as an element of spiritual communion among brothers, of spiritual life lived together"<sup>17</sup>.

**Theologically, the community aspect of apostolic spirituality is fundamental and vital, both as an experience in itself and in relation to the mission which we carry out as a community, and as an expression of the charism we profess and live together.**

"The people with whom we live, share our life, work, and meet are an essential reference point in our spiritual life as believers, and in the process of seeking our own identity"<sup>18</sup>.

**Being a horizontal spirituality, in the mysticism of daily life, apostolic spirituality is not far from nor out of**

<sup>16</sup> BREMER 1999, SIMAR 2000, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> CENCINI, 1999, *idem*, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

reach for those who want to follow Jesus. At the same time, it has nothing to do with convoluted speeches, but is concerned with the simple practice of serving others and paying attention to life. According to Gumucio (1999, SIMAR):

"Anonymous saints walk in our streets and homes without knowing they are saints [...]. They communicate with God confidently. In everyday life, they seem to stay attuned to Him, living in a discreet and habitual awareness of the Lord of life. Thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit, they accept themselves as they are, with the small daily quota of suffering and joy, of gifts and limitations".

The author gives more examples:

"Parents get their small children ready for the daily pilgrimage to school. The Holy Spirit also sits at the breakfast table and inspires the family's secret thanksgiving to God for the bread with margarine and the hot milk so many other children do not have... Morning bread smells like new life"<sup>19</sup>.

Living in the presence of God and feeling Him in everything that lives, in a horizontal mysticism attitude, makes our heart sing: *"Because God is in everything, because He is our God!"*

## 2. MARIST SPIRITUALITY IN EVERY WORD

*Esmeraldina Laurinda da Silva*<sup>20</sup>

More and more, companies put great importance on team skills. Several authors describe relational skills as one of the most important non-cognitive abilities people must develop.

"The way to learn and teach is changing, the way we work is changing, and our vision about what we need to cope with life constantly updates itself"<sup>21</sup>.

How can we translate this into our Marist language? How can we live this out in a faith-based institution with a view to building an harmonious environment? How can we take the market seriously without losing sight of Marist spirituality? In Palmas (in the State of Tocantins) the Marists work in a school offering basic education to children from two-and-a-half to seventeen years of age. The center started approximately 17 years ago, and I am part of its story.

One of my first goals upon arriving was to become acquainted with the institution, its history and mission, the people leading the process, and the specific objectives of my role de-

<sup>19</sup> GUMUCIO 1999, SIMAR 2000, p. 85.

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<sup>21</sup> Fernanda Fúria has an M.A. in Children and Adolescents Psychology (University College, London), and is a consultant for innovation in psychology and education. The quote is from "Ten Ways to Prepare New Generations for Life", available in Portuguese at <http://porvir.org/porpensar/10-maneiras-de-preparar-novas-geracoes-para-vida/20140613> (last access on July 21, 2015).

scription. All this was very important to make me feel part of the story. However, it did not happen overnight. It meant undertaking a new path without being afraid of walking. I got to know more each day, discovering new things and realizing I knew very little. Books, documents, and the people who already had the story helped me in the process. I participated in every meeting to which I was invited. I read all the recommended books and documents. Nevertheless, I realized all this work was not enough to make me feel part of the mission. I attended professional development activities, retreat sessions, specific training courses, and took part in residential experiences that provided greater knowledge of the institution's history. Still, nothing was as important as coming to a gradual understanding of the spirituality in the small things. Hence the importance of an accompaniment process, without which you cannot embark on such an experience. This is the main difference between such institution and what might be found in the life of an ordinary company. This is because the Marist institution is not an end in itself, and we find transcendence in day-to-day tasks. Although it might have the outstanding facilities of a commercial company, its project goes deeper than external appearances, and goes beyond the institution itself.

Spirituality implies bringing together the expectations of the market-place with the work I do, and

most of all, my expectations and those of the institution. I always wanted to work in a place that inspired peace, joy, health, politeness, discipline, good humor, confidence, spirituality, family spirit, and the proclamation of Jesus. I found all this in the Marist mission the Founder left us, which is the way in which I serve others: love of work, family spirit, presence, simplicity, humility, modesty, and love for God and Mary. I came to live my discipleship in an organization that works in the world, but has a project that goes beyond it.

From that time I have come to feel truly part of a mission that is not simply mine, but belongs to an institution. I dream together with other people, trying to give expression to the mission of "*making Jesus known and loved*" through my profession as an educator. It is a challenge! For me, this mission means joy in every new day as I get up and start over again, wanting that day to be better than the one before. Since the day starts at home, my kids and my husband know I like what I do; they support this life-project that I seek to pursue, or rather, they join with me in it, not leaving me alone but sharing it with me, dreaming along with me. This gives me strength!

As I go to work, and take up my daily routine, I am concerned especially to ensure that hypocrisy doesn't overcome the beauty of what we are about. Hypocrisy can erode and destroy our mission, and can lead people to give up on it prematurely. It

can spoil dreams, and divert people from the mission. It becomes concerned with power and money, and compromises the mission. Immanence tries to overshadow transcendence. However, I find strength in the testimony of Saint Marcellin Champagnat, who never hesitated before any the challenge, and always maintained his boldness, courage, swiftness, resilience, and faith. The fact of knowing I am not alone encourages me, because many people dream and carry on with the mission in the same way I do.

Briefly, living out Marist spirituality at work today is challenging, as it must be the case in many other places, but it is also rewarding because it completes the meaning of my professional and personal life. I live out Marist spirituality in small things, in the songs I sing, in the way I pray, when I speak to children and young people, in Church activities, in the councils I belong to, in my family, and in the work I do every day. To Christ through Mary, in everything!

### 3. LAY SPIRITUALITY

*Layza Maria Gomes  
Fonseca de Oliveira<sup>22</sup>*

"We Lay Marists are Christian men and women,  
who in the course of our life have listened

to the call of God to live the charisma  
of Champagnat and, from our lay state,  
we respond to it" (GAST 12).

From time to time in life, we come across a text that reveals deep spaces of our human experience. We wonder about the meaning of life and the decisions we have made along the journey. In the process, we find questions and answers that make us move ahead. Spirituality is something that helps us find some answers, but also prompts many questions.

Through our journey, we make decisions that eventually bring us to choose a state of life. I am a lay person. In Church terminology, the term 'lay' simply means you belong to the People of God. In this sense, theologians of each era have attempted to show that everyone in the Church is a lay person, because we all belong to the People of God.

Personally, after going through a Church experience and getting to know other charisms and spiritualities, I was "caught" by an apostolic network that is called "Marist" – a descriptor that is complex. If we truly want to follow Champagnat's way of living the Gospel, we should not worry too much about the adjective, but about the noun, which is the following of Jesus Christ. Every Chris-

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tian, in any state of life, must follow Him. The “life in abundance” Jesus wants for humankind must not be just an idea, nor can it be reduced to the image of a person, but has to do with the whole story of Jesus Christ, whom our senses have contemplated. We can also feel it, in all its dimensions, by bringing our life close to His, and his life close to ours. This exercise of going to Jesus through my humanity has nourished my Christian and Marist experience. There is no recipe to live as a Marist lay person. Each of us must discover what it means by contemplating Jesus Christ and being open to the action of his Spirit, who tells us what we must specifically do.

I was thinking about my vocation as lay Marist a few days ago, and realized that identifying myself as a lay Marist has been the outcome of following a path of personal and community discernment. Through this process, the elements that constitute my identity have made things clear. The witness of many lay people, who live the Marist charism with simplicity, have led me to an awareness of my own vocation<sup>23</sup>.

“The lay Marist vocation, like all vocations, originates and is developed by viewing one’s life in the light of the Spirit. This discernment has different stages;

and so each person should be accompanied while respecting his or her personal rhythm”<sup>24</sup>.

Now, as a woman, wife, mother, and professional, I am part of a generation that has opened a number of doors to women, but we know that there are many others to open. In the historical and cultural context of today, I believe that the role of women in the Church is essential. Catechists, who were mainly mothers and grandmothers, passed on the faith, and always played a key role in the transmission of Christianity, although the Church has not recognized this due to the sexist way in which it is structured. I think the present Pope has said fundamental things about the role of women in the Church, which if taken seriously could change the face of the Church as we know it. The Marist Institute has taken important steps around the participation of women in decision-making structures. Today we can say there is a significant number of women who have a both professional and charismatic roles in the Institute. This significant presence of women enriches what it means to be Marist.

“Living the Marist charism from the perspective of women invites us all to adopt in our lives the Marian elements such as tenacity, stamina, maternal affection, tenderness, attention to detail and intuition in our daily experience”<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> GAST 28.

<sup>24</sup> GAST 14.

<sup>25</sup> GAST 25.

As a woman, I have always experienced trust and respect for me to express my thoughts and convictions freely. Feminine spirituality has always been crucial for me in my faith journey. Devotion to Mary captured me from the moment I came into contact with the Marists, both brothers and lay people. A men's Institute with a woman as reference point and "First Superior", as Champagnat used to say, shows that he actually acknowledged in Mary the "Maternal Face of the Church".

Mary's way of being has inspired me since childhood, from when I received learnt of Mary from my mother and grandmother. For me, Mary's personality traits are a pathway of discipleship. Mary's kindness, strength and presence have been very important in my Christian formation. Community experience, from a very early age, allowed me to appreciate that God deeply loved me. I tried to live that love by dedicating myself to the service of people in various pastoral ministries, and nurturing my spirituality within a community-based faith, something that helped me recognize the presence of God in the events around us, in history, and in the daily lives of people. In a special way, my spirituality emanated from the phrase "to seek God in all things" – the word "things" meaning human, historical, and day-to-day circumstances<sup>26</sup>.

This is how I plunged into the wonder and challenge of following Jesus, renewing the hope and the utopia of building the Kingdom of God in the here and now.

In this journey, a discernment process led me to choose marriage, and I joined my life to a companion who fully welcomed me, with whom we set out to build a love project around the same charism: the gift we inherited from Champagnat. We had lived very similar stories of Christian formation, and finally embraced our baptismal mission together within the Marist charism.

We constructed our life project around this spiritual source, replenished everyday by the Word of God, revealed in the Gospel, the people we meet, and the signs of the times. After two years of marriage, we had a son who gave a different meaning to our lives, filled our house with light, and fulfilled another stage of our life project. Motherhood made me experience a new love without limits, which gives more than what it expects to receive, which takes care, leads, and loves unconditionally. I experienced the challenge of looking after a fragile life that depended on my attention and care to survive. I realized that small gestures could be the thin line between life and death, and most of all, how love makes the difference in a child's life. Mother-

<sup>26</sup> STIERLI, J. *Buscar a Deus em todas as coisas. Vida no convívio do mundo e oração inaciana*. São Paulo: Loyola, 1990.

hood is one of the schools that has taught the art of living.

Daily experiences are special places of encounter with God<sup>27</sup>.

Everyday life is the *space-time* in which I live my vocation and nourish my spirituality, through things as simple as helping my son with his homework, discussing household issues with my husband, sharing our meals around the table, reading a fairytale to my son, enjoying an outing with the family, praying together before bed, walking in the park, going to Mass together, visiting the family, and sharing dreams and challenges. All this has nourished our family spirit.

"From this spirit, the small details emerge with the others that characterize us. Like Marcellin, we cultivate among ourselves the small virtues: forgiving the little day-to-day slights, understanding the other person's point of view and putting ourselves in his place, being cheerful, anticipating the needs of others and, providing our service with simplicity, being patient and affable, and knowing when to give way when it is time for others to act. In this way, we nourish our daily life and continue to grow in depth"<sup>28</sup>.

In a world that yearns for connection and a sense of belonging, the home is a powerful symbol.

Families and communities become ideal places for people to grow, support each other, and renew their spirits<sup>29</sup>.

The community dimension remains fundamental as a source of my spirituality, and I live it in my family today. It is my support and way forward. Support because we place everything in common at home, and my husband and son are the first partners in the mission; they accept, welcome, and support me to live my own particular vocation. It provides me with a pathway of discipleship because I follow Jesus in and with my family.

Gathering around the table has been, more than simply its broader institutional meaning, a space to meet, share, exchange affection and joyous conversation, a moment to feed our body, spirituality, and life project. We build this project on our experience as a couple, which entails moments of joy and sorrow, achievement and challenge.

"The love of a partner reveals the fidelity and passion of God, and brings to mind the passion and fruitfulness that should encourage every Christian vocation.

In a similar way, the love of parents for their children is a vivid image of the unconditional love that God has for us"<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Water from the Rock 54.

<sup>28</sup> GAST 70.

<sup>29</sup> Water from the Rock 101.

<sup>30</sup> GAST 22.

These pages of my personal story allow me to speak about my vocation as lay Marist, woman, wife and mother. As lay Marist, I feel part of an international community sharing a spirituality that stems from Champagnat's charism, with a common mission 'on different fronts'. Reflecting on the path I have trodden, I feel that my family has been fertile soil for me to grow and bear fruit. I know there is still much to do, but there is light on my path, and I see horizons of hope before me. I feel blessed with the gift of life, and with the marvelous companions of my journey, life and mission. I proclaim not only what God has done in each of us, but what He is doing in us together as a family and as a community<sup>31</sup>.

#### 4. REVISITING MARIST SPIRITUALITY TODAY

*João Luis Fedel Gonçalves*<sup>32</sup>

I would like to propose a reflection based on a number of questions that arise as we look to the future. I will not seek exhaustive answers, but the method will elicit other questions as in a form of perpetual motion. The focus will be more on the ascetic side of spirituality, but the reflection process will also lead us to the mystical side.

We are heirs of the spirituality developed by Champagnat and the first brothers.

#### What does this mean for a lay Marist of Marcellin Champagnat?

This would be our first question. From the beginning, the Founder did not impose a "clerical" spirituality on the young men who joined his project. It is true that many religious practices, and even their lifestyle, came from the monastic model, but other groups of lay Christians at that time did the same thing. Ultimately, it was plain Christian spirituality, which was suitable for men who entered the universe of education with its challenges and demands.

The essential elements of this spiritual experience are clear. First, is the centrality of our personal encounter with God's presence; and second, the awareness of having been called, of being part of a project that comes from the Father's heart. The presence of God is a constant theme in the Marist tradition, highlighting this central point. In his first personal notes, when Brother François Rivat was 11 years old, he wrote, surely influenced by Champagnat's words:

<sup>31</sup> Water from the Rock 106.

<sup>32</sup> He works in the Sector of Consecrated Life and Laity of Brasil Centro-Sul, and is a member of the Expanded Secretariat of Laity (jgoncalves@grupomarista.org.br).

"I will remember the presence of God when I pray, teach, walk, during recess, at lunch"<sup>33</sup>.

We also find this topic in Father Champagnat's Spiritual Testament written twenty years later<sup>34</sup>.

The second essential element is an awareness of partaking in the mission of Jesus Christ, whom all Marists follow like the Apostles. This topic appears in the Fourvière pledge, through which the newly ordained priests promised to be "good Ministers of Jesus Christ"<sup>35</sup>, following the example of the Apostle Paul. Champagnat translated this zeal in an effort to instruct the poorest children, and to invite some young men to follow him as Brothers.

Humility, another characteristic element, was initially part of this apostolic context before becoming a virtue. For a Brother, being humble means devoting himself to educate the most humble of children.

**Mary is the model of humility for a Brother:**

"Mary was the first and most perfect follower of Jesus Christ in all his virtues, mainly in humility,

which is the reason why she deserved to be placed above all creatures"<sup>36</sup>.

Marist spirituality, therefore, looks to Mary as first follower of Jesus Christ, and closely links to her. At the beginning, it was more of a "Marian mysticism" than a "devotion". In his circular *A Revolution of the Heart*, Brother Séan Sammon tells us:

"The name of Mary was important to our Founder. In Marcellin's understanding of our faith, both Jesus and Mary were at the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation. So, we can say that while the founder's spirituality was truly incarnational, it was decidedly Marial too"<sup>37</sup>.

The fact of constantly combining the names of "Jesus and Mary" in his letters shows that Marcellin, in addition to the devotional dimension, had a deeply theological spirituality, which was also concrete and sensitive to human realities. Brother Séan Sammon calls this "practical Christianity":

"Marcellin Champagnat came to embody an incarnational spirituality. He knew from experience that an authentic spiritual life has its origin in the place and amid the circumstances in which we find ourselves"<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> RIVAT, François. Carnet 302, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> FURET, Jean-Baptiste, Life, p. 224. He devotes the third chapter of the second part to this issue (p. 272-284). See also LANFREY, André, *Essai sur les origines de la spiritualité mariste*, part 2, chapter 3 (Rome, General House of the Marist Brothers, 2001, p 124-133, photocopy); and MESONERO SÁNCHEZ, Manuel, *San Marcelino Champagnat, experiencia de Dios y vida mística* (Universidad Marcelino Champagnat, Lima 2012, p. 139-144).

<sup>35</sup> FURET, J.B. Life, p. 32.

<sup>36</sup> RIVAT, François, Carnet 308, p. 544.

<sup>37</sup> SAMMON, Séan. *A Revolution of the Heart*, p. 25-26.

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*, p. 43.

If we look closely at these characteristics of Champagnat's spirituality, we can see their relevance for the life of lay Marists. In general terms, this is what Chapter 4 of *Gathered Around the Same Table* is telling us:

"Spirituality is living in and from God" (100);

"We are his disciples

and we want to follow in his footsteps" (104);

"Mary, a lay woman, is also a model for us of the simple and hard-working life" (111).

There is, however, a challenge we must face. A superficial reading of Champagnat's spirit could reduce Marist spirituality to devotional practices, and not go to the heart of its mystical dimension. On the other hand, it is not a spirituality of other-worldly experiences, but is rooted in ordinary life. Champagnat's devotion to Mary does not have the pompous traits of the 17<sup>th</sup> century French spirituality. On the contrary, he uses the same titles as ordinary people, like "Good Mother", to express the kind of close relationship he describes, for example, in his letter to Brothers Antoine and Louis:

"Get Mary on your side; tell her that after you have done all you can, it's just too bad for her if her affairs don't go well"<sup>39</sup>.

Another significant trait of Marist spirituality, which lay people can eas-

ily assimilate, is its openness to the wider ecclesial context. Champagnat did not exactly invent new devotions and/or formulas of spiritual life. In the Circular to the Brothers dated on January 1828, the Founder begins with an expression that indicates a clear understanding of the Brothers' vocation:

"God has loved us from all eternity;

he chose us and drew us out of the world.

The Blessed Virgin has planted us in her garden, and she sees to it that we lack for nothing".

In this same letter, his concern for the people in need of prayer from the Brothers and young people shows his unshakable confidence:

"We will therefore offer our supplications, prayers, wishes and thanksgiving for all people".

Then he asks the whole community to recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary for nine consecutive days. Their daily practices rested on a deeply theological mysticism. Champagnat did not want a reclusive group attached to strange practices. Instead, he believed children and young people needed to learn to be good Christians, and develop a spirituality suitable for daily life. They would not stay forever in the Marist centers; on the contrary, they would go on with their lives, start a family, have responsibilities in civil society, be part of the ecclesial community,

39 Letters of Marcellin –February 4, 1831. <http://www.champagnat.org/510.php?a=5a&id=1364>

but living all this “in a Marist way”. Is this not what we dream as a life project for the lay Marists of Champagnat?

### **Is Marist spirituality suitable for any context?**

Before answering, we should recall that Champagnat developed his spiritual legacy in the particular social context in which he studied and lived, one which was rather ascetical and even anti-mystical<sup>40</sup>. His spirituality was born within “western thought”<sup>41</sup>, and initially spread looking as such. This, however, did not mean that its essence was unable to transcend these delimitations. The history of how the Institute expanded in the world shows the rich possibilities of our spirituality. Let us consider two points in this regard. Firstly, spirituality nowadays is constantly engaged with contemporary culture, and must address the perplexities of men and women who live in a world that is changing, demystifying tradition, crossing boundaries, and is free from constraint. It does not mean spirituality has no place, but there has been a radical change, and traditional models no longer work. The second consideration is not globalization of spirituality but rather the differences that come through place, pluralism, and the diversity of spiritualities. In

different ways these two factors are at play everywhere, and affect our way of being Christians and Marists. It is not an isolated problem of the *Ad Gentes* communities, for example, but touches all sorts of work. This poses two challenges. How do we, Marist Christians, cope with diversity, live with the other who is not part of our cultural and religious tradition? When non-Christians come into contact with the Marist tradition and identify themselves with it, how can they take on this way of living without necessarily giving up their own tradition? Is Marist spirituality possible within another religious tradition? How would we keep the identity of Marist spirituality, and at the same time respect the particularity of each tradition?

### **How can we include new topics in Marist spirituality?**

Such as socioeconomic inequality, diversity, new languages, and the protection and defense of the rights of childhood and youth? Brother Seán Sammon touches on some of these points in his above-mentioned Circular<sup>42</sup>. It looks like the Institute’s spiritual tradition has a particular ability to adapt itself, because there is a certain lightness to it. This is quite evident, for example, in the spaces where lay people can become an ac-

<sup>40</sup> LANFREY, A., *Essai*, p. 18-20.

<sup>41</sup> SAMMON, Séan. *A Revolution of the Heart*, p. 65.

<sup>42</sup> *Idem*, p. 62-63.

tive part of Champagnat's charism. The experience of Marist spirituality in different communion spaces between brothers and laity has elicited innovative reflections and enabled new experiences. In this sense, the contribution of lay people can be very valuable, because their way of being in the world allows for many other interaction areas, among which one of the most significant is the contribution of women, with their particular sensitivity and perspective.

I would like to conclude this section by quoting a significant testimony from a lay person in South Africa. A prophetic gesture of communion became a breakthrough for that community:

"Towards the end of the dark days of apartheid, the Brothers were among the first to open their schools to all races.

I am very grateful to work in such a non-racial environment, which has allowed me to witness the color-blindness of future generations. It is the Marist Brothers, the lay teachers and other staff members, the children and their families, past and present, making up the wider school community, which provides the heartbeat" (Pinceladas 26).

## Challenges to Lay Marist Spirituality

The last two general events of the Marist Institute – the General Conference in 2013, and the II Marist In-

ternational Mission Assembly in 2014 – identified some topics that can inspire our reflection on lay Marist spirituality.

Firstly, they pose the challenge of living both mystical and prophetic dimensions as a single reality of Marist Christian life. Brother Emili Turú commented this in his conference during the visit to the house of La Valla. He referred to the basement, an open space, small and collected, which he took as a mystic symbol:

"Perhaps this is a symbol of the road which, as an Institute, we are called to travel: the rediscovery of the "interior life", this sacred space of encounter with the Mystery which dwells in us"<sup>43</sup>.

In Nairobi, the brothers and laity stated:

"Our dream is that people will recognize that we Marists of Champagnat are mystics and prophets".

Besides the topics of mysticism and prophecy, II MIMA highlighted communion. It is an expanded communion, a new tent, built by the brothers and the lay Marists to welcome adults and young people.

This communion transcends borders and stereotypes, and generates new ways of being together, which are open to internationality, interculturality, and new mission contexts.

<sup>43</sup> TURÚ, Emili. Five Words for a General Conference, in FMS Message 44, p. 4.

Finally, we must tackle the challenge of formation.

Marist spirituality is a gift, an experience of personal encounter with the God of life.

However, we need a journey of formation that leads people to maturity of faith, to understand of the foundations of the Marist charism, and to realize possibilities for association around the charism.

Lay Marist spirituality is not a static but a living heritage which we must discover, maintain, and foster. This is not an individual task, but an effort for the entire Institute. Above all, it is the work of the Trinity in us, as happened to Mary. This trust in God's action, which Champagnat expressed many times, also guides us today, leading us towards new horizons of Marist mission, new models of communion, and new forms of living our spirituality.

# WHAT MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT CAN TEACH US ABOUT COMMUNICATING



Rosangela Florczak de Oliveira<sup>1</sup>

During the Marist Institute's two hundred year history, many things have been written about the distinctive traits of its founder, Marcellin Champagnat, beyond those he common to all people of faith in their response to the needs of the Church. A number of his distinctive characteristics can be an inspiration to people and organizations today.

In order to contribute to the development of leadership within the Institute and propose a profile of organizational leadership, we can explore more deeply a specific aspect of Marcellin's approach: his communication skills<sup>2</sup> and strategies<sup>3</sup>. Much of the research on Marcellin alludes briefly to them, but I would like to ex-

plore the topic more deeply based on bibliographic research.

At the end of his article on Marcellin's social and emotional intelligence, Consigli (2009) says:

"We have seen that Marcellin had a real talent for human relations [...]. He was an efficient communicator".

Through a historical overview, I would like to clarify the place that dialogue and human interaction had in the history of the Founder. In other words, how important was his particular style of communication for the consolidation of his project, that is, the creation of an Institute of consecrated religious devoted to the ed-

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<sup>2</sup> According to Fleury & Fleury (2001), skills are not limited to a set of theoretical and empirical knowledge held by the individual, nor is it restricted to specific tasks. Zarifian (1999) holds that skills reflect practical intelligence applied to concrete situations, and that they stem from a knowledge baggage the person is constantly transforming with an energy that is proportional to the situation's complexity.

<sup>3</sup> Process to achieve the main objectives of a project.

education in faith and knowledge of children and young people from the rural areas, especially the poor?

To understand the challenges that Marcellin had to face, we need to recall briefly his personal story. He was a young farmer of modest means and limited formal education, who lived in a period of severe social, economic and religious turmoil. However, his solid family foundation gave him a sure base for forming his personal values. While life was dangerous during the French Revolution and the post-revolutionary period, Marcellin's protective shield was his family. At home, he was shaped by the inspiring example of his father's fair and firm political leadership, and the religious conviction of his mother and aunt, in a harmonious ambience, where affection and care tempered the rigidity of social mores, and the soberness and the dogmatic nature of the way the faith was practiced.

When he received the call to the priesthood, Marcellin faced a number of challenges that would increase throughout his life: his poor formal education, which made the seminary studies even more difficult; the personal discipline he needed to grow in all dimensions; perseverance to carry out a project in which few people believed; faith, courage, and self-belief to challenge clerical power and implement a new form of evangelization; starting and housing a religious institute dedicated to education at a time of disbelief and with an utter lack of resources.

Marcellin Champagnat, today a saint of the Church, communicated in an effective way. What characteristics marked his communication style? What were the guiding principles of his communication? What communication platforms available at the time did he use? And, finally, what is legacy has the Founder left Marist leaders?

## 1. CONTEXT

The social, political and religious context in which Marcellin lived and developed his project defined his attitudes and leadership style. The fact of living in an atmosphere that was conflictual in many ways forged his personality, and allowed him develop the right skills to bring together contrasting interests and negotiate with different power groups in order to realize his dream. The importance of the historical period in which the Founder of the Marists lived is indisputable. Tiecher (2012) states that the French Revolution was a milestone marking the end of the Modern Age and the beginning of the Contemporary Age. According to Fattori (2012), the French 18<sup>th</sup> century brings to mind Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu, Danton and Robespierre, and the fall of the dark monarchy of Louis XVI. It reminds us, in short, of the Revolution and all its phases.

Although the social unrest before and during the Revolution did not touch him directly, the educational situation, one of the central issues of

the conflict, did strongly impact on Marcellin. Education was the basis of *equality*, one of the three principles of the Revolution, which claimed the right to education for all citizens, stated in article 22 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 1793:

“Education is a necessity for all.  
Society should encourage with all its strength  
the progress of public instruction  
and make education available to all citizens”  
(DIAS, 2007, p. 441).

Marcellin’s personal story reflects the educational situation in France at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Tiecher says (*ibid.*, p. 26), “[...] *the educational situation was fragile, and lacked material resources and physical structures, since schools were run in every possible place: barns, stables, basements and family houses*”. The author adds that people in the countryside dealt with chaotic arrangements for schooling. Schools depended on public charity, and the teaching profession was not valued nor remunerated.

Many religious congregations dedicated to education emerged from this context, consistent with the Church’s call that had been there since the Council of Trent (1563), asking bishops

and priests to take care of Christian instruction. In the Major Seminary, when he received the inspiration to found the Society of Mary<sup>4</sup> together with a group of fellow seminarians, Marcellin envisioned the possibility of contributing to the education of children and young people. He insisted from the outset, against the views of his future fellow priests, on the possibility of establishing a branch of the Society of Mary of consecrated religious exclusively dedicated to education.

After his ordination, as curate in La Valla, the founder of the Marists came face to face with the harsh realities he had himself lived as a boy: children who lacked education, who knew nothing about sciences and the mysteries of the faith. Transforming that world became Marcellin’s central mission. He struggled until the last days of his life to consolidate the project of the Institute, despite the many difficulties he faced in a number of areas, and the lack of support from the Government, the clergy and, in many cases, even from the fellow members of the Society of Mary.

On January 2, 1817, after the episode of the encounter with young Montagne<sup>5</sup>, Marcellin decided to found the *Institute of the Little Brothers*

<sup>4</sup> The pledge of Fourvière took place on July 23, 1816, as the founding event of the Society of Mary. The day after their ordination, a group of twelve new priests who had committed themselves to founding the Society of Mary celebrated Mass at the shrine of our Lady of Fourvière in Lyon and signed the pledge after reciting it, which can be considered as the Act of Foundation of the Society of Mary.

<sup>5</sup> A carpenter in Les Palais, a village close to La Valla, called Marcellin to assist his son, Jean-Baptiste Montagne, on his deathbed. Marcellin was surprised to see that the sixteen-year-old boy knew nothing about religious truths. Patiently, he consoled him and prepared him to die. This fact convinced Marcellin that he could wait no longer. He had to act swiftly! Hence, he decided to undertake the foundation of the Little Brothers of Mary or Marist Brothers.

*ers of Mary*. Before analyzing in more detail the elements of Marcellin's leadership, it is important to note some aspects of his ecclesial, political, religious (spiritual), and communicational context. Strobino's research (2012) will help us understand the communication strategies of the founder, which is the main subject of this study.

According to Strobino (2012), between Marcellin's birth and death, the Church was under the leadership of five different Popes. The clergy during the revolutionary period – considered as the Second Estate in French society – comprised two factions: those who remained faithful to Rome and those who swore loyalty to the laws of the French Revolution, the so-called Gallican priests. The Church had to cope with the interference of the state in the appointment of bishops. During Marcellin's life, his diocese of Lyon had four bishops who were loyal to the Pope, and two who the state appointed.

Two Archbishops would have an impact on the Founder's path. The first was Cardinal Joseph Fesch, Napoleon's uncle, who governed the Church in that diocese from the end of the Revolution. He encouraged the reorganization of seminaries and implemented a sort of vocations promotion campaign. A team of priests visited the farmers to find new priestly vocations. Marcellin received his invitation in one such tour. He also received the tonsure, minor orders, and the subdiaconate from

the hands of Cardinal Fesch on January 6, 1814.

Another important figure in Marcellin's life was Archbishop Jean-Paul Gaston de Pins, who was appointed Apostolic Administrator of Lyon some years after Cardinal Fesch exiled himself in Rome in 1814 without resigning his position as Archbishop. After facing the initial difficulties of persuading the Vicar General of Lyon, Claude-Marie Bochard, and other priests of the region, to support the project of the Little Brothers of Mary, Marcellin found in Archbishop de Pins the support he needed to take the first steps in the foundation of the Institute. Fathers Cholleton and Cattet, Vicars General of Lyon under Archbishop de Pins, were also major supporters of the Founder's work.

The *locus* for Champagnat's project – the Church – was affected by the major changes the clergy underwent and their own internal conflicts, and the tumultuous period of the political history of France and Europe. When the Storming of the Bastille took place, Marcellin in Le Rosey was almost two months old. During his childhood all the notable events of the Revolution took place: the Constituent Assembly, the First Republic, the condemnation of Louis XVI to the guillotine, the National Convention, the Reign of Terror, and the Consulate. While Marcellin was in the seminary and during his life as a priest, he witnessed Napoleon's Consulate and his ascension as Emperor of the French, the first brief

restoration of the monarchy with Louis XVIII (grandson of Louis XV), and Napoleon's Empire of the Hundred Days.

In that context, the moves to re-establish Christianity led to the re-population of the seminaries through a campaign to address the lack of priests, and the emergence of quite a few religious congregations dedicated to education and catechesis. Although it was a time of deep questioning, the Church had not freed itself from the authoritarianism that the clergy had held in the pre-revolutionary period, and therefore the new initiatives of congregations such as the Marist Brothers were not easily understood. The clergy, and even his fellow members of the Society of Mary, did not readily accept Marcellin's apostolic and non-monastic approach, and his practical Christianity that shaped day-to-day community life. We can say, therefore, that Marcellin's difficulties in gaining approval for the Institute was a function of the spiritual atmosphere within the Church, especially regarding the structure of the clergy, and the particularly complex historical and political situation in France. Another element we must take into account to understand how the Founder had to work is the way communications

worked at the time. By analyzing them, we can better understand Marcellin's communication skills and strategies.

At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, there was much innovation in the field of communications in France<sup>6</sup>. Wars and revolutions are a fertile ground for technological innovation because of the need for exchange of information between military troops and command teams. At the beginning of the revolutionary period, France set up the first telecommunications service in the world, the so-called optical telegraph invented by Claude Chappe. Although he invented it at the beginning of the Revolution, his telegraph became a communication network only between 1845 and 1865. In 1853, according to Mattelart (2000), the optical telegraph ceased to be at the exclusive service of the military and in 1867 became available to the public in general. During this same period, the extent of railway lines went from 3,010 to 17,733 kilometers. Lyon, the region where Marcellin lived, was an important railway center.

Despite the technological advances, traditional mail was still the preferred way of communicating

<sup>6</sup> L'Encyclopédié was an important development in communications which impacted on the period in which Champagnat was born and lived. It was the first printed record of human knowledge accumulated until then. Prepared by various thinkers such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, among others, it was edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, and published in France between 1751 and 1780. Its 35 volumes are considered as one of the great literary achievements of the 18th century. The fact of communicating knowledge and proclaiming a new humanism through L'Encyclopédié gave rise to conflicts between the Church and the State. In 1759, L'Encyclopédié was included in the index of books forbidden to Catholics, which did not prevent it from circulating.

and, therefore, it was at the center of attention of the political powers and maneuvers. One of the sources discontent before the French Revolution in the Paris region was the violation of mail privacy – the so-called *Cabinet Noir*, or black room, a postal censorship system established by Louis XII. A fear of conspiracy was the reason behind its introduction by the French Post Office. It was abolished during the Revolution but reinstated by Napoleon Bonaparte. France exported this model, and it spread all over the world, even after the official recognition of the right of citizens to mail privacy (Mattelart, 2000).

Despite the risk of censorship, the use of letters – originating in ancient Greece and common in France after a postal system was introduced the fifteenth century – was still the most effective means of communication for allowing people to conquer distance. Marcellin used personal and circular letters widely throughout his life.

I have briefly pointed out some aspects of the context in which Marcellin Champagnat lived and developed his grand project. In addition, we must look at a number of theoretical assumptions that guide our research. The concepts of *leadership* and *communication* underlie this study. Various sciences and areas of knowledge suggest several possible interdisciplinary approaches to both subjects.

## 2. LEADERSHIP

The strength of Marcellin's leadership is indisputable. In Furet (1989) we find the traits that characterized the Founder's public life and his interpersonal relations from the time of his ordination, and which show a decisive exercise of leadership, always aimed the service of the Church and its people, and at transforming their situations. The study of leadership is recent (1930) and complex, and bears on different fields of knowledge. I will not try to be exhaustive, but it is necessary to choose, among the many options these theories offer, a definition of leadership that may help us understand Marcellin's work better. In their brief study of leadership theories, Santana, Taghizadeh & Cunha (2010) synthesized some of the theoretical approaches currently prevailing in this field:

"In this context, it seems that studies on this topic in the past two decades tend to see leadership as a process involving the intentional influence of certain people over others, creating conditions and facilitating relations in order to carry out activities that contribute to the achievement of common goals" (*ibid.*, 2010, p. 4).

According to these authors, leadership is as a complex process that takes place between the leader and the followers in a reciprocal way, comprising multiple dimensions (psychology, knowledge, interaction, etc.) revolving around the goals they want to reach together. This study

highlights interaction as an important dimension of the leadership process.

Chanlat & Bedard (1996) studied leadership in relation to management, and describe it as an activity essentially of verbal communication, interaction, and language. They claim, moreover, that the people in charge are largely responsible for the type of interpersonal exchange they establish with the group they lead. The particular 'relational climate' leaders generate around them is of great importance, and reveal the strategies they use according to their technical competencies, skills and human qualities, and beyond them.

According to Consigli (2009), self-knowledge determines self-acceptance and personal change. The author argues that Marcellin was constantly learning and improving himself, and extremely able to concentrate on the areas of his personality needing change. His prayers, personal rules, resolutions, and the letters in which he declared his intentions reflect the deep insight and self-knowledge that characterize every leader.

In order to mobilize a group around common objectives, the leaders of a project must have a number of qualities. Among them, the authors identify: equity, ability to appreciate people, openness of spirit, honesty, generosity, courage, sense of responsibility and good judgment. These human qualities are

basic for developing technical skills such as the ability to listen and express ourselves well.

Besides these qualities, which we will later try to identify in Marcellin's life, we can add those revealed in 1835 when asking Archbishop de Pins for a priest to help him at the Hermitage:

"What we still need is someone who can supervise, animate and direct everything in my absence, who can meet and deal with those who come to the house; someone who loves, who realizes the importance and benefits of such a position, a director who is pious, enlightened, experienced, prudent, firm and constant" (Letter 056, 1835).

After suggesting the name of a priest who could be suited to the job, Marcellin added that the candidate should appreciate the project and be glad to participate in it.

For a leadership based on good human skills and qualities, communication is essential. But just as leadership can be understood in different ways, so can communication. Therefore, we need to be clear on how we are using the term.

### **3. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY COMMUNICATION?**

In all its variety and ubiquity for both individuals and organizations, communication

"is the result of a great movement of social, cultural and political emancipation that started in the West" according to Wolton (2006, p. 25).

The author – who understands communication as stemming from the need to relate and share with others – also holds that

"communication seems so natural that, a priori, there is nothing to say about it. And, however, its success and continuous starting over are not easy at all" (2006, p. 13).

An approach that seems have support in communication sciences (and especially in the field of communication between people within organizations), is the understanding of communication as a generator of meaning. For the French theorist Genelot (2001), who studies the complexity of organizational management, the construction of meaning is a complicated process, full of unforeseen factors, subtleties, and recurrences between the transmitter and the receiver (GENELOT, 2001 in CARDOSO, 2006). Consistent with this approach, we know that leaders interact with their partners through concrete requests for dialogue. This restores the role of the receiver, of the other, and of interaction as such. Transmitter and receiver are in a recurring and dialogic relationship, in which both have the power and right to debate.

According to such perspective,

"this equality of rights and powers does not mean symmetry of desire, knowledge, purpose and

position, but greater possibilities and flexibility in the negotiation, so that differences and conflicts are exposed properly, along with the reasons motivating them" (CARDOSO, 2006, p. 1.139).

Therefore communication becomes, according to Marchiori's phrasing (2006, p. 79),

"essentially a bridge of meaning generating trust and mutual understanding".

#### 4. COMMUNICATION IN MARCELLIN'S LEADERSHIP

Communication is essential for a leader who wants to create something new through a process of co-operation, networking, and meaning-making based on mutual trust and understanding. With this perspective, we will now look for historical evidence of Marcellin Champagnat's communication skills and strategies. Based on the historical records, especially Marcellin's official biography by Jean-Baptiste Furet, we can infer that the Founder refused to assume an authoritarian position, although he lived during a time when power and authority had a certain mystique. Far from taking advantage of his status as member of the clergy, and as superior of the brothers' community, Marcellin rejected an authoritarian style, harsh reprimands, offensive attitudes, rude comments, mistrust, disrespect, and the discrediting of people (Chanlat and Bédard, 1996, p. 143). Throughout his life, he opted for a leadership model that was con-

sistent with his education and evangelization project, and worked hard, along with the other people involved, to legitimize and make sense of the project they carried out under his leadership.

For the purposes of this research, we will consider Marcellin's interaction with the young brothers who joined the Institute, with other members of the clergy (often his superiors) and with the fellow members of the Society of Mary as communication of an informal group. In this type of group, people tend to speak openly, interact intensely, and find satisfaction in the group's listening attitude when they speak. Discourse of informal groups reflects an atmosphere of love, affection, mutual respect and friendship. These groups also have the ability to address problems openly, and the people involved

are able to dialogue, exchange views and even talk about the way in which they establish communication.

All these characteristics become evident in face-to-face interactions, that is, through the opportunities to express oneself and engage in dialogue with concrete partners. Marcellin's deep human qualities shape his technical skills and communication strategies, as it usually happens with great leaders.

Using Furet's biography (1989), and bearing in mind some of the features listed by Chanlat and Bédard as a framework to analyze Marcellin's communication skills and strategies, I will now try to identify some of the founder's features, among many others, which indicate his communication style in specific circumstances.

Evidence found in Marcellin's biography regarding his communication practices	Communication skill/strategy
<p><b>In his ministry as curate of La Valla:</b></p> <p><i>Since he enjoyed the respect and confidence of everybody, they were glad to accept him as arbiter of any parish conflicts that might arise. How often did he restore harmony in families, reconcile enemies, thoroughly eliminate long-standing feuds, and bring back to the sacraments people who had steered clear of the pastor for some alleged slight! His flair for conciliation, his cheerful character, his simple, gentle and affable ways, captivated all hearts. Good and bad alike loved him and accepted with pleasure, (or at least not too much pain), his counsels, warnings and even reprimands (FURET, 1989, p. 53).</i></p>	<p>Mediation</p>

**In his task of accompanying and forming the new brothers, when he corrected the brother in charge of supervising the boarding students because he spent too much time reciting the Office:**

*"Your first duty", the Father insisted, "is to supervise your children so as to keep them from harm and preserve their innocence. If you do that, your prayer will be more pleasing to God and more meritorious, even though you experience a little distraction from your work, than it would be by avoiding distraction at the expense of an important duty" (ibid., p. 73).*

**When he asked the brothers to avoid excesses, punishment and judgments:**

*Another time, having learned that a young Brother had imposed excessively strict prohibitions on the pupils, he summoned him and explained: "Speaking, wasting time... such breaches are not matters for severe embargoes. Go back and tell them that if they happen to speak a few words or fail slightly against your commands, there is no sin at all" (ibid., p. 75).*

**In the accompaniment of his brothers:**

*He would point out mistakes that had been made, correct any inaccuracies and show what had been missed from a complete explanation of a truth or doctrine. He would approve and praise the favorable aspects and always finished with a word of encouragement (ibid., p. 75).*

**In the relationship with his parishioners of La Valla:**

*From the time that Father Champagnat arrived at the parish, he set about winning the confidence of the inhabitants of La Valla, knowing full well that he must have their affection and esteem if he were to do good amongst them and lead them to God. His cheerful, frank and open character, together with a manner that was simple, modest, joyful, kind and noble, all at the same time, was a considerable asset to him in the process. When he was passing through the streets, or met up with a group, **he had a pleasant word for everyone, offering praise, consolation, encouragement or congratulation. At ease in conversation with everyone, he had the knack of adjusting to their level, of adapting to their character and of entering into their way of seeing and understanding things.** Having prepared their mind and heart, **he would give the conversation an edifying turn, offering good advice or a reprimand as circumstances indicated** (FURET, 1999, p. 38).*

Through personal testimony, he establishes relationships based on trust, transparency, coherence, and an optimal mood regarding the project and the mission.

**Through the ability to encourage people with his sermons:**

Father Champagnat was no less effective with his sermons than with his catechism instruction. In the pulpit, **he was very vigorous. His whole being was a sermon:** his gestures, his modest and pious demeanor, **the tone of his voice, his vivid, forceful and lively language**, were all just what was needed to impress and touch the listener. He never climbed into the pulpit without a preparation of study, reflection and prayer. His first sermons were short and informative, the very first being only a few simple reflections, which however, made all the listeners ecstatic. Each one avowed on leaving the church: **“We have never been blessed here with a priest who preached as well as he does!”** That feeling and verdict did the rounds of the parish. Families found out when he was to preach and flocked in to fill the church.

[...] So **powerful** was his treatment of these subjects that, on several occasions, his whole audience was in tears and the most hardened sinners were shaken. **His words were so clear, warm and full of unction that they convinced all minds and stirred all hearts.**

[...] “He is from Rosey”, was the saying, **“and his words are as sweet and pleasant as roses!”** (ibid. p. 43 & 44).

**In the animation of the first brothers:**

Father Champagnat loved them as his children, visited them often, sometimes even lent a hand in their work, encouraged them, gave them lessons in reading and writing, guided them and **confided to them his views and his plans** (ibid. p. 60).

The direction of the community of Brothers occupied much of Father Champagnat’s time [...]. He saw that there would be certain shortcomings in their formation, as long as he was not at their head. Swayed by these reasons, and even more by his love for the Brothers, he decided to take up residence with them.

He raised the matter with the parish priest, who made every effort to dissuade him. “How will you get on”, he queried, “with those young people of yours? They may be good and pious but they are uncouth and poor. Not one of them would be capable of attending to you or of preparing your meals”.

He could see that the best way of attaching them to their vocation [...] was to become one with them and to lead them by example, being the first to put into practice what he preached (ibid., p. 71).

<p><b>With his testimony of personal sacrifice and presence next to the brothers:</b></p> <p><i>His matter-of-fact instructions or his sermons were sometimes <b>forcefully levelled</b> at those vices, corrupt practices or disorders, prevalent in the parish. He <b>inveighed most vigorously</b> against drunkenness, dances, nocturnal gatherings and the reading of bad books (FURET, 1999, p. 48).</i></p> <p><b>Accompanying the brothers in their educational work:</b></p> <p><i>It was not long before they were capable of running the school themselves and they suggested to Father Champagnat that they do so. He was opposed to the idea, because he wanted their first efforts to be in a humbler sphere and played out on a more modest stage, so he assembled them and confided to them (Ibid, p. 69).</i></p> <p><i>The Brothers held him in the highest esteem, loving him as a father [...]; while showing him deep respect, they treated him pretty much as an equal (ibid., p. 72).</i></p>	<p>Listening attitude, transparency, and fire in the mission.</p>
<p><b>In the care of the children:</b></p> <p><i>He took sole charge of the teaching of catechism and attended to it very faithfully every Sunday and, in winter, on most weekdays as well. <b>He had an easy manner in his catechetical instruction and spoke simply.</b> First of all he required memorized answers. Those who could read, were to learn the words by heart themselves, the others, he taught himself. <b>Then he teased out the meaning with short follow-up questions.</b> He was always listened to with indescribable pleasure, for he had a special gift for capturing attention and for conveying his meaning clearly. So skilled was he at interesting them and sparking their curiosity by <b>comparisons, parables and little anecdotes relevant to his subject</b>, that each pair of young eyes was constantly riveted on him (FURET, 1999, p. 38-39).</i></p>	<p>Creating links and searching for mutual understanding through the widespread use of comparisons and metaphors.</p>
<p><b>In the relationship with his superiors:</b></p> <p>(Fragment about Marcellin's first years in the parish of La Valla, when he became aware of the parish priest's "sad habit" of drinking too much wine).</p> <p><i>Regrettably, this shortcoming, so serious in a priest, had become known. Father Champagnat was filled with deep sorrow at the harm it caused the parish priest and the scandal it caused in the parish. With prudence, respect and love, he did his utmost to halt the evil. Firstly, he prayed fervently that</i></p>	<p>Ability to listen; constant contextualization of the mission and of the specific needs of each situation, plus his attitude of resiliency.</p>

the parish priest might have the grace to correct himself; **next he raised the matter gently with him**, practicing abstinence from wine so that the offender might be led to imitate his sobriety. While he did not succeed in bringing him to correct completely his evil tendency, he did have the consolation of preventing many failures and warding off many excesses (FURET, 1999, p. 37).

**In undertaking the foundation of the Institute:**

Since Father Champagnat had two subjects who were so well disposed, he thought that it was time to launch his project. The problem was where to find suitable accommodation for them. Not far from the presbytery, there was a small house for sale. Although he had no money, he did not hesitate about buying the place (ibid., p. 59).

**By challenging the clergy’s status quo:**

It was obvious that the house [of La Valla] could not accommodate so many people and that a new building was a matter of urgency. Marcellin did not hesitate to undertake its construction. However, because he was short of resources, the work was done by himself and his Brothers, without external aid [...]. One day, a priest friend who found him in this state, taunted him, saying:

- [...] “My friend, you are going too far. This kind of work not become a priest” [...].  
Marcellin was provoked to reply:
- “This work does not in the least compromise my ministry. Many priests spend their time less usefully” (ibid., p. 99).

**In the construction of the Hermitage:**

Human wisdom would see a strange imprudence in Marcellin’s undertaking to construct such a costly building, while he was entirely without funds. The land alone cost him more than twelve thousand francs. Naturally, then, when it became public knowledge that the community was moving and that a vast building was to be put up, there was a new storm of reproach, criticism, insult and abuse. This one perhaps surpassed even the outburst at the most turbulent time of the Institute (ibid., p. 126).

**As curate in La Valla:**

The biggest factor in his securing the affection and esteem of the faithful was his edifying conduct: his piety, his orderly life and his exact discharge of duties. **He was always available, and showed himself ever obliging** no mat-

Absolute consistency between what he preached and lived; establishing relational links;

ter at what moment his services were demanded or he was called to the church or to the bedside of the sick (FURET, 1999, p. 38).

Day and night, he was unfailingly at their beck and call. He didn't even wait to be sent for; as soon as he heard that someone somewhere was sick, he was off to see him. The harshness of the season, rain, snow, nothing would stop him (Ibid. p. 51).

#### In the Foundation of the Institute:

[...] he set himself to repair and clean the house, adding the bare necessities of furniture. The two small plank beds and the little dining table were the work of his own hands. These things done, he installed his two Brothers in that tiny dwelling which was thus the cradle of the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary. The stamp of poverty was everywhere evident [...]. It was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, 1817, that the two novices took possession of the house and began their community life (ibid. p. 59, 60).

shared responsibility; establishing dialogue on equal terms. Offering availability and closeness.

**Source:** the author (2013), using extracts from Marcellin Champagnat's biography (FURET, 1999).

## 5. HIS LEGACY: SIX QUALITIES, SIX SKILLS AND SIX STRATEGIES

A capacity to interact with people is one of the important dimensions of leadership. The present study holds that Marcellin Champagnat, in his role as leader, demonstrated this ability thanks to a number of deeply rooted human qualities and skills which allowed him to communicate very efficiently, namely: deep knowledge of himself and others; the ability to start a project and to have a large group of people join him in it; and personal qualities that kept keeping people united through so

that, even during a period of growth, the mission remained clear and enjoyed the support of all members of the Institute.

Thanks to his faith and convictions, Marcellin started a project that is relevant for humankind, and has already lasted two centuries. Those for whom Marcellin is a reference point can enjoy the legacy of *six personal qualities* that research on leadership has pointed out as important, which we can easily identify in Marcellin's life story, namely,

the ability to encourage and appreciate others, boldness, generosity, honesty, horizontal relations, and responsibility.

Marcellin developed, refined and made the most of these qualities. Through them, he was able to communicate and implement the strategies that made the foundation of the Little Brothers of Mary possible. These personal qualities are in fact essential for a leader who wants to be an efficient and effective communicator. Because of these qualities, Marcellin developed important communication skills for the exercise of his leadership (either intuitively or intentionally, we do not know), which reflect his practical intelligence in everyday life situations.

I believe the following are Marcellin's *six key skills* in the area of communication: *self-knowledge; a healthy exercise of authority, which avoided abuse of power, arrogance and authoritarianism; ability as mediator; listening attitude; personal consistency; and talent as a speaker through his use of metaphors and parables.*

In his mission as leader, Marcellin had a number of unique human qualities and competencies, which we seldom find in the same person, and hence was able to implement a set of *communication strategies* assertively throughout his life. We can clearly identify six of them after the historical facts we have analyzed:

- 1. Establishing relationships** based on trust.
- 2. Generating meaning** for all participants of the project through the

exchange of information and goals.

- 3. Establishing dialogue on equal terms** with all those who could influence the project positively or negatively.
- 4. Sharing everything** with the brothers and involving them in the project in order to develop in them a sense of belonging to the mission.
- 5. Giving witness**, being an example and a point of reference, letting his consistent attitudes speak for themselves, and never neglecting his responsibilities.
- 6. Acting with absolute transparency**, without denying or postponing conflict situations, which he faced by giving all the necessary information.

Marcellin Champagnat's ability as a leader is all the more impressive when we take into account these three systems at the same time. Nowadays, in the era of transparency and information, it is difficult to find a leader who is able to develop all these qualities, skills and strategies. How much more so in the post-revolutionary France, where the challenges and difficulties were much complex. In summary, we believe this set of characteristics can be particularly relevant as a daily inspiration for the Marist leaders who carry on Marcellin Champagnat's dream and project.

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# BASILIO RUEDA GUZMÁN<sup>1</sup>, MARIST BROTHER OF THE SCHOOLS



**Br Aureliano  
Brambila**

Born in Acatlán de Juárez (Jalisco, Mexico), October 14, 1924. Died in Guadalajara (Jalisco, Mexico), January 21, 1996.

Jesus Christ reveals who God is and what human beings are, and he is the center of Christian life, which consists, neither more nor less, in a progressive identification with him, with his feelings and attitudes (Ephesians 1:31). He invites everybody, without exception, to go down that road. It implies the fulfillment of every human being according to God's creative and redemptive plan.

There are men and women who have been fascinated by Jesus, following him at every step throughout their life, imitating his way of being and doing. Among them, Mary of Nazareth, his mother, stands out as perfect disciple and first Christian. Then we have a great host of Saints: Peter, Paul, John, Mary Magdalen, Francis, Chiara, Teresa, Ignatius of Loyola, and Marcellin Champagnat. Obviously, the last, our Founder, touches us Marist Brothers very closely. A man who lived in holiness, he spoke to us about it in his lectures and writings:

*"God has loved us from all eternity" (Letter 10, Circular);*

*"make them realize that [...] only God can make them happy, that it was for him alone that they were created" (Letter 19, to Brother Barthélemy);*

<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive study of his person and work: : José Flores, "Quemar la vida", Ed. Progreso, 1997, 312 pp., y "El estilo de una vida", ed. Progreso, 1998, 160 pp.

*"God has called us to be holy. We urge you then to grow more and more in his love, to try to live in peace, to do what each of you has to do so that everything in you, mind, soul and body, may be preserved spotless for the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (Letter 135, Circular); "We can also truthfully say that our happiness is in our own hands, since there is nothing which, if we use it properly, cannot help us to obtain it: possessions, health, poverty, sicknesses, sorrows" (Letter 180 to his sister-in-law, Marie Clermondon, widow).*

He bequeathed his Marist apostolic spirituality to the Church and to the world, founding an institute of educators to work for the coming of God's Kingdom, which means shaping humankind according to God's plan, achieving happiness for all and respect for everyone, regardless of race, color, and sex, with equal opportunities for each person. Marcellin Champagnat's legacy is a religious institute which focuses on human dignity, which evangelizes through education, and where everything is at the service of children and young people:

*"Engaged in schools or in other forms of education, we put our heart and soul into serving the human person for the sake of the Kingdom" (Constitutions 85).*

Following in the footsteps of Marcellin, numerous and courageous disciples have lived his apostolic spirituality. There are martyr brothers such as Bernardo, Laurentino, Anselmo and others. There are so many 'bloodless martyrs' of everyday life, such as François, Alfano, Leoncio Martín, Ignacio Vázquez, not to mention the long list of those who are still on pilgrimage on this earth. Today, Marist Brothers from the five continents

*"live their religious consecration in the manner of the family of Nazareth, and give themselves, for the sake of the Kingdom, to the evangelization of the young in schools and in other forms of education" (Constitutions, Approval Decree from the Holy See, October 7, 1986).*

Brother Basilio Rueda Guzmán is one more in this multitude of Marist apostles, disciples of Marcellin Champagnat, who have deeply loved Jesus and Mary. He certainly is a noteworthy exemplar, since he spent forty-nine years working as educator, master of spirituality, spiritual director, teacher, and superior in various situations and at different levels. We can say that the basic attitudes that underpinned all these roles were his intense life of prayer, his Marian gentleness towards every person, and an unlimited personal dedication to the people he was next to or who depended on him.

These words capture the figure of Brother Basilio Rueda Guzmán as Superior General of the Marist Brothers during two consecutive canonical terms, from September 24, 1967, to October 7, 1985.

There is nothing more appropriate than analyzing this period of his life. I believe that being the Superior General of the Little Brothers of Mary was his life's mission:

"As successor to the Founder, the Brother Superior General gathers all the Brothers of the Institute around Christ. He guides them and accompanies them in their fidelity to their commitment.

He discerns with them the best way to adapt their apostolate to the needs of the times, according to the charism of the Institute" (Constitutions 130).

**Basilio was born for that. Whatever preceded that stage of his life was like a slow dawning announcing the day, and whatever followed was like a lengthy sunset shedding the most serene light:**

"You created my inmost self, knit me together in my mother's womb. For so many marvels, I thank you; a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders. You knew me through and through. In your book all my days were inscribed, everyone was fixed there. How hard for me to grasp your thoughts, how many, God, there are!" (cf. Psalm 139).

Obviously, I am not thinking about the Generalship as the position of greatest dignity or as the highest hierarchical title within the Institute. This would lack evangelical merit, or existential depth and meaning. I am referring to the Generalship as a mission of full and loving service with universal consequences, to which God called our dear Basilio. God had patiently prepared, equipped, and

formed this man to be Saint Marcellin Champagnat's successor for eighteen years, during the extremely difficult period following the II Vatican Council (1967-1985).

The first three articles of our present Constitutions (approved by the Holy See on October 7, 1986) describe the Marist charism – a gift of the Holy Spirit given to Marcellin for the good of the Church and of humanity – in a very clear way:

Article 1: "On January 2nd, 1817, Marcellin Champagnat founded the lay religious Institute, or religious Institute of Brothers, under the name of Little Brothers of Mary. He saw it as forming a branch of the Society of Mary. In 1863, the Holy See approved us as an autonomous Institute of pontifical right. While respecting our original name, it gave us the title of Marist Brothers of the Schools (F.M.S. - Fratres Maristæ a Scholis).

Article 2: "Led by the Spirit, Marcellin was seized by the love that Jesus and Mary had for him and for others. His experience of this, as well as his openness to events and to people, is the wellspring of his spirituality and of his apostolic zeal. It made him sensitive to the needs of his times, especially to the ignorance concerning religion among young people and the poor circumstances in which they were placed. His faith and eagerness to do God's will led him to realize that his mission was to "make Jesus Christ known and loved." He often said: 'Every time I see a child, I long to teach him his catechism, to make him realize how much Jesus Christ has loved him'. It was this attitude that led him to found our Institute for the Christian education of the young, especially those most in need".

Article 3: "The love which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts gives us a share in the charism of

Marcellin Champagnat and directs all our energies to this one aim: to follow Christ as Mary did, in His life of love for the Father and for people.

We live out this ideal in community.

By profession of the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, we commit ourselves to live the evangelical counsels. This commitment makes us witnesses to, and servants of the Kingdom of God.

Our vocation as Brother is a special call to live the brotherhood of Christ with everyone, especially with young people, loving them with a selfless love. Our Constitutions, approved by the Holy See, guide us in living out our consecration and in carrying out the intentions of the Founder”.

Historically, Basilio Rueda Guzmán is part of our Founder’s line of succession: Brothers François, Louis-Marie, Nestor, Théophile, Strattonique, Diogène, Léonida, Charles-Raphaël, Basilio Rueda, Charles Howard, Benito Arbués, Seán Sammon and Emili Turú. This sequence of men were responsible for keeping the Founder’s charism alive throughout the length and breadth of the Church and the world, bringing the brothers together in the following of Christ the Lord, gathering them around Mary, for the benefit of children and young people in any situation of need. He was the ninth in this group of Marcellin’s remarkable disciples.

I happened to be in Rome a few days before the celebration of the XVI General Chapter (1967-1968), which we called the “renewal chapter” because of its historical importance. Because of its scope, it would last two years. Chatting with Brother Paul Ambrose, Assistant General – who

had been my superior at Marian College in Poughkeepsie (1954-1956), and who enjoyed the support of many brothers in the Institute – I asked him in an informal and friendly way how he felt about his almost certain appointment as Superior General by the upcoming Chapter. I remember he said with great Marist simplicity and prophetic depth:

“No, brother, you know me well. I may indeed be capable as a leader, but I need sure reference points, something like clearly-drawn roads or rail lines through which I can powerfully lead the convoy. In this difficult aftermath of the Council the Church is living, the Institute needs a brother who is able to sail through the rough sea of ideas, without clear navigation charts, without immovable points of reference, and bring the boat to safe harbor.”

After the election, it was Brother Paul Ambrose who introduced Brother Basilio Rueda Guzmán, the new Superior General – *le petit mexicain* – to all the brothers in the General House. It was quite an event! He was the first Mexican Superior General, coming from a Third World country, and a small town in Jalisco, but had the solidity of a deeply Christian family. His parents were Heladio and Josefina. María Guadalupe, Josefina and Eladio, were his siblings. He started school in Acatlán de Juárez, his hometown, and continued in Guadalajara, capital of the State of Jalisco, where he was baptized on March 31, 1925.

I still remember the day of his election, when we formed a line to “con-

gratulate” him personally. Basilio told me, with tears in his eyes: “*Please ask the Lord to help me...!*” Yes, moved to the core of his being, Basilio was beginning the mission of his life, the work for which he had been born: steering Champagnat’s little boat, during eighteen long and crucial years of its history, through a rough and turbulent sea. His request for prayers was not empty rhetoric or emotionally driven: he was actually living his own Gethsemane.

The II Vatican Council (1962-1965) ended two years before our General Chapter. It was obviously of utmost importance for the Church of God, an irruption of the Holy Spirit exceeding all understanding from then until today, to the extent that several bishops (even those who participated in the Council), many priests and religious, and numerous lay people have not yet assimilated what it meant and implied. Among many other things, the Council asked for a renewal of religious life, meaning an in-depth process and not a simplistic makeover, implying going back to the essentials and leaving aside what was only dust from the cultural context of bygone eras. We formulated this renewal rather quickly indeed, but its concrete implementation entailed huge difficulties. Often, we humans are specialists in incidental details, not in the essentials. However, this was a turning point and we needed serious reflection about a number of topics: religious life as such; the Church in the present time, and its response to the world; the essence of the Marist charism, and

the Founder’s original insights; and how to respond to the problems of today’s world according to our authentic foundational inspiration.

In this important process, Basilio used all his wits, and took advantage of all the resources Divine Providence had granted him: the solidity of his Christian family; his quality Marist schooling; his novitiate under the guidance of an excellent formator (Brother Othonis); his secular studies (Queretaro Normal School and National Autonomous University of Mexico); his experience working with young people (Mexico Institute and Mexico University Center, both in Mexico City); his affiliation to Father Ricardo Lombardi’s *Movement for a Better World*; his contact with people from all walks of life through spiritual direction; his experience directing the second novitiate in Sigüenza and El Escorial, Spain, etc. In a word, the fulfillment of a great task – renewing Marist life worldwide according to the charism of Saint Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840), Founder of the Marist Brothers of the Schools – aligned his entire life experience, which he skillfully used.

He fostered the study of our Marist spiritual patrimony in an unprecedented way, establishing centers that could be fully dedicated to this task. He asked a number of brothers to undertake a fulltime research and dissemination work, and endeavored to set in motion a research movement that could be attentive to the sources in order to highlight what is actually

essential. In the area of Marist spiritual patrimony, he favored a friendly and unofficial collaboration among the branches of the Society of Mary: Marist Fathers, Marist Sisters, Lay Marists, Marist Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, and us, Marist Brothers. Together with the other Marist Superiors General, he established the Feast of the Marist Family, commemorating the Pledge of Fourvière in 1816.

He dedicated much time, pushing himself to the limits of exhaustion, to preaching retreats and listening to thousands of brothers on a one-to-one basis, lending them a hand in the midst of so much disorientation and confusion. Inadvertently, the boundary between essential and accidental tasks had blurred. The breath of the Spirit came to make all things new, reconstructing them out of their unchanging essence. There was our tireless Basilio, going back and forth between courses, conferences and meetings, always based on concrete reality by using meticulous and exhaustive surveys: "Let reality tell us all it has to say", he often repeated, rephrasing the Spanish philosopher.

The Circulars he wrote as Superior General were an important means of his leadership. His Circulars were magnificent, lengthy, and full of ideas, as the difficult times required, since the crisis had to do with mind-sets, not simply with practices and customs.

His first Circular was

***Calls from the World and the Church to the General Chapter***

*(January 2, 1968, in 5 parts and 523 pages).*

It developed the quintessence of a Religious Institute's mission: responding to God, who speaks through the Church and through humankind as such. He gave priority to mission, as the response of Marist religious life to the Church and the world. He issued the circular to the Institute in several parts, from a concern to help us realize how critical the dilemma was: nothing less important than our being able to offer this response; the alternative was for us to become o irrelevant and cease to exist.

***Community Life***

*(June 6, 1970, 212 pages)*

Was another key issue that Basilio tackled. He demystified community life as a place of "instant happiness", and presented it as a task to fulfill, assisted by God's grace. "*It is not the sum of individualism, but of selflessness*", he stated. He spoke about an open community that is alert to a mission. He was the first who spoke about Marist apostolic spirituality, to which his successor, Charles Howard, returned with so much boldness that the XIX General Chapter produced an entire document about it.

***Talks on Prayer***

*(September 1, 1973, 81 pages)*

Dealt with a key topic regarding Marist spirituality, about which he

wrote beautifully, organized special retreat sessions, and set in motion a renewal movement within the Institute. Always kind and understanding, but also sharp and accurate, he used to question us: *“Brother, you say you lack the time to pray; let me tell you it is not time that you lack, but love...”* He insisted on the basic principle that prayer goes beyond “moments of prayer”, and does not end there. *“Praying is thinking of God with love,”* echoing Charles de Foucauld. *“Nothing will make us more sensitive to the world and its needs that looking at it with the eyes of Jesus. To do this, we must keep Jesus in our mind and heart, making his feelings and attitudes our own. The Institute must go to the poor through this path, from Jesus and with Jesus”.*

### **Obedience**

*(May 30, 1975, 160 pages)*

Was another of his Circulars to offer a number of insights: obedience of the Church and the religious Superior to the Spirit; the importance of mediation; and dialogue as vital in the exercise of authority and in the practice of obedience. He also insisted on ‘mediated mediation’, that is, in the non-negotiable need for those in authority to be obedient, because “obeying a disobedient person in a matter in which he or she is disobedient, is actually disobedience”. He said this in reference to ecclesiastical or religious superiors who paid no attention to the Council and tried to convince others from their flock or community to follow the

same attitude for laudable but misguided reasons.

### **The Spirit of the Institute**

*(December 25, 1975, 74 pages)*

Basilio was masterful and daring when writing this Circular. He analyzed our traditional traits of humility, simplicity and modesty, and denounced with prophetic force the dehumanising and false interpretations that had been given to these beautiful virtues. He gave a resounding “no” to timid and shame-driven interpretations of humility; to simple-mindedness and carelessness in relation to simplicity; and to apostolic self-castration and lowly positions within the Church in the interests of misconceived modesty. This Circular remains as true today for what it says these qualities are and what they are not. It invites us to find the energy of these Marist virtues by living them faithfully, because they enable us to undertake any audacious task with faith and hope as our Founder did.

### **A New Space for Mary**

*(September 8, 1976, 260 pages)*

In this circular, Basilio revealed to us, unwittingly, the secret of his personal dynamism, which had deep Marian roots. He had a sublime vision of Mary from a passionate Christocentric perspective. This circular updated our Marian devotion in line with the teaching of Vatican II. During its preparation, he invited all the brothers to send him testimonials of what Mary meant for them, so it was

a joint circular letter, written by the Superior General and his brothers. The collective soul of the Little Brothers of Mary wanted to speak about she who “has done everything among us” at the institutional and personal levels.

### **Community Life Plan**

*(March 19, 1978, 2 volumes, 156 pages).*

A very helpful instrument for revitalizing and developing a real Marist community spirit, the Community Life Plan gradually adopted by Provinces and communities on a trial basis. Eventually it became so important that it was included in the Constitutions of 1986:

“An important way of building up Marist community is the plan for community life, which gives us the opportunity to exercise co-responsibility in the search for God’s will [...].

This plan for community life deals with some points of the Constitutions in relation to the concrete situation of the community. It takes into account the priorities of the Province [...].

The plan is to be approved by the Brother Provincial [...].

Where the plan for community life is not obligatory, the Provincial Chapter will find some suitable way of replacing it” (Constitutions 50.1 - 50.2).

### **Fidelity**

*(September 8, 1984, 510 pages).*

It was a dense Circular because of its breadth of content, but the topic of fidelity certainly deserved such an approach. The events taking place in the Church and the Institute were demanding it. The letter speaks

about being faithful to God, the Church, humanity, and ourselves. We cannot fail God! Although God is omnipotent, he counts on us, in spite of everything. This Circular was his last testament as Superior General, his “swan song”. He wrote it at the end of his second and final term. A faithful man was speaking his mind, someone “who was burning his life for the sake of Kingdom”, who slowly spent his health and strength by interviewing the brothers, organizing retreat sessions and conferences around the world, and unstoppably traveling. He went to the very heart of the matter, namely, being faithful to God and his Spirit in the post-Vatican era. Believing that we all lived in fidelity and loyalty, he invited us again to write the circular together with him. There is poignant beauty and realism in the many testimonies it contains. God is still doing wonders within our earthen vessels and through them!

The renewing influence of Brother Basilio Rueda, Superior General of the Marist Brothers, went beyond the Institute and touched other religious congregations through his valuable participation in the Union of Superiors General in Rome and in important Church events, such as the “Synod on the Mission of the Christian family” (October 26 to November 25, 1980), to which Pope Saint John Paul II invited him.

Before concluding his second term as Superior General at the XVIII General Chapter of 1985 (after a total of 18 years), he guaranteed that his

successor and the entire Institute would have a secure reference point in the Constitutions, which would allow them to continue walking along the paths of life. As new Superior General, Brother Charles Howard received the document from the General Chapter, submitted it to the Holy See's approval (which was done through the Decree of October 7, 1986), and presented it to the Institute. Fully aware of its potential, he brilliantly introduced this document, which contains a privileged written expression of Marcellin's charism for our post-Conciliar world:

"It gives me great pleasure to present to you our Constitutions and Statutes in the definitive form. The completion of this work is for us an ending and a beginning [...].

In reading the Constitutions, in praying them, both in private and in community, we shall discover their richness. At the same time, we shall acquire, or we shall refine, the special qualities of the Little Brothers of Mary.

We have a unique character within the People of God, and it is for us to make it more attractive, especially for the young for whom we work.

May Mary, our good Mother and our First Superior, be our inspiration and our resource in the practice of the Constitutions and Statutes, and may we rise above mere legalism to achieve the purpose of our lives: to love Jesus Christ and to make Him known and loved"

(Constitutions,  
Introduction by Brother Charles Howard).

This is how the *petit mexicain* concluded his mission as Superior General. He spent eighteen years sailing without fixed reference points, guiding the Marist boat with his loving

hand on the helm, glimpsing the morning star, sails billowing with fidelity to the breath of the Spirit, and exploring Marcellin's core intuitions. He had fulfilled his life's mission. The following stage of his life was important because it showed his Marist simplicity, affording his successor space and freedom to govern the Institute.

On his return to Mexico, he was asked to animate the *Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family*, for he always believed in Lay Marists. Then he was appointed novice master, so that he could transmit the Marist spiritual patrimony to the novices – 'my novices', he would call them, for he loved them dearly and affectively, in the way Marcellin had done. I am sure his novices, as they grow old, will value the spiritual richness of this man who lived among them with such simplicity. They will retain a fond memory of the privilege of personally witnessing in him the greatness of being simple, and the simplicity of being great. They enjoyed the last years of one of those men whose evening light keeps shining after death, like the sun in a long and majestic sunset, throughout the heavens that shelter us.

A few days before Brother Basilio's death (January 21, 1996), Brother Benito Arbués, Superior General, canceled all his appointments in the Marist world and came from Rome to Guadalajara exclusively to spend four days with him. In a certain way, the entire Institute was present through

Brother Benito at Basilio's beside those four days. This fraternal gesture came most naturally. Benito knew well that Basilio could have referred to all the brothers of the Institute using Saint Marcellin's words: *'I carry them deep*

*in my heart'*. He also knew that the brothers of all tongues and races in the Institute from 1967 to 1985 could have answered: *"Basilio, we also carry you in our heart. You have left your mark in us very deeply"*.

# CHAMPAGNAT AND COLIN

## Marists in the making



**Br Frederick  
McMahon\***

A Study in three Parts of the personal and spiritual development of Jean-Claude Colin S.M. and Marcellin Champagnat S.M. and the relationship between these Marists in their respective apostolates. Letters are also examined for their bearing on events and characters.

## PART III

### Revelations from the letters The correspondence: 1835-1840

#### INTRODUCTION

In this section concerning the development of Colin and Champagnat as Marists, we set out to consider the letters of the period of, roughly, 1835 to 1840.

It was in September 1836, shortly after Rome's official approval of the Society of Mary (priests' branch) by the decree "Omnium Gentium", that Colin was elected as Superior of the Society.

The vows of religion now bound the members, so the matter of Obe-

dience bore greater significance for Champagnat in his relationship with Colin.

Colin proves to be a moderating influence between Champagnat and Fr Douillet, a priest with whom Champagnat had a strained relationship over a long period. Colin continues to show a lasting interest in restoring Terraillon to the ranks of the Marists and he plays a part in advising Champagnat in the matter of the official authorization of the Institute of the Marist Brothers.

Colin the Superior appears in a chiding letter to Champagnat in Au-

\* Br Frederick McMahon passed away on 20 September 2015

gust 1837 and in a letter of command in September of the same year. There is, however, a commendation of Champagnat in a letter concerning a novitiate at La Côte-St-André, but there is also a caution to be moderate in dealings with Fr Douillet, of La Côte.

Colin pleads for prayers for the success of the Marist Mission to Oceania and, on the home front, makes some ominous statements about the Brothers' "finest hour" being that of serving the priests. Happily, Colin turns to the idea of forming a special group, the "Joseph Brothers" as part of the priests' congregation, quite separate from Champagnat's group.

This solution is hastened by the famous Verdelaï episode, where Champagnat is rebuked and given a penance for not promptly sending some of his Brothers to help the Marist priest at Verdelaï. The "20 to

1" gauge is invoked, i.e. a Brother helping a priest is twenty times more useful apostolically than one teaching in a school.

There is some further trouble, this time about the mode of dress of the Marist Brothers and the Joseph Brothers, but a solution arrives with the decision in 1839 to separate the groups permanently.

Colin again intervenes in support of another project of Bishop Devie – the novitiate at St Didier. Finally, his suggestion to the dying Champagnat that the Brothers' Institute be placed in the hands of the Archbishop of Lyon brings no joy to the dying Champagnat.

There is a long stretch of time, almost five months, before we come upon the next letter from Colin to Champagnat; it concerns a new topic entirely:

*Belley, 23 April 1835.*

*My very dear confrère,*

*I have delayed writing to you longer than I thought. I did not want to be over-hasty and I wanted to see the outcome of the bishop's new undertaking for his cathedral. The matter is settled; two Brothers (Holy Family) are to take possession of the sacristy from 1 May. I hope it will turn to the glory of God and the propriety of His worship. For ourselves, the essential thing is to strip us of ourselves and to avoid prudently all that could weaken the spirit of union so necessary in an undertaking - above all, in one such as we are working at. If a selfish spirit enters much into our endeavours, into our mutual relationships, we will very soon see the spirit of God abandon us, and then - what good are we? There is no sacrifice we should not make to prevent such a misfortune. Let us remember that it is not for ourselves we are working; that our undertaking is not our own affair,*

*but God's; that one only sentiment should occupy our minds, name'y, that we must rely on God and always fear lest we ourselves become an obstacle to His views for us. Ask this grace for me; let us ask it for each other, and let us tighten more and more the bonds of charity which should exist between the members of the nascent Society.*

*You will be able to send Br Eugene back to us; he won't have enough to do at La Capucinière, but he will be able to give a hand in several ways at the seminary. In his place I'll return you Br André, who appears to be doing a little better, or, rather, perhaps I'll return you Br Mary to take the holy Habit. Every thing as you wish and find suitable. You could also give me an account of the expenses incurred for Br Eugene, and you will keep an account of them. Br Anthelme Millot will remain at the expense of his family.*

*As for the Sisters of St Antoine, I don't well know what to say to you. You would do well perhaps to go and see them and advise them of the means to form, if it were possible, a foundation of Sisters in the diocese of Grenoble. It would, however, be preferable that this foundation be made in the diocese of Lyon. But, in everything, may the Divine will be accomplished.*

*I am still very happy with Br Timothée. My confrères send you warmest respects, and also to Fr Terrailon and your confrère. I am, with sincerest and most cordial affection,  
Your very humble and very devoted servant,*

*Colin.*

*P.S. I am going to write to my brother to come and spend a few days at Belley. If he can come, Br Eugene would be able to accompany him." <sup>1</sup>*

So far as can be judged from the first paragraph of this letter, it appears that, at one stage, whether to Bishop Devie or to Fathers Colin and Champagnat, there was a possibility that the Belley cathedral sacristy would be entrusted to Brothers of the Society of Mary, either Joseph or Marist. In the end, Devie called in the Holy Family Brothers, who took charge on 6 May 1835. This matter must be distinguished from the idea of a union between the Holy Family Brothers and the Marist Brothers, a project which arose in the following autumn.

Splendid example of an exhortation to selflessness as it is, this first paragraph can also be regarded as a manifestation of breast-beating on the part of Colin for not readily volunteering to help the bishop in his quest for sacristans.

It is quite likely that there is a reproof to Champagnat in the opening paragraph. Perhaps Colin was of the viewpoint that Champagnat, with Brothers at his disposition, should have been more willing to help the bishop of Colin's diocese, for a ready

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Fr Colin to Fr Champagnat, O.M. 1, Doc. 336.

and positive response on the part of Champagnat would certainly have helped Colin's situation with his bishop. Colin was probably unaware that Champagnat was opposed in principle to his Brothers' becoming sacristans; it was an apostolic work which caused big trouble for Champagnat in 1839 – the famous Verdelaï affair.

Poor Colin was still out of luck in getting rid of Br André – he was stuck with him until October!

Three years earlier Colin asked Champagnat to seek information at Grenoble about the Sisters of St Clair

– Courveille's group. Thus Colin would have been informed that the religious women brought together by Courveille had been at St Antoine since 1826; perhaps he had even made contact with them. In any case, it was to Champagnat they addressed themselves in the spring of 1835, perhaps with a view to union with the Marist Sisters, of which there was question later.

It was in October 1835 that Colin wrote to a Br Marie, advising him about the emission of vows. In the course of the letter Colin gives his views about Joseph Brothers and Marist Brothers:

*Belley, 3 October, 1835*

*My dear Brother Marie,*

*... As for what it is to be a Marist Brother or a Joseph Brother, it suffices that you know that the same Brother may, in the same day, be a Marist Brother and a Joseph Brother. He is a Marist Brother when he is occupied in instructing the children; he is a Joseph Brother when he is occupied in the forge or in the kitchen, and that applies even at the Hermitage. You see therefore that it is the employment alone which makes the distinction.<sup>2</sup>*

It is clear that this rough and ready distinction was bound to present problems in a situation which was already somewhat fraught and would become even more so as the number of Brothers increased. It is obvious that the two founders needed to work together on this topic. Unfortunately, the dis-

tinction between the two groups of Brothers was made only in 1839, and then it was made, not by the founders, but by an assembly of Marist priests.

Meanwhile, in regard to the archdiocese of Lyon, differences persisted between Colin and Champagnat

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Fr Colin to Brother Marie, O.M. 1, Doc. 345.

nat on the one hand and the priests at Valbenoîte (in the archdiocese of Lyon) on the other. Colin preferred a concentration in the Belley diocese, but he was dissuaded from that plan by Vicar General Cholleton of Lyon. In the following letter Colin asks that some of the Lyon group (not Cham-

pagnat) abandon their proposal for a foundation in the city of Lyon. The word “novitiate” in letters concerning this subject signifies not so much a house for novitiate training as such, but, rather, a house reserved to priest members - a residence where they could lead a religious life:

Belley, 19 January 1836

Father and very dear confrère,

*I feel prompted to write to you and I gladly follow this urge. Since I have been working for the Society of Mary, I have always made it a duty to follow the advice of Fr Cholleton and to be in agreement with him before taking action. In the present circumstance, I wish, with God's grace, to again follow this line of conduct more faithfully. So, in conformity with his advice, we have suspended all fresh endeavours to acquire a novitiate. I think it would be good to do the same in Lyon and to await the hour of Providence.*

*You remember that my confrères had thought they should elect from among us a centre of unity; and certainly this measure was quite natural and necessary for the success of our undertaking. I do not state what the result of this measure has been, but I must say this, and say it with all sincerity: For a long time now I have desired with all my heart to place into other hands, along with all the documents concerning the Society, this title of Superior which I have been given, and I hope to see my wish fulfilled very soon – the most ardent wish of my heart. I have always desired that the choice of the one who should walk at our head might fall on Fr Cholleton, but, while waiting for Providence to discharge him from his Vicar Generalship and place him publicly at our head, we should feel the necessity for a member fully devoted to the Society to become the central point, to direct all approaches to diocesan authorities and all new undertakings; otherwise we will do nothing solid and will destroy ourselves. Already in the past, imprudence and lack of unity have retarded the undertaking, have harmed it, and would certainly end by making it almost impossible.*

*It is this sentiment, this view of the attitudes of mind which make me say that we should conclude by concentrating ourselves in the Belley diocese until the new order, and in this I have expressed the wish of my heart far less than the necessity of circumstances.*

*What must we do, then, if we cling to the success of the work? We must pull together more than ever; we must undertake no approach to the Belley or Lyon administrations until after we have discussed the matter together. The assurance that I do nothing without Fr Cholleton should remove from you any anxiety, any fear that I take more interest in the Belley affairs than in those of Lyon. Moreover, here I wish to see only the general good of the Society, whose principal end is for us to be united and to work in concert with the bishops.*

*Finally, my dear confrère, I address myself to you, because it is in you and in Fr Pompallier that I have most confidence; it is in you two that I find most that religious spirit so necessary for the success of an undertaking. I am inclined to believe that it will be again through you that the Society will become consolidated in the diocese of Lyon. Think also of putting in order the branch of your Brothers. If I have time, I will seek how we will be able to bind them to the body of priests. Forward, courage. Let us agree together and strive by all the means of prudence and submission to their Lordships to give our undertaking a more uniform and firmer direction. Let us put aside all spirit of self-interest, of private viewpoint. It is for the same work that we are devoting our efforts; it is the general good of the Society that we ought to seek before all else. Let us ask the Lord to help us and enlighten us, especially in the choice of the subjects who present themselves, and to give us the true spirit of the Society, which ought to be a spirit of humility, of abnegation, and of devotedness. I am writing in similar vein to Fr Pompallier and to Fr Cholleton. Accept the assurance of my sincere attachment and of the respect with which I am, your very humble and obedient servant,*

*Colin, Superior*<sup>3</sup>

In this letter Colin makes it quite plain that he very much wants to resign from his position as Central Superior. It is also obvious that he wants his successor to be Vicar General Cholleton, who at that time was not a member of the Marist group.

Colin determines to leave to a later time the matter of choosing a novitiate house for Marist priests for both Belley and Lyon. His wish to concentrate in the diocese of Belley, if it meant transferring men from Lyon to Belley is, of course, a pipe dream, for Archbishop de Pins would not let his priests transfer to another diocese.

Colin pays a fine tribute to both Pompallier and Champagnat, but his mention of the Brothers – “how we will be able to bind them to the body of priests” sounds ominous, for his ideas and those of Champagnat on the status and the function of the Brothers were by no means similar.

Think also of putting in order the branch of your Brothers” probably refers to some form of canonical approbation.

The worries that motivated this letter, namely, dissatisfaction among some members of the Lyon group

<sup>3</sup> Letter of Fr Colin to Fr Champagnat, O.M. 1, Doc. 358.

about the pre-eminence of Belley in the management of Marist affairs, were blown away by good news emanating from Rome - Papal approval for the priests of the Society of Mary was imminent.

In a very short letter of 1 March 1836 Colin writes about some administrative matter.

He adopts an admonitory mode:

*I do not know whether you kept a deed, with corrections in the margin, concerning the latest contract of the Society. It cannot be found here. Would you please arrange for it to be sent to us. I was very grieved that you deposited your Society deed with the Notary at Saint Chamond. It was a trust deed which you may not deposit; it is Mr Bertholey who is the owner of it.  
All good things to you.*

Colin.<sup>4</sup>

The following letter seems to be a reply to one from Champagnat that has not been kept.

It refers to other letters from Rome which have not come down to us:

*My very dear confrère,*

*Belley, 11 April 1836.*

*I feel ashamed for not having earlier given you the glad news we have received from Rome. On 12 March last the question of the Society of priests was approved by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and, on the same day, His Holiness graciously approved the decree of the Sacred Congregation and ordered Apostolic letters in Brief form to be issued. That is what occupies me – the six letters received from Rome, two of them from Cardinals Castracane and Sala. I am so busy that I have been unable to give you the good news any sooner. Kindly have prayers of thanksgiving said and tell Fr Terrailon, whom I still love in spite of everything. Take care in selecting the Brothers whom you will be able to give for Polynesia. They must be good subjects, of sure virtue, fairly well instructed in religion and in all kinds of small tasks. I think the departure will take place sooner than we think; so have them ready.*

<sup>4</sup> Letter of Fr Colin to Fr Champagnat, AFM 122.28(?) A360301C.DOC

*I am very pleased that you are busy composing your Rule; that gives me great pleasure. But I am sorry you did not take advantage of Fr Depéry's stay in Paris to try to obtain the approbation of your Brothers; to me the occasion seemed favourable. We have noted down the Mass stipends you so kindly obtained for us, to a total of 800 francs. Accept my sincere thanks. Our missionaries have not yet returned. We Fathers, and also the Brothers, send you most respectful and affectionate good wishes. I am thinking of going to Lyons at the beginning of May; I would be very happy to meet you there. I have not time to re-read my letter. Good-bye. I embrace you with all my heart (toto corde), and am, with the most cordial friendship,  
Your very humble and obedient servant,*

*Colin, Superior.*

*P.S. I have spoken to you of one my brothers whom I would like to see die at the Hermitage if you could receive him. It is for his salvation that I desire to place him there; he is 55 years of age. He would live with your old retired men without, however, living on his private means.<sup>5</sup>*

Fr Depéry was secretary to the bishop of Belley and was in Paris to negotiate on the building of the cathedral at Belley. Champagnat did not favour the procedure proposed and made the journey to Paris himself in August.

Colin's brother Sebastien, born in 1782, had met with some reverses in business. He did not come to the Hermitage, but retired to an older brother's place and died there four years later. The 'vieux rentiers' were men with private means to support them. They would pay board and so help the Hermitage finances.

Cardinal Castracane had written to Colin on 11 March, assuring him that approval of the Society of Mary

was certain, especially because of the Marist commitment to the overseas mission in Oceania. Colin was obviously slack in telling Champagnat and other interested parties about the approval of the Marist Fathers by Rome. Perhaps the delay increased the volume of unconfined joy that welled in Marist hearts.

We note Colin's continued interest in the Marist vocation of Terrailon, an interest that eventually led to Terrailon's joining the group. We also remark the steady flow of Mass stipends. Colin's missionaries and seminary priest-teachers could readily celebrate Masses for the intentions of the stipend donors, for, not being in parish duties, they were not normally available to parishioners for Mass intentions.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Fr Colin to Fr Champagnat, O.M. 1, Doc. 380.

Hearing that the Papal Brief "Omnium Gentium" (although he had not yet received a copy of it) authorised the Marist priests to make vows,

Champagnat wrote to Colin to declare himself ready to make them. To this generous offer Colin, provisional Superior, replied:

*Belley, 23 June 1836.*

*My very dear confrère,*

*No doubt you know that the Brief of Approbation of the Society authorises us to elect a Superior General. Meanwhile, I am very far from wishing to consider myself as such, and hence of acting in that capacity. Until that election I fully agree to continue, as in the past, to be a rallying point, but I will take good care not to order or receive any vows.*

*It is not less true that your dispositions greatly edify me.*

*I very much wish that all the other confrères would think and act as you do.*

*I hope that in time God will give them this grace.*

*Father Mazelier wrote to me and sent the Prospectus of his congregation of Brothers.*

*He speaks to me of a union with the Marist Brothers, but he wishes that some of his Rules be retained, such as being able to send a Brother alone, who would then live with the parish priest.*

*I will await your advice before replying to him.*

*I do not know whether this is the right time to travel to Paris.*

*The Chambers close and the ministers will perhaps be very glad to rest for some time.*

*In any case, Fr Dépéry is returning to Paris; he should leave on Monday evening.*

*You could perhaps entrust your documents to him. He will see Canon Bétémps in Lyon.*

*You could send him your documents and recommendations and he will hand them to Fr Dépéry, who told me he would willingly look after them.*

*See what it suits you to do.*

*Fr Pompallier has just written to me. He has not been consecrated, but is getting ready for it.*

*I do not think he will come before the month of August.*

*The novitiate house is still the object of my solicitude.*

*We must of necessity have one if we want*

*to start anything good. Wherever it may be does not matter, provided that we find it and do the holy will of God. If you hear very soon of the intentions of the Lyon superiors, you will give me pleasure if you advise me. I now seem to see fewer difficulties in having this house in the diocese of Lyon.*

*If a providential occasion helps us to find one, I will accept it or, rather, I will be a party to it.*

*All the confrères embrace you in the hearts of Jesus and Mary. Let us pray and not cease praying.*

*I'm thinking of writing to Fr Terrailon soon if I can find a spare moment.*

*Meanwhile, induce him to examine carefully before God what Mary has a right to expect of him.  
The Brothers are well and offer their respects and sentiments of obedience.  
I have the honour to be, with cordial friendship and respect, very dear confrère,  
Your very humble and very devoted servant,*

*Colin, Superior"<sup>6</sup>*

In praising Champagnat's dispositions concerning the taking of vows, Colin seems to be afraid that certain aspirants to the Society were not as well decided about making their vows.

For a second time Colin recommends the procedure of attempting the legal authorisation of Champagnat's Brothers through the instrumentality of Fr Depéry.

Evidently, Champagnat still did not favour it and went to Paris himself in August.

In the paragraph before the customary final courtesies, there is a clear reference to Terrailon's religious profession in the Society of Mary, to which he was pledged at Fourvière as one of the first aspirants.

Towards the end of 1836, there arrived the following letter from Colin. He is in need of reinforcements:

*Lyon, 16 November 1836.*

*My very dear Brother,*

*My brother and I have been here since yesterday. We are thinking of blessing the house chapel on Saturday next, the nineteenth of the current month. I beg you to send Fr Besson to us. I would be very pleased if he arrives for Saturday so that, all together, we could establish rule and order in the house. As the house in Lyon is more important than any other, I therefore think it necessary that you leave us Brother Luke, who perfectly suits our situation. Therefore, please put Brother Felix in Luke's place and send Luke to us, if it is possible. I beg you to arrange to be sent to me the document of the Deed of Society of those priests of Valbenoîte, a document which you have in your possession. People ask for copies of the Prospectus of your establishment of Brothers; would you please pass on some copies to me? There is a request for you to provide Brothers for Draguignan, Department of Var. Give me your reply. As for what*

<sup>6</sup> Letter of Fr Colin to Fr Champagnat, O.M. 1, doc. 396.

*concerns the Sisters, about which you asked me, that is a matter that we can deal with only in personal conversation. I do not know when we will be able to see each other. Fr Besson can bring his effects, at least the essentials. I am writing to you very much in haste, and I have time only to tell you that I am, with respect, very dear confrère, your very humble and very obedient servant,*

*Colin, Superior<sup>7</sup>*

With Rome's approval of the Society, there arises the importance of a suitable novitiate for the formation of future Marist priests. Colin now has such a place in Lyon and wants Champagnat to send a Brother (Luke) who would be admirably suited for this situation. Also required are documents from the priests at Valbenoite, as well as copies of the Brothers' Prospectus.

It can be seen that, as the newly-elected Superior General of the Society of Mary, Colin is involving himself in all aspects of the Society – the transfer of priests and Brothers, recommendations for the opening of new schools for the Brothers, the affairs of the Sisters, etc. There seems to be a peremptory touch in the urgent order concerning the proposed change of Brothers, although the "if it is possible" is a softener.

*Belley, 1 March 1837.*

*Father Superior,*

*An increase of activity brought about by more than 80 of our students being afflicted by influenza has made me postpone replying to your latest letter. Nevertheless, I have arranged for a confrère to be requested to ask you to do nothing precipitate with Fr Douillet, and I dare to beg it of you again. An open rupture would harm the whole Society in the diocese of Grenoble, where the imprudences of Fr Courville are still freshly recalled. Remember that the spirit of the Lord is smooth and that we often obtain with time what at first we despaired of ever obtaining. Therefore, let us content ourselves with praying until the new situation arrives. When we shall see each other again around Easter time, we shall together take the prudent measures which God will suggest to us. I feel more and more the necessity of unity in our various enterprises and I occupy myself wholeheartedly at achieving this unity. Otherwise, the diverse branches of the Society will harm one*

<sup>7</sup> AFM 122.29 A361116C.DOC.

*another. And it often comes about that we do not see any trouble where, however, the Superiors detect several problems. I see that every day, and, in your dealings with Fr Douillet, if the matter were not of such a nature as to harm also the Society of priests, I would have abstained from giving you my advice, for reasons which I will unfold to you later on.*

*I have the honour of being, with respect, your very humble and very obedient servant,*

*Colin, Superior*

*P.S. I am thinking of writing to Fr Terrailon about my sentiments relative to our arrangements for the Marist Fathers.<sup>8</sup>*

In this letter there are messages to be read between the lines. “The spirit of God is gracious” implies that Champagnat is abrupt in his way of acting. “It often happens that we” (he probably means Champagnat) “see no inconvenience in situations where superiors see several.” The implication is: “So please cause no more trouble in the diocese of Grenoble by a sudden action taken in regard to Fr Douillet.” Colin may also mean that if superiors (Colin and Champagnat) are divided on a matter, there is sure to be misunderstanding.

Now, Champagnat’s Brothers had endured much from the local church authorities at La Côte-St-André, diocese of Grenoble, because of interference in the life of the Brothers by

Douillet and his woman servant. In the early years of the foundation, however, the same Douillet had brought eleven postulants to the Hermitage; thus, the area seemed good for vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life.

An additional reason for avoiding precipitate action lies in the reference to Courveille. Here Champagnat is reminded of the educational disaster of Courveille’s enterprises in the diocese of Grenoble. Hence Marists, as former associates of Courveille, must move cautiously.

We often obtain with time what at first we despaired of ever obtaining” is a key to an understanding of Colin and his mode of acting.

*My dear Superior,*

*Belley, 15 March 1837*

*Fr Depéry, Vicar General of Belley, has to go to Paris after Easter. He wants to obtain for you the approval of your Brothers. He therefore asks for:*

<sup>8</sup> AFM 1.2.2.17 370301C.DOC.

1. A copy of the documents sent to Paris to obtain this end; 2. An indication of the Office where the said documents are deposited and of the identity of the persons to whom you have confided them. Finally, he thinks that success would be surer if the Statutes of the congregations of Brothers already approved were to be submitted.

The bishop also appears to be disposed to have the establishment of St Didier approved. Would you consequently reply to me as soon as possible?

As we have many sick people at the seminary, Brother Paulin, who comes from Savcy, has been asked to carry out the functions of an infirmarian. If he can fit the situation, we would want to keep him. See if that is suitable to you. I am thinking of sending Brother Léon to you. I do not believe that this young man can succeed anywhere; he lacks both virtue and judgement.

I beg you to give me the result of your endeavours at Grenoble and to let me know the precise day of your meeting at Lyon with Fr Terraillon; we have to come to an agreement on several matters.

Accept the assurance of the respect with which I have the honour to be, Father,  
your very humble servant,

Colin, Superior.<sup>9</sup>

Here Colin again pushes Champagnat to accept the services of Fr Depéry in an endeavour to obtain legal authorisation for the Brothers, an offer that was not taken up by Champagnat. Out of deference to ecclesiastical authorities, Champagnat permitted a Marist Brothers' school to be set up at St Didier in 1836, but Bishop Devie and Champagnat failed to agree about the matter of a Brothers' novitiate, which the bishop was intent on having. The bishop, who had been Colin's prelate since 1824, was not pleased.

We again see the process of interchanging Brothers, a procedure which must have been inconvenient for Champagnat.

Also to be noted are Colin's continued interest in securing Terraillon for the Marists. Terraillon had pronounced vows with them in 1836 but had remained as parish priest of Notre Dame in St Chamond, thus living close to Champagnat. Colin also expresses his worry about affairs in the diocese of Grenoble (Champagnat's troubles with Douillet).

<sup>9</sup> AFM 1.2.2.18.B A370315C.DOC

*Belley, 22 June 1837*

*My very dear confrère,*

*Brother Paulin asks me to involve myself with you on his behalf. I replied that that he must deal with this matter with his immediate Superior, that I shall look on him as being of the Society only in as much as you will accept him. See what you think can be done. He appears to be very repentant. I do not think that he is an extraordinary subject.*

*A young fellow of fifteen years, brother of two Sisters of Bon Repos, has been presented to us. I am thinking of sending him to you; he will be able to pay for his novitiate.*

*I should very much like you to write to me about the old Mr Villot - what he is doing, if you are happy with him, what you think of him. They are looking for a place for him and I hope not to leave it for a long time. Try to be patient. If you yourself find a place for him, you could give me your opinion about it. The good Lord will recompense you for your charity. The Brothers are going along as usual and offer you their respects. It seems to me that you are not looking after your health well enough. Try to look after yourself a little more in this regard. My respects to Fr Terrailon.*

*I have the honour of being, with respect, your very humble and very obedient servant,*

*Colin, Superior.*

*P.S. All your confrères at Belley embrace you <sup>10</sup>*

Colin shows a brotherly touch in his obvious concern for Champagnat's health. The bulk of the letter is concerned with the suitability or otherwise of a Brother (Paulin) and also of some applicants for admission to the Brotherhood. Terrailon is again mentioned.

In all probability the name "Villot" is a misprint for "Millot", one of the

nephews of Jeanne Marie Chavoin. Colin would be very interested in this young man, partly for her sake. He had known the Millot family from early days at Cerdon; hence Colin's continued interest. This young man made temporary vows as a Marist Brother in 1835, renewed them in 1836, but after 1837 no longer appeared on the list of professed Brothers.

<sup>10</sup> AFM 1.2.2.19 A370622C.DOC.

Lyon, 7 August 1837.

My very dear confrère,

*I am late in replying to your letter. But in addition to my being very busy, I do not really know what to tell to you about this acquisition that you are asking me about. The Brothers' branch has not yet the settled basis on which we can establish a reply to the question. Will the specific establishments of the Brothers have funds or fixed revenue belonging to the Society or to each particular establishment? Or will they have only the salary provided by the parishes with the monthly payments of the children? There are so many important points which it would be necessary to determine. Then it would be easy to reply to the question proposed.*

*In any case, let us pray with fervour. Perhaps we are too much neglecting this unique means which we possess of knowing the will of God and of succeeding in our enterprises. I feel impelled to counsel you to suspend for three months every kind of project in order to occupy yourself entirely in setting up, and putting on a firm footing, your Mother House and your own establishments, and to so well regulate all your affairs that, if you were to die in three months' time, all would be in order.*

*I beg you as a friend and a confrère to occupy yourself less with exterior affairs than with spiritual affairs - those of your community. Your health will be better for it - and so will your soul.*

*I do not think that the moment has come for giving priority to similar arrangements for the priests' establishments. We do not yet offer enough guarantees and we would inspire mistrust.*

*Fr Chomel, curate of Tarentaise, is asking to enter the Society. Would you examine his vocation and tell me what you think about the matter? Yesterday I saw Fr Paullier. As for the Brothers at Fourvière, he will accept them with their habit. He asks for only two of them; but we have postponed matters until the month of September and have taken this period to examine things before God.*

*I should like to know whether we could make our Retreat on 11 September, that is to say, begin it. I have not time to check my letter. I am going to set out for Belley again. Your very humble brother,*

Colin, Superior<sup>11</sup>

Obviously, there is reference here to some purchase that Champagnat has asked to make. We may notice a sharpness of tone in "You move too quickly." In all the instructions given here by Colin we can detect an attempt, if not to organise Champagnat's life and work, at least to ensure that all is in order with Champagnat's affairs. Now

that the Society of Marist priests has been approved by Rome, Colin is becoming more and more aware of financial and property implications for the Marist priests' branch and also for the 'dependent' branches - those of the Sisters and the Brothers. He wants to restrain Champagnat in property affairs - hence the three months' moratorium.

<sup>11</sup> CSG 01, 230 A 370809C.Doc.

In asking Champagnat to assess the Marist vocation of Fr Chomel, Colin is displaying much trust in Champagnat's judgement in this matter. And once again Colin concerns himself with the possibility of another apostolic opening for the Brothers, just as he also shows himself worried about what he considers to be Champagnat's over-involvement with "exterior affairs". Of course, he may also be

anxious lest Champagnat should over-commit himself financially. Whatever be the sundry reasons for the letter, however, Colin, as religious Superior, does give a fine instruction about the benefits of prayer and about concentrating on the spiritual - "let us pray with fervour". He argues that Champagnat's health will benefit thereby. "And so will your soul" is a fine climactic (and melodramatic) touch.

29 September 1837

*My very dear confrère,*

*I have found the means to send all the Brothers of Belley to the Retreat. I hope that you will send them all back to me or that you will replace them advantageously for me. Br Timothy is absolutely necessary at Belley; kindly do not retain him. I am also sending you a novice, Mr Bellimas. I would be very much at ease if he were to receive the holy habit following the Retreat. Besides, I shall arrive at the Hermitage before the end of your Retreat.*

*I beg you to agree that my brother and Fr Convers go to St Etienne during your Retreat. Fr Lagnier will replace them. The absence of my brother would be too long if he were to go to St Etienne only after your Retreat.*

*Pray very much that the good Lord will provide me with the means of giving you help as soon as possible. I ask Him for this grace every day; I feel that you have need of it.*

*From motives of compassion and charity, and also to remove him from your location, I have allowed Mr Millot to come to see his parents at Belley. He is neither novice nor theologian. Already I have been busy finding a place for him. Incidentally, it is not the superior of Bon Repos who induced me to take the stand that I have taken; it is only the desire to get him away from your location.*

*Through an upright person of Faith, I am led to believe that the parish priest of Tarentaise has been more than once led into error. I shall speak to you at length about the matter in question.*

*I embrace you with a full heart. Your very humble servant,*

*Colin, Superior.*<sup>12</sup>

There is a strong note of command in the first paragraph in the reference to Br Timothy. For Champagnat, the

schools would need the best men available, so Colin's claim for the Brothers he had at his disposal previously or

<sup>12</sup> Marist Brothers' Archives, Rome.

for even more suitable ones shows that he is perhaps not fully aware of the multiplicity of demands on Champagnat for religious staff. Perhaps, with due consideration on his part, he honestly feels that his needs have priority over those of most of the other claimants.

We again see Colin's concern for Millot (Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn's nephew), who had withdrawn from

Champagnat's Brothers. According to Fr Jean Coste, Millot, on leaving the Society in 1837, set himself up as a teacher in St-Victor-sur-Rhins, where he died in 1840.

The reference to the parish priest of Tarentaise shows that Colin does not live in the isolation of an ivory tower. He is aware of local events, even those as far away as Tarentaise.

12 October 1837.

*My very dear confrère,*

*I saw Fr Douillet yesterday. I told him that you did not accept the conditions which he proposed. But, moving on from that matter, I found him to be a straightforward and good man who can render service to the Society. I promised him to write to you and to ask you to send him Brothers as usual. And I er join on you to do so. At the same time, you could write to him that you do not agree at all with his conditions, but that we shall go, you and I, to see him after All Saints, and that then all three of us together will seek to establish solid and favourable bases to arrangements concerning both the establishment at Côte-Saint-André and the Society. If, in this visit, we can settle nothing nor come to an agreement, then we will be patient for a year. We shall speak to the bishop of Grenoble, and, the following year, you shall make the changes at La Côte which you wish to make. Remember that you have obligations to all dioceses and that you must manage affairs in all of them. I should not see a great difficulty in there soon being at La Côte a good novitiate, provided that it be directed in the same spirit as that of the Hermitage and that it always remain under your guidance. Therefore, send immediately at least one Brother to the house at Lyon; Brother Luke cannot manage alone. You know that, necessarily, there has to be two of them. If Br Benoît does not wish to come back, send us someone who is strong, who can work the garden. Also send back right away to Belley the two who are to depart. If you still can do without Br Marie, we shall receive him with pleasure. I embrace you with all my heart. Your very humble servant,*

*Colin, Superior*<sup>13</sup>

The Douillet affair shows Colin's prudent intervention in retaining Champagnat's Brothers in the dio-

cese of Grenoble. Champagnat had endured much from Douillet's interference with the life and work of his

<sup>13</sup> CSG 01, 235 A371028C.DOC.

Brothers at La Côte-St-André and was strongly inclined to withdraw them. Colin, however, was conscious of Courveille's failure in this diocese and was anxious not to place the Marists in further disrepute with the locals by the withdrawal of the Marist Brothers. Moreover, he also saw possibilities for a Brothers' novitiate there. The same Douillet had been responsible for sending postulants to the Hermitage, so this was another reason for treading warily. Colin's formula for a long period of review, as outlined in this letter, again shows his "festina lente" approach.

Remember that you have obligations to all dioceses and that you must manage affairs in them all", that is, Champagnat must arrange affairs with all diocesan authorities and that he must have care for all his men, wherever they be placed. Perhaps

there is a suggestion here that the Brothers working in the Fathers' houses might be neglected.

"So send at least one Brother to the house in Lyon; Br Luke cannot manage all by himself." Colin is ever anxious to supply the priests' houses with a sufficient number of Brothers, both Marist and Joseph, to maintain the priests' residences.

Colin pays a fine compliment to Champagnat when he speaks about the possibility of setting up a novitiate in La Côte St André. His words, "provided that it be directed in the same spirit as that of the Hermitage and that it always remain under your guidance" are an acknowledgement of Champagnat's capacity for forming men. For a man not particularly noted for bestowing kudos, Colin here pays tribute to Champagnat's worth.

19 October 1837

*My very dear confrère,*

*We are awaiting the Brothers with all the more impatience because we have an ever-greater need of them. I am astonished that you have not sent us at least two – Br André and Br Mary - or others. Would you please send them to us straightaway? The Feast of All Saints approaches and preparations for the re-entry of the children keep us waiting for them, for we are so over-loaded with affairs. I beg you also to send Bellamaz to us this year, the one whom I sent to you without the habit. Let him bring back his ordinary clothing, for at times he will have need of it. Would you tell Fr Voron, of St Jean Bonnefonds, that I cannot find a place for him. We can only send him back to the place where I believe that he would be able succeed.*

*Fr Chanut will remain with you to help you, and Fr Lagniet will come to La Favorite in the capacity of chaplain for the time being.  
Please accept the expression of my sincere attachment. Your very devoted and very humble servant,*

*Colin, Superior”<sup>14</sup>*

I am astonished that you have not sent at least two...” The general tone here is one of impatience and urgency concerning the supply of Brothers for the priests’ houses. Fr Lagniet, mentioned here, was to become a significant member of the Society of Mary as a Provincial, an Assistant-General and a historian. Chanut is also of significance, for he was to become the “spark” that led

to the explosive letter from Colin to Champagnat in 1839.

La Favorite at this time was a boarding school conducted by the Tertiary Brothers of Mary, Pompallier being the first chaplain. The gardens of this property were designed by the famous Le Nôtre, one of the outstanding landscape gardeners of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

*Belly, 27 October 1837*

*My very dear confrère,*

*Remember that the Brother whom I ask you for is continually in the midst of children who come from select families, and that, consequently, it is necessary that he have a certain bearing, an appearance of education. It is also necessary that he has a good hand for writing and that he be sound from the point of view of morals, for he sleeps in the children’s dormitory and is obliged at every moment to render them services which demand of him a tested virtue. Can you count on a novice whom you know only from outsiders’ reports? I have asked for Bellimaz because I feared to have another less capable than he, and, besides, all these changes give trouble to my whole household. According to all reports, I very much doubt that Brother Fabien can replace Brother Marie, who, besides, voluntarily consented to come back.*

*I am quite willing to put myself out in order to please you, but it is also necessary that you seek to give us what is reasonably necessary for us, for otherwise you would put us into an embarrassing situation, and you would give your priest confrères an unfavourable idea of your Brothers if you were*

<sup>14</sup> AFM 1.2.2.22 A371019C. DOC.

*not to give us someone capable. I therefore rely on you for the choice of the Brothers whom you are going to send us - except that I shall complain if you treat us badly and if I have to provide myself in some other manner.*

*It is in the interest of the Society that the priests' houses be well served, and, for that, if it is necessary, that we make even fewer establishments.*

*I am thinking about a great reform in the government and the management of the Brothers and I expect from you a truly religious obedience which will be for your renown and your happiness. But beforehand, let us pray with fervour that the good Lord may enlighten us and give his spirit to you. I should not want, for anything in the world, to put forward into my plans one ounce of my ideas, because I am sure that the good Lord would cease to bless us. To me your own ideas seem too fixed on certain points, and I doubt that, in this matter, you are accomplishing the will of God.*

*Providence has provided you with Fr Chanut to assist you. Form him well; avoid treating affairs in an abrupt manner; in addition, avoid all kind of joking, which I regard as entirely opposed to the religious spirit.*

*Our friendly greetings to all the confrères. I shall write to Fr Lagniet to outline for him his course of action at la Favorite. Meanwhile, tell him that he will have to concern himself only with the purely spiritual affairs of the house, that he will place himself beyond all other matters.*

*I embrace you, as well as all the Brothers, and especially Brother Francois, with sincere affection, and I am, with respect, your very humble servant,*

*Colin, Superior*<sup>15</sup>

Colin requests a Brother who presents well, has some education, is a good hand at writing, is reliable as to morals...“But I shall complain if you send me a poor one.” This is a somewhat sharp comment. Colin also hints that the priests will form the impression that Champagnat is not discerning enough in the choice of Brothers sent to them. He thus introduces what could be taken as an unfair tactic –trying to influence Champagnat by suggesting that there will be a lowering of the esteem in which he is held by his fellow Marist priests.

Let the priests' houses be well served, even if it is necessary to found fewer establishments”. A priority is stated here which suggests that serving the priests' houses should be the primary function of the Brothers. If the “fewer establishments” refers to the Brothers' houses, which indeed it seems to do, then Colin is perhaps suggesting that teaching Brothers should fill the gaps in the servicing of the priests' houses.

I doubt if in this you are doing the will of God”.

<sup>15</sup> AFM 1.2.2.23 A371027C.DOC.

This is a strong attack on Champagnat by his religious superior.

Avoid treating affairs in an abrupt manner; avoid all manner of joking, which I consider to be entirely opposed to the religious spirit.” Annoyance is clearly shown here, as well as a jaundiced attitude to joking. It is quite clear that Colin is under strain.

A great reform in the government and the management of the Brothers” sounds ominous, but Colin did

not take immediate measures to implement this “great reform”. Actually, it was the assembly of Marist priests in 1839 which determined to separate the Joseph Brothers and the Marist Brothers –a decision which, taken earlier, would have prevented much strain and heartache.

The reference to forming Chanut well is, in the light of subsequent events, ironic, for Chanut was the one whose projects brought about an angry outburst from Colin against Champagnat.

*Belley, 26 December 1837.*

*My very dear Brother,*

*On the very day of my departure from Lyon, Mr. Burgos, who comes, I think, from Saint Etienne, and who was Principal at the College of Villefranche and in another college for twelve years, came to present himself for entry into the Society. He is aged forty-seven and is a man well-educated and accustomed to managing affairs. After I had conferred with Fr Cholleton, it was settled that we would ask you to receive him at your place in the belief that he will be able to be useful to you. He will pay 500 francs for the first year. Later on, something will be paid for him if he remains in your house. But it is appropriate that I tell you that this man has caused a lot to be said about him - I think in respect to the moral viewpoint. He was interdicted, but it is now a year since he came back to self-examination; he has been given back the right to celebrate Mass. The Curé of Ars, who converted him, advised him to enter the Society. You are well aware that we cannot receive him at Lyon. I do not see that the same difficulty obtains for receiving him at the Hermitage - as a retired priest paying for his board and lodging. I leave you free to take whatever action you wish. Speak about it only to Fr Terrailon. If you think that you can receive him, write to him. His address is: Fr Burgos, priest, at Glezé Saint Roch, Ly Villefranche. If you cannot receive him, you will also write to him to let him know the impossibility that you are in about receiving him at your house.*

*It seems to me that there would not be any grave inconvenience in accepting him at the Hermitage as a priest in retirement, and you would be able to make use of him for your ordinary letter-writing. They say that he has come back to God with sincerity. If you decide to receive him, you will explain to him that you cannot admit him to the Society, nor give him hope that that he will be received into it, but that, on the advice of Fr Cholleton, you will offer him a place of retreat in your house.*

*If you see Fr Chanut, kindly tell him that I want him to establish himself in the Lyon house, where he will soon be charged with all the dealings with the public and with the direction of temporal affairs. Nevertheless, he will be able to preach the Lenten sermons at Valbenoite. I am writing to you *currente calamo* "(in some haste)". You will guess what you cannot read. I embrace you with a full heart, and I am, with the most sincere affection, your very humble servant.*

*Colin, Superior*

*P.S. If you do not want to write to Fr Burgos, you will let me know your intentions and I shall transmit them to him."*<sup>16</sup>

Here is a request by Colin that Champagnat please accept the priest converted by the Curé of Ars. Why would Colin send him to the Hermitage when Champagnat was so busy? Nevertheless, it is a tribute to the spirit that Champagnat maintained at the Hermitage, one of peace and recollection where spiritual strength may develop. The request also shows that Colin feels he can call on his friend Champagnat,

who in the past had so frequently helped out.

Terraillon is mentioned yet again. Colin continues to throw these two men together; he wants unity in the ranks of his priests.

Chanut seems to be a rising star. In a few short years he will plummet from favour – and from the ranks of the Marists.

*Bellefleur, 10 January 1838*

*My very dear confrères in Jesus and Mary,*

*The latest letter from Valparaiso dated the first days of August tells us that Bishop Pompallier and our other confrères and Brothers were still in that city, but were about to embark again for their destination. We can therefore reasonably presume that they have at present arrived in the midst of their poor islanders, that their feet are treading on that primitive land, the object of their most ardent desires, that land which, in the designs of Providence, has become the shared lot of the children of Mary. Our duty to ourselves, we who are deprived of the happy distinction of being able to share the honourable work of our very worthy confrères, is to think of procuring for them some workers full of the spirit of God who, under the auspices of the most tender, as of the most powerful, of Mothers, fly to their aid and hasten to go to help them to open up this sterile ground.*

<sup>16</sup> Marist Brother' Archives, Rome.

*Already, the Pastor of pastors, the Sovereign Pontiff, through the voice of his ambassador Franzoni, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, who wrote to us on the date of 26th of last December, urges us to send them the support of apostles and to carry out this dispatch *quam optime fieri potest*"(as best as it is able to be done)". As a consequence, my very dear Brothers, we shall hasten to carry out at the soonest possible moment the preparations for the departure of three or four priests with two Brothers catechist.*

*Without doubt, it is not for me a small consolation to see the zeal of several of you who are ardently requesting to become part of this second apostolic group. And, certainly, this pure and generous zeal is not to my eyes the least mark of the protection of heaven on our enterprise. It is not the difficulty of finding workers but rather that of making a choice among them which is going to embarrass me, for, in view of our number, we cannot allow to depart all those who are asking to do so. It is in this that I feel, more than anywhere else, all the weight of my position; it is in this, here and now, that I require that all the members of the Society unite with me to pray with fervour to Jesus and Mary that they come to my help, that they enlighten me and make me know those whom they destine for the sublime vocation of the apostolic mission, for such a sublime vocation can come only from on high. That is why I ask all the members of the Society, in whatever branch to which they may belong, to be kind enough to redouble their fervour and to offer to God specifically for my intentions, from here until the Feast of the Purification: 1. An hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament; 2. From each priest, at least one Mass; from Each Brother and each Sister, three Communions; from all, three Aves each day. Each one will be able to add the other prayers which zeal will inspire, such as the offering of the Holy Office and the Rosary. You may even invite the holy people with whom you would have some contact to unite their prayers to ours for the same purpose. It is with the sentiments of the most tender affection that I dare to call myself, very dear confrères and Brothers, your very humble and very obedient servant,*

*Colin, Superior*

*P.S. Kindly read this letter to all the Brothers."*<sup>17</sup>

This is a fine letter of exhortation from a religious leader in stirring his men and women to a life of fervent prayer, with the special intention of praying for the success of the foreign mission and for the welfare of the missionaries.

He also begs them to pray that he may be guided from on high in the

selection of missionaries and in the management of mission affairs.

It is important to note that, despite the multifarious tasks that came Colin's way as Superior General of a new religious Institute, he gives high priority to prayer and to matters concerning the spiritual life and our dependence on God.

<sup>17</sup> AFM 1.2.2.24 A380110C.DOC.

1 March 1838

*My very dear Brother,*

*For the moment we have no need of Brother Paulin. I was astonished that he came in this way. Moreover, I do not believe that he can be suitable for the houses of the Fathers.*

*The archbishop desires that, during Easter, Fr Besson may be able to hear confessions at Isieux, where the parish priest is ill. He could go there three days per week, if that is possible.*

*I do not know whether you have obtained a deed, corrected in the margin, of the most recent Deed of the Society; we have not found it here.*

*Kindly have it passed on to us. I have been very troubled that you deposited your Society deed with the Notary of St Chamond. It was a confidential deed which you could deposit only with Mr Bittoly, who is its owner.*

*Every best wish to you,*

Colin <sup>18</sup>

Colin is grieved that “you have deposited your Act of Society with the Notary in St Chamond”.

This is perhaps because a legal man, Viennot, had just joined the Fathers as a postulant and was putting deeds, etc. in good order.

This is another letter of complaint about the Hermitage in regard to its legal affairs. The priest mentioned here, Fr Besson, was to spend thirty years as chaplain to the Little Brothers of Mary, to whom he was devoted and who loved him dearly.

Lyon, 14 July 1838

*My very dear Brother,*

*I do not think that Brother Régis is called to the Mission of Oceania. Kindly replace him as soon as possible and have the habits and shoes of the Brothers who are leaving made up in such a way that all will be ready at the first opportunity. You would surely have been destined to receive the income of Bishop Pompallier and we would have arranged for it to be passed on to him.*

*I told Brother Jean François Régis that I was deciding nothing in regard to his vocation to the*

<sup>18</sup> Marist Brothers' Archives, Rome.

*ecclesiastical state; that, if he were to come out of the Brothers' community, he would be relieved of his vows, but that it was left to him alone to bear the whole responsibility for his request. Brother Amiens has been sick since your departure from Lyon. He has suffered rather strong nervous attacks and blood has been drawn from his arm. The doctor was the first to recommend the country air for him. Kindly replace him immediately, for Brother Luke is also ill. You see our embarrassment and you understand our position. Brother Adolphe would suit perfectly; we must not have here either a novice or one of feeble health, but a skillful Brother, intelligent and capable of managing the kitchen. Perhaps, with time, we shall end up by forming a corps of Brothers solely destined for the service of the priests. I embrace you with my whole heart. I am, with respect, your very humble servant,*

*Colin, Superior.*

*P.S. Kindly tell Fr Besson that he is called to make his vows; that either he will be able to come at his leisure to make a Retreat at Lyon or that he may await the general Retreat of the holidays.”<sup>19</sup>*

Colin is again complaining about the quality of the Brothers sent to help in the Fathers' houses. Possibly some of the Fathers were saying that Champagnat did not give enough thought to the choice of the Brothers he sent them, that he was more concerned with staffing the schools with competent men and that those Brothers who were not good enough for school were the ones who came to the priests' houses. Well, what else could Champagnat do, always being at a stretch to supply both teaching Brothers and 'service' Brothers? Moreover, in regard to the Brothers he sent to the priests' houses, Champagnat would be

thinking of his young men being away up there in Belley – or wherever – among a community of strangers, possibly with no one to help them and with no one responsible for their welfare.

Perhaps with time we shall end up by forming a corps of Brothers solely destined for the service of the priests.” This is the “magic formula” adopted at the priests' gathering in 1839. It seems strange that both Colin and Champagnat were so long in coming to this decision. No doubt, and we shall see this later, they had their reasons for not arriving earlier at this arrangement.

<sup>19</sup> AFM 1.2.2.25 A380714C. DOC.

Belley, 22 February, 1839

Father and very dear Brother,

Already four or five times I have invited you or entreated you to send a Brother to Father Chanut in the diocese of Bordeaux. My request, so often repeated, shows you the importance I attach to the act of obedience which I expect of you. Remember that Mary our Mother, whom we ought to take as model, after the Ascension of her divine Son busied herself completely with the needs of the apostles. This is also one of the first ends of the congregations of the Brothers and the Marist Sisters with regard to the priests of the Society, so that these, entirely relieved from temporal worries, may devote themselves more freely to the salvation of souls. A Brother in the service of the Fathers of the Society does twenty times more good, in my opinion, than if he were employed in a town where, thank God, means for the instruction of youth are not lacking to-day. But you have never been able to understand well this plan and this end of the Society. Whatever it may be, after the reception of this letter, you will spend three days in a kind of Retreat in order to humble yourself before God for having, up to now, done so badly His divine Will under certain aspects, and then you will choose the Brother or novice whom you judge before God to be most suitable for making the journey by himself from Lyon to Bordeaux, for managing the house, and for forming, together with Father Chanut, other Brothers to the spirit of the Society. Do not forget that full and entire obedience is always blessed by God and that it ought to be the distinctive character of the children of Mary. It will be your security and the foundation of your greatest reward. Kindly receive the assurance of the sincere attachment with which I have the honour to be, my dear confrère,  
Your very humble and very obedient servant,

Colin, Superior

*P.S. I recommend you not to oppose any reasoning or delay to the request I am making you for a Brother for Verdelaïs. A letter I have received just now from Bordeaux insists on the sending of two Brothers, one to direct the works of the property, the other for the kitchen. Already they have several novices. It is necessary, then, as far as possible, to send at least one intelligent Brother. Father Chanut pays the travelling expenses."*<sup>20</sup>

This is the famous strong letter of Colin to Champagnat. The latter was very reluctant to let his men go to Verdelaïs, which was at a great distance from the Hermitage and there-

fore a lonely place for his Brothers. He was probably afraid that Brothers at Verdelaïs would be asked to take on sacristan duties, an apostolate which Champagnat did not want his

<sup>20</sup> AFM 1.2.2.30 A390222C. DOC.

Brothers to pursue. Again, Champagnat knew Chanut (the Marist priest in charge at Verdélais) and may not have been enthusiastic about his Brothers being under Chanut's leadership. There was also the fact that there were many other urgent calls for the services of the Brothers, principally for schools – the normal apostolate for Marist Brothers.

There is no evidence that Champagnat had received a direct order from Colin in this matter. Colin himself says, "I have invited you or entreated you." Had Champagnat received a direct order, no doubt he would have obeyed – as he did with the order to "spend three days in a kind of Retreat in order to humble yourself before God". As in other instances, Champagnat simply deferred action.

In a letter to Br Marie-Laurent a few months later (8 April 1839)

Champagnat wrote: "We are about to send some Brothers to Bordeaux." Champagnat was willing but, on this occasion, his Brothers were not sent. Colin had become alarmed about Chanut's independent way of acting at Verdélais and eventually quarrelled with Chanut. This falling-out resulted in Champagnat's Brothers being no longer required; it ultimately resulted in Colin's dismissal of Chanut from the ranks of the Marists.

A Brother in the service of the Fathers of the Society does twenty times more good, in my opinion, than

if he were employed in a town." Here is Colin's real set of values – Brothers are really for service to the priests of the Society. And this is true – for the coadjutor Brothers. But the bulk of Champagnat's men did not join for the purpose of manual service but rather for the teaching apostolate. Moreover, there were some Marist Brothers who, not being teachers, were engaged in manual occupations, but who wanted to be in an Institute of Brothers only. Colin did not pay enough attention and respect to the differentiation between Joseph and Marist Brothers.

Drawing a parallel between the Blessed Virgin's service to the Apostles and the Brothers' service to the priests, as Colin does on this occasion, is not really a fair comparison.

Despite a long series of problems with Colin about the service of Marist Brothers in the priests' houses, this awkward situation dragged on. Both Colin and Champagnat held back from an early attempt at a solution. As things stood, Colin could still turn to Champagnat for a supply of Marist Brothers to help in the priests' houses. For Champagnat, however, the position was more complicated. He was certainly opposed to the separation of the Marist Brothers from the other branches of the Society of Mary, partly because he believed in the unity of the branches under the one Superior General; after all, such was the Pledge of Fourvière, and he was devotee of that Pledge. In addition, he desired to keep the

Brothers within the framework of the Society, for he did not want to see any possible weakening of the Brothers' position. He probably saw safety for the Brothers in their being within the framework of a Society whose priests' branch had recently received Papal approbation. In that way their governance could transcend control by diocesan bishops.

Notwithstanding the opposition of Champagnat and some of the older priests, the majority of Marist priests voted for the separation of the two groups of Brothers at a gathering of priests in 1839. The Joseph Brothers

were now to be part of the priest's branch (as in the original idea of the Society) and directed by the leader of the priests; they were to have their own separate novitiate. The teaching Marist Brothers were also to be regarded as part of the Society and were to be ultimately subject to the Superior General of the priests. But their immediate direction was in the hands of, first, Champagnat, and then a Brother Director General. At this 1839 meeting, despite the protestations of those opposed to separation, the decision to have two distinctive groups of Brothers was taken. It was overdue; it was also correct.

Lyon, 29 February, 1840

Father and very dear Brother,

*In my journey to Belley, the bishop expressed to me his desire that the estate that he purchased at St Didier be taken as a deduction from the sum which he is giving to the Brothers. I promised him to speak to you about it. As the Brothers will enjoy the fruits of the estate, I think that these fruits will compensate quite easily for the funds (destined for the Brothers) that he disbursed for the estate. He also spoke to me of the novitiate. I told him that I shall speak to you again about it, but that that matter concerns you alone. The bishop also thinks that you will succeed in having your Brothers approved only by re-presenting the Statutes of a Congregation of Brothers already approved, and by asking only for an extension of the ordinance of approbation.*

*I received with pleasure your reply and that of the Brothers to my letter on our future arrangements. As I have often told you, we shall never have any difficulty between the two of us. I shall make my observations and I shall expose my ideas, which I am very far from believing to be infallible. If they are not to your taste, I shall be the first to renounce them.*

*In order to link the branch of the Fathers and that of the Brothers I had believed that we must establish between them a type of mutual dependence by putting the two branches in the necessity of running from one to the other in times of need. I did not see any difficulty about the Brothers' changing habits in passing from one house to another, all the more so in that it was in the interests of the Fathers that this transfer should take place only in real need. I found that, since even at the*

*Hermitage the Brothers change habits for work, the arrangement could take place for the time that the Brothers would pass in our houses. Moreover, I do not think that there would be difficulty for the teaching Brothers to interchange some novices for our houses, and it was by this means that I was thinking of attaching the two branches to one another by putting them in the situation of rendering mutual service.*

*But, since these items appear to present some difficulties to you and also to the Brothers, since some repugnance can be felt about them, I voluntarily renounce them. Thus there will no longer be any question of changing habits or of receiving postulants into your houses for us. Providence will provide. The habits of Brothers Luke and Aurélien have been made; they are waiting to be taken and for me to give them permission about it. I wanted to give permission only after your reply. But I shall postpone this permission and, if you think it a good thing, I shall seek to replace them at the earliest possible time, for I see a grave inconvenience in having in our houses two types of Brothers.*

*In having Brothers to be at our disposition, we are coming back to the first ideas. We believe that that conforms to the will of God and even that it is necessary for the priests' branch. Moreover, you know as well as I do that several times you yourself have suggested it, and that most of the confrères have declared themselves in favour of this measure. Because of this changing of the habit, and of the Brothers, I see, to my great regret, a difficulty in the beginning, in that the teaching Brothers will end up in our priests' houses. You will feel this as I do, but later this difficulty will disappear. In spite of everything, my desire is to regulate things so well that later on everything will go along peacefully and according to the spirit of God. I cannot dispense myself from telling you that, while you are living, I can scarcely engage myself with the teaching Brothers. As a consequence, you can continue to govern them according to the spirit of God, as in the past, and if, by reason of your vows, you feel that you have need of whatsoever permissions, I give them to you in as much as it is in my power to do so.*

*Please accept the sentiments of affection and respect with which I have the honour to be, your very humble and very obedient servant,*

*Colin, Superior*

*P.S. My warm expressions of friendship to the Brothers."<sup>21</sup>*

Champagnat was not enthusiastic about having a novitiate at St Didier. He was, however, conscious of the association of Colin with Bishop Devie and, in a spirit of obedience, went along with the plan. Eventually, the

novitiate idea was dropped, much to the bishop's disappointment.

The tone of this letter, especially in the second and fourth paragraphs, is very respectful and affectionate.

<sup>21</sup> CSG 01, 316 A400229C.DOC.

In taking Brothers for our service”- i.e. for the service of the Fathers - “we are going back to the early ideas.” The early ideas did indeed include co-adjutor Brothers for the service of the Fathers, but Champagnat had convinced his fellows of the Fourvière Pledge to include teaching Brothers in the Society of Mary and had been commissioned by them to look after these teaching Brothers. Part of the problem was that Champagnat also accepted men who were not suited for teaching or who wanted to do work other than teaching but who still wanted to belong to Champagnat’s Brothers. Since, in the very early days, no re-

cruiting of co-adjutor Brothers, as such, took place, Champagnat’s men came to be employed in helping the priests in their ministry.

I see, to my great regret, a difficulty in the beginning in that the teaching Brothers will end up in our priests’ houses.” This would indeed create a situation fraught with difficulty; there would be dissatisfaction all around.

As his Superior in religion, Colin gives Champagnat permission, to the extent of his own powers, to carry out the management of the affairs of the Brothers as Champagnat sees fit.

Lyon, 24 April 1840

*My very dear Brother,*

*This week some unexpected affairs arose depriving me of the pleasure of coming to you. I therefore profit from the journey of Fr Girard to St Etienne to learn from him how your health is faring. Take good care of yourself! I very much hope to go to see you in a little time. Alas! I very much dread the gap which will follow if the Lord calls you to Himself. God’s will be done! But this fear suggests to me the idea of putting the branch of the teaching Brothers back into the hands of the archbishop. It seems to me that there will be advantages for it.*

*Without doubt the archbishop will nominate a Marist priest to take care of it, and this co-operation with the first authority will turn out for the good of all. Pass on this idea to the two Brothers, François and Louis Marie, and all pray to the Lord to make known to us His divine will.*

*I have learnt, not from Mr Viennot, but through another person, that you had an account to settle with Mr Viennot for some wine purchased; I advise you to settle this account. Seeing the high cost of foodstuff, and also because this is a year which shows itself to be not too good for a harvest, we here do not dare pursue all our house repairs so as not to become too indebted. I advise you to do the same, to carry out the least possible repairs this year so as not to put your house in an embarrassing situation. As for Autun, arrange matters as you judge them to be appropriate.*

*I am herewith sending you a letter from a parish priest of Paris who is asking for one or two Brothers. Kindly indicate to me the response to make to him.*

*Mary marks of affection to the Brothers. I have the honour of being, with the most sincere respect,  
your very humble and very obedient servant,*

*Colin, Superior*<sup>22</sup>

Colin presents the idea of handing over the branch of the Marist Brothers (if Champagnat should die) to the archbishop of Lyon. Did this show a lack of confidence by Colin in his own ability to handle the branch of the Marist Brothers? Perhaps Colin was not anxious to take over the 200 Brothers in addition to his own responsibilities. Was Colin really interested in the Marist Brothers and the village schools? Maybe he recalled the reference by Champagnat in his resignation statement in 1837 to the indebtedness of the Marist Brothers to Archbishop de Pins. Perhaps Colin saw in this reference a possible way out. But it seems to be a strange situation – to cut the teaching Brothers off at their Founder’s death and then hand them over to archdiocesan control.

Surely Colin would have been aware of Champagnat’s desire to keep his Brothers within the framework of the Society of Mary? And surely Colin could discern that it was this desire on Champagnat’s part that led him to endure the constant little squabbles with Colin about sup-

plying the priests’ houses with Champagnat’s Brothers.

Champagnat’s Testament shows just how strongly he desired unity within the Society and the union of the Brothers with the Society. His Brothers would have much more chance of survival if they were under the leadership of the Superior General of a religious Institute recognised by Rome, which was now the situation with the Marist Fathers. Were they to be subject to bishops in different dioceses, they would quickly run into troubles in regard to survival as a united group.

Br Sylvester describes the respect with which Champagnat received Colin when he came to the Hermitage. This was a token of his adherence to the one overall-leader principle and to the unity of the branches under the one head.

Had Colin known the extent of Champagnat’s illness (only six weeks before the latter’s death), we would expect that he would not have worried his dying friend about a relatively

<sup>22</sup> CSG 01, 319 A400424C.DOC.

minor matter -Viennot's wine bill, nor about a major matter - the future of the Brothers under the control of sundry diocesan bishops rather than under the Superior General of the Rome-approved Society of Marist Fathers. We may then assume that Colin did not know just how bad was Champagnat's condition.

We do know that Colin visited his friend Champagnat a few days before the latter's death on 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1840. No doubt he brought balm to the mind and comfort to the soul of his saintly companion of the Fourvière pledge.

## CORRESPONDENCE: CHAMPAGNAT TO COLIN

This being the only extant letter of Champagnat to Colin, we give it is full, with a longer commentary than normally employed with most of the Colin letters.

Fr Champagnat writes to Fr Jean-Claude Colin, Superior of the Society of Mary in Belley, Ain, 29 March 1835. The purpose of the letter is to inform Colin of the requirements for admission to the Brothers' congregation and to settle several specific problems.

29 March 1835

Father Superior,

*Young men who wish to enter the congregation must give good reason to hope that during their novitiate they will acquire the virtues required for the religious state, as well as the talents needed for the type of work for which each is destined.*

*The novitiate lasts two years and part of it is spent in an establishment of the Society, gaining practical experience either of teaching or of cooking, and thus giving proof of a real vocation. We require everyone, on entering, to pay at least one-fourth of his room and board, plus twenty-five francs for books, paper, etc., which are supplied by the Society. We give them the habit only when they have paid for their novitiate and acquired the required wardrobe. If someone leaves, we keep, out of what he gave us, only a pro rata amount for the time he spent in the novitiate. Those who enter are not allowed to keep either a watch or money. Their clothing is given to the Brother tailor, who every Saturday gives each one what he needs, and on Monday takes back the things which were used on Sunday. Everything is kept under lock and key.*

*The wardrobe and the first habit are estimated to cost 400 francs. Therefore, those who bring no clothing pay 600 francs. If someone cannot pay anything, but we feel sure of his vocation, we make him promise that, if he ever leaves the Society of his own volition, or if he is sent away because of misconduct, he will repay the Society out of his future earnings. Each one must also bring a copy of his Baptismal certificate and his Birth certificate.*

*Before admission to the novitiate the candidate must answer the following questions:*

*What are his place of origin, his family name and Christian names, those of his father and mother, their occupation, their age, and their place of residence?*

*Was he born within wedlock?*

*What are his parents' occupation or position?*

*At what age did the young man make his First Communion? Was it postponed after he had been approved to make it?*

*Has he always lived with his parents? If not, as what age did he leave home? Why? Has he worked for someone else? How long did he work for this person? What kind of work did he do for him?*

*Is there any disrepute attached to his family, either because of their occupation or because of some crime?*

*How many brothers and sisters does he have? Are they comfortably well-off?*

*Did he himself earn the money he is contributing towards his novitiate expenses, or is one of his relatives or some stranger paying for him? Why, if he has exercised some profession, or, if he worked for someone else, why, I say, has he not earned anything? What has he done with his savings?*

*One should have great consideration for someone who pays out of what he has put aside, or if, having nothing, he has taken care of a poor father or mother.*

*How well-off are his parents?*

*What did he do for a living after leaving his parents?*

*Does he have a sound constitution? A good temperament? Is he robust?*

*Is he good-humoured?*

*Is he physically healthy? Does he suffer from scrofula? Chest problems? Bad breath?*

*Does his family have a history of lung problems?*

*Does he have good eyesight? Does he have a good reputation?*

*Is he educated? What grounds does he have to claim exemption from military service?*

*Has he continued to frequent the sacraments since making his First Communion?*

*Who advised him to enter religious life? How long has he been thinking about it?*

*Does he perhaps think that he will have to work less in religious life than in the world? That he will have an easier life? That he will have nothing else to do but pray, go to Mass, etc., etc.?*

*Has he already belonged to some other community? In that case, he could be admitted only for very serious reasons.*

*If the young postulant has not yet reached his majority, he must have the consent of his parents.*

*Has he ever had to beg? Are his parents still begging?*

*If the postulant asks for advice about which Institute he should enter, he must be given the name of another which is more deserving of his confidence than our own. However, if he still shows a preference for the Society of Mary, especially because of our patroness, he must be welcomed and shown how well-placed his confidence is, since he places it in the Mother of God.*

*If the novice does not pay anything, he must be asked to write out an I.O.U., or to sign in the register a promise to pay if he leaves the Society. His parents should also sign, if possible.*

*I still think that that business of the sacristy for our Brothers will create many problems for us. Do what you can to get out of it. We shall do what we can to give you someone at All Saints, someone whom you can count on for your novitiate, if you have a sufficient number of novices. Brother Anthelme seems to be doing better and better, thank God.*

*I am still awaiting your order to send you Brother Joseph-Eugène.”<sup>23</sup>*

We have no idea why Colin would have asked Champagnat about the requirements for admission to his congregation. We have no letter in which such a request was made, so he must have made it verbally. Did Colin want the information for himself? We have no justification for saying so. Normally, one would think that he knew the conditions already, at least in their broad outlines. Had someone asked him for them? If so, why did that person not write directly to Champagnat? We can only make conjectures. But, in any case, this letter shows Colin's interest in the Little Brothers of Mary.

As for the business of caring for sacristies, that undoubtedly came from Bishop Devie through Colin. Had the bishop expressly asked for the Brothers of Mary, or was he thinking of the Joseph Brothers? We have no way of telling since there is no documentation available. This request must also have been made verbally. All we know is the final deci-

sion, which Colin communicated to Champagnat in his letter of 23 April 1835.<sup>24</sup>

Champagnat shows deference, respect and readiness to assist. He regards Colin as his religious Superior, Colin having been elected Central Superior of the Marist 'hopefuls' in 1830. It was not until the Society of Mary was Pontifically approved in 1836 that Colin was canonically elected as religious Superior.

For several reasons Champagnat was not interested in the role of sacristan for his Brothers; it was not an apostolate he favoured. He was aware of Colin's close link with Devie and sought his help to avoid this commitment to Devie's diocese of Belley.

We note Champagnat's offer of a Brother for service with Colin. The setting-up of a novitiate to train Colin's Joseph Brothers, however, did not come about until 1839.

<sup>23</sup> Letter of Fr Champagnat to Fr Colin, "Letters of Marcellin Champagnat", p. 124.

<sup>24</sup> O.M. 1, Doc. 336, p. 758.

## A CONCLUSION

### 1. Jean-Claude Colin

In the letters under consideration, the character of Fr Jean-Claude Colin is much more clearly defined than that of Fr Marcellin Champagnat. For a modern reader the picture of Colin may emerge as that of a demanding Superior who could not see the viewpoint of his friend in regard to role of the Marist Brothers and who was rather insensitive to Champagnat in this regard. And perhaps this is the impression conveyed by the comments given by a member of a religious Institute of the twenty-first century.

On the other hand, in commenting on these forty-nine letters of Colin to Champagnat, a member of a religious congregation living in the 1850s would perhaps present viewpoints and comments quite different from those given above. A religious of the 1850s would be very much imbued with an understanding of the type of religious formation that came the way of Colin and Champagnat. We can recall the formation these men received in the major seminary of St Irenaeus:

“The regulations also prescribed that the seminarian must strive to acquire a good spirit – ‘the spirit of simplicity or of holy childhood, the spirit of blind obedience, of a humble and hidden life, the spirit of charity and openness of heart,

the spirit of dying to oneself and to the world, the spirit of holy indifference in the hands of God and superiors.’”<sup>25</sup>

This was the type of training that secular priests received. For priests joining religious congregations, how much more stringent would be the training in the matter of respect and obedience to superiors.

Not only were subjects expected to show due deference and submission to superiors, but many superiors inevitably came to view their election under God (and the vote of their fellows) as a calling on them to give the lead and, where necessary, to exact obedience from members of the congregation.

Therefore the comments on Colin given during our examination of the letters must be nuanced by these considerations, and the presentation of characters must be viewed against the background of religious life in the early part of the Eighteenth century. There is the old adage about not putting new cloth on old garments. Perhaps it is not quite fair to view the Colin letters from the viewpoint of a Twenty-first Century religious. We must make allowances; it is by so doing that a different picture of Colin is revealed.

Although Jean-Claude Colin was quite sharp with Champagnat at times and although he “exploded” in

<sup>25</sup> “The Seminarian’s Guide”. (In “Voyages et Missions”, No. 126).

the famous Verdelaï affair, he is not generally the demanding Superior. Rather, he is more the petitioner, the reasoner, the persuader, the friend – not the overbearing Superior ready to command “in virtue of holy Obedience”.

Understanding Colin’s personality and temperament, the reader can admire the restraint that usually marks Colin’s letters to Champagnat. Most of his problems with Champagnat centred on the supply of Brothers to serve the priests’ communities. We may argue, of course, that these problems could have been averted had Colin set up his Joseph Brothers much earlier, but we must allow that Champagnat himself made no move to push for a separate congregation of Brothers attached to the priests’ group – probably because he wanted his Brothers to stay as close as possible to the priests’ branch of the Society to preserve them from the control of diocesan bishops. As for Colin, he could rely on Champagnat for a supply of Brothers to help the priests. This relieved him of all the arrangements necessary for the recruiting and training of the special group for the priests’ houses – the branch that came to be known as the “Joseph Brothers”.

There are many other factors which underline the general quality of restraint shown by Colin in these letters. As “Centre of Unity”, or Central Superior, after 1830, and, as Su-

perior of the Marist priests after 1836, Colin had many matters which demanded his attention, drained his energy and strained his nerves. We need to recall some of his major concerns: the nascent Society of priests and their apostolic work; Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn and the Marist Sisters; the newly-established branch of the Third Order, for example, Pompallier’s Tertiary Brothers of Mary and the female group called Christian Virgins of the Third Order of Mary; the newly-dispatched missionaries to the Pacific and the supply arrangements for them with the Propagation of the Faith; and, of course, the authorisation of Champagnat’s Brothers and matters concerning the Joseph Brothers. Colin had many causes of concern; we can therefore understand and accept the occasional sharpness in his correspondence.

Differences of opinions, misunderstandings, mild rebukes apart, Colin’s relationship with Champagnat remained one of mutual respect and solid friendship, each being in admiration of and supportive of, the other’s work for Christ and His Mother. Sifting through the letters that we have considered, we find these expressions which extol the qualities of Champagnat. He who spoke the words demonstrates his own magnanimity:

All the letters which come from your hand are dear and pleasant to me, but certainly I have never received any from you which gave me more pleasure than your second last one,

in which you informed me of what you wrote to Fr Cholleton. I saw then your disinterestedness and your devotion to the Society of Mary in general.” (4 September 1834)

Finally, my dear confrère, I address myself to you, because it is in you and in Fr Pompallier that I have most confidence; it is in you two that I find most that religious spirit so necessary for the success of an undertaking. I am inclined to believe that it will be again through you that the Society will become consolidated in the diocese of Lyon.” (19 January 1836)

It is not less true that your dispositions greatly edify me. I very much wish that all the other confrères would think and act as you do. I hope that in time God will give them this grace.” (23 June 1836)

It seems to me that you are not looking after your health well enough. Try to look after yourself a little more in this regard.” (22 June 1837)

I should not see a great difficulty in there soon being at La Côte a good novitiate, provided that it be directed in the same spirit as that of the Hermitage and that it always remain under your guidance.” (12 October 1837)

These quotations leave us with the conviction of the fundamental strength of the esteem in which Colin held Champagnat. Fellow labourers in the Lord’s vineyard and dedicated to the Marist cause, Colin and Champagnat supported each other in their apostolic endeavours, each being aware of the fine qualities of character and religious spirit of the other.

## 2. Marcellin Champagnat

The one letter of Champagnat to Colin is a very formal document, showing the exacting requirements for those wishing to become Marist Brothers in 1835. Obviously, there has been considerable development in this matter since the early days of Institute. The document shows Champagnat as a thinker and an organiser

In regard to Colin Champagnat shows due respect and a readiness to help his Superior, Colin having been elected Central Superior of the would-be Marists in 1830.

Even in this one letter we can see Champagnat’s opposition to the idea of his Brothers acting as Sacristans. We may speculate on his reasons for this, but the point is that Champagnat knew what he wanted for the Brothers’ apostolic work. He saw the scene for apostolic work and determined the parts of it with which he wanted to become associated.

Some of Champagnat’s wisdom in dealing with people is also manifested. His request to Colin to intervene is an attempt to avoid having to send his Marist Brothers as sacristans. Obviously, Colin was in a better situation than Champagnat to effect this desired result. Knowing this, Champagnat has recourse to his friend.

Champagnat's offer of a Brother for service with Colin is yet another instance of Champagnat helping Colin; the call for help is constant theme in Colin's letters.

From Colin's letters, it is obvious that Champagnat is reliable, respectful, and obliging. He is, however, cautious and slow to respond. Understandably, this caution in responding is simply a result of Champagnat's having few men at his disposal and many calls on his services. With bishops and parish priests strongly pushing their re-

spective causes, it was a matter of utmost difficulty for Champagnat to satisfy the requirements of his friend Colin in providing Marist Brothers for service in the priests' communities.

With the passage of time Colin and Champagnat come to know each other better and to work together in Mary's name. Despite the sundry vicissitudes of a hectic apostolic life for both men, they made a good team, both in making Marists of other men and in moulding themselves as Marists par excellence.

## APPENDIX A

### *Marist Brothers as part of the Society of Mary*

Fr Champagnat had no intention of separating his Institute from that of the Fathers, if for no other reason than the fact that he himself was a Marist Father and, as such, directly under Fr Colin's authority. In 1837, after the approval by Rome of the Society of priests (only) and the election of Colin as Superior General, steps were taken to prevent any misunderstanding about the authority-structure. Consequently, the question of the regularising of Champagnat's position as Superior of the Brothers came up for clarification. Champagnat was asked to hand in his resignation and, in all humility, he hastened to do so. He was careful, however, to make mention of the archbishop of Lyon as a benefactor and as an archdiocesan superior who could have claims on the services of the Brothers.

Colin immediately re-appointed Champagnat to the same post as before, and for the next two years Champagnat directed his Institute as in the past. Because of the existence of a single branch of Brothers, some engaged in teaching and some in the service the Fathers, Colin and Champagnat frequently exchanged letters, whose theme was often that of supplying Brothers for the Fathers' houses. This situation created numerous practical problems and inevitably led to friction.

At the Retreat of 1839 the separation of the two groups of Brothers clarified the situation. A month later,

on 12 October, 1839, at the suggestion of Colin, Champagnat resigned from his position as Superior, and the Marist Brothers, under Colin's Presidency, elected one of their own men, Br François, to succeed the Founder. Thus, during the lifetime of the Founder, continuity of government was ensured. It is interesting to note that, when he dictated his Spiritual Testament on 18 May 1840, Champagnat solemnly re-affirmed the dependence of the Brothers' Institute on the Superior General of the Fathers.

In 1842 the Brothers sent a petition to the Fathers' Chapter, asking that it sanction, once and for all, the union between the Fathers and Brothers under the same Superior General. The Fathers' Chapter agreed to the request, subject to approval from Rome. Now, Rome had always expressed reservations about the structure of the Society, with its four branches consisting of priests, Brothers, Sisters and a lay confraternity. Rome did not give its approval.

It seems that, about this time, Colin began speaking openly about abandoning the idea of union. At their General Chapter of 1845 Colin put this question to the Fathers: "Is it opportune that the Superior General of the Marist Fathers be also the General of the Marist Brothers?" Considering the opposition of the Holy See and the difficulty of one man coping

with the problems of two congregations, the Fathers replied in the negative. They decided, however, that the Superior General could retain “a right of high supervision, at least of restraint, whereby he could preside at the Brothers’ Chapters and, if need be, recall them forcefully to the Society’s spirit in both the temporal and the spiritual fields”. This decision was none too precise, but, in point of fact, Colin now left the entire responsibility for all decisions to Br François.

In 1852 the Brothers met in General Chapter to examine and promulgate the Rules which had been codified by François and his Assistants. Colin, who presided, took the opportunity to notify the Brothers that a union of the two branches under the one Superior was now out of the question. This can be regarded as the date of the official separation of the two branches.

## APPENDIX B

### *The co-adjutor Brothers*

Three co-adjutor Brothers were present at Belley in 1832. They were quite separate from Fr Champagnat's Brothers, but in 1834-1835 Fr Colin sent the three to take the Habit at the Hermitage.<sup>26</sup>

Up to 1839 all the Brothers, no matter where they came from, made profession at the Hermitage among the little Brothers of Mary, but the time came to consider carefully the distinction between these two groups of Brothers. Colin put the matter of separation to the priests at the 1839 Retreat. Champagnat and others among the senior priests opposed it, but the vote of the younger priests carried the day; separation was decided on.

There is no evidence showing how the distribution was made. It seems that the Brothers employed in the Fathers' houses in 1839 (some of these would have been Champagnat's Brothers) continued on as Co-adjutor Brothers; the others remained Little Brothers of Mary. From 1840 candidates for the co-adjutor Brothers were received by the Marist Fathers, and on 25 September 1841, the first profession ceremony of these Brothers took place in the Mother-House of the priests at Belley, four making the vow of Obedience and one making perpetual vows. This practice continued.

The situation would have been clarified perfectly had it not been necessary to reckon with those Champagnat-trained Brothers who had already left for Oceania. All those who had left for the Pacific before 1839 had, of course, been professed with the Little Brothers of Mary. Furthermore, from 1839 onwards and during Colin's whole Generalate, Brothers from both groups were sent to Oceania. Yet, no matter what group they came from, the position of all these Brothers was that of co-adjutor Brothers, since they helped and lived with the missionary priests. That is why the Marist Fathers always considered that these Brothers had chosen to become Co-adjutor Brothers by the very fact of leaving for the Missions. Consequently, all who died in Oceania figure in their necrology. On the other hand, however, the Marist Brothers have never ceased to claim as their own those Brothers who left for the Missions after having been professed with them, and, certainly (says Fr Coste), they cannot be denied that right. Nevertheless, the exact status of these Brothers remained uncertain, as is made clear by the variety of attitudes adopted by those who returned to France: Br Charise rejoined the Marist Brothers, whereas Brothers Justin and Emery, though also professed with the Marist Broth-

<sup>26</sup> "The Seminarian's Guide". (In "Voyages et Missions", No. 126).

ers, ended their days as Co-adjutor Brothers in the Fathers' houses.

It should be kept in mind, therefore, that for the period of Colin's Generalate, and indeed throughout the nineteenth century, the status of

each Brother must be studied separately, although after 1839, in Europe at least, there can be no confusion, for Marist Brothers and Joseph Brothers were thenceforward trained separately and registered separately.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In a Footnote to Fr Jeantin's account of Fr Colin's story, we find the following: "The first use of the term 'Joseph Brothers' was in February 1832. In 1833 he says that the Co-adjutor Brothers are 'in a special way under the protection of St Joseph and so are called Brothers of St Joseph'. Used again in 1835, the term 'Joseph Brothers' is not found any more in Fr Colin's correspondence and seems to have disappeared quickly." O.M. 3, Doc. 819, p. 322 (Footnote 3).

## APPENDIX C

### *The story of the Twelve 'Apostles' of the Fourvière Pledge*

When Jesus endured the agony of the cross, only one of his Apostles stood faithfully by his side. In 1823 the original twelve 'apostles' of the Pledge of Fourvière scored better, three of them (Colin, Courveille, and Champagnat) having been actively engaged in Society of Mary endeavours during those first seven years. But, whereas eleven of Jesus' Apostles eventually remained in the 'fold', only four of the Fourvière 'apostles' became Marist Fathers – Colin and Champagnat, plus Déclas, who joined in 1824, and also Terrailon, who came back to the group eventually (in 1839).

It is Fr Mayet, the indefatigable scribe of matters pertaining to Jean-Claude Colin and to matters Marist, who gives us a list of, and a commentary on, the first twelve – those who took the Pledge of Fourvière.

Of the four who remained faithful to the pledge, Mayet has his own list of 'demerit points' for partial failure in fidelity.

#### **Terrailon**

Lost three points, for he left the work but kept in touch. Ordained in 1816, he became a curate and chaplain, and in 1825 was appointed to Champagnat's "Hermitage", whence he left to preach the Jubilee Indulgence at the end of 1826. He later became a parish priest in St Chamond, made vows with the other Marist in 1836, then finally quit the parish priest

position in 1839 to be with his confrères, later becoming a Marist Assistant General.

#### **Champagnat,**

According to Mayet, lost two points; he doubted the work at one period. He was rallied from his low spirits concerning the priests' branch by the youthful Séon and thereafter never wavered in his belief in the future of the Marist Fathers.

#### **Déclas**

Earned only one demerit point. Early on, he was wavering about whether to be drawn into a different type of work, but he joined the Colin brothers in 1824 and thenceforward took not 'his hand from the plough'.

#### **Pierre Colin,**

Of course, does not come into this scrutiny, since he was not one of the twelve at Fourvière on 23 July, 1816. His brother, Jean-Claude was, however, and it is he who receives Mayet's accolade as the one who never wavered.

The careers of the other eight (those who, as it were, "fell by the wayside") lay in directions other than that of the Marist way of life. The faithful four eventually achieved the consummation of their desires, entering the newly-approved Society of Mary in 1836 – a long time after the heady days of Fourvière Pledge of 1816.

**Mayet**

Admits that he is not completely sure that he has listed the twelve accurately. Although the Pledge was certainly recorded, those who made it were not listed. Mayet says, "For a long time I have made careful research to find out who they were. As far as I know, here are the names (other than the four mentioned above):

**Seyve**

Ordained in 1816, he became curate at Tarentaise, Feurs, La Valla (1823); then at Burdignes, where later he became parish priest until his death in 1866.

**Maynard (Perrault-Maynard)**

He shared a room with Courveille at the major seminary and was ordained in 1822. He became a curate and a priest-in-charge and retired from active ministry in 1836. He wrote two books and died in 1850.

**Jacob**

Ordained in 1817, he was curate at Feurs when Courveille opened a school there in 1822. He later became parish priest of two parishes in the archdiocese of Lyon and died in 1848.

**Gillibert**

Was secretary to Cardinal Fesch for a year and a half. Ordained in July in 1816, he eventually became a seminary professor. In 1831 he trans-

ferred to the diocese of Belley, thence to Paris. In 1840 he went to join his brother as curate at St Genest-Malifaux, dying there in 1862.

**Motton (Mottin)**

Was ordained in 1821 and was a curate until 1827 when he entered the novitiate of the Society of the Cross of Jesus. Rejected by this group, he again became a curate and joined the Jesuits in 1840. He then worked in several parishes until his death in 1872.

**Verrier**

Ordained in 1819, he became parish priest and a professor at Verrières, then joined the Society of the Cross of Jesus in 1820. He was a very holy priest and became co-heir of Champagnat's Will, made in January 1826. He died in 1837, being the first to die among this group of twelve.

**Poucet**

He was ordained in 1817 and joined the Society of the Cross of Jesus in 1820. He founded the diocesan congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family in 1832, was the author of two spiritual books and died in 1883, the last to die of this group of twelve 'apostles'".

**Sources:  
Fr Colin's letters**

A word re sources of letters: Most of Colin's letters given above were

taken from “Origines Maristes”. Others, from the post-1836 period, came mainly from the archives of the Marist Brothers, Rome. Copies of all Colin’s letters are now in the Marist Brothers’ archives in Rome.

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# FROM «L'HERMITAGE DE NOTRE DAME» TO «N.D. DE L'HERMITAGE»

The Society of Mary in the evolution of Father Champagnat's Spiritual Journey (1824-1836)



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The use of the word “The Hermitage” or less frequently, the expression “Our Lady of the Hermitage”, tends to make us forget that during the years 1824-1826, the expression “The Hermitage of Our Lady” was the one used when referring to the place where the Brothers lived after having left their home in La Valla. This expression was not chosen at random as will be demonstrated. However, before proceeding any further, let us call to mind a minor detail: before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the French words “ermitage” and the word “hermitage” were used interchangeably. Since then, the French word “ermitage” has become the more acceptable of the two. However the word “hermitage” is still often used today when referring to a certain place or location.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. A MYSTIFYING NAME

The choice of the word: “hermitage” is a surprising use of terminology when we consider that the

property along the Gier faces the Partrouillard workplace which was purchased in July of 1824, it lied in close proximity to Saint Chamond and was located near the crossroads leading to St Martin en Coailleux. If a place of solitude was being sought, elsewhere might have been better! For his part, when Father Champagnat left La Valla he sought to create a missionary center that would accommodate a large number of priests, a number of Brothers, and lie in close proximity to a thoroughfare in order to ensure easy access for travel on missionary journeys. The early writers of our Marist history appear to be well aware of this paradox.

However they offered no objection to the use of the word “hermitage”. Brother Jean-Baptiste simply states: “After he had seen all of the possible locations, none seemed to be more suitable for a religious house than this one”. (Vie ch. 12 p. 125) Brother Sylvestre (Ch. VII p. 133) is hardly

<sup>1</sup> For example the city of Tain l'Hermitage in the Rhône valley

more articulate : “ This location was referred to as “les goths”, and called “L’Hermitage”, which he (Father Champagnat), felt was a most appropriate term for the second “cradle” of the Institute”. As for Brother Avit (1824 § 49), he felt that the location was inadequate but has Father Champagnat saying: “...it is a quiet place and is just what I have in mind”. The use of the word “hermitage” a perfect choice of words for it both reveals and covers up the inspiration of Fathers Champagnat and Courveille of establishing a center for the Society of Mary without our knowing why the word “hermitage” was chosen in the first place.

## 2. THE CHOICE OF TERM: HERMITAGE OF OUR LADY

The first mention of the word “hermitage” appears in May or June of 1824 in article 10 of (*La Regla del Fundador* p. 83): “As soon as we have completed the construction of the Hermitage and provided a wellspring to deliver fresh water for our needs, we will accept needy children”. The casual use of the word “Hermitage” inclines us to believe that it might have been used before. The building plans signed by Father Cholleton on July 19, 1824 (OM1, doc. 108) clearly state: “At this very moment, the building for this

Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary is being erected at the Hermitage of Our Lady in Saint Chamond, Department of the Loire”.

The use of the term “Hermitage” used by Father Cholleton, Vicar General, was certainly used prior to this when he came to bless the cornerstone of the building in May of 1824. The building received its official name of “The Hermitage of Our Lady”, or simply “The Hermitage” sometime between May and July of 1824.

As early as October 2, 1824, a document submitted to the notary, M. Bonnand (OFM3/doc. 648), specifies that Fathers Champagnat and Courveille mortgaged lands and buildings “...that they have in the area of Chez Colaud (St Martin-en-Coailleux) where they are in the process of founding a hermitage<sup>2</sup> under the name of Notre Dame.”<sup>3</sup> This was the first time that the name appeared in a legal document and the notary appears to have some reservations about using the term exactly as the two priests intended, yet deferred to their wishes but modified the use of the word Hermitage.

With the purpose of seeking legal authorization (OM1/ doc. 129), a letter by The Little Brothers to Msgr. Frayssinous, minister of Public Education bears as its heading: “The

<sup>2</sup> The expression used in the original French was “...sont après,” a popular expression for “en train de” meaning in the process of.”

<sup>3</sup> It is not yet a question of the Hermitage, but of a hermitage, a word used conjointly by Fathers Courveille and Champagnat.

Hermitage of Our Lady at Saint Chamond, Loire, January 15, 1825". On December 13, 1825, Fathers Courveille and Champagnat took out a loan of 12,000 F. listing their address as: "The Hermitage of Our Lady". At the beginning of 1826, during Father Champagnat's illness, Father Courveille opens an account book for expenditures bearing the title: "Account Book of Expenditures for 1826 - Community of The Hermitage of Our Lady. And when Father Courveille wrote to the Brothers requesting prayers for Father Champagnat who was ill, he specifies: "From the hermitage of Our Lady, January 3, 1826" (OM1/ doc. 147). On January 6<sup>th</sup>, in his Last Testament, Father Champagnat describes himself as being a: "...priest living at the Hermitage of Our Lady." Having arrived at Aiguebelle on June 4, 1826, in his well-known letter declaring his withdrawal from the Society of Mary, Father Courveille wrote: "To 'monsieur' Champagnat, priest and Father Director of the Little Brothers of Mary at the Hermitage of Our Lady at Saint Chamond."

### 3. THE TERMINATION OF A SPIRITUAL BOND

In a letter dated September 29, 1826 to Father Champagnat, Father Courveille suggested that they meet at St. Clair du Rhône on October 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>, and uses the heading: "To Father Champagnat, Director of the Little Brothers of Mary at the Hermitage of Our Lady near Saint Chamond, at the Loire Hermitage." The tone of the

letter is heartfelt, however Father Courveille has not made any significant attitudinal changes since he only attributed to Father Champagnat the title of Director of The Little Brothers of Mary and concluded his letter by joining the letters *f.d.s.g. part.* to his signature, probably standing for: *fratrum director superior generalis patrum.* (OM1/ doc. 165).

The Champagnat-Courveille meeting of October 5<sup>th</sup> would be decisive, not only on a financial and administrative level, but also in terms of the spiritual bond that had existed between the two men, a bond that found its expression in the use of the expression "Hermitage of Our Lady." This is reflected by the fact that when Father Courveille turned over his rights to property to Father Champagnat on October 5, 1826, he signed the official document as: "...priest residing at Saint Clair". For his part, Father Champagnat signed the document with: "...priest residing at the hermitage, commune of St Martin en Coailleux near St. Chamond (OM1/ docs. 166-167). These notarized documents do not specify whether Father Champagnat bore the title of Director or Superior. The absence of either title is not surprising for the issue at hand concerned financial and administrative issues of a private nature and nothing further. While on September 29<sup>th</sup> Father Courveille still thought of returning to his position, there was no longer a question of his being able to do so after October 5<sup>th</sup>. The only remaining option he had in terms of governing the Brothers was

his right to a room at the Hermitage and to make use of it when needed.

For Father Champagnat that was a rather lenient concession given the fact that he was given a freehand by an associate in exchange for 5,000F. Now with a new objective, Father Courveille would look elsewhere. From the abbey of St Antoine in the Diocese of Grenoble, he would seek to establish another Mother House for Brothers in that area. It is not until May 21, 1830 (OM1/ doc. 217), that Father Courveille acknowledges the new situation created by his departure and that of Father Terrailon and concedes to the administrative decisions made on his behalf by Father Champagnat, “priest and Superior at the Hermitage in Gauds where he resides”.

#### 4. THE DISCONTINUATION OF THE ORIGINAL EXPRESSION

After September of 1926, Father Courveille no longer made use of the expression “Hermitage of Our Lady” and its use rather quickly disappeared. The expression reappears on November 16, 1826 when Jean-Claude Freycon acknowledged the debt of 200 F. owed by Marcellin Champagnat

“...priest and Director of The Hermitage of Our Lady at Saint Chamond located in the Gaux region” (St Martin-en-Coailleux).<sup>4</sup> On December 8, 1826, Father Jean Claude Colin writes to Father Champagnat at “the hermitage of Our Lady near Saint Chamond” (OM1/ doc. 169), congratulating him for having terminated his relationship with Father Courveille. He continued to use the same terminology in a letter dated April 7, 1828 (OM1/ doc. 181). However on May 22, 1828 (OM1/ doc. 182) he wrote: “Father Champagnat priest at Our Lady of the Hermitage”. From then on, he would no longer use the formula “The Hermitage of Our Lady”. Between April and May of 1828, an event or communication took place that brought about a change in terminology.<sup>5</sup> More than likely, it was a letter from Father to Father Colin inviting him to consider making a change when using the phrase.

Simultaneously on May 16, 1828,<sup>6</sup> Antoine Gratalon “...member of the Little Brothers of Mary residing at the Hermitage of Mary”<sup>7</sup> (St Martin-en-Coailleux) chose Marcellin Champagnat to be his special legal representative. When signing the register for temporary vows on October 12, 1829 (OFM3/ doc. 574), he ends with: “...given at Our Lady of the Her-

<sup>4</sup> An article by Eric Perrin in Marist Notebooks no. 32

<sup>5</sup> January 25, 1830: “To the hermitage near St Chamond” (OM1/ doc. 209). On February 13, 1830: “To Notre Dame de l’Hermitage near St. Chamond” (OM1/doc. 212). On September 10, 1830 (OM1/doc. 220): “...priest at N.D. de l’Hermitage near St Chamond”, idem October 22, 1830, doc. 221, 222, 225, 227, 228...

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> A rather unique variation of “The Hermitage of Our Lady”

mitage". All the Brothers signing after him use the same expression.

When signing the register for the taking of the religious habit on October 13, 1829 (OFM 3/ 497), Brother Régis Civer uses the older expression "...given at Our Lady of the Hermitage". He was the first to sign and the only one to use that wording. All of the others signed "...taken at Our Lady of the Hermitage."

It is difficult to determine which expressions Father Champagnat used in his letters after 1830 as there are so few of them. However in his "Lettre n° 15" of February 12, 1830 addressed to Father Cattet, he uses the expression: « Our Lady of the Hermitage.»<sup>8</sup> Finally, the Marist Fathers gathered at the Hermitage from December 3-8 of 1830 to elect a Provincial (who would be Father Champagnat). In the minutes of their meetings they described themselves as: "Societate Sanctissimae virginis Mariae in domo ejusdem dicta de Ermo conventis (OM1/ doc. 224)".

The term "The Hermitage of Our Lady" was first used in 1824, and then disappeared sometime between 1826 and 1829. The shift to "Our Lady of the Hermitage" was indicative of a new beginning. Father Etienne Séon arrived at the Hermitage on June 13, 1827 and Fa-

ther Bourdin would follow him the following summer. It was also at that time that Father Champagnat reorganized the Brothers' community: religious habit, the taking of vows, method of reading... Thus "The Hermitage of Our Lady" was the designation used for one beginning, and "Our Lady of the Hermitage" was indicative of a new beginning, one that involved new priests and even new Brothers, for the first disciple, J.M. Granjon had left, as did Etienne Rouméty (Br Jean-François) .

## 5. EVERYDAY CONFUSION ABOUT "HERMITAGE" AND "OUR LADY OF THE HERMITAGE"

Ecclesiastical authorities generally have little patience with designations that are too long or poorly understood. As early as August 13, 1825, (OM1/ doc. 138), Father Bedoin, the new pastor at La Valla, mentions in his records that he blessed "...the chapel of Our Lady of the Hermitage." On August 25<sup>th</sup> (OM1/ doc. 141) Council minutes of Msgr. De Pins indicate that Father Terraillon would go "...to The Hermitage near Saint Chamond to provide instruction to The Little Brothers of Mary."<sup>9</sup> Occasionally the expression "the Hermitage of Lavalla" can be found in the council

<sup>8</sup> He does the same in his letter to Brother Barthélemy on January 3, 1831; the "lettre ° 23" to "monsieur Moindon" in April of 1831 and "letter n° 23" to A Labrosse on October 29, 1831. See also n° 32; 36

<sup>9</sup> On March 15, 1826 (OM1/doc 149) the same document mentions "The Hermitage of the Little Brothers of Mary". (OM1/doc. 152) and on July 5, 1826, Msgr. De Pins's Council considers giving a retreat to the teachers "at l'ermitage de St Chamond". In August (OM1/doc. 158-159) the Diocesan Council speaks of the "Brothers of the Hermitage". On September 28, 1826, the same Council asserts: Father Courveille, having incurred some faults at the Hermitage..." On June 13, 1827, Msgr. De Pins came to bless "the said house of the Hermitage".

minutes (OM1/ doc. 207), for example, one reads in the entry for December 1, 1830 (OM1/ doc. 223) "...Father Fontbonne...is authorized to go to The Hermitage of Lavalla."

On the level of civil government, thanks to documents prepared by Mr. Eric Perrin (Published in Marist Notebooks # 32), we can appreciate how the word "l'ermitage" tended to replace "les Gauds". After the death of Father Champagnat, his undertaking earned him recognition in the toponymy of the region which is no small accomplishment and speaks well of his success. Today, the maps of "l'Institut Géographique National" pinpoint the location of "L'hermitage - couvent". The only question that remains is why did Father Champagnat choose the word "hermitage"?

## 6. DISCOVERY OF AN ANCIENT HERMITAGE BY CHAMPAGNAT?

The choice of the word "hermitage" could, in some way, be linked to a possible archeological discovery by Father Champagnat. In fact, the excellent "*Monographie de N.D. de l'Hermitage*" (1925) brings to light "an extraordinary event" that might explain, if not the original use of the word, at least the choice of its location: one day, an octogenarian from Izieux happened to meet Brother Tibère, the house gardener. As often happens between persons of that age, the conversation turned to the remembrance things of the past:

"I know something wonderful about the beginnings of your cloister said the octogenarian. In my younger days everyone spoke about it." Among other things, he continued to relate the following:

"Wanting to find a good location for the construction of the main building, Father Champagnat looked carefully at the present site of the Hermitage. Suddenly, he discovered a statue of the Blessed Virgin in the cleft of a rock formation that was partly hidden by some bushes and was unable to reach it. Fascinated and intrigued, he ran to the humble dwelling of a nearby man who repaired horse wagons and who lived along the banks of the Gier where there were other dwellings. 'Could you lend me a ladder', he exclaimed, 'I have just found a treasure.' 'Can we share it?' asked the wide eyed repairman. 'Oh, no' replied the priest, this treasure cannot be shared.' Father Champagnat took the statue and showed it to his respectful neighbour and climbed back to Lavalla with his precious cargo. A few days later, he returned to the same location, and found to his surprise that the statue was back in same location where he had discovered it. After having made a quiet and thorough investigation, he was convinced that no one had touched the statue and that it had returned to its original location without anyone's assistance. The message was clear: Mary had come to assist the priest to make the right decision in selecting the location for the new home that he was planning.

No mention was made of this story in *The Life of the Founder* by Brother Jean-Baptiste, the memoirs of Brother Sylvestre, the "Annales de l'institut", nor in the diocesan process of Beatification (1888-1891). On the other hand, Pope Benedict XV refers to this tradition (Circulaires t. XIV, 15 août 1920, p. 386) in his formal address on the occasion of the declaration of the historicity of the virtues of Father Champagnat on June 22, 1920:

"By the appearance, disappearance and final discovery of her likeness, the Blessed Virgin was no stranger to the proliferation of undertakings by The Little Brothers of Mary. She directed them along the right path and continually protected them."

The question remains of finding the link between an independent Marist tradition and the roman text that Pope Benedict XV's address included. The fact that it was kept in the original text speaks for itself. The date and time of when the conversation occurred with Brother Tibère can easily be determined for the Brother (J.M. Gelin), was born in 1824 in (Chassigny-Sous-Dun (Saône-et-Loire) and died in 1903. The conversation they had must have occurred shortly after the Decree from Rome on August 9, 1896 conferring on Father Champagnat the title of Venerable. The event was celebrated with numerous triduums and renewed in-

terest of his life.<sup>10</sup> However, in spite of the papal discourse and the "*Mono-graphie de l'Hermitage*", this part of our tradition has failed to elicit much interest among the Brothers.

Perhaps the story is deserving of greater attention, for it does contain elements of reality as we know it. For example, Father Champagnat does in fact ask the repairman for a ladder, and he does show him a statue. These appear to be points of departure from the rest of the story. Furthermore, Father Champagnat could have found traces of an ancient hermitage that he supposed was once there. This hypothesis is not without merit, for in 1830, Father Bourdin recalls in his memoirs (OM2/ 754) the strange behavior of Jean-Marie Granjon, the first follower of Father Champagnat, who in 1826 strongly disagreed with the direction the undertaking was undergoing.

He moved into a hut that he had made...When the Brothers returning from vacation found him absent, they asked where Brother Jean-Marie<sup>11</sup> was, they were told that he was unavailable and that he should not be disturbed.

Brother Avit confirms the fact when he writes:

<sup>10</sup> Eulogies, Allocutions and Discourses Pronounced on the Occasion of the Introduction of the Cause of Marcellin Joseph-Benoit, Marist priest, Founder of the Little Brothers of Mary, 1896-1897, Lyon, X. Jevain, 1897.

<sup>11</sup> This is indicative of the respect given to him as somewhat of a co-founder.

"He made himself a little hut out of branches under the cliff overlooking the large open field that was made in 1830"

Having been a longtime Director of the Brothers and a well trusted confidant of Father Champagnat, Jean-Marie Granjon was perhaps expressing his displeasure with the crisis the Society was undergoing.<sup>12</sup> In brief, it is possible that an ancient hermitage existed by the rock formation near the Gier. Without being an isolated location in the strict sense of the world, it was nonetheless a beautiful corner of the world with the Gier creating a strong barrier prior to the construction of the dam with its lake. The diminished valley just below La Valla<sup>13</sup> now allowing only for the small hamlet called: "de La Rive".

## 7. THE HERMITAGE OF OUR LADY AS REFLECTING THE TRAPPIST TRADITION

The choice of the word "hermitage" could also be explained because when Fathers Champagnat and Courveille joined the Society of Mary, they were both influenced by traditional early monasticism, specifically that coming from the Desert fathers of the East. This legacy came

into vogue in the Trappist tradition with the influence of abbot, Rancé in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. It was renewed during the Revolution by Dom Augustin de Lestrange.<sup>14</sup> His Trappist monks escaped from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era by leaving Normandy and going as far as Russia and the Americas. All the while, they were considered as heroes because of their resistance to tyranny. One should not also forget the influence of Rev. Michel Ange Marin, OFM, (1697-1767) and his classic "*Les vies des Pères des déserts d'Orient*" in which he invokes the ascetical doctrines and exploits of the anchorites.

This period in history was well known throughout Catholic France and it is not my chance that Brother Jean-Marie Granjon and Father Courveille made their way to the Trappist monastery at Aiguebelle, one in 1822 and the other in 1826. In his letter written in June of 1826, Father Courveille suggested that the administration of the Hermitage should be modeled after that of Aiguebelle. Nor can we ignore the influence of Rev. Michel Ange Marin, OFM and his classic work on the spiritual life entitled: "*Les vies des Pères des déserts d'Orient:*" in which he invokes the doctrinal and ascetical doctrines of the anchorites.

<sup>12</sup> It was the year of the displacement of Fathers Courveille and Terrailon.

<sup>13</sup> I wonder if the construction of the open field over the slope above the valley of the Gier during the winter of 1830, (Avit, 1830, para. 134) did not have as its objective to hide the location of our beginnings and Brother Jean-Marie Granjon's opposition.

<sup>14</sup> See Augustin-Hervé Laffay, *Dom Augustin de Lestrange et l'avenir du monachisme (1754-1827)* Paris, Cef, 1998, 659 p.

“La vie de Rancé” by Dom Le Nain relates that Rancé had been a diocesan priest who had recently converted and who wished to establish a “hermitage” in the Pyrenees. He finally He opted for living in La Trappe as this would allow him to not only live a solitary and communal life, but it would also permit him to carry on an apostolic life at the same time.

He saw the Abbey as a center of religious activity: reaching out to the poor, associating with people, and even seeing to the administration of schools. However even if the monks were no longer to live in total isolation as were the anchorites, they were nevertheless to live in rather remote areas, as Rancé explains in a letter written to the bishop of Pamiers (Pyrenees) who wished to establish a monastery there:

“The most important thing to do is to find a proper location for the abbey. Our rules require that we should build our monasteries from commercial activity... all that is needed is a little valley with water nearby, where there is a little forest nearby and sufficient room for planting a garden to provide food for the monks.”<sup>15</sup>

In his biography, « La Vie de Rancé », Marsollier (livre IV, ch. V) treats at length about another interesting detail:

“He, (Rancé) never considered a person’s status: what assets he might have, or how much he could

contribute if he were accepted into the community. He made no distinction based on, the physical strength a person might have, his personal health, degree of learning, talents, the quality of his voice, or any other qualities of body, mind or spirit that a person might have that the world would look favorably upon.

He considered discriminating against a person on these grounds would prevent that person from becoming a saint. Nothing prevented anyone from being accepted (in La Trappe) even the elderly and the infirmed were welcomed.”

Like Rancé, Father Champagnat deliberately chose a remote location to establish his undertaking, yet one that would not preclude having some interaction with others living nearby. Father Courveille certainly did not influence Father Champagnat’s choice of location. He was rather reserved<sup>16</sup> and considered himself to be somewhat of an abbot in such a community. On the other hand, like Rancé, Father Champagnat welcomed everyone without any condition or exception. There are many other indications that Father Champagnat was either directly or indirectly influenced by Rancé’s brand of monasticism. For example, many of the religious names of the Brothers were inspired by those of the Desert Fathers: (Dorothee, Cassien, Arsène...), more especially in August of 1834 (OM1/321), when he wrote to Father Cholleton offering him land and a residence at La Grange Payre for the Marist Fathers of Valbencite because he felt that they lacked the sufficient privacy to be adequately pre-

<sup>15</sup> Dom Le Nain, op.cit. p. 248

<sup>16</sup> This would continue be a source of disagreement between the two of them.

pared for their missionary work. The theory that the word “hermitage” has its origins in Rancé’s view of monasticism should not be taken lightly. Father Champagnat’s discovery of an ancient hermitage would only deepen his understanding the type of monasticism that Rancé promoted and how it might be applied in the Society of Mary. Father Collin and the Marists at Belley did not completely share his view on the matter.

## 8. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL MEANING OF “THE HERMITAGE OF OUR LADY”

If the word « hermitage » has its origins in the Marist world because of the influence of Dom Rancé, the complete expression “Hermitage of Our Lady” does not. He and his successors used the traditional designations of: “Our Lady of La Trappe”, or “Our Lady of Aiguebelle” when referring to their Abbeys. In order to have a better understanding of what Father Champagnat may have in mind when he used the expression “The Hermitage of Our Lady”, we should reflect for a moment, on the literal meaning of that expression for it expresses that fact that Mary invites her chosen ones to share in her solitude. The Hermitage of Our Lady and The Society of Mary are interchangeable terms.

If it is uncommon to think about Mary in terms of the hermetical life,

one need only recall Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation referring to the cosmic struggle between the dragon and the pregnant woman adorned with the sun whose son, having been born, was taken straight up to heaven, while the woman “escaped into the desert.” In the cosmic battle that follows, Satan and his followers, having been cast upon the earth by Michael and his angels, rush into the pursuit of the Woman who is given a huge pair of eagle’s wings “... to fly away into the desert far away from the Serpent, where she is to be looked after for a year and twice a year and half a year. Finally the dragon, “...was enraged with the Woman and went away to make war on the rest of her children, that is, all who obey God’s commandments and bear witness for Jesus.”

At the time of the Revolution the Book of Revelation was passionately read and analyzed, especially this particular chapter. Like so many others, Fathers Champagnat and Courveille were also deeply moved by the conversation and it is possible that they were immersed in the reading of « *La cité mystique* » by Maria de Agreda. Her work was fervently read by J.C. Colin and included in Father Champagnat’s personal library in 1840. This holy and religious Sister of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century offers a critical analysis of Chapter XII<sup>17</sup> which she refers to at least twice, stressing the role of Mary as one who lives in an out-of-the-way place, fighting victoriously against Satan.

<sup>17</sup> 1<sup>re</sup> partie, Livre 1, ch. VIII-X and 3<sup>e</sup> partie, livre 8, ch. VII.

"This Woman will live apart where I will prepare a place for her...this secluded site to which the Woman will flee will be the dwelling of our Queen...I will grant and bestow upon her a solitary dwelling place overflowing with heavenly grace Ch. VIII § 105)... she will withstand Lucifer's greatest attacks... while waging war against him as only consecrated virgins of Jesus-Christ can do (Ch. X § 131)."

At the end of her work, Maria de Agreda describes Mary's final battles from her hidden Cenacle (ch. VII, § 508 p. 357).

"They (all of the devils) resolved to launch an attack on her in her sanctuary convinced that they would find her there...as she would be unprotected by her defender...all at once, they descended upon the Blessed Virgin Mary in her oratory... they did their utmost<sup>18</sup> in their final efforts (§ 510) by means of false revelations, false promises, threats and deceptions..."

When the battle had ended (§ 516) Mary withdrew to an interior deserted place. It is called "...a deserted place because among all creatures, she is the only one who has ever been elevated to this special place". At the end of the chapter, Mary gives an instruction in which she declares that next to her son (§ 529) she is "... the commander of these wars (against Satan). Christians have given power to Satan because of their disloyalty". With Jesus, and within the Church, she continued: "...we are always want a few good souls who are willing to defend the

glory and honor of God and who are willing to fight against the devils and put them to flight."<sup>19</sup> In her first critical analysis, Maria de Agreda emphasized Mary's role as the Woman living in solitude in a deserted place while awaiting the fulfillment of God's plan. In her second exegesis, her portrayal of Mary is more complex. On the one hand she is depicted, as one who has physically retired to her oratory and preserves her spiritual composure; on the other hand, she is represented as one who struggles to save and preserve the Church throughout its history.

While it is true that Maria de Agreda rarely used the word "hermitage", she often used the words: "desert", "solitude" and at other times the word "oratory". The word "refuge" in relationship to Mary is used some 35 times.

## 9. EVIDENCE OF MARIA DE AGREDA'S INFLUENCE

Finding a definite connection between Father Champagnat and Maria de Agreda's "*La cité mystique*" is not an easy task<sup>20</sup> as he left us only a few personal spiritual reflections. Furthermore, her "*La cité mystique*" was not without controversy and could only be read by those who had sufficient theological background to

<sup>18</sup> Meaning their greatest effort

<sup>19</sup> The Pledge taken at Fourvière reflects this sentiment.

<sup>20</sup> We find a specific reference to Marie d'Agreda in Brother François' notes 313 (catéchisme marial).

do so.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, in the rough draft of a letter (1827) to Msgr. De Pins (OM1, doc. 173) Father Champagnat tells of the pain he experiences resulting from his breaking up with Fa-

ther Courveille. He tells of an eschatological view of the Society of Mary that is much in keeping with ideas expressed by Maria de Agreda, specifically about “the works of hell”:

*“Reverend Monsignor,*

*...my deepest conviction is that God wants this undertaking to continue...The unfortunate incident that came from the heart of the one who pretended to be our leader clearly shows the terrible power that the devil has come up with to overthrow the undertaking that he knew was destructive of his evil purpose. I will always put my trust in Jesus and Mary. They are my rock foundation.*

In his Circular of January 1828, he reveals a milder attitude: He looks upon the Hermitage as the new Garden of Eden where Mary, the new Eve and ordinary resource protects her chosen ones. He also sees it as the New Jerusalem:

*“God has loved us from all eternity. He has called us and has chosen us to be with Him. The Blessed Virgin has planted us in her garden, she sees to it that we lack nothing.”*

In another letter to Mgr. De Pins, 1835 (L. 56), like Maria de Agreda, he looks upon Mary as the mystical, welcoming city.

*“Our undertaking is flourishing by leaps and bounds... dare not turn anyone away. I consider them as having been sent by Mary herself.”*

In an earlier letter (1832) to the future Brother Louis Marie, he reassured him:

*“You will do well in our home. Mary, our Good Mother will protect you. After having had her as your First Superior, you will have her as your Queen in heaven.”*

The considering her to be the “First Superior” is perhaps the strongest indication of the influence of Maria de Agreda. It was an expression used when the monastery of the Immaculate-Conception of Agreda was dedicated to Mary on March 22, 1643. The entire text is included in the appendix of *“La cité mystique”*. Although the style of the formula is somewhat rhetorical, it does include several elements dear to the hearts of Marists:

<sup>21</sup> Father Colin did not want young priests to read her works.

"We have decided that all Religious Sisters residing in this monastery, now or yet to come, will bear the name of "Mary"<sup>22</sup>. Those who already bear the name will keep it; those who do not will claim it either before or after their baptismal name. As for me, Maria De Agreda, the least of all your servants, I yield into your hands the responsibility that I have as superior of this humble community so that we have no other mother and no other superior than she whose subjects we wish to become. . . . Kneeling at your feet, our Good and Tender Mother, we beg you to accept our choice, and to rule over us now and forever and be our special advocate and our only Superior."

The idea of the Hermitage being thought of as Mary's dwelling place where she welcomes her faithful children could be attributed to Maria de Agreda. Yet why did Father Champagnat disown the expression: "The Hermitage of Our Lady"?

## 10. A TIME OF SPIRITUAL DRYNESS

The answer can be found in his letter of 1827 to Msgr. De Pins in which he makes reference to the one who seemed to have been chosen to lead the undertaking was overcome by the power of hell. Father Champagnat was always convinced that God wanted the work to succeed. However, he wrote: "...perhaps he wants someone else to establish it".

He expressed similar sentiments in a letter addressed to Father Gardette (OM1/173) and adds: "...more than ever, I have come to realize the meaning of the saying of the Prophet King: "*Nisi dominum edificaverit domum in vanum laboraverunt qui etc* ».

Father Champagnat recognized the fact that the first attempt to establish The Society of Mary had failed. The reason that it did not succeed was because those behind it either did not follow God's will (Courveille), or they were not called to establish the work to begin with (himself). This being the case, the title given to their foundation had become obsolete. From then on, Father Champagnat waited for a sign from God before starting anew with a foundation of the society of Priests which always remained dear to him but thinking that he was not the one who would bring it about.

Here we have the key that unlocks our understanding of his behavior. During the years 1830-1840, he had no difficulty accepting the fact that the core of the Society of Mary and its superior would be passed on to Father Colin. He himself would join the Society of Mary officially recognized by Rome in 1836. His intuition of 1826 was realized: God wanted the Society of Mary and other men would lead it.

<sup>22</sup> The Common Rules of 1852, Ch. VI: On Marial Devotion, Article 1: "The Brothers shall consider themselves infinitely happy to bear the name of Mary. They shall consider themselves blessed to bear the name of Mary and look upon their membership in her family as one of the greatest graces that God has bestowed upon them."

## 11. THE CHAPEL OF 1836 AS AN EXPRESSION OF OUR EARLY SPIRITUALITY

During this period, his venture prospered to such an extent that the Hermitage had to be remodeled and expanded. Brother Avit dates the work at 1835 (Annales, t. 1 § 89)

« The western wing was expanded by some 10 meters so that it joined the completed chapel whose foundations extended to the rock formation that had been leveled off. The eastern wing was raised up to three stories in order to make room for the Novitiate, the Infirmary and the Dormitory. This wing did not yet reach the chapel. It was cut off by solid rock that had not yet been leveled. »

The work progressed at the same time that the negotiations between Father Colin and Rome were taking place. The Chapel became an outward symbol of the official recognition of The Society of Mary that received recognition in a brief from Rome entitled *Omnium gentium*, April 29, 1836. From September 20-24, twenty priests gathered in Belley. Canonically, they comprised the first community of Marist Fathers and they elected Father Colin as their Superior and pronounced their first vows. This represented only the first phase of the proceedings

of the Society of Mary, for soon after, as Fathers Colin, Convert and Champagnat made their way to the Hermitage in order to direct the retreat for the Brothers Prior to leaving for Oceania, Msgr. Pompallier blessed the chapel and at the closing of the retreat on October 10, the Brothers pronounced their public vows for the first time reciting a formula that loosely bound them to The Society of Mary.<sup>23</sup>

The motif of the new chapel speaks eloquently of Father Champagnat's view of how the Society of Mary was begun, and Brother François<sup>24</sup> has left us a minute description<sup>25</sup> of the décor that was chosen. Joseph Ravery (1800-1869) was the designer who was chosen to do the work. He is the same artist who painted a portrait of Father Champagnat in 1840. If we were to draw an imaginary line, top to bottom in the choir, we find depictions of the Trinity, a Crucifix, and the Assumption, all leading to the altar. On the horizontal plane, we find the painting of the Assumption in the center with ten decorative portraits inspired by invocations from the litany of the Virgin Mary, separated by twelve columns.

The following outline provides the basics of the arrangement:

<sup>23</sup> The Cereimonial indicates that they professed their vows before Father Colin, the superior of the Society of Mary. However, the minutes indicate that they professed their vows to the superior of the Little Brothers of Mary, that is to say, Father Champagnat.

<sup>24</sup> Cahier des annals de l'Hermitage, AFM 213/16

<sup>25</sup> Brother Avit notes that at the time of the retreat of 1836, beginning in early October, "...the new chapel that was begun a year earlier, has been completed." (Annales, t. 1 par 148). However a letter written to Msgr. Pompallier on May 27, 1838, Father Champagnat wrote: "We have completed the work on our chapel. It is very beautiful."

<b>Trinity (on the ceiling above the altar)</b>		
Angel in adoration (fresco)	<b>Crucifix (fresco)</b>	Angel in adoration (fresco)
Blessed Virgin Mary (statue) St. Louis Gonzaga (statue)	<b>Assumption (tableau)</b>	St Joseph (statue) St Francis Xavier (statue)
<b>Altar</b>		
5 oval (frescos) separated by columns		5 oval (frescos) separated by columns
Janua Coeli		Foederis Arca
Stella Matutina		Rosa Mystica
Regina Virginum		Regina Martyrum
Sedes Sapientiae		Turris Davidica
Consolatrix Afflictorum		Auxilium Christianorum

The theological message of the vertical imaginary line is a traditional one: on the ceiling, the Trinity is represented in the circle of glory; the Crucifix reminds us of the Incarnation and Redemption of the Word Incarnate who is adored by the angels; in the third portion of this collection is the Altar where the sacrifice of Christ is re-

newed; as for the horizontal axis, it is evident that Father Champagnat did not take lightly the ten invocations chosen out of the forty five contained in the Litany of Our Lady. The mystical relationship that exists between the representations on the left to those on the right reaches its highest point in the The Assumption.

Epistle side	<b>ASSUMPTION</b>	Gospel Side
Blessed Virgin Mary		St. Joseph
St. Louis de Gonzaga		St. Francis Xavier
<b>Janua Coeli</b> (gate of heaven)	New Covenant between God and man	<b>Foederis Arca</b> (Ark of the covenant)
<b>Stella Matutina</b> (morning star)	The Annunciation	<b>Rosa Mystica</b> (a beautiful rose)
<b>Regina Virginum</b> (lilly, crown, dove)	Mary, Mother of the faithful	<b>Regina Martyrum</b> (crown of roses and palm-leaf)
<b>Sedes Sapientiae )</b> (throne surmounted by a dove)	Mary, Mother of the Word Incarnate	<b>Turris Davidica</b> (tower)
<b>Consolatrix Afflictorum )</b> (a cross laced with a vine) croix	Mary, Mother and Leader of the Church	<b>Auxilium Christianorum</b> ( cross linked with a sword)
<b>String of roses surrounding the nave</b>	The Church participating in the Divine Mystery and Glory of Mary	<b>String of roses surround- surrounding the nave</b>

The five symbolic stages represented, summarize Mary's role in the history of our salvation with the Assumption being both the beginning and the end of the partnership of humanity in its salvation. It is quite possible that the image of the Assumption was inspired by the Book of Revelation in which Mary is depicted as having the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars over her head. Similar ties could be made with other of the images of Mary. Each of the two series of frescos leading to the Assumption has its own specific message. On the Epistle side, the representations arouse feelings of stability, fertility, hope and purity, all of which originate in Mary. She is all pure and all compassionate; she is the Immaculate Conception. The statue of St. Louis Gonzaga represents one who is the perfect imitator of Mary by his purity. On the Gospel side, Mary also is represented as a leader and defender; she is the Tower of Strength, the sword, the Ark of the Covenant. St. Francis Xavier, missionary par excellence, is represented as the corresponding likeness of St. Louis Gonzaga. St. Joseph is represented as the head of the household, guardian of Jesus, husband of Mary, model of trustworthiness and dedication.

A vertical reading is also in order. The Church and The Society of Mary are both represented; both are suffering and embattled; both are in need of Mary's wisdom and defensive power, imitating her in her in both her roy-

al dignity and her martyrdom (Salve Regina), and rising with her triumphantly into heaven. Here we have the ultimate expression of what Father Champagnat had in mind as early as 1824 when he used the expression: "Hermitage of Our Lady".

It would seem therefore, that when Father Champagnat fashioned his iconic display for the chapel, he wanted to thank Our Lady for having brought to fruition the Spirituality of the Society of Mary as expressed as early as 1816. He also wanted to express the fact that the Brothers had earned a certain level of maturity within the Society of Mary. We have known Father Champagnat as a master builder. We have perhaps overlooked the mystical dimension of his personality that he expressed so well. By means of using iconic displays, he conveyed his profound conviction that the Society of Mary is at the heart of the history of our salvation and that the Hermitage is at the heart of the Society of Mary.

However, has Father Champagnat's iconic message been well understood? The answer is at best ambiguous. If Brother François carefully described the chapel of 1836 in minute detail, he offered no interpretation, even of a personal nature. The reason for the omission is perhaps due to the fact that he considered the Hermitage as "the great reliquary of the Founder", and no further explanation was deemed necessary. Whatever the case may be, the chapel of 1836<sup>26</sup> was

<sup>26</sup> It was hastily constructed.

done away with in 1875 and its iconic display with it. One would think that Brother François, who was still living at the time, would have found it useful to document what was being replaced, even if it were only by means of a sketch or a photograph, for photography was common enough at the time. The adornment of the new chapel (*Monographie de N. D. de l'Hermitage*)<sup>27</sup> would be completely different.<sup>28</sup>

The Brothers apparently did not establish a strong connection between the adornment of the earlier chapel and the teachings of the Founder. It is as though Marist spirituality lay hidden behind symbols that were so well known that only that which was apparent was clearly understood. However, it is also true that no one ever questioned what was behind the obsolete expression: “The Hermitage of Our Lady”.

## CONCLUSION

By way of a conclusion one thing is certain: the term “Hermitage of Our Lady” was initiated in 1824 and served as a symbol of the bond between Father Champagnat and Father Courveille as they sought to establish the Society of Mary in “les Gauds”. The rupture of their relationship in 1826 called for a replacement of the origi-

nal terminology with something different. The word “hermitage” coming from the Rancé tradition was retained, forming a connection between the two eras while still being faithful to Mary’s designation to Father Champagnat of its location.

Related to this, it is to be noted that the spiritual overtones of the Bonner House in La Valla were never considered. Father Champagnat’s abrupt swale of the residence is an indication of the distance he put between the “cradle of the Institute” and what was to follow. The legend of the statue that was discovered, brought to La Valla and returned to its original location is a symbolic indication of the relative importance of both locations and reinforces the notion that the selection of “les Gauds” as the new location was done for more than practical reasons.

Finally, if one is to understand Father Champagnat’s vision of the Society of Mary, it is important to establish a link between the terminology “The Hermitage of Our Lady”, and the configuration of representations used in the chapel of 1836. I have suggested some ideas about the origin of the use of the key word “hermitage” which further research may either prove or disprove. I am convinced, nevertheless, that I was not mistaken in affirming that in using the

<sup>27</sup> A one hundred and eighteen page booklet published at Saint Chamond in 1925.

<sup>28</sup> Having been designed in 1890, in the choir, it consisted of two rows of saints. On the lower level: St. Pothin and St. Irenaeus, patron saints of Lyon, Saints Peter and Paul and St. Michael the archangel; on the higher level on either side of the Dove representing the Holy Spirit and facing one another: Saint Anne and Saint Philomena, Saint Louis Gonzaga and Blessed Peter Chanel, John the Baptist and St. Stephen.

esoteric expression “The Hermitage of Our Lady”, and his selection of the ornaments used to decorate the chapel of 1836 speak loudly of the wonderful dimension of Marist spiri-

tuality that are deserving of far more critical attention so that we may go beyond devotional considerations and reach the spiritual and mystical reality that lies beyond them..

# REPORT ON VERRIÈRES

## From the Archives of the Archdiocese of Lyon

Portfolio A 2 II 104



Br André Lanfrey

The author of this document is M. Cabarat, former canon of the Diocese of Tours. He became the rector of the minor seminary of l'Argentière between 1805 and 1808. Like most teachers at the seminary, he was a member of the Society of "Père de la Foi", a religious society that was banned by Napoleon because of its similarity to the Society of Jesus. Although it was protected for a time by Cardinal Fesch, their members were dispersed in 1808. M. Cabarat remained in the dioceses as a canon and vicar for minor seminaries.<sup>1</sup> Having been given these responsibilities on January 23, 1808, he quickly took action, as the following report will indicate. To my knowledge, it has not made its way to any of our Marist resources.

The year 1808 was a turning point in the history of the seminary at Verrières. Although many changes had been tried, the general quality of education and basic instructional resources left much to be desired. A plan of action was put into place by the diocesan authorities to remedy the situation. Marcellin Champagnat was in Verrières from All Saints Day 1805 to the summer of 1813. He lived in a situation that was poorly organized and highly improvised at first, to one that gradually improved. The general tone of priestly formation was better than what is reflected in the report of 1808.

Br André Lanfrey

[1] "Lyon, June 27 1808

*I am pleased to send you, your highest eminence, the report of my visitations to the minor seminaries of Verrières and Roches as requested by your Council."*<sup>2</sup>

[...]

<sup>1</sup> On Rev. Cabarat, see André Lestenschnider, L'Argentière, Lyon, 1905, p. 77-135 and OMI/doc. 29 p. 179

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Cabarat goes on to give details about a young man by the name of Pietra, a protégé of the cardinal

[2] "Report on the minor seminaries of Verrières and Roches - Visitation of May, 1808"

[3] "Report to the council of his highest eminence, Msgr. Cardinal Archbishop of Lyon on the visitation of the two minor seminaries of Verrières and Roches completed in May, 1808."

### **Verrières**

The minor seminary of Verrières was established in 1804 by the refractory priest, M. Périer, of the parish in the said location. An unknown amount of money, coming from an unknown source, was given to him with the stipulation that it be used to establish a center of learning for the young. In 1805, he purchased the presbytery in Verrières for 5,500 F and a year later, he obtained the house next to it belonging to a certain Clavelon, for the amount of 4,000 F.

M. Périer made use of both houses by using them as a boarding school. After the Council called for its inspection and entrusted him with students for the purpose of priestly formation, he referred to it as "Le Petit Séminaire" and paid for part or all of their up-keep.

Last year, in order to accommodate additional students, Father Périer erected a three story structure next to the Clavelot house in which he added a large kitchen and dormitory rooms. According to Father Périer, the cost of the construction and the additional alterations amounted to 8,500 F. He also expanded the garden with the purchase of a smaller one next to the one by the rectory for the sum of 300 F. The renovated Clavelot house is linked to the other rectory buildings by an 8 foot walkway leading from the courtyard to the garden. The house itself has 85 feet facing the garden, and the rectory buildings, 65 feet.

At the present time, these buildings situated between the courtyard and the garden, are adequate for a minor seminary of 160 to 180 students. The complex includes a kitchen, a dining room, study halls and other rooms, dormitories, laundry room, recreation rooms, etc. It is unfortunate, however, that the stairs leading to the dormitories are inadequate and poorly constructed. It is also unfortunate that the courtyard is so narrow, (it measures only 55 feet). The chapel is accessible without leaving the building. But the gardens are not yet enclosed. M. Périer is working on this.

[4] (4) The spring providing water for the building is located outside of the property and is located in a public area opposite the entrance. This situation provides a ready opportunity for the young students to leave the property under

the pretext that they are going out to get water. M. Périér is trying to remedy the situation by channeling some of the water from the spring onto the property. The market town of Verrières is a busy place and there are many taverns. This calls for stricter supervision when students leave the property.<sup>3</sup>

M. Périér not only owns the houses and the garden of the minor seminary of Verrières, he also owns a wooded area measuring 65 "métrées" (métrées)<sup>4</sup> which he purchased for 12,000 F. He also enjoys revenues from properties located in Gumières and elsewhere given to him by a woman referred to as "la tante"<sup>5</sup>; they are valued at between 30,000 to 40,000F. She provided M. Périér with the bill of sale for land valued at 20,000F, including the produce therefrom. It has been verified that this woman acquired<sup>6</sup> these properties with monies given to her with the stipulation that they be used to defray the cost of education of young people.

Father Périér is an intelligent 42 year old man gifted with many practical skills. Would that these qualities were extended to the spiritual realm! Since he has come to Verrières, he has too often neglected the religious instruction of the children of his parish. That is one of the reasons why he is not loved or held in high regard by most of the people of his parish. For the past several months, one of teachers has been taught catechism in the parish, for which people are grateful. M. Périér has excused himself from this responsibility due to his many other preoccupations. Furthermore, the religious instruction for the children preparing for their first communion has been far too neglected and their supervision is inadequate. Interaction with outsiders is too easy. Only half of the boarders have beds.<sup>7</sup> M. Périér is hardly involved in the academic program; he depends on the head teacher to do this. Besides the superior, at the seminary in Verrières there are seven teachers plus a prefect or general supervisor.

- Teacher of the 3rd, M. Antoine Linossier, priest, 46 years of age, capable, handicapped, can only walk with someone assisting him.
- Of the 4th, M. J.B. Nobis, tonsured, 29 years of age, completed theological studies, sharp, capable, and industrious.

<sup>3</sup> Given this context, Father Champagnat's resolution regarding his visits to local taverns is better understood

<sup>4</sup> The official word is "métrée". It is a surface measurement representing a "ha" ( hectare)

<sup>5</sup> A generous benefactor in the history of "le petit séminaire de Verrières".

<sup>6</sup> The original term used was "acquêts", a juridical term for acquisitions

<sup>7</sup> A good number of seminarians are accommodated by locals. They are "caméristes".

- [5] — each of the 5th, M. Chomarat, 32 years of age, layman, did philosophy in Le Puy, mediocre ability.
- 6th, M. Breuil de Roche, 20 years of age, student at St Irénée, capable.<sup>8</sup>
  - 7th, M. Crépu, 27 years of age, student at St Irénée, capable, religious and very edifying.
  - 8th, Mr. Bachelard, layman, 37 years of age, only studied philosophy, capable, industrious.
  - Teacher of beginners: M. Chappuis, layman, 21 years of age, (in the margin: N (ote). M. Chappuis left Verrières in the month of June.)
  - Prefect: M. Jean Fr (ançois) Morlier (?̄) sub-deacon, 23 years of age.
- In general, teachers at Verrières do not seem to be happy here, M. Linossier being an exception. M. Chomarat appears to be indifferent. All of the others are seeking other opportunities.

Household help for Verrières include:

- 1° A cook who is about 40 years of age
- 2° A kitchen hand who is 36 years of age
- 3° A laundress
- 4° A baker who also does the shopping — a widower
- 5° A young kitchen helper who is also a student

There are 183 students of whom:

- 15 in 3rd called humanities
- 16 in 4th also called 3rd
- 25 in 5th
- 30 in 6th<sup>9</sup>
- 26 in 7th
- 29 in 8th
- 42 beginners

There are far too few domestics to adequately maintain an establishment for such a large number of students, and general cleanliness of the it leaves much to be desired.

M. Périer shows his accounts to the Council. For his stipend he receives a maximum of 24F per month. The Council offers him 15F for each of 18 boarders in the upper levels, four receive 8F per month and one 3F per month.

<sup>8</sup> Marcellin Champagnat is in his class

<sup>9</sup> See OM1/Doc. 9 (1807-8) which indicates that Marcellin Champagnat is among the 28 students in the 6th

*This report is hardly favorable regarding the establishment of Verrières. However we acknowledge the fact that it prepares some subjects (5) have been prepared for the ecclesiastical state, especially true of local vocations.<sup>10</sup> Among these are found students who, having originally been students of good pastors, keep their sound habits and work wholeheartedly at whatever they do. Yet how many of these candidates from the minor seminary of Verrières would be better prepared if it were better directed; how much hidden evil, which we suspect is there, could be reduced and redressed! Academic studies could be improved, although M. Linossier has contributed a great deal in this area since his arrival at Verrières in June of 1806.*

*We let it be known to M. Périer that the proper administration of such a large parish as that in Verrières and the suitable management of such a large house of studies are beyond the ability of a single person. That is why he has asked that a finance manager be appointed for him who would be responsible for the revenues and expenditures of the minor seminary. He would submit to him all his income and expenditures, as well as those of "la tante", all of which would be subsequently submitted to the Council. He would continue to be the superior and owner during his lifetime. This would be subject to review at a later date."*

*There follows a far more favorable report on the seminary at Roches, pages 7-10.*

## CONCLUSION

"It can be seen from the report:

1° That the two minor seminaries of Verrières and Roches are in need of improvement or reorganization.

2° That the state of affairs is better in Roches than in Verrières and it should be preserved, especially as

it pertains to its overall dynamics. If one had to choose between the two, the former is preferable to the latter.

3° If improvements could be made at the seminary of Verrières, it would be advantageous for the diocese to maintain both."

<sup>10</sup> The French word is *indigènes*, normally meaning those from the immediate area. But Cabarat seems to have extended the use of the word to include country boys generally of whom Marcellin Champagnat would be one.



# THE SAYINGS IN THE ROOM OF FATHER CHAMPAGNAT



**Br André Lanfrey**

We know that the first two Marist Brothers occupied the Bonner house from January 2 1817 until late 1819. We also know that what was called the room of Father Champagnat's had another purpose prior to becoming his room because Brother François mentions in his writings<sup>1</sup> that the first community retreat was held in 1819 and took place "...in the classroom which later became Father Champagnat's room on the ground floor". No precise dates were mentioned of what seems to have been the first community retreat ever held, however we do know that the ceremony for the taking of the religious habit (OFM/3, doc. 575 p. 244) took place on September 8, 1819 during the retreat.<sup>2</sup>

In his circular of July 2, 1855, Brother François described the room as follows:

"After having purchased from the local parish in La Valla the small house that was to become the cradle of the Institute, our holy Founder remodeled one of the rooms with his own hands and made it into a little community prayer room. There, he would often gather the young Brothers and pray with them at the foot of the statue of Our Lady and form them in the fundamentals of the religious life."

## He went on to report:

"One day, while teaching them about the purpose of the Institute and how they might effectively achieve these objectives by being faithful to the observance of the Rules, in his enthusiasm exclaimed: 'When will we have the pleasure of having Jesus Christ present among us? When will we have our own chapel? And when will we have our own religious habit? When will we have the pleasure of seeing our Congregation firmly established with its own novitiate and its own Rules? Take heart, my dear Brothers! All of this will soon come about! Very soon, we will have all of these things to help us our spiritual journey.'"

<sup>1</sup> A.F.M. 501.302 p.121

<sup>2</sup> The "Chronologie Mariste" lists September 8, 1818 as the date when this took place. However this date is highly unlikely. G. Rivat came to La Valla to study Latin in the month of May. It would be surprising that he would take the habit during the very same year. On the issue of when the first Brothers entered, see OM1/Doc. 756, note 5

If I were asked to give a date for when this declaration was actually made, I would say that it occurred on September 8, 1819. This would coincide with the taking of the habit by the young aspirants who were not yet religious at the time. The comments by the Founder coincide perfectly with the situation that they were in. Brother François in particular, would have been eager to preserve these various details. The renovation of the room and the various exhortations painted on the walls would have done from 1817 to 1819, and perhaps even before the arrival of Gabriel Rivat which occurred on May 6, 1818, for his name is not included among “The First Brothers”. The fact remains that the following aspirations were written on the walls:

“Jesus, you are everything to me.  
 You are my love and my joy!  
 May the fire of your love burn within me!  
 Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament  
 of the Altar! To God alone be the glory!  
 Blessed be the pure and immaculate Conception  
 of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God!”

These sentiments correspond very well with the ambience of the room that was used for prayer, religious instruction and perhaps even for the taking of the religious habit and for the making of the promises. It was in this room that the small group of six disciples made their retreat, where Brother Jean-Marie Granjon was elected as

director and where a rule was introduced. It was perhaps around the month of September of 1819 that these events occurred. Shortly later, Father Champagnat quietly moved in during the night.<sup>3</sup> Related to these events is the fact that the retreat of 1820 would take place “in the little chapel on the first floor” as the “classroom” of 1819 was no longer available.<sup>4</sup>

The original use of the room occupied by Father Champagnat from late 1819 until 1825 has been largely forgotten. On February 5, 1829, the house was sold by Father Champagnat to M. Couturier for the sum of 1,000F (*Annales de La Valla*) and was repurchased by the Institute in 1858. Having been used as a storage room, Father Champagnat’s room appears to have been largely untouched.

“Brother Gentien, who had been Director from 1874-1878, found the room in shambles, full of old junk, and the walls in disrepair. On the walls were remnants of painted borders that encased a few faded letters. However, someone had the good sense to reproduce some of the words on paper before they had vanished completely and fastened them below each of the recorded items. The Brother Director had Brother Cécilien come from the Hermitage to repair the walls and faithfully reproduce what had been written on the walls by Father Champagnat. Brother Cécilien thought he would re-arrange the sayings more symmetrically and evenly spaced. However, Brother Director told him: ‘If Father Champagnat decided not to carefully measure them out, that was up to him, but let’s reproduce them exactly in the

<sup>3</sup> Life of Father Champagnat. Part 1, Ch 7. p. 78

<sup>4</sup> AFM, Ibid

same location that he did. Sometimes one said: 'Ah! If these walls could talk!' These walls do talk, and they tell us something that was dear to the heart of the Founder. This room is a real dwelling place of the love of God."

Around the year 1960, the original sayings found on the walls were restored. From 2012-2013, preliminary work done prior to the restoration by the architect M. Joan Puig Pey, uncovered the original sayings and the two attempts to restore one of them.<sup>5</sup> Further investigation revealed that the room was originally painted sky blue and that the twice restored saying revealed that the original saying was carefully written in black, bordered by orange and bright red colors.

## 1. THE PROBLEM OF THE PAPERS POSTED ON THE WALL

We know that it was the colorful Brother Vincent, the Director of La Vallée,<sup>6</sup> who initiated the re-purchase of the Bonner House in 1858 by finding benefactors who were willing to donate for the cause. Because the Superiors were so taken up with the alterations being made at St Genis-Laval and their efforts toward the recognition of the Institute by Rome, they did not attach much importance to the

purchase of the house; furthermore, no additional costs were involved.

According to the *Annales de La Vallée*, the final decision on the purchase of the house was made by the general administration of the Institute on August 10, 1858.<sup>7</sup> Brother François was in Rome at the time pursuing official recognition of the Institute. Having left on February 6<sup>th</sup> with Brother Louis-Marie, Brother François would return on August 25<sup>th</sup> while Brother Louis-Marie would return at the end of the month of April. As the *Chronologie Mariste* indicates, the general administration would leave the Hermitage for St Genis-Laval on August 6<sup>th</sup>, so the decision was made in the new Mother House. Finally, the purchase received official authorization from the government on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1858 (*Annales de La Vallée*).<sup>8</sup> The deed of sale for the house was passed on to be notarized by M. Finaz at an unspecified date, but most likely in 1859. The subsequent long delay that lasted until sometime in 1874 was perhaps due to the tensions that existed between the contractor and the contentious Brother Vincent who was not highly regarded by either the parish priest or his curate.

The only indication of local interest was the papers posted on the wall,

<sup>5</sup> It is unfortunate that further restorations of other original sayings were not undertaken sooner. The partial unveiling of a second original writing has revealed that it had similar characteristics

<sup>6</sup> He was rough and ready, well liked, and also served as a dentist

<sup>7</sup> The "lettre administrative n° 32784" makes known that the purchasing intention submitted was submitted in July to the prefect for the LoirE

<sup>8</sup> Having been designated as an association for public service, the Marist Brothers fell under the jurisdiction of the State

certainly left by one of the purchasers during the negotiations during 1857 or at the beginning of 1858. The sayings that were put on the walls by Father Champagnat were mostly faded. However, at least one of the visitors, perhaps Brother François himself, remembered seeing them. Until the room could be restored, the visitors transcribed what was written because they considered them to be an important part of our heritage.

Since it is true that Brother François was still living at the Hermitage in 1874, it is curious as to why neither the *Annales de La Valla* nor any other document mentions his role or at least his opinion about the restoration of the sayings on the walls. They have been poorly documented. Having been written prior to 1819, neglected from 1825 to 1858, there was a brief interest in them. Then they emerged from obscurity in 1874 without any apparent involvement of Brother François. It is true, however, that as far as he was concerned, the great “reliquary” of Father Champagnat was the Hermitage. Nevertheless for the Brothers of the

following generations, La Valla became the “cradle” of the Institute.

## 2. A MYSTICAL THEOLOGY WITHOUT A CLEAR MARIST IDENTITY

The Trinitarian, Eucharistic and Marial aphorisms used by the Founder were not ordinary expressions of popular devotion. They constituted a summary of a theological and mystical proclamation that could only be attributed to him.

Why, however were there no references to any of these expressions in our historical documents? Equally surprising is the omission of the Marist motto that was used at Fourvière in July of 1816: “All for the greater glory of God and the honor of Mary, Mother of Our Lord, Jesus-Christ...” as well as the phrase used by the Brothers for five years when making their promises: “We the undersigned for the greater Glory of God and the Honor of Mary, Mother of Our Lord, Jesus-Christ...”. In all, only one clear Marian spiritual idea is found:

Fourvière (1816)	La Valla
Praised be the Holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Blessed be the Pure and Immaculate Conception of Mary, Mother of God.

## 3. TRACES OF THE BROTHERS’ FIRST FORMATION

These sayings are similar to the ones found in the monastic tradition. They can

be found written on cloisters wall, chapter halls, cloisters, and even in some monastic cells. They were used to promote spiritual fervor and meditation. They would serve the same purpose in the home of the young aspirants in La Valla.

Above all, they reflect the first phase of formation in the Institute during which Father Champagnat regarded himself only as the spiritual director of a group of young lay men. He would only gradually reveal to them the Marist project. What they needed initially was a sound spirituality, but quite general. We have an indication of this modest approach when we read the commitment formula that was used for over five years (OM1/ doc. 168) "...in the pious association of those who consecrate themselves under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary for the Christian education of rural children." This formula, used until 1826, appears to have accurately reflected their living situation. The use of the expression: "Brothers of Mary" would come only later.

Similarly, we know that according to the retreat notebook Brother François kept during the retreat of 1819 that the motto: "All for the greater Glory of God and the Honor of Blessed Mary" was used, but perhaps not before then. This invites us to consider Father Champagnat's talk to the Brothers referred to earlier. He was no longer satisfied with a pious association but revealed his intention of founding a religious order. The end of the year 1819 would be a pivotal moment for them, for first time they defined themselves by name (Brothers of Mary), made use of a motto, and nominated a Director and in the presence of a Superior.

The written sayings on the walls had now become somewhat passé because the Brothers had moved

beyond them. By writing the sayings the way he did, Father Champagnat captured in time that particular phase of their development.

I believe that these sayings represent the basic spiritual formation that the Brothers received during the first two years of their training in La Valla. They are deserving of much greater attention for, in spite of the fact that they do not adequately describe what Marist spirituality later became, they do reflect the fact that Father Champagnat did not invite his disciples to some simplistic devotions or religious practice but, from the beginning, he provided them with a valid spirituality appropriate for the essence of the Marist project. The effects of this sound formation can clearly be seen in the lives of several of those who benefited from it, such as Brother Louis, Brother François, or even Jean-Marie Granjon in whom they left a lasting impression.

#### 4. COMENTARY DOCUMENT

I have recently discovered an entry in the *Annales de la maison de l'Hermitage* (FMS 213/16) on page 30, that adds to what I have written and provides complementary information:

"The sayings in Father Champagnat's room in Lavalla The room occupied by Father Champagnat had served as a classroom and a prayer room prior to his arrival to live with the Brothers. The various classroom sayings and religious aspirations written on the walls testify to this. Here are a few examples

that have been deciphered:

- 1°- Listen attentively to catechetical instructions
- 2°- Don't waste time when writings
- 3°- Jesus. You are my love and my joy  
May the fire of Your love burn within me
- 4°- Blessed be the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar
- 5°- To God alone be all the glory
- 6°- Blessed be the holy and immaculate Conception  
of Blessed Mary, Mother of God
- 7°- God sees me (written in a different handwriting)  
(above the door)

The first two sayings are clearly inspired by the *Conduite* of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.<sup>9</sup> This leads us to believe that from the first years, the De La Salle method exerted an influence. The seventh can also be found in *The Life of the Founder* where an entire chapter is devoted to this theme.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> F.P. Zind, «Bx. M. Champagnat son oeuvre scolaire dans son contexte historique », Rome 1991, p. 359

<sup>10</sup> Life of Father Champagnat, Part 2, Chapter 5

## THE SUNDIAL AT THE HERMITAGE

Br André Lanfrey

At the Hermitage, there is a small stone block in the grassed area near the famous “Chapel in the Woods” that escapes the notice of most visitors. On it is mounted an apparatus made of steel, the purpose of which may not be immediately obvious. Even though it often goes unnoticed, it is a not an insignificant part of our heritage. The mounted object is a sundial, specifically an “equatorial” sundial, which makes it possible to determine the exact time at a particular location. Inscribed on the sundial itself is the date when it was made: 1851.

The person to draw our attention to this rare treasure is M. Jean Rieu, an engineer and teacher at l'École des Mines in St Etienne. The clock itself was made by a priest, Jean-Marie Guyoux (1793-1869), Curé of Montmerle, which is a parish in close proximity to the village of Ars where a similar clock can be found. The parish is also located near St Didier-sur-Chalarnonne where Father Champagnat founded one of our first institutions in 1836.

While doing research recently, M. Rieu came across a book entitled *Les Cadrans Solaires* by l'abbé Guyoux. Besides providing data about sundials, M. Rieu's findings also brought to light information about the man who made and designed these simple and easy to use sundials. Not only was Guyoux a creative inventor, he

was also a brilliant mathematician. He was also a priest and a contemporary of Marcellin Champagnat. M. Rieu has been able to recover and restore twenty-seven sundials made between 1831 and 1867.

Further research reveals that the inventor was born Jean-Marie Guyoux on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1793 in the village of Bully, to the north of the Department of the Loire. He was the son of a potter and the first born of a family of ten children. I was able to trace some of the stages of his priestly formation. He was ordained as a sub-deacon on December 18, 1820, to the diaconate on March 17, 1821, and finally ordained a priest on June 17, 1821 at the age of 28. He most likely entered the major seminary of St Irénée on All Saints Day, 1818. Unfortunately, we have no record of where he pursued his advanced studies, or where he developed his natural ability with mathematics; St Jodard and then Verrières are the most likely places. In 1813, his name does not appear on the list conscripts for the army, which leads one to believe that he was exempted from military service as an ecclesiastical student.

With only a five year age difference between him and Marcellin Champagnat, they are likely to have followed similar paths. They no doubt met occasionally before their destinies led them apart. Guyoux remained in

Montmerle from 1821 to 1869 where he served first as curate, then as parish priest. When the diocese of Belley underwent restructuring in 1823, Guyoux found himself no longer in the diocese of Lyon. It was while continuing to be a zealous and dedicated as the pastor at Montmerle that he began making sundials. At first they were destined for those in the immediate area. Later, they found their way to far more distant locations. The one located in Jonzieux, near Marlihes, is dated 1846, while the one at the Hermitage is dated at 1851. They are among those found in the more distant places. Of note is the fact that Jean-Louis Duplay, a close priest friend of Marcellin Champagnat who later became a seminary professor and then Rector of St Irénée, was originally from Jonzieux.

Up to this point in time, I have not found any evidence in Marist documents, including visual records, as to when the sundial of 1851 at the Hermitage may have been installed. Its function, however, can easily be explained. The monastic rhythm of life of the house called for a reliable way of keeping time. This certainly could have been done with the use of watches and mechanical clocks, but they were expensive and often unreliable. At a time when rapid communication did not exist, the only way to be sure about the time was by means of a sundial. That is why those made by Guyoux and others can still be found in monastic settings such as in the Trappist Abbey of Dombes (1863). It was also an important tool used for

determining the ringing of church bells; in Jonzieux the clock was positioned in the garden next to the presbytery. Finally, they were also used as decorative items in parks and could be found in the surroundings of castles.

The first years of the Institute after 1817 were spent without such an instrument. That is why the first Brothers found it difficult to work out the time. This is mentioned in *The Life of the Founder* where it is noted: "Since they were very poor, and had not been able to afford an alarm clock, they sometimes rose too early in the morning, sometimes too late." It is also noted in his biography that Father Champagnat stretched out a string between his presbytery to the Brothers' house and would ring that would ring a bell when it was time to rise. (*Life*, Ch 6, p.69). This slightly clumsy arrangement was resolved when in 1819 Father Champagnat moved in with the Brothers. In the Prospectus of 1824 (*La Regla de Fundador* p. 24), which deals with expectations for founding a new house, listed among the required items is # 10, "an alarm clock". From 1825 at the Hermitage, a new bell governed daily life. In *Les Annales* of Brother Avit (1830 #147), Brother Jean-Joseph (J.B. Chillet) is eulogized by the author with the words: "He always rang the bell exactly on time. He was punctual at all times and for fifteen years never missed a minute."

Record books of business transactions also provide valuable information about the use of clocks and watches. Records of income also like-

wise furnish insights: (OFM1/ 111/1) in January of 1832: "Received from François Ginest (future Brother Apollinaire), 50.75F and a copper watch." In the record book of expenditures of 1837 (OFM 130/ 17), the secretary noted: "In 1837, I received from Monsieur Champagnat the sum seventy-eight francs on the 22 of the month for a clock and a watch." In the account of expenditures of 1838 (ODM, 131/20): "To pay the clock-maker 37 francs", and in 1841 (OFM 134/12), "To balance the account with Michoudet, the clock-maker, 34 francs." Finally, the prospectus of the Institute in 1837 (C. 1, p. 242), lists for the Brothers' study: "an alarm clock with its protective sheeting" (40F), and a watch (30F). The total operational value of equipment to be purchased for one school was listed at 1,370F, more than 5% of which would be used for the purchase of equipment for telling the time.

At the beginning of the Institute, the cost of buying a watch was considered not only exorbitant, but also a luxury. In fact, the superiors at the Chapter 1852 considered eliminating its use in communities entirely. However the facetious Brother Avit in his annals, (Avit 1852 #49), dampened the proposal by suggesting that watches were not really needed, even when traveling. "All that is necessary is to have a clock securely fastened with shoulder straps on the back of one of the Brothers and have him walk ahead of the others. The right time would always be available and staring his followers right in the face." In his later years, however, Brother Avit regretted

what he had said, for around 1880 he noted: "Watches are now so commonly in use that their use as become an abuse."

From these texts we can see that bells and clocks (some with alarms) were and essential part of communal and professional life the Institute. Their use and function should not be forgotten. We have learned that initially, the use of personal watches posed something of a problem because not only were they costly, but they were also expensive to repair. Nevertheless, their use spread rapidly throughout the Institute. In our own day, we depend far less on the observation of the skies for the telling of time. Our lives are not centered on living by the sound of a bell. Furthermore, watches have become far less expensive.

The installation of the sundial at the Hermitage in 1851 appears to be part of a general trend. Interestingly enough, however, this date is also linked to the legal authorization of the Institute for it occurred on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1851. Records kept in our *Chronology* indicate that the event was commemorated on September 7 with the blessing of a statue of Our Lady which was installed in the southern courtyard, and a second statue, that of St. Joseph, being installed in the inner. The installation of the sundial would, as it were, serve as a link between these two events. It would also serve as a reminder for the members of the young and developing religious order, to use their time properly and always maintain their religious fervor. Furthermore, its

influence as a teaching tool for the young Brothers in formation was not to be overlooked. The clock would also be an incentive for the Brothers doing manual work in the garden to use their time effectively.

These ideas, however, are only a hypothesis. There could be other conclusions to be drawn. For example, is it possible that the installation of the clock made by Guyoux arrived at a later date? Could it have come from another location? Possibly it could have come from St Genis-Laval where in 1853 the Brothers purchased the Château du Montet. The expansive grounds of such a large and aristocratic house would have likely had a place for a sundial.

In any case, everything seems to indicate that the sundial of Guyoux or other solar clocks had limited impact among the Brothers. In fact, Brother

Avit relates (*Annales* 1866 § 32-34), that Brother Dacien had constructed a mechanical clock that could be seen in the main hallway from 1859 to 1866. "It indicated the movement of the earth during the day as well as the phases of the moon. It also followed the course of several of the planets, and the rising and setting of the sun. A toy soldier stationed on a rectangular railway indicated the minutes with his sword and did an about face every hour only to re-start his march." It was finally taken down to make room for a location for an area for shoe repairs. Parts of the clock were stored in the attic only to be pillaged by soldiers who occupied the building during the war of 1870.

That fact remains that, even with the lack of documentation, there is a sundial at the Hermitage, that it is an important part of our heritage, and that it is in need of being restored.

## ATLANDIDE 14

### A Play Based on a Marist Brother's Letters

Br André Lanfrey

On June 13, 2005, a group of four Marist Brothers including myself travelled from Lyon, to Avignon to attend a play entitled *Atlantide 14*. The title of the play likens the destruction of Europe during World War I to the disappearance of Atlantis.

The writer of the play, Corinne François-Denève, based most of her work on letters written by Séraphin Michel, a Marist Brother, whose religious name was Brother Aloysius.



Br Michel Séraphin

Originally from Orange, he returned from Spain between 1916 -1918 to serve as a stretcher-bearer during the War. He wrote a total of 35 letters to his sister-in-law, Antoinette, whose husband had been killed in September of 1914, and who lived in Jonquières, a market-village north of Avignon. Her son, Henri Michel, gave the letters to the local parish priest who later gave the collection to the city archives in Avignon. Brother Colin Chalmers, director of the archives in Rome, has provided significant additional information on the life of Brother Aloysius.

The writer does not go into details about the letters because her emphasis is to put into play the emotional atmosphere away from the front lines

as experienced by the women who were left behind. Based on communications received from the front, three women performers express their anguish about a War that is beyond them, and question the basic convictions they had prior to the conflict. The play presents a moving account of how three women left behind become as one in their response to the War. It is unfortunate however, that writer focused on the non-religious aspects of the war rather than the highly religious tone that is found in the letters. Yet we must bear in mind that we are in France, and what is staged does not always reflect what is real. We should also remember that although there were many positive reviews of the play, it actually comes to us through Forcalquier's "C'est-à-dire": [cad-editions@orange.fr](mailto:cad-editions@orange.fr).

For those of us who are Marist Brothers, the scenario brings to mind our school in Jonquières. Brother Avit refers to it in his *Annales*: it was founded as a primary school in 1851, secularized in 1886 and then became a private school in 1889 only to be closed in 1903.

As to Brother Aloysius (Séraphin MICHEL - 1882-1963), he died at St Paul-Trois-Châteaux, having had assignments in Mexico, Texas and Cuba before returning to France in 1935 to

further appointments, notably at Bourg-de-Péage. While attending the play in Avignon, I spoke to a man who knew Brother Aloysius personally. He is certainly deserving of the brief biography that follows, and I have included his photo.

This play plumbs only part of a rich source of material. In addition to the 35 letters sent to his sister-in-law, Broth-

er Aloysius sent seven to his family and 36 to his father. His file also contains 66 letters written by to him by his fellow Marist Brothers (1915-1929), and 17 Circulars that had been written to Brothers conscripted to military service 1916-1917 (*Livret Atlantide 14* p.16).

This collection represents an important part of our patrimony and is deserving of further in-depth study.



## LA VALLA EN GIER: RESTORATION OF THE “PIETÀ” OR STATUE OF NOTRE DAME DE PITIÉ”

Br Michel Morel

In the house of the first Brothers in La Valla en Gier, a little ceremony took place on February 8 2015 to commemorate the installation of the restored statue of *Notre Dame de Pitié*. The ceremony took place following Sunday Mass and was attended by sixty or more residents of LaValla.

According to the curator of the Department for the Preservation of Historical Monuments (DRAC de Rhône-Alpes), this multicolored wooden statue standing 96cm in height, 81cm in width and 38cm in depth dates back to the eighteenth century. Particularly striking about the statue are its overall elegance and the facial expression of the Virgin Mary. Since 1905, it has belonged to the Commune of LaValla, and on December 30, 1982, it was included in its list of Historical Monuments.

For a long period of time, the statue remained in the chapel of *Leytrat*, located on the outskirts of LaValla, and was venerated by the local people. Father Champagnat, his parishioners and the first Brothers would often make a pilgrimage up to *Leytrat*. It was in front of this statue that Marcellin prayed for vocations in 1822. It was stolen in November of 1973 and found with an antique dealer in April 1974. For security reasons, it was later placed in the sacristy of the church where it remained, generally unnoticed.

When renovations of the “Cradle of the Institute” began, the Brothers in LaValla asked the mayor of the Commune and the curé of the parish if the statue might not be placed in a special room of the original home of the Brothers where other treasured items are also kept. Their request was granted. It was then discovered that over time, the statue had deteriorated, that it needed to be preserved from further deterioration and, if possible, restored. The mayor graciously offered to initiate the process of restoration and to finance the required work. He entrusted the work to *l’Atelier Virginie Lamarche-Barral de Chambost-Allières* (Rhône). Work on the statue was begun on April 24 2014 and completed on February 5 2015.

The work of preserving the statue that had been partly damaged by wood-eating insects was begun. This was followed by the long and delicate work of removing overlays of red and blue coloring from the mantle and dress of the Virgin Mary. Their original colors were found to be silver and blue, very different from the red and blue in which they had been repainted. For the other parts of the statue, as hardly a trace of the original colors remained, it was necessary to look at what was typical of the late baroque period and approximate the colors to be used. As for the skin color, partic-

ularly the facial region of Christ and the Virgin Mary, the person doing the restoration had to add some coloration. For example: rather darker colors for the hair, eyebrows and beard for the Christ, and lighter brown colors for the eyebrows for the Virgin Mary.

After the complete restoration of the Pietà, the finished product looked rather different from before. What was gained, however, was a more accurate depiction of the garments, and a more evocative representation of the emotions of the figures of Mary and Jesus.



## NEW RESOURCES FROM THE GENERAL ARCHIVES

Br Colin Chalmers, *general archivist*

Two sets of valuable resources will soon be available to researchers studying the foundational story of the Institute. Letters of Father Champagnat and a number of Cahiers of Brother François have recently been professionally scanned and the scans will be placed in the Archivum computer programme. This will allow wider access to the original documents as researchers will not have to come to the General Archives in Rome to examine them.

Through a friend and former student of the Brothers in Italy, the General Archivist was put in touch with a specialist company with highly sophisticated scanners. These scanners were able to produce scans of a much higher quality than could be achieved with the scanner in the General House. The cost of the work was extremely moderate, for the time and expertise involved.

The following is a list of the writings of Father Champagnat which were scanned: Series 111, 112, 113, 133, 134, 137, 144. Also scanned were two Registers of the Taking of the Habit: a) 1829 – 1839 and b) 1840 – 1858.

From the Cahiers of Brother François, the following were scanned:

301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313.

Three types of scan were provided by the company: TIFF: the highest quality of scan. These will not be placed in Archivum, but will be made available to researchers who request a high-quality scan for their research. JPEGWEB: a high-quality scan and JPEG300, which provides a good-quality scan, sufficient for examination of the documents.

The process of adding the scans to Archivum is as follows: One page of the JPEGWEB scan goes onto Archivum so that researchers can verify that this is the document they need. Every scanned page of the document is added separately to Archivum in JPEG300 format. This is quite a laborious process as some of the documents are very long. Some of the Registers, for example, have more than 100 pages. A transcription of each document in pdf format will also be provided. Each document constitutes a single record on Archivum.

Further scanning of original documents will take place in the near future. Readers of Marist Notebooks will be kept informed of the progress of this important project.



## BROTHER FREDÉRIK McMAHON (1928-2015)

Br Michael Green

With the death in Sydney of Brother Frederick McMahon on 29 September last year, the Marist world farewelled someone who not only had made a much appreciated contribution to Marist scholarship for three decades, but also who had made the riches of the Marist story accessible to a wide audience. The books and articles written by Brother Frederick will continue to inform and to form Marists for a long time to come.

Brother Frederick began his Marist formation in 1947 at Mittagong where he completed his juniorate and novitiate. Professed on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1950, he spent the next twenty-five years in teaching, administration and part-time study, including twelve years as headmaster of three secondary schools and as community superior. At the University of Sydney he earned his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in English and history – his main teaching subjects – and post-graduate certificates in theology and spirituality from the Catholic Theological Union. He loved teaching, and was known as a master of his craft. He was also recognised as a highly competent administrator. He did his second novitiate at Fribourg, Switzerland in 1970. The next part of Brother Frederick's life saw him play a major role in Province leadership, both as

Provincial Councillor and as Province Bursar.

The third phase of his life commenced with an appointment to the General House in 1985 to research and to write on Marist origins. It was not long before his first book appeared, *Strong Mind, Gentle Heart* – a short biography of Marcellin Champagnat, which drew from the longer work of Brother Stephen Farrell (*Achievement from the Depths*) and that of Brother Paul Sester on the Letters of the Founder. A second quite valuable work was published soon after – a comparative study of the lives of the four Marist founders: Jean-Claude Colin, Jeanne-Marie Chavoine, Marcellin Champagnat and Françoise Perroton. Brother Frederick always had in mind his reader, and tried to write in ways that would be interesting and useful for them. One such example is the guide he prepared for pilgrims to “Chamapagnat Country”, a guide that continues to be used to this day. He wrote similar guides to Rome, both for St Peter's Basilica and a series of walking tours of the Eternal City. On his return to Australia, he continued his research, his writing and his teaching on Marcellin and the founding period. He was a frequent contributor to Marist Notebooks. His last book, published in 2011, *An Abun-*

*dance of the Heart*, was an introductory text to the letters of the Founder.

Brother Frederick McMahon was a marvellous companion to his confreres, a great friend to many, a man of hu-

mour and wit, a scholar with a love of English literature, and Marist Brother of deep faith and generous heart. He was someone well described by the title he gave his first book on the Founder, a man of "strong mind and gentle heart".

*Drawn from the eulogy given by Brother Desmond Murphy at the Thanksgiving Mass for the Life of Brother Frederick. St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill. 6 October 2015)*



