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Marist Notebooks:

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

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EDITORIAL

This Number 30 of Marist Notebooks seems to me to have a rather special function: instead of the traditional articles reporting on various topics of research, it announces the end of two projects and the launching of another.

ORIGINES DES FRÈRES MARISTES

Published during 2011, and included in the collection *Fontes Historici Societatis Mariae*, was the three-volume compilation of everything written by Fr Champagnat, as well as the documents or records produced or commenced in his time. Entitled *Origines des Frères Maristes*, this work is the fruit of long undertaking by Brother Paul Sester, with the technical aid of several confrères: Jean-Rousson, Louis Richard, Claude Morisson, and Henri Réocreux.

The use of the word “Origines” in the title pays homage to the fundamental work of Frs Coste and Lessard who published *Origines Maristes* in the years 1960-67. Brother Paul Sester, in

his introduction, emphasizes another reason: these documents are not all from the hand of Fr Champagnat and many of the notebooks and registers commenced in his time continue after him. The expression *Ecrits du P. Champagnat* being too limited, the title that was finally retained appeared the most suitable.

Volume 1 (566 pages) is entitled “From personal project to congregation”. It includes Champagnat’s resolutions, and the eight “Champagnat Notebooks” bringing together the rules of the Mother House, the Prospectus and Statutes, the projected rules, drafts of letters, summaries of conferences and instructions, and account books.

Volume 2 (785 pages) is entitled “Firming the identity of a religious family”. It contains the register of admissions from 1822 to 1848 and Champagnat’s correspondence, arranged according to subject: letters to the Brothers, to Fr Mazelier, signed administrative letters and minutes. Lastly, we find the sermons, discourses and instructions.

Volume 3, entitled “Structuring and developing the Marist Brothers”, includes the registers: taking the habit, temporary and perpetual vows, deaths. Then, an “Ecclesiastical Memorial” groups all the notable religious events, such as blessings of chapels, erections of the Stations of the Cross, from 1825 to 1842. The work closes with the “Various individual writings” bringing together various acts of purchase and sale, but also more fundamental documents, such as the promises of the first Brothers and the Spiritual Testament of Fr Champagnat.

The second part of volume 3, (pages 509-698), is devoted to the different indexes: subject, names of places and especially names of persons, Brothers and non-Brothers.

This collection of 687 documents thus completes the *Origines Maristes* of Frs Coste and Lessard as well as the *Letters* of Champagnat published by Brother Paul Sester in 1985 (Volume 1: Texts) and in 1987 (Volume 2: References), the latter with the aid of Brother Raymond Borne. Thanks to this work, we now have in a single collection all the documents concerning the origins of the Institute and overlapping often enough with later periods since the notebooks and registers, published here in their entirety, often continued after 1840. Thanks to some detailed critical scaffolding (introductions, notes, index), it offers researchers an exceptional working tool.

CHRONOLOGIE MARISTE

The General House has also just published a new *Chronologie Mariste*, from the origins to 2009, drawn up under the direction of Brother Jean Ronzon, former Secretary General. This book of 535 pages in very polished form is Number 1 of a new collection entitled *FMS Studia* which is intended for the publication of significant works on the Institute.

The work completes the 1976 Chronology of the Institute, but in a rather different spirit. The listed events have been structured in a new chronological arrangement, which is less centred on the internal history (Mother Houses, Superiors General, etc) but attempts to situate the Institute within a general history. This is why there are brief introductions to give an overview of each of the historical phases or emphasize particularly important dates. In addition, the citing of the source of each event, already present in the 1976 chronology, has been systematized, leading to the elimination of certain events not verified by reference sources. Finally, a certain number of maps, photos and appendices offer valuable visual summaries.

PROJECT OF A HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE

With the year 2017 approaching, the Spiritual Patrimony Commission believes the time has come for a project of writing a general history of the Institute which, without being too ac-

ademic or too detailed, could offer a serious overview of our two centuries of history. The material for such an enterprise is not lacking, as can be seen from the rich bibliography presented below by Brother Juan Moral. But the main difficulty is, without a doubt, to craft it so that the final work remains within reasonable dimensions or does not become simply a compilation of histories of Provinces. This is why Brother Aureliano Brambila has written up, for Mexico, a methodological model giving an overall view, both documented and succinct, of a region of the Institute. For their part, Brs André Lanfrey and

Michael Green have attempted to draw up outlines for an enterprise, which will doubtless call for collaboration and undergo modifications.

Thus, this Marist Notebooks No 30 announces a certain ending to Marist research focused on Champagnat and the origins, while outlining the necessity of reflection on the Institute as a whole on the eve of its bicentenary. The article of Brother Antonio Martínez Estañ on the notion of Marist family, recently re-interpreted by Brother Virgilio Leon, seems to us a good example of this type of work.

THE MARIST FAMILY ACCORDING TO Br. VIRGILIO LEÓN



**Antonio Martínez
Estaún, fms**

1. MOTIVATION, PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

At the time of writing, two anniversaries are being celebrated at almost the same time. September 6, 2011 is the 25th anniversary of the death of Brother Virgilio León Herrero (1927-1986), a man who saw new horizons for our Marist family for which he was an apostle and champion. Around this time also, each Province has been celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family (CMMF). The Hermitage Province held its celebration in October 2010 in the refurbished *l'Hermitage*. The 18th General Chapter of the Brothers approved this Movement in 1985. In his Circular dated October 15th, 1991 Brother Charles Howard, Superior General, published the Movement's Plan of Life and his vision of Champagnat Lay Marists.¹

These events have prompted me to analyze the scope of the Marist family based on Brother Virgilio León's original insights, taken from some of his writings. By means of this research I would like to make a contribution to help enrich the thinking, life and dynamism of the fraternities that are linked to the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family and to other groups that feel drawn to Champagnat's charism.

1.1. The Marist Family before the Champagnat Movement

Brother Alexandre Lefebvre contributed greatly to our understanding of the Marist family in his work *Desde los Exalumnos al Movimiento Champagnat de la Familia Marista* ("From the Former Students Associations to the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family").² In his

¹ The *Proyecto de Vida del MCHFM* was published on July 16, 1990. Brother Charles Howard included the text in his Circular dated October 15, 1991 making it an official publication of our Institute. (Charles Howard, Circular Letters, Vol. 29, pp. 351-428)

² Alexandre Lefebvre, *Desde los Exalumnos al Movimiento Champagnat de la Familia Marista*. Marist Notebooks (May 1999), n° 15 p. 123-174.

text, he did research into two distinct phenomena in our history: associations of Marist graduates on the one hand, and the Marist family on the other. Brother Alexandre identified important points where the stories of the two groups overlap. To learn more about both, again and again he referred to the biography of Brother Virgilio León Herrero, published in 1991. In his work Brother Alexandre used references from this biography that relate to the Marist family and organized them to achieve his goal of bringing together the topic of Associations of Former Students in combination with his research about the Marist family. Among other things, Brother Alexandre proposed “discovering the defining role of Brother Virgilio León Herrero”³ in relation to the Marist family. He affirms that Brother Virgilio León was “a visionary, a prophet and a main driving force”⁴ behind this work. His book follows Brother Virgilio and his written insights about the Marist Family for Conferences of Former Students, when the idea had already become widespread. On the other hand he does not dwell on the origins of this intuition, which go back well before the talks to Conferences of Former Students.

Brother Alexandre attributes the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family to “the promptings of former

students.”⁵ I would not take anything away from the Association of former students and the support they provided to Brother Virgilio in the process that led to our Institute’s official recognition of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. However, I am also aware of the nuances of thought that need to be made in this regard. Yet the former students themselves did recognize that “Brother Virgilio León deserves to be seen as the promoter of the concept of the Marist family.”⁶

The Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family was officially established in the Institute with the adoption of Statute 164.4 in our Constitutions, along with publication of the Plan of Life in Brother Charles Howard’s Circular dated October 15, 1991. In this way, Brother Charles Howard was simply implementing the recommendations of the 18th General Chapter in 1985. There is a long story behind that date, and it is quickly fading into the past.

For many in the Movement as well as for people accompanying formation programs for those wanting to become members, these dates are seen as its starting point. However, both the members of the Marist family who belong to the Movement as well as those who do not are linked by a long and interesting history going back

³ *Idem*, p. 123.

⁴ *Idem*, p. 123.

⁵ *Idem*, p. 123.

⁶ *Boletín de la Federación Nacional de Exalumnos de España*. That is the way that Brother Lefevre himself cited this, without indicating the date, number or page.

several decades before being formally recognized and certified in official documents. To claim that the Movement began when the authorities gave it their stamp of approval does not take away from the reality of that humble time wrapped in stillness when the Spirit gave birth to this life-giving stream in the Institute. More than that, many people would be inspired to know about the first droplets of water from this spring of charismatic Marist life, both in the way it makes people want to get to the bottom of this intuition and the manner of living it out. Tracing the course of the river of life can lead us to the delightful source of its origins.

In this paper I plan to highlight the initial intuition of Brother Virgilio León concerning the Marist family. I will start by looking at four of his writings on this topic, published when he began to spread this idea among Brothers in the formation centres of the Province of Catalunya – the Juniors, Novices and Postulants, Scholastics, and their families.

1.2. Description of the sources

The texts I will use for this research consist of a selection of four of the ten articles that Brother Virgilio wrote between November 1966 and June 1968 in the magazine *Familia Marista*⁷.

This publication was first distributed by the Scholasticate in Llinars del Vallés in November 1966. It had 16 pages, 16 x 24 cm. in two colours, and was printed by “Gráficas P. Kolbe” of the Conventual Franciscan Friars of Granelles, Barcelona. Over time that has turned out to be the longest-running publication among all those that stirred Brother Virgilio’s creative mind. By January 2010 there had been 138 issues, including some special issues. As the number of students in formation centres declined, so did the number of articles. Several issues appeared in the form of wall calendars and directories of the Marist houses in the Province, maintaining the original format. At the beginning of the 1990s the size changed and it was published as a calendar (first in black and white and then in colour). The publication continues to this day, in colour, with the same title.⁸

The articles are meant for Juniors, Novices and Postulants, Scholastics and their families, i.e. a general audience. Brother Virgilio writes for them using language filled with passion and feeling, in a kerygmatic style inspired by the way he experienced life and God, with a pastoral and catechetical approach yet not coming across as pedantic. The texts are brief, addressed to the laity, in straightforward, easy-to-understand language.

⁷ The *Familia Marista* magazine published 10 of Brother Virgilio’s articles relative to the Marist Family. Given the amount of material in those texts, we have selected four that appear to be the most significant in explaining his intuition about the Marist Family.

⁸ The Calendar for 2010 is issue number 138 of *Familia Marista*, published in Catalan. Special edition: January 2010. Edita Maristes Catalunya D. L.: B-9951986; published by Tallers Gràfics EDELVIVES Pictures: Archiu Maristes Catalunya.

1.3. Texts

Text 1⁹

"This time I'm not going to refer to your family, mine or anyone else's. This time I wish to refer to our family, the one that we all belong to. This time I'm going to refer to the Great Marist Family.

This is the family, yours and mine, that is going all out to celebrate its 150th anniversary! It's sending up a hymn to the Lord, who has desired that the Scripture passage be fulfilled in us: I will multiply your sons and daughters to be as numerous as the stars in the sky...

And just who are we who make up this Great Marist Family? When this new sense of belonging dawned on me, in 1940 to be exact, just a few months after I had gone away from my other family, I felt a great joy. When the Lord asked me, as He asks all His followers, to physically – never morally or spiritually – leave my home, sensing that I was truly a son in a new family filled me with the greatest of joy, and I understood right away that God was always blessing me a hundredfold.

This realization came to me little by little. Better said, I learn something new every day because it is each day's love that allows me to learn new things, and since I still haven't stopped loving . . .

That is the reason that my joy and dreams are renewed every day, because in the measure that I love everyone in this great family, the motivation prompting this love is renewed and there are always beautiful things still to be discovered.

One day, I discovered that there is this great saint whom everybody was calling Father.

I started to call upon him in that way. And from that time on, my Father Founder, Blessed Marcellin Champagnat, has occupied a very special place in my heart, without in any way diminishing God's role in my life here on earth. Quite the contrary, Marcellin has helped me supernaturalize my sentiments and strengthen my filial love. Soon, very soon, I discovered that the men who welcomed me into their great family had a unique mother with whom they were madly in love and invoked as their Mother, Patroness, Model and Superior.

Then indeed my joy was immense. The Lord was demanding a lot from me when he asked me to leave my dear mother for the time being, the one who had brought me into this world. But sensing that I was a favorite son of our Blessed Mother, knowing it was possible to harmonize my love for both mothers, intensely feeling that day after day my love for my mother in heaven was purifying my love for my mother on earth, feeling love for the two of them more and more with each passing day, my awareness deepened that in reality I was loving both of them with one and the same love, the same immense love. Because in both cases that love is a spiritual one. In the depths of my heart my Heavenly Mother was confirming my good fortune that I would be able to see her and my earthly mother together in Heaven. That's when I truly began to be filled with bliss, with a joy that I hope will bound into eternity.

I also soon discovered that many Brothers had been born into this Family, and that within it we are all brothers; those who are older together with you, the newcomers in this formation centre. My Brothers in spirit, in Mary

⁹ Published in *Familia Marista*, magazine in June 1967; the text is transcribed in *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde* by Antonio Martínez Estaún, Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 553-554. This article was written at the height of the celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the institute: "Our family is right in the middle of celebrating its 150th anniversary."

and in Champagnat, the members of your family and mine are Brothers for everyone we meet. Every one of us prays to our FATHER! And since that's who he is, he loves and protects us. Every one of us prays to our MOTHER! Ever affectionate, she responds to each of us, "Son!" In this family there are no outsiders, looked upon with suspicion, no stepbrothers from whom you try to hide family secrets, no brothers at each other's throats, as sometimes happens when families are distributing an inheritance. All of us form a single unit: as Brothers we all have the same rights and share the same legacy:

- The immense and tender love of our one Father;
- The immense, most joyful love our one Mother.

May They grant all of us the tender joy of that same home, the infinite blessing of feeling that we are one Family: the GREATER MARIST FAMILY of Mary and Champagnat.

Brother Provincial"

Text 2¹⁰

'A while back, at the initiative of the Holy Spirit, the Christian family met to celebrate the Council. Pope John outlined the work to be accomplished: to review existing structures in order to update them, and measure how the family is living according to the standards of the Lord's Message as revealed in the Gospel. The results not were long in coming, because whenever He wills, the Spirit can bring forth Abraham's sons and reignite the torch about to go out, making His presence felt as powerfully as on Pentecost. As a result of the Bishops' profound reflection as a community, the Council told us: The Church is defined as the great Christian family; the people of God on the move, united by ties of universal fraternal charity ... On our way towards our heavenly home, in the Lord we must secure the Redemption of every creature. Simple words, yet very profound, and we Christians devote ourselves to taking them seriously; we mediate on them to enrich ourselves with the message they contain. That's what our General Chapter has been: a miniature Council of the Great Marist Family, a communal meditation to assimilate the teachings of the Church. In light of these teachings, we have become much more aware that we are a family: We are the Great Marist Family. That's why, in the midst of that great assembly of 155 delegates, using Spanish, French, German, English, Italian and Portuguese, all of us felt we were Brothers, Sons of the same Mother, our Congregation. There were people from Europe and Oceania; of all races; from developed or developing countries. But we all loved each other as brothers in Christ and in Champagnat. And when we sought the words to define our Congregation and establish it on a firm foundation, we found none better to settle on than THE GREAT MARIST FAMILY. The desire that our Blessed Founder left us in His Testament stood out in our minds: That people could really say in all honesty: SEE HOW THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER!

¹⁰ Published in *Familia Marista* magazine, December 1967, p. 2; transcribed in *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde* by Antonio Martínez Estaún, Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 560-561.

*Now the path to our renewal is in plain sight before us: to know that we are Brothers, to feel that we are Brothers and to love one another as Brothers.
 Brothers who nourish themselves on the unique rich spiritual bread that satisfies ALL and makes us happy in the house of our Mother: the bread of LOVE, the bread of CHARITY that is bestowed on all in prayer. And the more we share it and it reaches people of all ages, the more it is multiplied.
 Because within this all we find our senior Brothers and brand new Brothers in our home, their relatives and ours, our students and former students and all their families.
 Lord, may there be bread for all in the house of Marcellin!
 Let us always have in mind that we are a true family!*

Brother Virgilio León, Provincial"

Text 3¹¹

*"Today, dear parents and relatives of all the Brothers of the Province of Catalunya, the Marist Family has been born for you. At this time I would like to address each and every one of you by name so that no one feels left out. On behalf of my Brothers, I have been asked to introduce you to this simple magazine that we are creating for all of you. Perhaps a certain amount of rigidity in our tradition as men consecrated to the Lord has kept us somewhat aloof from our extended family. And you, out of respect for this sacrifice that the Lord asked of you and which as time went by you generously accepted, have maintained a certain distance, very meritorious for sure, but in a certain way excessively rigorous, something that the Church of Vatican II has wished to ease. We Brothers have reflected on this. And if in earthly sense you will feel consoled to frequently meet with us, we want you to know in all honesty that we too wish to be closer to you in a spiritual way, for you are and have every right to be members of our family. We think of you and pray for you every day, and we want you to have closer ties with us, enjoying all the spiritual benefits of our Congregation.
 For that reason Marist Family magazine is being launched today.
 To bring you, the fathers and mothers of our Brothers, those of you who are still in our midst, the joy and comfort of knowing that in every way we are all members of our Marist Family.*

- For you, the Brothers in our family, with whom we have shared the joys of this very home, also the comfort of participating in all that we have*
- For you, grandmothers and grandfathers who are still living, to provide you with a sense of the richness of our Congregation's inheritance*
- For you, our brothers and sisters, cousins, nephews and nieces, to enable you to participate in the treasure that the Lord has promised to us, His chosen ones.*

¹¹ Published in *Familia Marista* magazine, February 1968, No. 1, p. 3, addressed to the families of the Brothers; Transcribed in: *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*, by Antonio Martínez Estaún. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 591-592.

Yes, with immense joy, Marist Family is for you, as a material bond that symbolizes the spiritual one that has always existed, one that from now on we are determined to strengthen within us, Brothers and all the members of our family.

Brother Provincial."

Text 4¹²

'June 6th! Feast of Blessed Marcellin Champagnat!

One day long ago, January 2, 1817, two young men joined the young curate of the rural parish in the town of La Valla, Archdiocese of Lyon.

From that very day they called him FATHER, because in the heart of that person whom God had chosen to be the head, the leader of a family, the Great Marist Family, they found all the love, understanding and support they needed. From that time on, all of us who have come to form a part of that family continue to call him Father, convinced that his love for the first Brothers is reaching out to us. When we study and meditate on his life we become convinced that our Founder truly deserves to be called "Father."

Though all Founders have abundant reasons to show a special love for those who are to continue their work, throughout his life our Founder, Blessed Marcellin Champagnat, showed us signs of possessing all the gifts of a gentle heart, filled with self-sacrifice and tenderness.

His infused his personality – familial, kind, gentle and openhearted into the Rules that we have inherited from him and also in all his spiritual writings.

They will call themselves Brothers, he wrote that in our Rules, to remember that they make up a single unique family in which everyone must love one another.

That's why for us this desire, to form a true family within the Family of God, in which charity, love, gentleness, understanding and mutual assistance characterize all its members... is a necessary goal, so that every member will experience happiness and unity reigns among all.

On another day, precisely just before he died, expressing the deepest desire of his heart as a Father, our Founder urged us to be concerned about the future of our family: 'Have the world say about you what was said of the first Christians: See how they love one another!'

That is the reason why, at this time when our Holy Church is seeking to renew itself and more deeply appreciate the wealth of its teachings, at this time when the Council desires to strengthen the bonds of the People of God, when more than ever we Christians feel that we are God's family, we must commit ourselves to this inner striving for love, solidarity in spirit and unity among all of us who likewise belong in one way or another to this great big family: Champagnat's Marist Family.

¹² Published in *Familia Marista*, magazine, June 1968, published simultaneously with No. 3 dedicated to the Brothers' Relatives; transcribed in: *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde* by Antonio Martínez Estaún. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 595.

One day about a hundred and fifty years ago, the first two young men whom Marcellin had brought together to found the Congregation started calling him 'FATHER.' They truly recognized and loved him as their Father. On another day, also long ago, gathered around his deathbed, more than one hundred Brothers did all they could to comfort him, ease the suffering of that man who had always stood by them and now was bequeathing them their greatest inheritance, a most inspiring Spiritual Testament, an authentic guide on how to love others, the basis of our family spirit.

As the years have gone by, thousands upon thousands have become part of his family, sensing that love and devotion to their common Father has been the nexus of their unity, the secret behind their excellent family spirit. Today there are more than half a million of us – students, graduates and their families, people in formation programs, Brothers and their relatives, who continue experiencing our life as a family with that charism of simple, practical, gentle love that brings happiness and well-being into all our homes.

And this is our commitment for tomorrow: to expand this Great Marist Family; to strengthen the bonds of unity and solidarity among all its members; to have the wherewithal to hand on to future generations our rich legacy of the family spirit thanks to which we, its sons and daughters spread throughout the world, remain faithful to the sacred wishes of our Founder's Spiritual Testament, continuing to form one big family in which everyone calls him "Father" and shows him their love in that way.

Brother Provincial."

2. WHAT IS “THE MARIST FAMILY” THAT BROTHER VIRGILIO TALKS ABOUT?

2.1. What the expression “Marist Family” means

Among the Marist Brothers the expression “Marist Family” has been used in different ways, which has created some degree of ambiguity. What was the “Marist Family” that Brother Virgilio was talking about when he start-

ed dealing with this topic? When we look at the wording he used, it is important for us to understand the significance he attached to it. Everyone faces the challenge of choosing expressions capable of conveying what he or she is trying to say. Experts who study Marist patrimony acknowledge that they face challenges “in four areas: history, spirituality, language and politics.”¹³

At the inter-Marist colloquium¹⁴ held in Rome in 2008, an annual interna-

¹³ Father Alois Greiler, *Marist Notebooks*, 28 (May 2010), p. 112.

¹⁴ “Since June 2006 at the General House of the Marist Brothers in Rome, there has been an annual inter-Marist meeting on the historical and spiritual patrimony of the different branches of the Society. This was the fourth one held. In part, this series of meetings started because of the Marist Brothers. On January 8, 2004, they initiated a six-member Patrimony Team, which in turn depended on a Commission composed of four members of the General Council. The Team's main tasks are: to organize research, assure that it is disseminated in the publication *Marist Notebooks*, and publish their Marist sources.” *Marist Notebooks*, No. 28, p. 99.

tional gathering of those who study Marist patrimony, Father Alois Greiler, SM proposed that a study of Marist terminology be undertaken; specifically, “What do the expressions *Marist Family* and *Society of Mary* mean in each branch?”¹⁵ This study served as the focal point during the Inter-Marist colloquium that took place the following year, 2009. Here are some of the points that were discussed, based on a year’s research:

Father **Alois Greiler**, SM, maintained that the expression “Marist Family”:

“...refers to the relationship (historical and spiritual) of the present-day Marist Congregations and Marist Lay Groups.”¹⁶

Brother **André Lanfrey**, in his contribution during that same colloquium, explicitly referred¹⁷ to the mention of “Marist Family” in the book *Origines Maristes*, published in Rome in 1967:

“A designation recently given to the groups of Religious Congregations and the Third Order that grew out of the project of the Society of Mary as it was conceived in 1815-16 at the Major Seminary in Lyon. Before 1836, the name “Society of Mary” ... was applied to the whole project.”¹⁸

At the conclusion of his talk, Father Alois Greiler clarified the proposal

found in *Origines Maristes* that the term “Marist Family” was a relatively recent one:

“According to Green, the expression ‘Marist Family’ has been used since the 1960s, beginning with a Circular by Brother Basilio.”¹⁹

In point of fact Brother Basilio Rueda, in his Circular dated January 2, 1968, while the Institute was still “in between” sessions of its General Chapter, wrote:

“Blessed Marcellin Champagnat died with the profound conviction that the Marist Fathers and Brothers would continue to be but a single family (cf. The Spiritual Testament). However, some time after his death, intervention by Rome caused the two branches to undergo a “legal” separation. Since that time there have been two distinct congregations. Their hearts remained united with deep affection but mutual interaction between them became less and less common... Little by little, however, under the influence of the unity that persisted in their hearts, spontaneously the Fathers and Brothers began to once again draw closer. In various countries fraternal relationships multiplied,²⁰ with both branches expressing a desire to actively work together in substantive ways... Between the two “General Houses,” especially after ours moved to Rome, relationships became so frequent, warm and caring that one could no longer speak of a separation. We were once again like two branches of the same Marist family...”

¹⁵ Marist Notebooks, 28, May 2010, p. 100.

¹⁶ Idem, p. 112.

¹⁷ Brother A. Lanfrey provides this reference in Marist Notebooks, 28 (May 2010), p. 115.

¹⁸ *Origines Maristes* 4, Rome, 1967, p. 842.

¹⁹ Marist Notebooks, 28 (May 2010), p. 113.

²⁰ The extent of this point is open to further research. Which countries is Brother Basilio Rueda referring to? How are these relationships put into practice?

The Brothers, separated due to the dictates of History and the Church, draw near again at the urging of that same history and Church ...”²¹

Be that as it may, over the years the Brothers had used and developed the expression “Marist Family” even before Brother Basilio Rueda mentioned the term in his Circular of January 2, 1968, cited above. Researchers into our Marist patrimony used this reference to better understand the expression. As proof of this we can look into the Circulars of Brothers Léonida and Charles Raphaël, written between 1950 and 1967.

2.2. The very beginnings of the Brothers’ “Marist Family”

2.2.1. The expression “Marist Family” in the Circulars of Brothers Léonida and Charles Raphaël

The expression “Marist Family” appears in the Circulars of Superiors General prior to the dates cited in *Origines Maristes*. Brother Charles Raphael used the expression some years before Brother Basilio in a Circular referred to by Brother Michael Green. Brother Léonida even used the expression in referring to something different from its customary meaning having to do with the four

branches. We would offer the hypotheses that among the Brothers the expression “Marist Family” had its very own meaning before the renewal movement fostered by Vatican II: *The Marist Family of the Brothers*. If this is so it would be one more sign that, from the earliest days of the Marist charism, there has been a spiritual family led by our Brothers.

2.2.2. The religious family of Brother Léonida

In his Circulars, Brother Léonida briefly referred to the concept of the Marist family on three different occasions, quite far apart in time. These ideas represent just four lines buried in the middle of a big 500-page book containing all his Circulars.²² Such brief quotes might seem quite insignificant but that is not the case.

In his Circulars, whenever he referred to all of the Brothers in the Institute, Brother Léonida was in the habit of using the expression “religious family.” But on three occasions he changed the wording, and instead of using “religious family,” an expression that any Superior General of the time would have used to talk about his Institute, he wrote “Marist Family.” In the paragraphs cited, one can see how original this expression is.

The first time Brother Léonida mentioned the “Marist Family” was in his

²¹ Basilio Rueda, *Circulaires*, Vol. 24 (1968), p. 487-488.

²² Spanish version published by Luis Vives Press, Zaragoza.

Circular dated December 8, 1950, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, at Saint-Genis-Laval. He wrote:

1. "Although we are especially insistent on the necessity of finding candidates for the wonderful career of religious educators in our dear Marist family, as far as possible we will also have to work at recruiting new vocations for priesthood."²³

This reference to the priesthood appears in a paragraph that deals with recruiting vocations to the life of the Brothers. Thus the expression "our dear Marist family" seems to refer to "religious educators" as distinct from the Marist Family of the Society of Mary.

Almost eight years later, at Saint-Genis-Laval, in his Circular of March 1, 1958 convoking the 15th General Chapter (1958) Brother Léonida again used the expression *Marist family*. He wrote:

2. "And in the trials and tribulations that sometimes assail one or another branch of our Marist family, what great confidence in God our Superiors need to never let themselves become discouraged nor quench the ardour and enthusiasm of the others!"²⁴

In this instance the expression was further explained in the following paragraph, with the elaboration of two ideas that could go a long way in helping us understand what Brother Léonida meant by the Marist family:

"On the one hand, if you keep in mind the extent of our Institute is today, present throughout the world, the impressive number of Brothers, centres and students, you can get some idea of the intelligence, methods, ability to follow up on things, order and necessary vision possessed by those responsible for administering such a vast and complex undertaking. And that's only the material side of things. How great is the responsibility of Superiors in looking after the welfare of so many religious, seeing to it that they advance in the virtues proper to their state, guaranteeing the smooth functioning of so many schools and programs for Aspirants, Postulants, Novices and Scholastics, providing them all with an excellent formation. They have to look after so many communities and provinces to maintain regularity and fervour everywhere, in short, to guide all our Brothers and their students along the path to holiness!"²⁵

This reference to the totality of the apostolate is made through the lens of an administrative and practical perspective in which concerns about structure and well-coordinated performance are paramount. In other words it stresses a concept of the functionality of the Marist family rather than one having to do with its charism. And it is not focused merely on the Brothers but takes into account the "impressive number of members, centres and students" within the Marist family. In the second part of Brother Léonida's thought, where he speaks of Superiors' care and responsibility for the Institute, he views the overall picture using the concept

²³ Leónida, *Circulaires* T 20 (1948-1951) p. 415.

²⁴ Leónida, *Circulaires* T 22 (1957-1962) p. 148.

²⁵ Idem. p. 148.

of a centralized and well-structured authority. Everything depends on authority. Even in his vision of pastoral animation based on responsibility, there is a great deal of concern about providing continuity in the establishments regarding the Aspirants to be formed. This highlights two very important points: Aspirants and formation. This way of looking at the Marist Family appears more geared to effectiveness and prestige rather than faithfulness to the charism and mission. In fact there is no explicit reference to membership in this family in terms of an institutional charism or mission. Rather, the Superior's mind inclusively opens out to beyond the "religious family," surpassing the range that is usually accorded to this expression.

Another interesting point selected from Brother Léonida's Circulars could reinforce this idea. In several of his Circulars he was accustomed to include news taken from reports by Assistants General on their return from Provincial visitations. In his Circular written at Saint-Genis-Laval and dated May 24, 1952, Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, Brother Léonida included a few notes from the report of Brother Charles Raphaël, Assistant General, upon his return from a visit to Belgium and the Congo. In speaking about Belgian schools he wrote:

3. "In Leuven itself the Province has a house for students, well set up, where our Brothers can easily follow all the courses at this famous University while at the same time living the life of the Marist family according to our tradition. In the future it will probably be possible to welcome students coming from other Provinces."²⁶

From this information we can conclude that the expression "Marist family" was already in use during Brother Léonida's time in office. It applied to a particular group of people including, at least in theory, people who were not Brothers. This way of understanding the Marist family was different from that found in other texts referring to the Society of Mary, at least in Europe. I am not aware of what was taking place elsewhere around the world.

Based on this information we can affirm that during Brother Léonida's term in office, the Marist Brothers readily used the expression "Marist family" around the time they held their 15th General Chapter.

But Brother Léonida was not the one who definitively spread this expression throughout the Institute. Rather, in his Circulars, he consistently used the term "religious family." Not even on so favourable an occasion as Marcellin's beatification, a time when the other Marist branches felt close to us

²⁶ Brother Leónida, *Circulaires* Vol. 21 (1952-1956), p. 71.

in a mutual way, did he allude to the concept of the “Marist family,” a term that had “recently” been given to the Congregations stemming from the project of the Society of Mary.

In his Circular about the beatification and fidelity to the virtue of the vow of poverty, published at Saint-Genis-Laval on December 8, 1955, Brother Léonida, referring to Marcellin’s beatification, the great event of that year, makes special mention of the Marist Fathers, their presence at the ceremonies and the contribution they made to cover its costs, giving them special mention. He went on to write:

“May all of this contribute to uniting our two religious families more and more, for they have sprung from the same roots and are enlivened by the very same spirit.”²⁷

Without a doubt the Institute’s great coming together, being one huge Family took place at Marcellin’s beatification in 1955. It was a key time that brought awareness of our belonging to a very important group. The event in Rome bringing together Brothers from everywhere in the world led them to discover vividly the international and universal dimensions of their presence. We are one family present on every continent. The creation of the World Union of Former Students, encouraged and promoted by the Major Superiors, was yet an-

other reality that the Brothers took to heart at that time, which helped to reinforce the Brothers are an international, worldwide body.

In that same Circular, Brother Léonida included a quotation from a Circular of Father Cyr, Superior General of the Marist Fathers:

“When Pope Benedict XV imparted his special blessing to the Institute of the Marist Brothers and the Society of Mary, on the occasion of the proclamation of the heroic nature of the virtues of Father Marcellin Champagnat, he expressed his ardent desire that both religious families would strive to imitate the virtues of that Venerable Servant of God who belongs to our two families.”²⁸

In his Circular December 8, 1955, when Brother Léonida invited us to “pool our efforts” in order to attain Marcellin’s canonization, he listed a series of people that could well be considered as Brother Léonida’s initial insight into who makes up the Marist family:

“...Brothers, students, parents, friends, priests, religious men and women with whom we maintain relations.”²⁹

The beatification that took place in Rome was taken back to our provinces and houses, communities and schools in a spontaneous and simple way. Brothers returned from

²⁷ *Circulares del Reverendísimo Hermano Léonida*, Edelvives, Zaragoza 1958, p. 435.

²⁸ *Idem*, p. 435.

²⁹ *Idem*, p. 437.

Rome relating what they had seen and heard. Superiors were not the only ones who participated in the big celebration in Rome; it was not an experience limited to those in authority. Each Province organized to send Brothers even though quite a few of them were not able to travel to Rome due to administrative duties and responsibilities throughout the Institute. Brother Léonida wrote: "I'm pleased to note that those engaged in manual work were not forgotten."³⁰ In some places participants were selected by means of a ballot.

Three years after the Beatification, the 15th General Chapter assembled in Grugliasco.

2.2.3. "Marist Family" in the Circulars of Brother Charles Raphaël

During those years Brother Charles Raphaël was heir to two great events that energized our Institute: the beatification in 1955 and the convening of the 15th General Chapter in 1958. A third event of worldwide importance that he would experience during his time in office was the 150th Anniversary of the foundation of the Institute, in 1967. Throughout the Circulars that

he wrote during his nine years as Superior General, (1958-1967) we find that he used the expression "Marist family" quite often: twenty times in nine different Circulars.³¹

The first time Brother Charles used the expression "Marist Family" was in his Circular dated May 24, 1960, making an observation concerning the General Chapter in 1958:³²

1. "The long discussions of the Chapter delegates concerning the suffrages for our departed Brothers turned out to be of interest to **the entire Marist family.**"³³

This highlights the dimension of inclusion that this expression will gradually take on as time went by. In the mind of the Brothers who were delegates at the Chapter, deceased members also formed an integral part of the Marist Family.

This plain expression appeared twice. Once in a Circular dated May 24, 1960 when referring to the obedience, respect and love that is owed to a large group of Brothers: Superiors.

2. "In the **Marist family** it is not enough for the Superior to be obeyed and respected, he must be loved..."³⁴

³⁰ Idem, p. 432.

³¹ The Circulars in which he uses the expression "Marist Family" are: December 8, 1958 (2), May 24, 1960 (4), December 8, 1962 (1), May 24, 1963 (3), December 8, 1964 (2), December 1, 1965 (2), May 1, 1966 (1), December 1, 1966 (3) and February 20, 1967 (2).

³² In this Circular, Brother Charles Raphaël dedicated the first part to explaining "the three means proposed by the Chapter of 1958 to vivify among ourselves the spirit of our Blessed Father." The first part was dedicated to developing the idea of "family." Charles Raphaël, *Circulaires*, Vol. 22 (1957-1962), p. 429-434.

³³ Charles Raphaël, *Circulaires* T 22 (1957-1962) p. 433.

³⁴ Idem, p. 445.

In another Circular, dated December 8, 1962, he wrote:

3. "Above and beyond the limitations of our community and our Province, we should be aware of the needs of the entire **Marist family**."³⁵

On three occasions the expression Brother Charles connected "life of" and "spirit of" to the express "Marist family." That's what he wrote in his Circular of May 1, 1966. In outlining the topics that he was going to write about, in fourth place he listed:

4. "Safeguarding the **life of our Marist family**."³⁶

We find something similar in the Circular dated December 1, 1966:

5. "In a parallel way the Chapter should calmly carry out a review of... the **life of our Marist Family**."³⁷

We come across this again in the Circular of May 24, 1963:

6. "...It will give birth in each province to that beautiful **spirit of the Marist family** that attracts good vocations and admirably supports religious in any trials they may be going through."³⁸

On four more occasions the expression is intensified by the possessive adjective "our." This happens twice in the Circular of May 24, 1960. In the first instance:

7. "In all our communities that are quite large there are age differences. Sometimes people talk about "nowadays" versus the "the good old days." These differences can easily lead to misunderstandings. In **our Marist family** this should not happen."³⁹

The second instance:

8. "At this time, let us remember the many rules that refer to life in common in our Marist family..."⁴⁰

We read this expression a third time in the Circular of May 24, 1963:

9. "Nearly all our aspirants enter our Marist family as Juniors."⁴¹

The fourth time in the Circular of December 1, 1966:

10. "Miracles 'of unity' are possible today just as they were in the early days of **our Marist family**."⁴²

We find the fifth instance in the Circular of May 24, 1963:

³⁵ Idem, p. 708.

³⁶ Charles Raphaël, *Circulaires*, Vol.23 (1963-1967) p. 358.

³⁷ Idem, p. 431.

³⁸ Idem, p. 43.

³⁹ Charles Raphaël, *Circulaires*, Vol. 22 (1957-1962) p. 452.

⁴⁰ Idem, p. 455.

⁴¹ Charles Raphaël, *Circulaires*, Vol. 23 (1963-1967) p. 129.

⁴² Idem, p. 436.

11. "What a tremendous amount of good **our Marist family** could accomplish in the Church!"⁴³

The expression "our Marist family" was also used in the introduction to the Circular that Brother Charles Raphaël wrote after receiving a letter from Pope Paul VI concerning the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Institute (1967):

12. "All the members of **our Marist family** will greatly appreciate this fatherly gesture of His Holiness Paul VI."⁴⁴

In his Circular of February 20, 1967, Brother Charles Raphaël referred to the notes that the Brothers were encouraged to send to the General Chapter. In this regard he wrote:

13. "Generally you will draw inspiration for them from your personal experience and serious reflection, inspired by a spirit of loyal service related to **our whole Marist family**."⁴⁵

2.2.4. The inclusive dimension that accompanies the meaning of Marist family in the thinking of Brother Charles Raphaël

Who belongs to the "Marist family" according to the thinking of Brother Charles Raphaël as presented in his Circulars?

In the Circulars of Brother Charles Raphaël there are no texts in which he explicitly lists those whom he considers to be members of the "Marist family." However, based on context, one can get an idea of what he had in mind. The text of his Circular of December 8, 1964 can be considered the first fruits of Brother Charles Raphaël's thoughts about the people he included in the expression Marist Family:

14. "Let us make a promise that is very close to our heart, especially right now: let us not forget our Brothers and our Provinces and Districts whose very survival is being threatened at this very moment. Let us continue to pray without ceasing for our Brothers forcefully kept apart from their **Marist family** (the Province of China); for those tenaciously fighting to carry on their apostolic mission; for those whose dedication is not understood and appreciated, even as their hearts are aflame with love. . . . Let us pray for each and every one of them, for their students and for all who treasure the presence of our Brothers. Let us also pray to always be blessed with "new generations," so that the Institute will always have an abundance of brave and faithful missionary vocations, and that recruitment will yield excellent results in missionary lands themselves."⁴⁶

Given this list of people and administrative structures we can gain insight into how inclusive the idea of the Marist Family was in the thinking of Brother Charles Raphaël. He refers

⁴³ Idem, p. 145.

⁴⁴ Idem, p. 517.

⁴⁵ Idem, p. 511.

⁴⁶ Idem, p. 226.

explicitly to Brothers, students and missionary vocations as being directly linked to the Marist Family. But he goes beyond that, including others living in circumstances requiring them to “struggle tenaciously,” be “deeply committed” and people who “treasure the presence of the Brothers” and structures that bring groups together, such as Provinces or Districts.

At the opening of the 15th General Chapter in 1958, while it was in session, and in the weeks that followed, Brother Charles Raphaël asserted that he had received comforting expressions of support and appreciation:

15. “...from Brothers in every country and all kinds of communities, ... from infirmaries and retirement houses, the elderly and those who are ill ... from hospitals and residences, ... from young people in all our formation houses, ... Many Brothers have had their students interested in what has been going on ... And the great interest shown by the graduates of our schools concerning the Chapter’s most important topics has been a revelation to many of us.”⁴⁷

This text would seem to go hand in hand with the previous one in the way it lists people belonging to the Marist family.

2.2.5. The “great family” according to Charles Raphaël

Another nuance that added to the expression “Marist family” was that of “great” or large. In his first Circular to the Institute on December 8, 1958, Brother Charles Raphaël, while retaining the expression “religious family” that Brother Léonida had used in referring to the Institute, took up the expression “large family” for the first time in this kind of literary format:

16. “In our Institute supreme authority belongs to the General Chapter (C 111). The General Chapter provides guidelines to all the members of our large family until the next Chapter convenes. These guidelines are given to all of us and they must be diligently followed.”⁴⁸ (1958)

Obviously the expression “large family” refers to the Institute governed by the General Chapter. It doesn’t seem to allude to other Marist branches in any way. The adjective “large” (“great,” “grand”) would soon be linked to the expression “Marist family” and form a new expression, “great Marist family” (“*la grande famille mariste*”) that came quite prominent.

In those same Circulars of Brother Charles Raphaël we find some assertions that may help us better understand the full extent of the meaning that the expression “great Marist family” had in the mind and heart of our Brother Superior General.

⁴⁷ Charles Raphaël, *Circulaires*, Vol. 22 (1957-1962), p. 452.

⁴⁸ *Idem*, p. 212.

We find his first assertion in his Circular of December 8, 1964:

17. "We need Superiors and, between you and me, sooner or later almost every Brother needs to be willing to take responsibility for a special task in this **large Marist Family**."⁴⁹

And in his Circular December 1, 1965 he wrote:

18. "Christians, united as one, make up the Church. Since the Council was first announced, all Christians have been invited to feel "one in heart and mind with the Council." We too are working together to build up our great Marist family; so all of us have a responsibility to see to the steady progress of our Institute."⁵⁰

Just as Christians, who constitute the Church, are to feel involved in the work of the Council, so too those who make up the Institute and are being called upon to build up the great Marist family. That means that new horizons are opening up for our Marist Family, which is being called upon to broaden its horizons to include the entire scope of the Church.

In another text from that same Circular of December 1, 1965 Brother Charles wrote:

19. "It should be obvious that we need to pray often for our Brothers who are suffering, for our Brothers who are far away or forcibly "separated" from our **great Marist family**,

for our deceased members, the sectors in our Institute that are struggling to survive, our missions, the recruitment of good vocations, for the graduates of our schools and all who put their faith and trust in us."⁵¹

This statement can well be considered a description of how inclusive the "great Marist family" is. That wording broadened the base of membership to include new entities connected with the Brothers, groups that up to that point had not been considered in this light, e.g., graduates from our schools and "those who put their trust in the Brothers..."

2.2.6. Conclusion

Based on this analysis it seems clear that Brother Charles Raphaël's use of the expression "Marist family" in the above quotations taken from his Circulars give us no reason to think that he was referring to the Fourvière project but to the communities and schools of our Brothers.

The only exception we have come across is a text written when Brother Charles' term of office was coming to an end, in which the expression "great Marist family" seems to include the other branches. In his Circular of December 1, 1967 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Institute, he included some resolutions to prepare hearts and souls

⁴⁹ Charles Raphaël, *Circulaires*, Vol. 23 (1963-1967) , p. 217.

⁵⁰ Idem, p. 305.

⁵¹ Idem, p. 332.

for commemorating this event, an exhortation to welcome this anniversary and some practical guidelines for celebrating it. And he concluded:

20. "Of course, the members of the **great Marist family** throughout the world will be invited to participate in these festivities."⁵²

On the other hand we have come across a text that Brother Charles Raphaël wrote a few months earlier, in which he used a completely different interpretation. In 1966 the Marist Fathers were preparing to celebrate the 150th anniversary of their founding. With this in mind Father Buckley, Superior General of the Fathers, had brought this event to the attention of all the members of the Society of Mary by means of a Circular. Brother Charles Raphaël included that document in the Circular he addressed to his Brothers, along with his own introductory remarks. Father Buckley had explicitly mentioned that document about "the Marist Family" and pointed out those included as members of that "Marist Family:"

21. "Always keeping in mind what's possible and appropriate, you can invite to our celebration other members of the Marist Family who reside in your Province or city: the Marist Brothers, Marist Sisters, Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, the Servants of Nazareth, Congregations in the Pacific whose origins and aims are associated with the Society of Mary and, of course, the members of the Third Order of Mary."⁵³

Father Buckley's outlook in this regard contrasts with that of Brother Charles Raphaël when he presented that same text to the Brothers in his Circular of May 1, 1966. There he remembers the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Marist Fathers and offers a commentary in which he refers to the "great Marist project linked to the promise at Fourvière" closely tied to the Society of Mary. He recalls Champagnat's wish, expressed in his Spiritual Testament, that "the same charity that must bind you to one another as members of a single body, should embrace all the other congregations." But nowhere does Brother Charles Raphaël use the expression "Marist Family" to include all the Marist branches. When referring to the Marist Fathers, he uses the expression "religious family." And when writing about the Brothers and Fathers, he refers to the "two religious families."⁵⁴ It seems that to his way of thinking there is still the legal fact of "the two families being separate entities."

Here the question spontaneously arises: why did people in the Institute start using the term "Marist Family" around the time of the 15th General Chapter? What had happened in our Institute that brought our spiritual sensitivity as a group into harmony with our values as a family?

Thus it is clear that the expression "Marist family" is used in a very con-

⁵² *Idem*, p. 468.

⁵³ *Idem*, p. 400.

⁵⁴ Brother Charles Raphaël, *Circulaires*, Vol. 22 (1957-1962), p. 398-401.

crete way when referring to the historical and spiritual relationships that the various branches of the Marist family have maintained since Vatican II. However the situation has been evolving so that today those who are doing research into the various branches of our Marist spiritual patrimony need to clarify the term “Marist family.” Backed by cordial relationships among those in leadership during the time of the Council, those studying Marist spiritual patrimony have gone on to delve into the meaning of that expression and how inclusive it is.

Nevertheless, from the earliest days of our charism we can show that there has been a spiritual family led by the Little Brothers of Mary. Therefore if the Brothers have imprinted their own special traits on the Marist family we need to describe what they are and how they are revealed.

Based on all of this, we can conclude that before Brother Basilio Rueda “recently” verified the *de facto* existence of the Society of Mary’s Marist family, we were already speaking about the Marist family of the Brothers, in a quite different sense. In the context of the Circulars, “our Marist family” and “the whole Marist family” referred to the Brothers and their schools.

It is not clear whether the expression “Marist family” used by our Superiors General in their Circulars, especially those written by Brother Charles Raphaël, is an original term that they

introduced or a reflection of a notion already existing in the Institute which they simply brought to light. Further research is needed in this area.

The practical aspect of this new way of looking at the Marist Family was very warmly welcomed in a host of Marist works, while at the same time it opened up a discussion to determine the full extent of this question.

As will be seen from the texts that we are presenting, for Brother Virgilio the concept of “Marist family” did not give priority to the religious congregations and the Third Order that arose from the project of the Society of Mary but to a particular reality to be found among the Brothers. It was not something that came from the various branches but an intuition that sprang from the gathering of Brothers at the Chapter. As we will try to demonstrate in the pages that follow, for Brother Virgilio the “Marist family” meant the Brothers spread throughout the world and the many people who relate to them, centred around Jesus, Mary and Champagnat.

3. BROTHER VIRGILIO’S INTUITION REGARDING THE MARIST FAMILY; HIS LIFE EXPERIENCE

3.1. The story of a life experience

Lay people have written accounts of how they discovered the Marist charism and what it has meant in their

lives. These writings have been called "Life Stories."⁵⁵ The collection of Brother Virgilio's four written accounts that we are considering in this article may well be thought of as his life story as it relates to his intuition about the Marist family. Having intensely lived his life in community, he shared this account of his discovering the Marist family with his Brothers and students in formation when he was about 40 years old.

According to Brother Virgilio's narrative, the spiritual journey that led him to discover the Marist family revealed that his peak experience came during his participation in the first session of the 16th General Chapter held in Rome in 1967, just after the conclusion of Vatican II.

In 1967 Brother Virgilio participated in the 16th General Chapter as Provincial of the then Province of Catalunya. The two events, the Council and the Chapter, made it clear to Brother Virgilio that the "Church is defined as a great Christian family"⁵⁶ and that a Marist General Chapter is, "on a smaller scale, a Council of the great Marist family."⁵⁷ During the Chapter sessions, "we all felt that we were Brothers, sons of the same Congregation."⁵⁸

The Christian family came together at the Council to:

"...revise its structures in order to bring them up to date; re-evaluate the message that it received from our Lord and look at itself in the mirror of the Gospel in order to contemplate His countenance."⁵⁹

"And as a result of the Bishops earnestly meditating as a community, the Council said to us that The Church is defined as the great Christian family."⁶⁰

This being the case, Brother Virgilio came to believe that the Marist Institute assembled at the General Chapter was doing nothing more than taking to heart the task that the Council had given to religious institutes.

"That's what our General Chapter has been: The great Marist family as a miniature Council, praying and contemplating together in order to assimilate the Church's teachings. In light of these we have enlivened our awareness of being a family. We are the great Marist family."⁶¹

In meeting Chapter Delegates from all over the world, he was struck by the experience of belonging to a great family, made up of people nurturing the same charism and united by the same faith, yet representing

⁵⁵ <http://www.champagnat.org/es/240208000.asp>

⁵⁶ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, December 1967, p. 2. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 560.

⁵⁷ *Idem*, p. 560.

⁵⁸ *Idem*, p. 560.

⁵⁹ *Idem*, p. 560.

⁶⁰ *Idem*, p. 560.

⁶¹ *Idem*, p. 560.

different ethnicities, languages and cultures.⁶²

"In the midst of this great Assembly of 155 delegates, speaking in Spanish, French, German, English, Italian and Portuguese, we all felt that we were Brothers, having the same Mother, our Congregation. There were delegates from Europe and Oceania; whites, blacks and Asians; from both well-to-do and under-developed countries. Yet we all loved each other as Brothers in Christ and Champagnat. And when we looked for a precise expression to define our Congregation, the only one we could think of was GREAT MARIST FAMILY."⁶³

When he returned to his Province after the first session of the General Chapter (August 29 – October 28, 1967) the tasks he had left behind when he went off to the Chapter were waiting for him. At that time he felt a need to share with those around him the joyful discovery that he had made in Rome. He wrote the first of four articles for Marist Family magazine, which we have just touched upon. In this first instalment he gave an account of how he "discovered" the Marist family. To do that he went back in time, returning to the origins of his vocation.

3.2. The first steps in his discovery

Virgilio first experienced what it meant to belong to the religious family of the Marist Brothers was when he was twelve years old and entered the Marist Juniorate. He accomplished this transition from one family to another without missing a beat, almost spontaneously and serenely, going from "my other family" to "a newly adopted one." When he said goodbye to his family – his parents and siblings in San Cristóbal de Boedo in Palencia, his birthplace – to enter the Marist Juniorate in Carrión de los Condes, he did not become homeless, without family ties, close friends, or an inheritance. Rather, in the Juniorate he discovered that he had acquired a "new set of relatives," becoming part of a spiritual family blessed with a rich patrimony. This happened "back in 1940,"⁶⁴ "a few days after I said goodbye to my other family."⁶⁵

For Brother Virgilio this "new affiliation" that conferred upon him membership in the Marist Family was a welcome charismatic gift to go with that of his vocation on entering the Juniorate. Moving on from his local church, that used to gather at the parish in San

⁶² "No Chapter has seen a larger number of delegates: 61 ex-officio members and 94 elected. Some countries and ethnic groups will be represented for the first time. The Chinese Brothers present at the two previous Chapters, will be joined by a Sri Lankan Brother and one from Madagascar. " *L'œuvre de nos Chapitres Généraux*, in *Bulletin de l'Institut*, Vol. 27 (1966-1967), p. 645.

⁶³ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, December 1967, p. 2. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 560-561.

⁶⁴ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, June 1967. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 553.

⁶⁵ *Idem*, p. 553.

Cristóbal de Boedo, where he was baptized, confirmed and received his First Holy Communion, to the Church Communion at the Juniorate church in Carrión de los Condes was the time and situation that the Lord used to bless him a new spiritual Family.

In this new family, in addition to inheriting a long and proud history, Brother Virgilio also received the gift of fraternity:

"I discovered that, in this family,
I had many Brothers waiting for me.
In this place we were all Brothers."⁶⁶

The subsequent process that led him to "discover this new family," was a gradual one, the result of his love for the Institute and his vocation:

"Love every day is what allows me to reap rewards...
And so my joys and fondest hopes are renewed
each day in the measure that I love
all the members of this great Family."⁶⁷

During his journey of discovery Brother Virgilio came upon four great **surprises**:

1. "One day, I discovered that there is a **great saint whom everyone was calling Father.**"⁶⁸

2. "I quickly, very quickly discovered that the men who had welcomed me into their great family **had a very special mother**, with whom they were madly in love and they fervently called upon her as their Mother, Patroness, Model and Superior."⁶⁹

3. "I also discovered that in this family I received the **gift of many brothers.**"⁷⁰

4. In this family "we're all in the **same boat**, have the same rights and fraternally share in the same inheritance."⁷¹

Here we have the nucleus of what is meant by "our family, the one that belongs to all," ...the "great Marist family."⁷² Those four statements contain the core principles that sustain our new ties as a family that has an identity all its own.

The gift of this spiritual family that Brother Virgilio received was accompanied by the surprise of something new, the joy of acquiring a rich and pleasing identity. This experience filled him with happiness and deeply moved his soul, a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life.

"A few months after leaving my other family, I felt immense joy."⁷³

⁶⁶ Idem, p. 554.

⁶⁷ Idem, p. 553.

⁶⁸ Idem, p. 553.

⁶⁹ Idem, p. 553.

⁷⁰ Idem, p. 554.

⁷¹ Idem, p. 554.

⁷² Idem, p. 553.

⁷³ Idem, p. 553.

"To truly feel being a son in a new family filled me with enormous joy."⁷⁴

This grace of a "new affiliation," the gift of a spiritual family, led to new filial relationships with the Mother and the Father of that new community of faith.

"I began to invoke him (Marcellin) using his title. Since then, my Father/Founder, Blessed Marcellin Champagnat, has occupied a special place in my heart."⁷⁵

"They had a Mother all their own, loved her with all their heart and fervently invoked her as their Mother, Patron, Model and Superior."⁷⁶

This spiritual experience brought into harmony his feelings about the newness of his charismatic family, a spiritual gift, with the gift of his family on earth.

"My Father/Founder, Blessed Marcellin Champagnat, occupies a special place in my heart without in any way lessening my love for the one whom God has given me here on earth. Just the opposite: Marcellin has helped me to supernaturalize my feelings and empowered my filial love for him."⁷⁷

"Feeling that I'm a favourite son of our Blessed Mother, knowing that it's possible to harmonize my love of both mothers, fervently believing that my love for the one in Heaven was purifying my love for the one on earth, confirming that I loved both of them more and more each day, becoming aware

that in reality that I love both of them with one and the same love, the same tremendous love, both loves being spiritual, the one in Heaven confirming for me in the depths of my heart my good fortune to be able to also love them together in the next life, that's when I really began to feel ecstatic, with a happiness that I hope will last for eternity."⁷⁸

3.3. Paternity, Maternity and being a Marist Son

Brother Virgilio started out with the notion of family, born from rich experiences that bring out what is essential in life. Reduced to its simplest dimensions, a family is made up of a father, mother and children who engender and develop rich and profound relationships.

Brother Virgilio's intuition regarding the Marist family is based on two vital references: the large family that welcomed him when he entered this world and his experience of living as a Brother in the various Marist communities to which he belonged.

The bonds that unite children with their parents constitute an "affiliation." Brother Virgilio was aware that those born into the Marist family were linked to

"...form a true family within the family of God."⁷⁹

⁷⁴ *Idem*, p. 553.

⁷⁵ *Idem*, p. 553.

⁷⁶ *Idem*, p. 553.

⁷⁷ *Idem*, p. 553.

⁷⁸ *Idem*, p. 553.

⁷⁹ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, June 1968; published simultaneously with No. 3 dedicated to the parents of the Brothers. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 595.

Brother Virgilio's intuition linked belonging to the Marist family to the fruitfulness of the Spirit by means of the charism and mission of the Institute. For him, being Marist family involved one's heart welcoming the Gospel imperative to be born again, to be brought to life spiritually by the Mother and Father of this new family and to be welcomed, respected and appreciated by the Brothers who constitute the family. The Marist family is the result of the fruitfulness of the Spirit.

It was clear in this man's mind and heart that the spiritual awakening that led to his becoming a member of the Marist family was by nature spiritual, already underway when he first drew close to the Marist charism on entering the Juniorate. His time in formation was a life-giving period of spiritual growth and development.

At the precise point in time when Brother Virgilio started to form his first impressions about the Marist family, the result of the enriching charism that Marcellin had bequeathed to it, life born of this great grace took him beyond existing ways of thinking that had been limiting those who made up the Institute, and new areas of the presence and action of God came into view. This can be seen from words

that Brother Virgilio addressed to his Juniors, words that brought down barriers separating the "elder" perpetually professed Brothers and the "benjamins," the newcomers preparing to enter the Institute,⁸⁰ including them all within the same family:

In this family "we are all Brothers; older ones looking out for you, the newcomers in our formation programs. My Brothers in spirit, in Mary and in Champagnat are yours, and mine are for everyone else."⁸¹

"In calling ourselves Brothers, we proclaim that we belong to a family united in Christ's love."
Constitutions, Article 6

These words show us that Brother Virgilio, although acknowledging that there were various degrees of maturity within the family, asserted that belonging to this new spiritual family conferred its members with rights:

"You have every right to be full-fledged members of the Marist family."⁸²

"...know that we are full-fledged members of our Marist family."⁸³

Brother Virgilio saw the Marist family as a communion of persons born out of the fruitfulness of the charism received through Mary and Marcellin. As

⁸⁰ "Nearly all our Aspirants enter our Marist Family as Juniors." Charles Raphaël, *Circulaires* Vol. 23 (1963-1967) p. 129.

⁸¹ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, June 1967. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press. Lleida 1992, p. 554.

⁸² Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, February 1968, No. 1; addressed to Parents of the Brothers, p. 3. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press. Lleida 1992, p. 591.

⁸³ *Idem*, p. 593.

an older brother, he accepted the younger ones as

"...my Brothers in Spirit, in Mary and in Champagnat."⁸⁴

"It ought to stir up feelings of sincere filial affection in people when everyone feels this way about newcomers in this highly respected family. And why not! We need to nurture a heartfelt desire to keep our family going, with all the Brothers as grateful sons bringing in new vocations each year."⁸⁵

The ultimate goal of the Marist Family is love. Without love community life cannot exist. Members new to the family become offspring intimately and organically bound to Christ through Mary and Champagnat out of love.

"As one we all call him FATHER! And being a Father he loves and protects us. As one we all pray to her as our MOTHER! And she always responds to us with affection: my SON! In this Family there are no distant relatives to look upon with distrust, no stepbrothers from whom you have to keep certain secrets, no cantankerous brothers, as sometimes exist in families here below, battling over their inheritance. All of us form a single family, have the same rights, and as Brothers we all partake of the same inheritance -

- ...the immense and gentle love of our Father
- ...the immense and most joyful love of our Mother"⁸⁶

Without love a family cannot live, grow and mature in its life as a community. Thanks to the love of Mary and Champagnat the Marist family was born and is what it is today.

"We all loved one another as Brothers in Christ and in Champagnat."⁸⁷

Being Brothers in Christ is very different from being blood brothers.

This special relationship with Christ means that we have freely welcomed and taken to heart our membership in His Church.

3.4. A family born out of a rich and fruitful charism

Brother Virgilio's lifelong insight regarding the Marist family made its way into the celebrations and festivities marking the 150th anniversary of the founding of our Institute.

"This family, ours, is enjoying a rousing celebration of its 150th year of existence."⁸⁸

That joyful anniversary celebration led him to see that the Marist family that he intuited was a continuation of the one in LaValla, a result of the fruit-

⁸⁴ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, June 1967. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 554.

⁸⁵ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, May 1967. See Martínez Estaún, Antonio. *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 500.

⁸⁶ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, June 1967. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 554.

⁸⁷ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, December 1967, p. 2. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 560-561.

⁸⁸ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, June 1967. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 553.

fulness of the charism that had appeared 150 years earlier in a humble town in France and was still bearing fruit all over the world. Brother Virgilio felt he was an heir in a family that dated back to the historical origins of the Marist charism.

"One day long ago, January 2, 1817, two youths joined a young priest, the curate in a simple parish in the town of LaValla, in the Archdiocese of Lyon. From that day on they called him FATHER, because in his heart they found all the love, understanding and support that they needed in that man whom God had chosen to be the head of a family: the great Marist family."⁸⁹

He saw right away the historical connection between those two young men who "called him (Champagnat) Father" on January 2, 1817 and those who were now discovering their identity as his "new sons."

"All of us who have come to form a part of this family continue calling him Father, convinced that the love that he had for the first Brothers he continues to lavish on us."⁹⁰

"The Rules and all the spiritual writings that he has handed down to us give witness to his way of doing things, being family-minded and kind, gentle and amiable."⁹¹

In the Rules he tells us, "They will call themselves Brothers so that they remember that they belong to a single and unique family in which all of them must love one another."⁹² Hence for us this desire to become a true family within the family of God, infused with charity, gentle love, understanding and mutual support ... is a necessary goal for all members to experience happiness and have unity reign among all. One day, a century and a half ago, the two young men with whom he started his Congregation began calling him FATHER." They felt his care and truly loved him as their Father. Another day, also long ago, gathered around his deathbed, more than a hundred Brothers eagerly sought to comfort and relieve the sufferings of the one who had spent his life with them. Now he was about to leave them his greatest bequest, a rich Spiritual Testament, a genuine love letter, the basis of our spirit."⁹³

3.5. Belonging and inclusion. Who are those who constitute the Marist Family?

With the passage of time, as Brother Virgilio gradually developed his initial intuition, he saw the list of groups of people that constituted the Marist family evolving.

⁸⁹ Idem, p. 595.

⁹⁰ Idem, p. 595.

⁹¹ Idem, p. 595.

⁹² During the second session of the 16th General Chapter (1967-1968) a new text of the *Constitutions* was drawn up, where it is written: "Our Congregation is composed of professed Brothers: those in temporary vows, those Perpetually Professed and those with the Vow of Stability. There is no distinction at all in terms of class or observance: they are lay religious, Brothers in the same family, one with each other in charity and obedience to the Constitutions The Novices are associate members." *Constitutions*, 3 (1968) Brother Virgilio participated in drawing up these *Constitutions*.

⁹³ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, June 1968; published simultaneously with No. 3, dedicated to the parents of the Brothers. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 595.

Together with the Chapter delegates from different ethnicities, languages and countries, the first group of people he included as forming part of the “great Marist family” were those then in Marist formation programs and their families. As an older Brother in the family, he welcomed the newcomers who were already becoming part of the Marist family.

In this Family “we are all Brothers, we older ones towards you newcomers in our houses of formation. My Brothers in spirit, in Mary and in Champagnat are your family members, and mine are yours.”⁹⁴

He kept expanding this warm welcome to include the fathers and mothers of the Marist Brothers together with their relatives (brothers and sisters, grandparents, cousins, nephews and nieces) to whom he said:

“Indeed, with immense joy, the Marist family is for you as a material bond, a symbol of the spiritual ties that have always existed, and that henceforth we desire to strengthen between ourselves, your Brothers, and all the members of our family.”⁹⁵

To address this group on a more personal level, he published a supple-

ment to the *Marist Family* magazine specifically dedicated to them:

“Today, dear parents and relatives of all the Brothers in the Province of Catalunya, Marist Family”⁹⁶ is being born for you.⁹⁷

“To bring you, the parents of our Brothers, the consolation and joy of knowing that we are all full-fledged members of our Marist family:

- ...to bring you, brothers and sisters in our family with whom we have shared the joys of our very home, the consolation of also participating in what we do
- ...to bring you, our grandparents, some of the wealth of our religious heritage
- ...to bring you, cousins, nephews and nieces a share in the treasure that the Lord who chose us has promised”⁹⁸

“You are full-fledged members of our family. We think about you and pray for you every day for we want you to be closer to us, enjoying all the spiritual benefits of the Congregation.”⁹⁹

Just a few months later, Brother Virgilio enlarged the circle of membership to include former students and their families:

“Included in this everyone, we find our older Brothers and newer ones in our communities, their family

⁹⁴ Idem, p. 554.

⁹⁵ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, February 1968, n. 1, addressed to the parents of the Brother, p. 3. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 592.

⁹⁶ This “birth” refers to a supplement of the *Familia Marista* magazine dedicated to a former teacher for the parents of the Brothers. These additions to the original format of the magazine bring out how, little by little, the idea about who made up the Marist Family was growing and spreading.

⁹⁷ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, February 1968, No. 1, addressed to the parents of the Brothers, p. 3. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 591.

⁹⁸ Idem, p. 592.

⁹⁹ Idem, p. 591.

members and ours, our students and former students and all their families.”¹⁰⁰

Driven by a profound love for God, the Church and the Institute, Brother Virgilio’s apostolic soul welcomed into this great spiritual community all who were connected with the Brothers.

“As the years have gone by, thousands and thousands have become members of this family, having a sense that our love and devotion to our common father has been the nexus of our union, the secret behind our excellent family spirit.”¹⁰¹

“Today they constitute more than half a million souls counting our students, former students and their Families, students in formation houses, Brothers and their families, who we continue to feel are our family members, having that plain, gentle, practical charism of love that brings happiness and well-being into all our homes.”¹⁰²

Right from the start the great Marist family was very warmly welcomed and many felt more attached to our Marist name than our Marist charism.

3.6. Spirituality and Prayer in the Marist Family

Those in the Marist formation centres in Catalunya reflected on, developed and lived the concept of the Marist

family using three resources of a pastoral nature: the “*Marist Family* magazine” to spread the concept, “Mother’s Day” as an annual time to gather together, and “Marist Saturday,” still a feature of the religious calendar in the Province of the Hermitage, a day dedicated to praying for the Marist family.

The first component used in support of the Marist family was the magazine “*Marist Family*.” The title of this small instrument of communication brought into focus everything having to do with promoting the Marist family that had its origins in the Marist formation centres in Catalunya. An analysis of the contents found in its pages would reveal how influential it has been.

Together with their initiative to create the *Marist Family* magazine, the Brothers on the Province formation team came up with the idea of celebrating “Mothers Day” in the formation houses, although in a way very different from the dictates of the business and consumer-oriented society in which we live. The first celebration was held on May 7, 1967.

“The touching words of Brother Virgilio León, the Provincial brought tears to the eyes of everyone in the large audience, especially mothers, upon whom they made an indelible impression.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, December 1967, p. 2. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 561.

¹⁰¹ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, June 1968; published simultaneously with No. 3, dedicated to the parents of the Brothers. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 595.

¹⁰² *Idem*, p. 595.

¹⁰³ 05/07/1967 1967 House Annals of the community in Llinars, written on “green-colored paper,” identified as such because the paper used in chronicling the main events of the year for the Secretary General was green.

This celebration greatly emphasized the role of a mother in her family. Each year the festivities on “Mothers Day” (honouring both the one we have in Heaven and the one here on earth) ended the academic year in the formation centres. Families who had sons in these Marist centres found a time and place when they could see themselves as having a starring role in this annual celebration. Just as Easter is the high point in the liturgical life of the Church, for the families of those in formation and the students themselves “Mothers Day” represented the high point in the academic and family life of the formation centre.

This celebration on “Mothers Day” had two key features: the Eucharist and a music program. Throughout the academic year and especially during the winter months, those in formation prepared a program to honour their mothers. During the celebration the mother of a Brother or student would always say a few words and during the time he was Provincial Brother Virgilio would offer warm and vibrant words of his own. This occasion brought about a spontaneous exchange of life stories offered as inspiring testimonies that families of the young Brothers and students shared during the festivities.

The joyful way in which families welcomed this celebration of Mothers Day awakened in the Brothers in charge of formation additional ideas for animating the spirit of the Marist Family. To this end, making use of *Marist Family* magazine, they launched the “Marist Saturday” campaign.

The slogan “Marist Saturday” was first used in the Marist formation centres in Catalunya to promote a campaign asking people to set aside one day a week to pray for Marist vocations. Saturday was proposed as a day to be in union with Mary and to pray to her for vocations. This commitment to pray for the Marist family every Saturday gave added importance to the day each week that the Marist Brothers traditionally dedicate to Mary, giving special catechism classes. With this proposal Mary takes centre stage, with the members of the Marist family gathering around their Mother. In addition to personal prayer, this encouraged the practice of family prayer by inviting the whole family to come together to pray for Marist vocations.¹⁰⁴

The campaign aimed to have a family pray as one, everyone entering into a prayerful union, in an intimate and supernatural way, with the other mem-

¹⁰⁴ This was the announcement that began this activity: “Yes, Ma’am, everything comes together in that shared commitment to the great day of your Son’s total consecration. And to traverse this path together we’ve come up with something out of the ordinary: **Marist Saturday**. Perhaps all we are asking you to do is sacrifice a bit of time in front of the TV... and to be brave **every Saturday** and round up Dad, Grandma and everyone else in the house and ... and all together begin praying the Rosary for your son’s perseverance.

So don’t forget this time every Saturday: We for you, you for us; every Marist Saturday **the Family Rosary**, as a bolt of grace on all of us. Don’t forget, at least **every Saturday...**” Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, April 1967. See Martínez Estaún, Antonio. *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 531.

bers of the family. Above all, prayer is the time when the family comes together in spirit, supports one another, fills its quiet time with the presence of God and those young people who are loved in Him and through Him. Communion in prayer is the fruit and requirement of the communion we receive in the Sacrament of Baptism. Brother Virgilio looked upon the Marist Family as a small cell of believers in which people render worship to the Father through praise, adoration and intercessory prayer for vocations. We must pray to the Lord of the harvest.

The family stays together by rendering worship that is due to God. Brother Virgilio looked upon the Marist family as a human-religious unit made fruitful by the charism that their Son in the formation centre was receiving through his nascent vocation. The Son's vocation and charism created a new dynamic in the interior life of the family. The spiritual influence of the Son came from his self-giving and intercessory prayers.

"Every time a Son in formation prays for his family – and he constantly does so – his prayer brings streams of grace into his beloved home."¹⁰⁵

For Brother Virgilio it was clear that a son in formation, or one already professed, an intercessor based on his

new charismatic life, exercised a "son's very salutary influence on his mother," raising up mothers in a spiritual way, to the point where they became "the ideal mother," in the image of "the mother of Jesus."

"Fathers and mothers or our young men in formation, when doubts or deep concerns about the future of your sons come your way, remember that it is their FATHER in Heaven who has called them, because He needs them. And pray as a family that one day they will become the holy religious that you have dreamed about."¹⁰⁶

One of the moral obligations of a family is to teach its children the meaning of love and how to put love into practice in all their human relationships. Fostering love within the Marist family promotes a more profound and authentic spirituality, inspired by the mighty well-spring of our Marist charism and developed by living a Christian life with prayer and the Sacraments.

"As a family people offer a complete sacrifice in community, very pleasing in the eyes of God."¹⁰⁷

Brother Virgilio promoted the Marist family as one that is united in love. The way this charity is put into practice shapes one's spirituality. Awakening and encouraging the practice of charity among those in a fraternity, one

¹⁰⁵ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, April 1967. See Martínez Estaún, Antonio. *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 550.

¹⁰⁶ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, November 1966, No. 1. See Martínez Estaún, Antonio. *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 530.

¹⁰⁷ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, April 1967. See Martínez Estaún, Antonio. *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 551.

sows and nurtures holiness in the great community of the faithful, thus enriching God's Church.

Brother Virgilio asked parents to foster a family atmosphere in their homes, one imbued with Christian love, and that they work together with the formation centre to train their sons to esteem and show gratitude to their parents for everything they receive from them. These sentiments will prompt them to better understand the fatherhood of God.

"The path to our renewal is plain to see: recognizing that we are brothers and sisters, feeling that we are brothers and sisters, showing love and affection for one another as brothers and sisters.

Brothers and sisters who dine on the only full-bodied spiritual bread that satisfies ALL and makes us happy in the home of Our Blessed Mother: the bread of LOVE, of CHARITY, shared by all in prayer. And the more we share the bread the more it is multiplied and reaches the young and the elderly.

Lord, may there be bread for all in Marcellin's home! May we fully appreciate that we are truly a family!"¹⁰⁸

A very simple way to put into practice sharing the bread of love and charity would be to come together and pray the Rosary once a week. Praying the Rosary gives collective witness to a spirituality based on using plain, down-to-earth language that everyone can understand.

3.7. The family and promoting vocations to the consecrated life

It was in the context of houses of formation that practical knowledge and personal experience of the Marist family were especially in evidence, and this offered hope for coming to grips with a heavy cross that they were carrying. At the time Brother Virgilio was telling people about his insights into the Marist family, the formation houses were getting bad reviews in the press and suffering from the loss of many candidates. Brother Virgilio wrote,

"Nowadays to mention the subject of formation houses is to become embroiled in messy and dangerous theories, misguided thinking and situations in which we have no idea how they will end. Not always, thank God. However too many people are swimming in troubled waters, so muddled that a fisherman couldn't earn his living."¹⁰⁹

Those were challenging times in the houses of formation, almost too much to bear. Many Institutes converted training centres from boarding schools to facilities for day students; then after that into ordinary schools. This process ended with the closing of these formerly specialized centres because they gave rise to more prob-

¹⁰⁸ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, December 1967, p. 2. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 561.

¹⁰⁹ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, May 1967. See: Martínez Estaún, Antonio. *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 515.

lems than they were worth. As a consequence, in a few years there were no novices, no ordinations..., *there was a vocation crisis*. Brother Virgilio analyzed the data and stated in stark terms,

"They've murdered the mother and now they're bemoaning a lack of children."¹¹⁰

For Brother Virgilio, on the other hand, formation centres were the apple of the eye for the Marist Institute, and looking to the future he was filled with optimism:

"I know. Given the facts dealing with young people in formation centres, it is sometimes difficult to be optimistic. Be that as it may, I come down on the side of optimism, backed up by concrete facts, even though most people continue to spend a lot of time writing about a vocation crisis in houses of formation."¹¹¹

Brother Virgilio saw that the Marist Family's firm faith and fidelity to the Marist charism went hand in hand with the certain hope that it would yield much. In his writings, we come across a reference to the Biblical account of the call of Abraham, the father of believers, whose faith would bear abundant fruit and bring him more offspring than the stars in the sky and the sands of the seashore. The fruitfulness of faith, which creates the family of believers, comes from people's response and fidelity to their vocation.

It should come as no surprise that the first and most fitting place that Brother Virgilio found to spread his insights were Marist formation houses, the relatives of those in formation, the Brothers of the Province and their families. His intuitions resonated with these groups and they spread them, feeling energized by the Marist charism and seeing Marcellin as their father and Mary as their mother.

One of Brother Virgilio's fondest thoughts was about the important part his Mother played in his vocation and his faithfulness to it. His insights into the Marist family were very much strengthened by what he experienced coming from the spiritual life that his own mother must have lived. In great measure he attributed his vocation and perseverance to her prayers. This formed the basis for his apostolic vision for the family: mothers are the ones primarily responsible for nurturing the vocation of their sons. He was very insistent that mothers, parents of those in formation and of professed Brothers, are the ones who should provide the strongest support for their sons' perseverance in their vocations. Brother Virgilio attributed the presence of young men in Marist formation centres to the lively way in which mothers practised their faith:

"If solid young men are continuing to knock on the door of our Marist formation centres, seeking to fulfil

¹¹⁰ Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 529.

¹¹¹ *Frontera* magazine. Year 3, November 1966, No. 7, p. 34.

their dreams through a life of self-sacrifice and service to the Church, it is because there are still mothers who know that when our Heavenly Father calls, their sons need to devote their lives to things that point toward the Kingdom and the great family of God."¹¹²

Time and again Brother Virgilio returned to the Family as the setting where the faith and vocations to the consecrated life are sown. He put great faith in families at a time in society when this Institute was entering a grave crisis not unlike the one that the families of those in formation were experiencing.¹¹³

"Every family aspires to be an ideal one. I don't know if many come close to this goal. What I do know is that when families have sons who are consecrated to God, it paves the way for them to make their dreams come true."¹¹⁴

Hence he set out to empower the families of those in formation and the professed Brothers. He even invited those young men in formation to encourage their parents, brothers and sisters to intercede with the Lord for their apostolates.

Brother Virgilio asked every family to see having a son in a Marist formation centre as a great motivator in the lives and prayers of the entire family.

"When a Christian family hands over a son to God something very important happens, something that Heaven admires."¹¹⁵

At the time that Brother Virgilio proposed making the entire family responsible for the vocation of one of its members it was a bold move and novel approach. People listened to him with admiration because his message was very prophetic and filled with charismatic vitality. The spirited, jubilant and stimulating manner in which Brother Virgilio presented his proposal to live as the Marist family was intended to encourage families to promote their son's vocation. He especially relied on the support of mothers.

"On the day that parents handed their son over to God, there's no doubt that they gave up continuing to enjoy the earthly pleasure of one more smile in their home. Their Son, however, brought his smile into the Family of God, and at that very instant a star that will

¹¹² Brother Virgilio León's words on "Mothers Day" to the mothers of young men in formation at a celebration in Llinars del Vallés, May 12, 1968. Martínez Estaún, Antonio. *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 594.

The celebration of "Mother's Day" was written down in the annals of the House as a special event: **Mother's Day** in Llinars (May 12, 1968) was carefully prepared together with the students in Llinars y Rubí. A wonderful day! The mothers of two students said a few words. People sang and recited poetry. Brother Virgilio, our Provincial, received applause and the large group of people in the interior patio where the celebration took place cried.

¹¹³ In those days our formation centres had a number of students who did not come from Marist schools but from others where our Brothers maintained good relationships with their administrators and teachers.

¹¹⁴ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, April 1967. See Martínez Estaún, Antonio. *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 550.

¹¹⁵ *Idem*, p. 551.

bearn forever appeared in the Heavenly Family. On the day a family surrenders a son to God, an angel appears to protect and keep watch over everyone in the home."¹¹⁶

A vocation to the consecrated life is a sign of God's predilection, not only for the Son who has been called but for the family who generously lets him go.

"Within your Christian home, you have been given an instance of God's predilection."¹¹⁷

Each family is to recognize their Son on his way to becoming a Brother as

"...someone chosen, consecrated, a favourite of the Lord, at the service of the Church, his family's lightning rod, a future apostle of youth."¹¹⁸

Brother Virgilio intuited this aspect of the spirituality of the Marist Family as being closely connected with **the fruitfulness the Marist charism**. In the same way that mothers are fertile and bring new Children to life on earth, so, through love, they exercise a spiritual fruitfulness that brings new children into the Marist family and the Church.

"Thus between pain and love, memories of the past and dreams of the future, intimate conversations and not a few fervent prayers, this Christian mother, a

strong woman like those in Scripture, such as the mother of the Maccabees, once again brings forth a Son, to hand him over to God and consecrate him to our Blessed Mother."¹¹⁹

Brother Virgilio was convinced that the apostolate of the Marist family has to do with families. Families attain salvation through the apostolate of their own families. Therefore the Marist family calls for a true apostolate of the family.

"For the future, that will be our commitment: to spread this Greater Marist Family far and wide, to strengthen the bonds of solidarity and unity among all its members, to be able to pass on to future generations the rich patrimony of our Family Spirit, thanks to which its Sons spread throughout the whole world keep being faithful to (Marcellin's) Spiritual Testament and continue constituting the Greater Marist Family in which we all call him Father and love him in that role."¹²⁰

We need to demonstrate our apostolic mission in a communal way. Christian perfection is achieved through the soul's union with the Lord. This mission finds its proper expression among those who commit themselves to strive for perfection while living devoted community lives. That is the reason why Brother Virgilio worked hard to promote a true com-

¹¹⁶ Idem, p. 551.

¹¹⁷ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, March 1968. See Martínez Estaún, Antonio. *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 592.

¹¹⁸ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, May 1967. See Martínez Estaún, Antonio. *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 552.

¹¹⁹ Idem, p. 552.

¹²⁰ Virgilio León, *Familia Marista*, June 1968; published simultaneously with No. 3, dedicated to parents of the Brothers. See Antonio Martínez Estaún, *Hermano Virgilio León, marista rebelde*. Leridana Press, Lleida 1992, p. 595.

munity of people, one based on and nourished by an interior life of communion in love.

"During this time when Holy Church wishes to renew itself and experience the riches of its fundamental teachings, when the Council wishes to strengthen the bonds of the people of God and when more than ever we Christians see ourselves as God's family, we who in some way also belong to this other great Family, the Champagnat Marist Family."¹²¹

need to be engaged in this interior work of love, spiritual solidarity and union that going on in all of us.

4. TO SUMMARIZE

The use of the expression "Marist Family" is plain for all to see in the Circulars of Brothers Leónida and Charles Raphaël. While the meaning and scope of the expression were still imprecise in those Circulars, its origins can be traced to the very life of the Institute that was insistently calling for the embodiment of an intense family spirit during its 15th General Chapter in 1958.

As seen in this study, Brother Virgilio proposed the idea of the "Marist family" in four seminal texts. Reflection, dialogue and, above all, life gave rise to many different approaches in developing the expression's scope and contents, and naturally, to the practical way to follow through on

them. The full extent of Brother Virgilio's intuition unfolded gradually during a long period of discussion, reflection, prayer and study leading up to the opening of the 18th General Chapter. The limited space available for this article does not allow for a consideration of other original texts by Brother Virgilio, which fill out his thinking on the Marist family. To delve more deeply into his visionary insight it is necessary to take into account his life, work and writings, covered in great measure in his biography.¹²²

The expressions "Marist family" and "great Marist family" as Brother Virgilio first presented them are in tune with the language and thoughts expressed in the Circulars of Brothers Leónida and Charles Raphaël. However, he enriched these terms with references to theology and Marist tradition, linking them to Marcellin's charism. When he introduced and spread the notion of the "Marist family" as a place of communion, for many people he brought to light the fresh vigour of Marist spiritual life and moved their hearts to joyfully adhere to it.

The term "Marist family" was appealing because it brought many people closely associated with the Marist Brothers into a new relationship with them. It was inclusive by nature and opened doors for them to participate in the mission of the Institute, being very in tune with the Brothers'

¹²¹ *Idem*, p. 595.

¹²² See: A.M. Estaún, *H. Virgilio León, La familia marista de los hermanos*, Saragossa Editions, Barcelona 2011

charism, spirituality and mission, even though not linked to it by any legal or juridical commitments. Rather than, Brother Virgilio's initial intuition was to have people relate to the Marist family theologically, in plain and straightforward ways, rather than legally.

In proposing the idea of the "Marist family" in the Marist houses of formation, Brother Virgilio showed great creativity and originality, at such a tumultuous and challenging time for formation programs of that era, the years immediately following the closing session of the Council. The classes, welcoming atmosphere and formation programs for the incoming Marist vocations were concrete manifestations of the richness of the Marist family. That is how he joined the fruitfulness of the Institute with fidelity to the Marist charism, part of the treasure of the communion of saints, overcoming formal and legal distinctions, bringing together a great group of people to richly benefit the Church, inspiring and cultivating calls to the Consecrated Life.

The novelty of Brother Virgilio's intuition is not to be found in an idea, proposition or wish that needs to be constructed in the abstract in order to provide an effective response. Rather

it is found in confirming a fact: "We are the Marist family." That affirmation by Brother Virgilio makes evident that he envisioned the Marist family as a reality present in the midst of the community. Thus, whenever he talked about the Marist family he did not speak in terms of abstract ideas and plans but of life, attitudes, personal involvement, fire and passion.

Brother Virgilio spoke intuitively of people belonging to the Marist family without being clear as to the need for previous discernment, formation programs or ceremonies for becoming members. He recognized people as "de facto" members because they possess gifts to be welcomed as belonging to our Marist identity. In inviting families to encourage professed members of the Institute and those on their way to taking vows to be faithful to their vocation, Brother Virgilio was suggesting that these families already participate in the charismatic ideals of the Institute. Little by little his initial proposal to the families – the mothers, fathers and relatives of those in formation – was broadened to include the parents of students, former students, etc. The seed which fell on the fertile ground of a Church in communion, as called for by Vatican II, generated an abundant harvest of the fruits of holiness.

THE PRIEST AND THE DIOCESAN PASTOR

Father Champagnat's relationship with Bishop Devie



Fr. Frederick
McMahon, fms



Bishop Alexandre Devie

BISHOP DEVIE EARLY CAREER

Alexandre Raymond Devie was born into a family of modest means on 23 January 1767 in Montélimar, Drôme. After beginning his education in his home town, he began his Philosophy in 1783 in the seminary of Viviers and, two years later, his Theology in Bourg-Saint-Andéol. Both seminaries were directed by Sulpicians, the second being affiliated to the University of Va-

lence. Since both seminaries were highly reputed in the neighbouring dioceses, they generally sent their most gifted students there. After two years at the last-mentioned institution, Mr Devie received his M.A. Even though Devie was still only in Minor Orders, his bishop quickly named him Professor of Philosophy at the seminary - 31 July 1787. He was ordained sub-deacon by Bishop de Savines on 23 March 1790, then deacon on 20 May. The French Revolution of 1789 had not yet clouded his clerical horizon.

Since Bishop de Savines subsequently took the oath to the Constitution, Devie had to find a 'non-juring' bishop to ordain him to the priesthood. That was Bishop Fallot de Beaupré, of Vaison, who ordained Devie in Valréas in October 1791. As he had refused to take the oath, Devie had to exercise his ministry clandestinely, being hidden first by a family in Thueyts, and

then by one in Montélimar itself, until Napoléon's coup d'état of Brumaire (9 November 1799). After that he served openly as curate in the parish and as chaplain to the local Visitation nuns.

In January 1812 Devie became professor of Moral Theology at the seminary of Viviers and, at the beginning of the next school year, he became its Rector. On 31 May 1813 Bishop Vécherel of Valence simultaneously appointed him First Vicar General and Rector of the major seminary in Valence. After receiving the necessary approbation, he took over his new positions on 19 August. He was one of the four Vicars General named by the Chapter after Bishop Bécherel's death on 26 June 1815. When the new Ordinary, Bishop De La Tourelle, took possession of his See, he confirmed Fr Devie as Vicar General.

On 13 January 1823 the king appointed Devie to the See of Belley, which had been re-established as a diocese by the Bull "Paternae Caritatis" of 6 October 1822. He was appointed Bishop of Belley on 10 March and was ordained by Bishop Frayssinous on 15 June in the chapel of Issy-Les-Moulineaux in Paris. He then made his solemn entry into Belley on 23 July.

From the very beginning Bishop Devie found himself in contact with the Society of Mary, especially with the priests and the Sisters - branches of

the Society which were forming in his diocese. In 15 July 1827 he ordained Pierre-Louis Chanel as a priest of his diocese. It was in 1831 that this proto-martyr of Oceania joined the group of priests who wanted to become members of the yet-to-be-approved Society of Mary.

DEVIE AND CHAMPAGNAT FIRST CONTACTS

Bishop Devie very quickly became acquainted with Marcellin Champagnat because schools, as well as particular religious congregations, were in a high priority in his plans for the diocese. It was mainly during the decade from 1830 to 1840 that the Founder of the Marist Brothers and the Bishop of Belley were in direct contact.

On 16 September 1831 Fr Bourdin left Champagnat's Hermitage, in the Archdiocese of Lyon, to join Fr Colin and other would-be Marists at the minor seminary of Belley. Bourdin was there to teach Humanities, at a centre which was now under Colin's direction. This move is an indication of the incipient acceptance of the concept of a Society of Mary.

On 7 October 1832, at the closure of the Brothers' Retreat, Bishop Devie made a visit to the Hermitage and, in a conference to the Brothers, encouraged them and blessed them. Brother Avit gives this account:

'Bishop Alexandre Devie of Belley, who had always shown great kindness to the Society of Marist Fathers and Brothers, honoured us with his esteemed visit to Notre Dame de l'Hermitage during the Brothers' General Retreat of that year, 1832. ... Fr Champagnat brought the bishop into the prayer-room where the Brothers were gathered. His Grandeur encouraged them, gave them his blessing, and withdrew. The Retreat time-table was not in the least modified by this much-appreciated visit.'¹

THE AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL AT BRESSE

Further contact came with the Bishop of Belley because of Devie's growing interest in agricultural schools for boys. We hear about this from his biographer:

Bishop Devie not only encouraged the different model agricultural schools which were set up at various times in the Department of the Ain, but he himself even tried a experiment of this type, at considerable expense.²

On 16 July 1832 Devie and Champagnat met to discuss an agricultural school, or model farm, which the bishop wanted to open in Bresse. Without rejecting the idea, the Founder, after discussing it with Fr Gardette, one of his advisers, managed to obtain a delay. Devie enlisted help in this cause - that of Fr Jean Claude Colin, who at that time was the 'Centre of Unity'

of all aspiring Marist priests. On 24 June 1833 Fr Colin informed Champagnat that the bishop of Belley was asking for two Brothers for an establishment in Bresse. He invited him to go to see this establishment and to pass through Belley. We do not know whether Champagnat followed that suggestion, but, in any case, towards the end of July, he seemed willing to take on the project.

In his letter of 24 June Colin imparted to Champagnat his intention of going to Rome at the beginning of September, hoping to meet him before this date. He also requested that, while waiting, Champagnat prepare an overview of the Rules of the Brothers.³

Fr Champagnat came to Belley around 6 July⁴ and reached an agreement with Bishop Devie about sending Brothers to the school in Bresse towards the end of the summer. After further reflection, and on the advice of Fr Gardette, Champagnat requested a delay of several months.⁵

In a letter to Bishop Devie at the end of July 1833, Fr Champagnat justified the delay in sending Brothers for the establishment at Bresse. He had to await the return of Fr Cholleton to Lyon, and also for the gathering of the Brothers for the holidays and Retreat.

¹'Abregé des Annales de Frère Avit', pp. 121-122.

² Cognat, 'Vie de Mgr Devie', L. I, p. 259.

³ O.M. I, Doc.272.

⁴ AFM, reg. 11, p.64.

⁵ O.M. I, Doc.273, Intro

The letter is undated, but it clearly comes from the summer of 1833, and fits in between Champagnat's journey to Belley and the return of

Cholleton to Lyons around 6 August⁶. The letter is addressed to Bishop Alexandre Raymond Devie of Belley, Ain:

I waited a while before answering you, thinking that Fr Colin would in the meantime have shared with you the letter I wrote concerning the establishment in Maison Blanche.⁷ I am more and more attached to this good work which, upon close examination, does not diverge from my aim since it is primarily concerned with education of the poor. So I intend, My Lord, to back up your zeal wholeheartedly since you have deigned to look in my direction.

On my way back from Belley I spoke with Fr Gardette about this establishment that I was about to open⁸. He suggested that I wait until Fr Cholleton arrived⁹ and also mentioned that August and September are unhealthy months in that part of the country. It would be extremely difficult for me to remove from a very large school the Brother I want to give you. The school has already had several changes this year, even very recently. I know that the parish priest relies heavily on this Brother. At the moment all our Brothers have gathered for their vacation and their Retreat at the Mother House. Brother's travel expenses would also become considerable. Our vacation begins 15 September and ends 15 October¹⁰.

So, My Lord, I humbly ask you to agree to this slight delay, which will make it possible for me to give you suitable subjects. I do not believe that Fr Cholleton will raise any objection to these arrangements. I very much like Fr Colin's idea of a Third Order. I think that, as Your Grandeur envisages it, it will succeed¹¹.

I could go to Meximieux around the fifteenth or sixteenth of October. I shall be able to give you a specific date a little later.

Accept the assurance of the respect with which I have the honour, My Lord, to be your most obedient servant.

Champagnat.

Evidently, other obstacles must have arisen since, from the Brothers' side, the plans fell through; there was no

further mention of giving this establishment to the Little Brothers of Mary.¹²

⁶ O.M. I, Doc. 273.

⁷ i.e. Bresse.

⁸ We know that Fr Gardette was one of Fr Champagnat's principal advisers.

⁹ Being dependent on the bishop of Lyon, Fr Champagnat could not make new foundations without his approval, i.e. without the consent of Fr Cholleton, Vicar General, who was to return to Lyon only at the beginning of August.

¹⁰ Fr Champagnat means that he would be unable to supply Brothers before 15 October.

¹¹ This is the first reference to a plan for a Third Order on the part of Fr Colin. It is a pity that we have no information as to how Bishop Devie regarded it.

¹² O.M. I, p. 594.

Ultimately, a certain Fr Jean Granjard took over the project, but it turned out to be a financial disaster¹³.

DEVIE AND THE SOCIETY OF MARY

Turning to affairs dealing with the endeavours of the members of the Society of Mary to be approved by Rome, we come to a letter of 8 April 1834, addressed to the ordinaries of Lyon and Belley by Cardinal Odescalchi, who communicated the result of the plenary meeting of the Congregation of 31 January, a meeting which rejected as a totality the plan for the Society of Mary, while at the same time authorising the election of a canonical Superior for the priests, and also granting indulgences.¹³ This constituted a significant advance for the Marist priests' branch of the Society, for which indulgences were also to be granted. Despite that, because of some clerical error (i.e. error by Roman clerics), the indulgences sought in this application were granted to the Third Order of Mary, Belley branch. The decree thus contained little joy for the Marist Sisters and the Marist Brothers, whose congregations still remained under diocesan jurisdiction. Furthermore, it was Rome's intention that election of a Superior for the priests'

branch was to be subject to the approval of the two local bishops.

THE CRISIS REGARDING THE APPOINTING OF SACRISTANS

Touching on another matter, we have a letter of 29 March 1835¹⁵ in which Fr Champagnat asked Fr Colin that the Marist Brothers never be charged with the position of church sacristan. As for the business of caring for sacristies, that move undoubtedly came from Bishop Devie through Fr Colin. Some of Champagnat's Brothers had been working for the priests in Belley, and the authorities there wanted to confide the sacristy duties to Brothers. Had the bishop expressly asked for the Brothers of Mary, or was he thinking of the Joseph Brothers, a group under Colin's direction? We have no way of telling since there is no documentation available. This request must have been made verbally. All we know is the final decision, which Fr Colin communicated to Fr Champagnat in his letter of 23 April 1835.¹⁶

In his reply Fr Colin announced to Fr Champagnat that the sacristan position at the cathedral of Belley had been confided to the Brothers of the Holy Family. It is obvious that Cham-

¹³ OM IV, p. 293-294.

¹⁴ O.M. I., Doc. 309

¹⁵ LMC 55 ; OFM 250 [12]

¹⁶ O.M. I, Doc. 336.

pagnat did not want the apostolate of the Marist Brothers to extend to diocesan sacristy work.

There was more trouble concerning religious Brothers in the diocese of Belley. On 1 November 1835 Fr Gabriel Taborin, founder of the congregation of the Brothers of the Holy Family, wrote to Bishop Devie to explain his repugnance at the proposed union of his Brothers with those of the Society of Mary. Some authorities wanted to make Joseph Brothers of them. Before that, diocesan officials had sought to unite them to the Brothers of Fr Bochard, and then to those of Fr Querbes.¹⁷ The Joseph Brothers had been introduced by Colin as lay helpers to the Marist priests. At first they were integrated with Champagnat's Marist Brothers, whose leader, Champagnat, saw to their training as religious. It was not a satisfactory arrangement, however, and eventually Colin saw to their separate formation and to their belonging wholly to the priests' Society - quite distinct from the Marist Brothers.

It has been noted that Bishop Devie was an adviser to Fr Champagnat on the subject of legal authorisation. After a meeting with the bishop towards the end of 1836, Champagnat was satisfied that the bishop had seconded the idea of forming a union between the communities of Cham-

pagnat's Brothers and those of Fr Mazelier. This was part of Champagnat's plan to acquire authorisation by uniting with a congregation which possessed that precious qualification.¹⁸

TROUBLE REGARDING A NOVITIATE; HARMONY REGARDING AUTHORISATION

About this time the matter of St-Didier-sur-Chalaronne came more sharply into focus. A certain Miss De la Poype wrote to Bishop Devie in 1835, saying she wanted to found a school for the children of the parishes of St-Didier-sur-Chalaronne and Thoissey, and presenting him with a gift of 72,000 francs. The bishop saw to the carrying out of the project. He had a school building put up in St-Didier, but close to Thoissey, then asked Fr Colin for Brothers from the Hermitage, informing him that he intended to add to the school a novitiate for the Brothers. Out of obedience to his superiors, Fr Champagnat agreed to the request, but showed himself very reluctant about the foundation of a novitiate because, according to Brother Avit, it would be 'too close to the one at the Hermitage'.¹⁹ Besides, Fr Madinier, parish priest of St-Didier, who had the house built, had not foreseen additional space for a novitiate. Towards the end of 1836, 'being un-

¹⁷ O.M. I, Doc. 346

¹⁸ 'Chronologie', (4 Novemer, 1836) p. 71

¹⁹ 'Annales Abrigé de Frère Avit', p. 193.

aware that the Brothers had arrived in St-Didier, Bishop Devie wrote to the venerable Father and urged him to send them as soon as possible. His Grandeur also asked him where things stood with the legal authorisation.²⁰ So, some time in December

1836 Fr Champagnat wrote to Bishop Devie of Belley, announcing the arrival of the Brothers in St-Didier-sur-Chalaronne and telling him how the business of our legal authorisation was progressing. Here is Champagnat's reply:²¹

My Lord,

The Brothers for St-Didier have left here and have been settled for a week now. They were received eagerly, and they have already told us they have 260 children in their classes, and that, unless they get help quickly, they cannot possibly keep such a number.

To obtain our authorisation we drew up the Statutes below, which we sent to Paris on 28 February 1834²², with a letter to the king containing an historical sketch of the foundation of our Institute. In May 1835 we also wrote to the queen, who replied that our documents were in the hands of the Minister. The main cause of the delay we are facing is, I think, that Mr Guizot, being a Protestant, is not pleased to see an association totally dedicated to Mary. Here is the answer we received:²³ 'As for the request itself, for the authorisation of your house as an association, it did not seem to us possible to approve it at present. I know you spoke to me about the Statutes of the Brothers of St-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, but I do not recall receiving them. We have the Rule of Fr De la Mennais, which was sent to us by an eminent priest of the diocese of Grenoble. The Statutes of the association are at the beginning; we will send them to you at once.'

My Lord, I am still following up on this matter. A request has come from the arrondissement committee in support of our request, with several letters of recommendation from the Mayors of the towns where our Brothers are working. At present our documents are in the hands of Mr Delebecque, first Head of Division. When I was in Paris, I was able to see him with Bishop Pompallier; he was exceedingly polite to us. He promised me he would do his best to bring our undertaking to a successful conclusion. Several other distinguished persons have also expressed their good will towards me. So I hope that, since our Statutes were approved by the Rcyal Council on 7 March 1834, we will finally obtain the Ordinance we seek.

Please accept, My Lord, the expression of the profound respect and entire devotedness with which I will always be Your Grandeur's most humble and obedient servant,

Champagnat.

²⁰ 'Annales Abrigé de Frère Avit', pp. 194-195.

²¹ LMC 75 ; OFM 277

²² Wrong date - a copyist's error. The letter should be dated 28 January 1834.

²³ Reply of the Minister, 4 September 1835.

Here, in part, is Devie's letter to Champagnat, dated 7 February 1837:

Dear Father,

'You will find enclosed a bank draft for 400 francs for the novitiate of the fourth Brother whom you sent.²⁴ Fr de la Croix and Fr Depery²⁵ went to a lot of trouble to look for your documents at the Ministry of the Interior so that they could push the authorisation of your congregation. They still have not been able to find any trace of them. But one Departmental Head promised to do all he could to locate them. At the same time he told them that, since it was a question of a new religious congregation, a law passed by both Chambers would be necessary. Did anyone in Paris tell you anything like that?

I do not recall that there was ever question of anything more than an Ordinance.

I should also like to know if, among your documents, there is any record of a donation made to your congregation at the Hermitage, for I should like to have the donation of the house of St-Didier, with about forty thousand francs of capital, approved at the same time. Keep me up to date on what happens with regard to your house.

I shall tell you everything I learn from our travellers when they return, which should be soon.

Fr Champagnat certainly lost no time in answering this letter; that is the reason we can date it from mid-Febru-

ary 1837²⁶. Champagnat thanked Devie for what he had done to further the authorisation of the Institute:

My Lord,

We have received your esteemed letter with the enclosed bank draft.

We want to thank you for the letter with which you were good enough to honour us. Your kindness and your generous liberality towards the Society of Mary, of which you have given us such evident proof, will never fade from our memory. We are very touched by all the trouble which Fr de la Croix and Fr Depery have taken on our behalf in Paris. We believe our documents are still in the hands of M. Delebecque, a Department Head in the Ministry of Public Instruction. We were never told that a new law would be needed for our authorisation. At the time of the fall of Charles X everything was ready and the procedures completed; all that remained was for him to sign the Ordinance, but events blocked that.

²⁴ To St-Didier.

²⁵ Vicars General of Belley.

²⁶ cf. A. A. p.214 ; LMC 90 ; OFM 291

Among our documents there is no statement of a donation made to our house; no one even spoke to us about it. We have not heard anything very positive about this whole affair since my return from Paris. We have been waiting a long time to learn the outcome. ...

My Lord, please accept the homage of our total devotedness and the firm resolution we have taken not to overlook anything in co-operating with your truly apostolic zeal for the glory of God and the good of religion. We will be happy if you will be so good as to continue to give us your advice and the help of your prayers. Please accept these thoughts and sentiments of Your Grandeur's most humble and most obedient servant.

Champagnat.

THE ST DIDIER NOVITIATE AND THE NANTUA AND THOISSEY SCHOOLS

In a letter of 11 October 1837 Bishop Devie asked Fr Champagnat to open a novitiate as soon as possible in St-Didier-sur-Chalaronne since vocations had already come from there. He also asked that one or two Brothers be sent to Thoissey to open a school and also that three Brothers be supplied for Nantua.

He added:

*'If Fr Colin is still there, speak to him; I am sure he will encourage you. It seems to me that you should be interested in concentrating your establishments in the diocese of Lyon and that of Belley because of the consequent ease of supervising them and having them supervised by your confrères. ...'*²⁷

In reply to this letter of Bishop Devie, Champagnat expressed his willingness to fulfil the request²⁸:

18 October 1837:

To Bishop Alexandre Raymond Devie, of Belley, Ain.

Your Lordship,

I am filled with the deepest gratitude for your Grandeur's interest in our Society, and this feeling will always lead me to do everything to meet your expectations and further your zeal. The building in St-Didier²⁴ really leaves nothing to be desired as a school, which it presently is and, with a few renovations, it would even be suitable for starting a preparatory novitiate. But, since the ground floor, as well as the first, is already occupied, and the

²⁷ AFM 128.4

²⁸ LMC 143 ; OFM 327

²⁹ Saint Didier sur Chalaronne where the Brothers had been since 1836.

second is far too low - to the point where the Brother Director, even though he is barely of medium height, told that he had to stoop to walk under the cross-beams - I believe that it is not possible to begin the novitiate immediately;

As for the Brothers Your Grace requests for Thoissey³⁰, I do not think it possible to send fewer than two³¹. As soon as the parish priest informs me that everything is ready and in conformity with our Prospectus, I will hurry to send them³². On the basis of the good reports Your Grandeur gives us about the establishment in Nantua, I have decided to do everything I can to found it next year³³. In the establishments I set up in your diocese I will always have the double advantage of being able to place them under the more immediate supervision of my confrères and of proving to you the sincere devotedness and profound respect with which I have the honour to be,

My Lord, Your Grandeur's most humble servant,

Champagnat.

Shortly afterwards we find Champagnat writing to Bishop Devie on the touchy question of a Marist Brothers' novitiate at St-Didier. He did this, not only to spell out his thinking about the novitiate in St-Didier and the schools in Thoissey and Verjon³⁴, but also to ask Devie's advice about resuming the process for obtaining the legal authorisation of his congregation.

It is possible that, for once, this letter is not a reply to one received from the

addressee, but that Fr Champagnat, after his letter of 18 October 1837, spontaneously and out of filial respect, brought the bishop up to date about the steps being taken to carry out his wishes. In the register of letters, the final paragraph was added later, in the margin, since the next letter of that same day had already been copied in. Fr Champagnat must have added it, or had it added, to the final copy before sending it - or even had the whole thing rewritten:³⁵

³⁰ A town about one kilometer from St-Didier.

³¹ Considering the proximity of the two places, a commentator suggests that one Brother from the community of St Didier could have gone every morning to teach in Thoissey and returned each evening. The need to send two therefore arose from the number of students, not from the requirements of the Rule.

³² That information came quickly, for, by the thirtieth of that month, it had been received by Champagnat, according to his letter to the bishop, 30 October 1837.

³³ In fact, Brothers did not go to Nantua until the beginning of the 1840 school year.

³⁴ A town in the Department of the Ain. We have no other information on this matter, which was not brought up again.

³⁵ LMC 145 ; OFM 330

30 October 1837:

To Bishop Alexandre Raymond Devie, of Belley, Ain.

My Lord,

It seems to us that the season is too far advanced to start the renovations needed for the novitiate in St Didier. Perhaps it would be more advantageous to await the return of spring since we would be able to have time to make our arrangements in more leisurely fashion, so that everything would be done exactly according to your wishes for the greater glory of God and the good of religion.

The special interest with which you deign to honour our Society constantly renews both our feelings of gratitude and our desire to co-operate with your truly apostolic zeal as far as we are able.

The parish priest of Thoissey has just asked us to send him two Brothers before All Saints³⁶. We hurried to fulfil his wishes. The Brothers will leave at once³⁷.

We have learned from the parish priest of Veijon that the town cannot yet meet the expenses of the establishment of our Brothers, but that the Mayor is still very eager to have an establishment of this type, and that, if, later on, the town feels it can bear the expenses, it will not fail to inform us.

Some highly-regarded people of good will³⁸ are urging us to attempt once again to obtain from the government the approbation of our Brothers. Since we have always made it our duty to ask your advice in our undertakings and since we have never had any reason to be other than grateful that we did, you will permit us to ask Your Grandeur for advice about this step and, if you approve, we ask you to please give us a letter of recommendation. I am, My Lord, with profound respect, Your Grandeur's most humble and obedient servant,

Champagnat.

All was not going well for the proposed foundation at Nantua. Although Champagnat hoped to make a foundation there in 1838, he had not re-

ceived from the parish priest, Fr Debelay, the conditions the parish priest was offering for the opening of the school. This affair brought Cham-

³⁶ This is the letter which Fr Champagnat was waiting for. The parish priest had evidently complied with the requirements of the Prospectus, as the Founder requested in the 18 October letter (to Bishop Devie), since the first draft of the this present letter states: 'His request was accompanied by 400 francs, foundation expenses for the second Brother. We immediately set about sending him some Brothers; they will leave at once.'

³⁷ According to Brother Avit, in the Annals of Thoissey, 'Brother Pierre-Marie and one other came to teach in November 1837, in the rooms rented by Fr Michaud (parish priest) on the edge of the town, facing St Didier'. 'Annales de Thoissey', p. 10. (AFM 214.99.)

³⁸ No doubt including, among others, Fr Mazelier. See Champagnat's letter of 20 September 1837 to Fr Mazelier.

pagnat once more in contact with Bishop Devie.

The founder had replied to Fr Debelay, parish priest of Nantua, on 11 May 1838.³⁹ According to Brother Avit, 'it seemed that this reply jolted Fr Debelay a bit'⁴⁰ since he did not answer until April 1840. In the interval he appealed to his bishop, with whom he discussed his problem. Bishop Devie then wrote a second time to Fr Champagnat on 4 January 1839:

I am writing, dear Father, to join my entreaties to those of the parish priest of Nantua⁴¹ to obtain an establishment of your Brothers in his parish, if that be possible. Like you, I know it is necessary to make

a choice in regard to such an important place, but I also realise how advantageous that location would be for your establishment.

I do not know how things stand for your Brothers, but, if nothing happens, I advise you to make the trip to Paris and to submit the Statutes of Fr De la Mennais. You will get through more quickly and surely. I advise the trip because you will see things for yourself and you will be less exposed to further obstacles ...

In reply to this letter, Champagnat wrote to explain the difficulties involved in the foundation of Nantua and to thank the bishop for his concern for the authorisation of the Institute⁴²:

20 January, 1839:

To Bishop Alexandre Raymond Devie of Belley, Ain.

My Lord,

I strongly desire to co-operate to the best of my ability with Your Grandeur's zeal for the good of your fine diocese and to show you more and more how grateful I am for your benevolence towards our Society. The establishment in Nantua which Your Grandeur wanted to recommend to us presents difficulties which it would be almost impossible for us to overcome at present, unless the parish priest were willing to found a free school. The town of Nantua has several teachers who, no doubt, enjoy the consideration and esteem of a certain number of its inhabitants. The civil authorities are not speaking out in favour of the Brothers' establishment. To maintain the competition we would need subjects, which we do not have at present, and even then success would be uncertain, as experience has taught us. None the less, there is nothing which we are not ready to undertake to show Your Grandeur our gratitude and devotedness. If the parish priest of Nantua can fulfil our request, we shall be glad to send our Brothers to carry out their functions in that town, under Your Grandeur's auspices and in the shadow of your powerful protection.

³⁹ LMC 189 ; OFM 350

⁴⁰ 'Annales de Nantua, p.10.

⁴¹ Fr Debelay.

⁴² LMC 239 ; OFM 383

I am very grateful, My Lord, for Your Grandeur's solicitude and zeal for the authorisation of our Brothers. I hope to have very shortly a meeting in Lyon with Fr Colin, our Superior, about the new steps we should take under the present circumstances to remove the obstacles which block the prompt and satisfactory outcome of this important matter.

Please accept, etc.

Champagnat.

The novitiate which Bishop Devie had requested for St Didier in 1837 did not begin immediately, for the building had first to be renovated to accommodate the novices. Besides, the project included accepting boarders, something for which the Brothers held more interest than they did for a novitiate. None the less, an honest effort was made, but it left Fr Champagnat convinced, for reasons he

sets forth in the following letter, that the arrangement was not ideal for that sort of institution.

Fundamentally, Champagnat did not agree with concept of having a novitiate on the same premises as a boarding college. He wrote to the bishop, explaining the difficulties involved in establishing a novitiate in the boarding school in St-Didier.⁴³

3 December 1839:

To Bishop Alexandre Raymond Devie of Belley, Ain,

My Lord,

I very much regret my inability, at the time of the Retreat, to find an opportunity to present you my respects and to share with you in person my observations about the novitiate in St Didier.

In conformity with the wish Your Grandeur expressed, whether through Father Superior or in my various contacts with you, I increased the personnel of St-Didier so that the Brother Director could devote himself more fully to the care of the novices. He wrote to me that he had received several, and I was pleased to hear it, but I very much fear that the novitiate will not be able to be solidly established amid the routine of the classes and the boarding school. We have learned from experience that these different works cannot be combined in the same house. In the beginning we started off at the Hermitage by accepting some outside students and some boarders. We found ourselves obliged to give it up since they caused the loss of a good number of novices and did evident harm to everyone. We were even obliged to separate the postulants totally from the Brothers. This was the only way we could put order into our house and preserve our subjects.

⁴³ LMC 305 ; OFM 435

An outstanding priest from the diocese of Grenoble, having begun an establishment in La Côte-St-André on exactly the same basis as the one in St-Didier, also wanted to add a novitiate to it. We gave in at his insistence, but he was the first to recognise from experience that it could not work, and he wrote to us that he would limit himself to preparing subjects for the Society, on condition that we give some to the diocese in proportion to those we receive from it.⁴⁴

My Lord, it is not that we refused to begin the novitiate which Your Grandeur wants, but, after much reflection and careful study, we do not believe it will succeed on the basis on which this establishment now stands. However, we will try it if Your Grandeur is still of a mind to do so, but it would be a pity if we were afterwards obliged to watch this work collapse or at least fade away.

Would it not be better to put the establishment of St-Didier provisionally on a footing similar to the one we have at La Côte-St-André until we can find a suitable location reserved exclusively for the novitiate, something like the one His Lordship the bishop of Autun gave us in Vauban? My fear would be that there could be real danger to the vocation of our postulants if we remove them from the Hermitage to send them to St-Didier. Besides, we should have to buy or transfer furnishings, which would be very expensive, something our present resources will not permit since our expenses have almost doubled this year.

I beg you, My Lord, please examine my reasons carefully. I submit them entirely to Your Grandeur's disposition. The Society of Mary is so much obligated to you that we should be ready to undertake everything and to risk everything in order to show you our respect, gratitude and devotedness, sentiments which I have the honour to bear towards you.

Champagnat.

FRÈRE AVIT WRITES ABOUT THE AFFAIRE ST DIDIER

In a section of 'Abregé des Annales de Frère Avit', the author has some comments on the St-Didier affair. We need to bear in mind that Brother Avit could at times be a somewhat caustic commentator - a lively writer with a good sense of humour:

'Immediately after the school opened the bishop requested that the novitiate be opened as well. The Founder replied that there were no rooms for it in the building. The bishop went there himself, saw that the rooms were indeed lacking and wrote to Fr Champagnat that he had just given orders to raise the house. So the house was raised a metre and a half. A boarding school and a novitiate were established there, but the former killed the latter. The bishop was displeased, turned his back on the Institute, and supported the Brothers of the Holy

⁴⁴ Champagnat preferred that Fr Douillet should send prospective novices to the Hermitage. This letter indicates that Douillet may himself have tried to form some young men at A St André - perhaps before sending them to Champagnat. Clearly, the attempt was not successful..

Family, as well as those of the Cross, for his diocese. None of this unpleasantness would have happened if the Founder had had a free hand.⁴⁵

In the 'Annales' of the early Marist communities, in which he played a leading role, Brother Avit has much the same to say about the St-Didier novitiate problem:

'A novitiate was begun, but it was quickly seen that it would be incompatible with the school, especially with the boarding school, for which plans had already been made and in which we were more interested. The novitiate was therefore abandoned, which offended His Lordship. Then His Grandeur abandoned us and supported the Brothers of the Cross and those of the Holy Family, who were getting started in his diocese.'⁴⁶

In regard to the so-called 'break' in relationships with the bishop we must bear in mind that the bishop obtained Marist Brothers for Thoissey (1837) and Nantua (1840). He had, above all, advised the Founder and had supported him in his steps to obtain the authorisation of the Institute, as we know from the numerous letters they exchanged.

THE POST-CHAMPAGNAT SCENE

With the death of Champagnat on 6 June 1840, contact with the bishops now fell to Champagnat's successor, Brother François, Gabriel Rivat, so our

study of Devie and Champagnat comes to an end.

Brother François wrote twice to Bishop Devie in 1844, and he also wrote to other bishops in whose dioceses the Brothers were established, to request their backing for his application for authorisation. The next contact with Devie was in 1846, when there were unsuccessful negotiations over the foundation of a school in the parish of Echallon.

DEVIE'S FINAL YEARS

Bishop Devie spent his remaining years in Belley. In 1850, at the age of 83, he requested, and was given, a co-adjutor, with the right of succession, Bishop Chalandon. Devie died on 25 July 1852, after several months' illness.

It is reported that Devie's last words to Fr Colin were:

'If God shows me His mercy, I shall certainly not forget the Society of Mary in heaven.'

Colin called him a benefactor of the Society.

A man of doctrine and a voluminous writer, Devie published a great many books, besides writing numerous letters and circulars. Among the books he wrote were the 'Rituel de Belley',

⁴⁵ 'Abregé', p. 194.

⁴⁶ 'Annales de St-Didier', AFM, 214. 74, p. 20

in three volumes, a real compendium of church discipline and pastoral activity⁴⁷, and also 'Méthode pratique pour faire le Catéchisme'.

In the political realm Bishop Devie held a position both prudent and firm. His independence from the civil government did not prevent the king from naming him, by an Ordinance of 4 December 1839, to the archdiocese of Rheims, which he refused. The king also sounded him out, with no greater success, about the See of Paris.

A REVIEW OF THE DEVIE-CHAMPAGNAT RELATIONSHIP

Devie's letter to Champagnat of 11 October 1837 contains much that is of significance for the Champagnat-Devie relationship :

'If Fr Colin is still there, speak to him; I am sure he will encourage you. It seems to me that you should be interested in concentrating your establishments in the diocese of Lyon and that of Belley because of the consequent ease of supervising them and having them supervised by your confrères.'

Bishop Devie is obviously anxious to have Marist Brothers for his diocese, but we may detect a touch of reluctance on Champagnat's part. First of all, we can sense a hesitancy on Champagnat's part concerning the proposed agricultural school at Bresse – a project which eventually was confined to others – and it failed!

Then there was the fact that Devie was Colin's bishop and sometimes made use of Colin to try to influence Champagnat, as we saw above in regard to St Didier and Thoissey. (He 'then asked Fr Colin for Brothers from the Hermitage, informing him that he intended to add to the school a novitiate for the Brothers'.) Champagnat would not feel comfortable in having too many establishments in a diocese where there were two authority figures (Devie and Colin) who might attempt to influence him – or even overrule him. Besides, Champagnat would doubtlessly be aware of the struggles that Colin had had to endure with Bishop Devie, who, in regard to the emergence of the Society of Mary, which was Colin's great dream, was much more intransigent in opposition than was Archbishop de Pins in the neighbouring archdiocese of Lyon. Devie was not happy about his good diocesan priests joining new religious Institutes.

So it would appear that Champagnat was wary of too deep an involvement with the diocese of Belley. Another reason for this was Champagnat's sense of loyalty to Archbishop de Pins and to the needs of his archdiocese. After all, de Pins was a solid supporter of Champagnat's endeavours and, even though he sometimes took measures which brought anguish to Champagnat, there seems to be no doubt that he meant well.

It is a pity that Champagnat was burdened with an archbishop who was

⁴⁷ O.M. I, p. 750, note 1; O.M. II, p. 309, note 3, p. 500, note 1

out of favour with the influential people in government education circles, but who kept on trying to obtain legal authorisation for the Marist Brothers despite constant failure. Champagnat, too, could not see the writing on the wall in this matter and kept plugging away – a great tribute to his patience and perseverance, but these qualities did not, in this case, lead to success.

If Champagnat had heeded the advice of Devie in regard to the manner of approaching the government regarding authorisation, success may have come his way. Nevertheless, when in 1851 Champagnat's congregation was legalised, it was a more than substantial blessing – permission for apostolic work in the schools

throughout the length and breadth of France. Champagnat had failed in his own endeavours towards this end, but the virtues of patience, perseverance and long-suffering had been honed in the process, shaping him towards sainthood.

To return to Bishop Devie, even if the bishop distanced himself somewhat from the Marist Brothers, as Brother Avit says, the Brothers cannot deny all the help he gave them – in his authoritarian way, no doubt, but loyally. He stood out among the bishops of his time by his broad education. One encomium directed towards him (by J Christophe) reads:

'Intellectuals like Bishop Devie of Belley are rare.'⁴⁸

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N.B. Sections omitted from Champagnat's letters and from those of other writers are indicated by ...

⁴⁸ Letters, Vol 2, p.186.

“THE GOOD MOTHER” AND THE VIRGIN OF THE VOW

Reflections on an iconographic tradition



André Lanfrey
fms

In several recent publications¹, Brother Agustin Carazo, former postulator general, has been working on the Marial statues of the Institute especially on that of “the Good Mother” (“*la Bonne Mère*”), a statuette moulded in plaster of virgin and child, about 75cm high, carefully restored² and today preserved in Rome. In these texts, he reminds us that this statue probably figured at the Hermitage from 1824 in the “chapel in the woods” and even before, at La Valla, in the room of Fr Champagnat. Replaced subsequently by larger statues, probably more in keeping with the taste of the period, it seems to have been somewhat for-

gotten, although Brother François mentions its presence at St Genis-Laval in the room which had been occupied³ by Brother Jean-Baptiste⁴. It figures again in 1882 in a portrait of Champagnat writing at his work, painted by Brother Wulmer, a Belgian Brother⁵. The statue then took part in the displacements of the Mother House: in 1903 to Grugliasco, in 1939 to Saint Genis-Laval and finally to Rome in 1961. It was there that, in the archives, Brother Agustin Carazo, looking for documents, found it by chance in a bag in February 1982. He then relates the story of the “resurrection” of this statue, which is given

¹ In *Tras la huellas de Marcelino Champagnat*, Provincia Marista de Chile, 1999, p. 208-233 and in a fascicule of 63 p. entitled « Nuestra Buena Madre » edited by the Marist Province of Mediterraenea in 2007, not counting various articles.

² By Brother Claudio Santambrogio, between 27/11/1998 and 21/02/1999.

³ The use of the imperfect in the French shows that the author wrote after the death of Brother Jean-Baptiste en 1872.

⁴ See in the notebook « Annales de l'Hermitage en forme de compte-rendu de certains événements » (AFM 213/16) which draws up an inventory of the objects possessed by Fr Champagnat and composed by Brother François, p. 23-24 : « Effects used by Fr Champagnat which are in the mother house at St Genis-Laval » [...] « In the room which Brother Jean-Baptiste occupied 1° The crucifix before which the good Father Champagnat used to pray; 2° the statue of the Blessed Virgin he had in his room at Lavalla ; (the same author adds in smaller letters) the child Jesus is lying in the arms of his mother, index finger in his mouth »...

⁵ Brother Agustin Carazo attributes great importance to the presence of this statue which seems to witness to the tradition handed down by the brothers of the origins still alive at this time.

the name of “Good Mother” and which photographic reproductions make popular among the Marist Brothers. A Brazilian Brother, Francisco das Chagas Costa Ribeiro, author of a thesis on Mariology in Rome in 1988, indicates that the model of this plaster statue is located in the cathedral of Rouen, under the name of the Virgin of the Vow (*La Vierge du Vœu*)⁶.

From a second statue of “the Good Mother”, crudely painted, and still at the Hermitage, a Brother of the province of Castille (Estebàn Martin) made a mould, and so statues of plaster, wood, terracotta and other materials, of various sizes, have multiplied, especially in Latin America. Nevertheless, this representation does not seem to have gone far beyond the world of the Marist Brothers.

TWO ORIGINAL STATUES OF “THE GOOD MOTHER”?

Brother Agustin has given us a very solid history of the statue of «The Good Mother» among the Marist Brothers which has allowed for a sort of resurrection of this important piece of our early spiritual patrimony. I think, however, that he underesti-

mates the importance of the statue still present at the Hermitage which, in his opinion, is much smaller than the Rome one and of a later date. So he comes up with the hypothesis that it would have been acquired after 1860 by Brother François when he returned to the Hermitage.

In my opinion, this statue is about the same age as the one in Rome. But since my basic proposal is to complete the historical work of Brother Agustin Carazo, I will present the discussion on this particular point at the end of my article.

THE VIRGIN OF LECOMTE (1777)

The Virgin of the Vow in Rouen is a marble statue of normal height (about 1 m 60) placed today in the chapel of Sainte Marguerite, one of the many side chapels of the nave of the cathedral of Rouen in Normandy. It rests on a stone cube set on the altar in place of the tabernacle, on which is inscribed the formula “*Nostra clemens, accipe vota*” (Our clemency accept our vows)⁷. This inscription confirms the traditional name given to the statue, “the Virgin of the vow”.

⁶ This thesis appeared in condensed form in Brasil in 1999 under the title *A « superiora » dos Maristas*. A French translation was published the same year under the title *La supérieure des Maristes*. But, to my knowledge, no details are given there about the Rouen statue.

⁷ A document indicates that the altar was erected in 1954. That seems much more likely since the cathedral, having been severely damaged during the war of 1939-1945, was subsequently subjected to some important transformations. A photo of 1921 (*Vierge de Lecomte*, site Inventaire des monuments historiques. Base Palissy) shows that at that time the statue stood at the crossing of the transept.



Virgin of the Vow. Rouen. Photo A. Lanfrey

Sculpted by Félix Lecomte, it was offered to the Rouen cathedral about 1775 by the Cardinal-Archbishop Mgr. de la Rochefoucauld. It is characterized by one original trait: the baby Jesus is sucking his forefinger. But it should be noted that this statue is not isolated: the altar front bears a bas-relief by the same sculptor shows a dead Jesus wept over by Mary and the holy women.

According to the *Dictionnaire des artistes de l'Ecole française au XIX^e siècle* Félix Lecomte was born in Paris in 1737 and died in 1817. In 1764 he won the grand prize of sculpture, and in 1771 was accepted as a member of the former Academy of Painting and Sculpture. He was as well professor of the Academy and member of the Academy of the Fine Arts. His statue of the Virgin and the bas relief of Rouen are considered among his master works.

THE MEDIEVAL ROOD SCREEN AND THE FIRST VIRGIN OF THE VOW

This altar of the Virgin of the Vow is not the first one erected under this title and it is not in its original position. In fact, there existed in Rouen, as in most of the medieval cathedrals, a rood screen separating the choir from the nave. About this one, certainly in the Gothic style, Jean-François Pommeraye⁸ gives, at the end of the seventeenth century, the following details:

"The rood screen which closes off the choir has been enriched with two magnificent altars of very rich sculpture, crucifixes and other ornaments of woodwork all gilt [...]. The altar of the vow was made from the contributions of the factory. I understand, from the memoirs of an individual who wrote about what he had seen, that this altar of the Virgin was completed at the end of March 1639 [...]"

⁸ *Histoire de l'Eglise cathédrale de Rouen métropolitaine et primatiale de Normandie*, Rouen 1685, p. 20-25.



Virgin of the Vow, detail. Rouen. Photo A. Lanfrey

that on 26 April [...] this altar was consecrated by M. François de Harlay the elder who placed in it the relics of St Paul apostle and Nicaise. It was called the vow because of a great plague which afflicted the city of Rouen for a long time; this had obliged them to have recourse to God's mercy".

The author adds,

"The principal ornament of this altar is the image of Our Lady made of alabaster which was donated about 1357 by a canon named François Le Tourneur" [...]

"The altar of Saint Cecilia, which is next to the one of the vow is celebrated because of the confraternity of

this saint where the musicians gather every year to solemnize her feast". [...]

"I learned from several memoirs that on 23 April 1642 this altar was finished and the two images set in place"⁹. To commemorate the event, a procession took place on 20 September and a lamp burns in front of the Virgin's altar.

Thus, a medieval Virgin, probably already present in the cathedral, is set up in 1643 as the « Virgin of the vow » on the medieval rood screen, in company with St Cecilia who certainly figured there already.

A SECOND ROOD SCREEN AND A SECOND VIRGIN OF THE VOW

It was doubtless because this rood screen and its statuary appeared too "Gothic" that they were replaced by a rood screen in classic style, constructed between 1773 and 1778 to the plans of the Rouen architect Mathieu Lecarpentier, composed of an Ionic portico bearing Christ between the Virgin and Saint John, crowned with balustrades in bronze and *cassolettes* (decorative vases). It harboured two side altars dedicated to the Virgin (the statue and altar front of Lecomte) and to Saint Cecilia. So this modernisation of the rood screen was only relative: Saint Cecil-

⁹ According to Maurice Vioberg, author of *La vierge et l'Enfant Jésus dans l'Art français* the altar of this Virgin of the vow backed on to the right pillar, at the entrance to the choir, « location of the chapel called of the vow, erected in the ancient rood screen following a vow during the plague of 1637 ». Quoted on the site of the Abbey of Tamié.

ia and the Virgin of the vow were still its major pieces.

The eighteenth century rood screen was demolished in its turn in 1884, but its statues were preserved: that of St Cecilia, with its altar and the bas-relief adorning it, works of Clodion, have been relegated today to the chapel of St Nicolas¹⁰ while the Virgin, her altar and the bas-relief, works of Félix Lecomte, have been placed in the chapel of St Marguerite. Two of the six columns of the rood screen are still present in the cathedral: they frame one of the side doors¹¹. It seems, though,

that in the XIX century the meaning of the devotion to the Virgin of the vow underwent modification: an unverified but very plausible tradition claims that it was before this statue that new priests of the diocese consecrated themselves to Mary before going to their parishes.

There were, then, at Rouen two Virgins of the Vow and two rood screens. Nothing seems to have remained of the first statue and the first rood screen, but we have pictorial representations of the second rood screen; and the altar of the Virgin of the Vow has been carefully restored in a new location.



Altar front. Rouen. Photo A. Lanfrey

¹⁰ On my visit in 2010, this chapel seemed to serve as storage for superfluous furniture.

¹¹ The work consulted says nothing about the central group: Christ between the Virgin and Saint John.

A STATUE WITHIN A NORMANDY TRADITION?

Even if we know nothing about the making of the medieval statue set up in 1642 as Virgin of the Vow, we can suppose that Lecomte must have undertaken his work within a tradition and would have kept its main characteristic traits, among them the infant Jesus in the arms of his mother sucking his finger.

The hypothesis is not at all gratuitous, for there exists an iconological precedent in the same cultural zone: the Virgin of Valmont, an ivory statuette 41 cm high, from the end of the XV century, kept in the Abbey of Valmont, in Normandy, up to the Revolution. The original is now in the Museum of Antiquities of Seine-Maritime (Rouen)¹². The commentary accompanying this statue¹³ is extremely interesting:

"The Virgin is standing, her face turned towards her son whom she holds spread out in her two arms. She is clothed in a long robe adjusted with a low rounded neckline¹⁴ ...

The chubby, curly-haired infant, is enveloped in a swathe from which his naked torso emerges. The sad expression of the Virgin, who casts a melancholy look upon her son for she knows what his destiny will be, is the reflection of the sensibility



Virgin of Valmont. Rouen

of the fifteenth century, much inclined to seize on the sorrowful aspect of the life of Christ and reproduce its image ...

¹² Its historic value is such that the sculpture workshop of the Louvre proposes to make copies in resin for a relatively affordable price (244 €).

¹³ See computer document on internet: « Virgin of Valmont ».

¹⁴ Her garment appears inspired by the feminine fashion of the XV century: « She wears on her shoulders a cape fastened by two little cords terminating in tassels which she draws under her left arm and which is smoothly broken up into voluminous heavy folds. Her long hair ripples down either side of her face and down her back ».

The rare gesture of the child putting two fingers into its mouth corresponds to the need to bring the worlds of men and God closer together, to make the divine world more familiar.

Clothing apart, this description perfectly fits the Virgin of Lecomte. So it is sufficient to compare the statue of the fifteenth century and Lecomte's one to ask if he did not simply modernise a previous iconographic model, of which the Virgin of Valmont would be an example.

This "modernisation" is shown in the clothing of the Virgin: the Valmont one, following medieval tradition, presents ample folds largely concealing the body, while the Lecomte one follows classical tradition, the mainly flattened robe revealing more than concealing the body. The veil over the head partly modifies this impression of an antique statue in attaching it to a classical representation of the Virgin. As for the Child Jesus, still somewhat a man in miniature and partly clothed in the Valmont statue, he appears as a beautiful almost naked baby in the Lecomte one.

PERMANENCE OF THE THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE?

One would be tempted to consider that, in the two statues, the religious message, which rests in the contrast between the melancholy on the face of the mother and the charm of the baby, is largely implicit and so the Virgin of Valmont would witness to a cer-

tain religious weakening of the end of the Gothic, while the Lecomte one, for its part, appears quite typical of the sensibility of the XVIII century which has rediscovered the woman and the child but scarcely expresses any profound religious feeling.

Nevertheless, for the Virgin of Lecomte the theological message is transparent if one takes into account the bas-relief of the altar front representing the veneration of the dead Christ by the holy women, which appears to be inspired by the iconographic theme of the *pietà*. Thus, statue and bas-relief sum up the history of salvation: Incarnation and Redemption.

The child, who sucks his index finger and not his thumb, could even be interpreted in theological terms since the index finger is the one which, placed on the lips, signifies the wish to impose silence. So the silence of the Incarnate Word would be invoked here. In which case, the figure of the Christ-child would connect with the text of Philippians 2: 6-11:

« His state was divine... but he emptied himself... and became as men are »... But explicit sources would be needed to support such an interpretation.

To sum up: the Lecomte Virgin is inscribed in a Norman iconographic tradition illustrated by one statue from the fifteenth century and another from the eighteenth, the statue of 1357, re-employed around 1637 serving as hypothetical model for both works.

ARTISTS INSPIRED BY THE VIRGIN OF THE VOW

If the tradition in which the Lecomte Virgin is inscribed is largely hypothetical, its aesthetic and devotional posterity seem important enough, as we are going to try to show below, using essentially the resources of the internet site of the Inventory of historic monuments¹⁵.

We can first of all distinguish an artistic posterity, inspired by Lecomte rather than slavishly copying him and working in precious material. Thus, the site of the Museums of Upper-Normandy presents a "Virgin of the Vow" in ivory, 13.2 cm high, preserved in the castle museum of Dieppe, obviously copied from the Lecomte virgin. The same Dieppe museum has recently acquired another copy, signed Brunel, in ivory, 34 cm high, dated 1857. A third ivory statue inspired by Lecomte, 13.2 cm high, without an author but probably from the Brunel workshop, figures also in the Dieppe collections. We may suppose, then, that from the end of the XVIII century to about 1860, there was the production of ivory statues copying the Lecomte virgin, to which the three examples cited above testify. If they were able to serve a devotional use, given their size, it must have been private and restricted to a certain élite. Also in Normandy, the Inventory of Historic Monuments indi-

cates at Préaux, near Rouen, a statue of a larger nature (160 cm) in terracotta and even specifies that it was on 30 July 1780 that the treasurers and inhabitants decided to have this copy made.

We also find a certain number of church statues, of fairly crude workmanship, apparently works of local or regional artists. The regional service of the Inventory of Limousin presents a Virgin and Child, called the Lecomte virgin, at Nigremont: 104 cm high, of painted wood (polychrome) and dated to the 1st half of the XIX century. If the attitude of the Virgin and her clothing are clearly inspired by Lecomte, the infant Jesus, sculpted rather clumsily, like the rest of the statue, is seated and spreads his arms in a welcoming gesture.

In the same region, at Felletin (Creuse) an « Our Lady of Good Help » carved in wood and polychrome, 81 cm high, dating from the XIX century, is a faithful copy of Lecomte. A third statue is noted at Lit et Mixe, in the Landes (south of Bordeaux) in gilded wood, about 1 m high. It is dated to the middle of the XIX century. Finally, there exists in the Abbey of Tamié, in Upper-Savoy, a statue of 140 cm, a copy in wood of the Lecomte one, offered by the parish of Ugine, close to the abbey, in 1930. At the time, it was polychrome. A monk of the abbey stripped off the paint and replaced the

¹⁵ One can go to the site « Inventaire des monuments historiques. Base Palissy » or even, more simply, « Vierge de Lecomte ».

left arm which had been broken¹⁶. Nothing is said about the origin of this statue but it probably dates from the XIX century.

The artist probably took as model the statue preserved in the parish church of Verrens, on the road of the Tamié Pass, a dozen kilometres from the abbey. It is of plaster, about 97 cm high and can be dated to the middle of the nineteenth century. The veil, Mary's robe and the loincloth of the child Jesus are gilded and their faces are painted flesh colour. The statue has no back; a simple canvas covers a very large oval opening going from the shoulders down to the pedestal¹⁷.

COPIES IN PLASTER OF THE VIRGIN OF THE VOW

It would seem that the Saint-Sulpician art enterprises were interested in the Lecomte virgin, if the relatively large number of plaster copies of 96-99 cm¹⁸ listed by the Inventory of Historic Monuments is to be believed.

Thus, at Saulgé (Vienne) the Priory of Saint Divitien possesses a copy in plaster 99 cm high, dating from the middle of the nineteenth century. At La Potherie-Mathieu (Eure), the parish church of Saint Pierre has a molded plaster statue 97cm high. The her-



Virgin of Verrens (Savoie)

itage directorate of Aquitaine presents another Virgin called Lecomte, at Tournon-d'Agenais, in moulded plaster and painted, 98cm high, and dat-

¹⁶ Internet site of the Abbey of Tamié.

¹⁷ At the time of my visit, 12 August 2011, this statue, normally placed on the altar of the Virgin, had been moved to the sacristy for transportation to Lyon for restoration.

¹⁸ These differences in height are apparently due to the difficulty of obtaining an exact measurement with rudimentary means.



Belley. Marist Sisters

her clothing are there identical to the original statue but the child is seated between his mother's arms and giving a blessing with his right hand, the left arm being broken. In the parish of Saint Louis in Monferrand, near Bordeaux, the Virgin's altar has a faithful copy of the Lecomte statue which seems about the same height, about 100cm. Another statue, quite damaged, was pointed out to me in the same region at St Jérôme d'Escalans and yet another at Grésillac (Gironde)¹⁹. A statue painted white and 96cm high is found at the convent of the Marist Sisters at Belley²⁰ and a similar model is found in the church at Coutouvre, birth parish of Jeanne-Marie Chavoin, their foundress. There exists another in New Zealand, certainly carried there by a Marist missionary after 1836²¹.

I discovered yet another statue of 96cm in the church of Saint Christophe-la-Grotte (Savoie). It was painted white quite recently and the left arm of the child Jesus is broken. According to oral tradition, it was given by the monastery of the Grande Chartreuse, this being close to the parish. At the monastery itself, there is a similar statue, but 75cm high²².

ing to the middle of the nineteenth century. The attitude of the Virgin and

Thanks to M. Jacques Delen, a lay Marist, I learned about another of

¹⁹ These three statues were kindly pointed out to me by M. Rambert Christophe, of the Regional Service of the Inventory of Aquitaine. Apparently, the General Inventory has not recorded them as being virgins inspired by Lecomte. So we do not know their exact dimensions nor of what material they were made.

²⁰ The left arm of the infant Jesus, broken, has been clumsily restored.

²¹ We do not know its exact height.

²² Letter of the Brother archivist.

these statues in a monastery of the Trappistines, at Chimay in Belgium²³, whose itinerary can be described as follows: the nuns of the Cistercian Abbey of Gomerfontaine (1207-1792) in the commune of Trie-la-ville (Oise), then belonging to the diocese of Rouen, were dispersed by the Revolution. They re-established them-



St Christophe la Grotte. Savoie. Photo Lanfrey



Chimay. Belgium. J. Delen

selves at Nesle, in the Diocese of Amiens, in 1804-1816, then installed themselves at Saint Paul-aux Bois in Picardy, in the diocese of Soissons where they remained until being exiled from France in 1904, following the decrees against the congregations. At that date, the statue, acquired at an indeterminate period, was entrusted to a family which returned it in 2007. It is painted blue and white. One may suppose that it was acquired about the middle of the nineteenth century.

A friend of M. Delen has photographed one of these statues even at the castle of Clermont, in Upper Savoy,

²³ The latest news is that this statue has been transferred to the Trappistines at Anhem in the Low Countries.

which seems the same height²⁴. Finally, the church of Ars, that of Jean-Marie Vianney, near Lyon, conserves a statue of 99 cm, recently restored, the Virgin's veil being golden and her robe red.

These statues, of slightly less than a metre, appear to correspond to three types that are fairly faithful to the original model. We have already seen that certain statues represent the infant Jesus sitting and blessing, but the others reveal a more subtle difference in the treatment of the garment the child is wearing. With Lecomte it is a simple band of material covering the child's right thigh and descending between his legs, leaving the left thigh uncovered, so that he appears almost naked. The statues of Ars and Clermont seem to follow this model, but the others present a child Jesus clothed in a sort of wrap covering the infant's lower stomach and two thighs, treated differently according to the statues: a thin veil at Belley and at St Christophe la Grotte, it becomes a very important piece of material with the statue at Chimay²⁵.

In our opinion, the statues presenting a practically naked child Jesus would be prior to those which cover him with a sort of wrap. On this point, we have a clue for Catherine Lassagne, witness of the life of the Curé of Ars, who

reports, "M. Vianney had, at the beginning, bought a statue of the Blessed Virgin holding the Child Jesus" and adds that this statue "is now in a niche at the side of the chapel of the Blessed Virgin"²⁶. The Curé of Ars having arrived in 1818, one may suppose that the actual statue, which still occupies the same niche, could have been acquired in the years 1820-25. The statues of the child Jesus with more covering would date rather to the middle of the nineteenth century and come from a Saint-Sulpician art studio.

THE LITTLE PLASTER STATUES

As for the copies of the Lecomte virgin of the same size as those of the Marist Brothers, in rather roughly moulded plaster, about 75 cm high, the General Inventory does not seem to include any. Several reasons may explain this: their low artistic value, the Inventory not being complete, the fact that the investigators did not find a link with the model. Another reason seems to me conclusive: these statues are from the beginning especially adapted to private or conventual devotion and hence difficult to locate. Up to the present I still know of only four of these statues: two with the Marist Brothers, one in a monastery

²⁴ A Brother mentioned to me the presence of another of these copies at N. D. du Laus, a sanctuary in the Southern Alps, but I have not been to verify it.

²⁵ But the polychrome perhaps accentuates this impression.

²⁶ Quoted in Mgr. René Fourrey, *Le curé d'Ars authentique*, Edition L'Echelle de Jacob, 1989, p ; 126, note 440.

of the Grande-Chartreuse and one in the convent of the Saints Anges in Mâcon. Having been able to view three of these four statues, I can state that for each of them the child Jesus wears a sort of wrap covering the lower body and the two thighs.

A LITTLE INVESTIGATION OF THE STATUES OF THE MARIST BROTHERS

Brother Agustin Carazo attributes to the statue in Rome a height of 75cm and only 68 cm to the one at the Hermitage, which suggests the two statues do not come from the same workshop. At my request, Brothers Antonio Martínez Estaún and Joan Moral measured the statue in Rome

and came up with the following measurements:

"The pedestal of the statue measures 3.6 cm. We took the measurement from the frontal part, in front of the statue's feet. In actual fact, the pedestal does not have a uniform and exact thickness, because of the painting, throughout its structure, but this measurement can be taken as valid for all the faces of the parallelepiped which serves as the base of the statue. The statue, not counting the 3.6 cm. of the pedestal, measures 70 cm. So the total height of the work is 73.6 cm.

As for observation of the interior of the statue, I must say that a direct examination by sight cannot be done. In the base of the statue can be observed a conical hole, of a couple of centimetres in its external part and a bit less in the internal. One cannot work out what is in the interior through this hole without introducing into it an instrument with a source of light which would help in photographing and observing directly the structure of the composition from within. It appears to be that the base of the stand has been covered with a thick cap of plaster closing up an existing cavity. The plaster cap added is perceptible in the scarcely completed borders left after the application of the paste. Over the material employed for the covering has been applied a coat of paint similar to that on the visible parts of the pedestal. The hole made in the centre of the base lets one see perfectly the thickness of the plaster cap that has been applied. And the white colour of this material is also perfectly obvious".



Virgin. Holy Angels of Macon (France)

A similar operation was performed at the Hermitage on the same date (end of January 2011) and the following table shows the results obtained.

| | Hermitage. Statue in the oratory (original) | Hermitage. Statue in the conference room (recent copy) | Statue in Rome |
|---|---|--|--|
| Height of pedestal | 3.5 cm | 4 cm | 3.6 cm |
| Statue + pedestal | 71.5 cm | 72.5cm | 73.6 cm |
| Depth of hollow in the interior of the statue | 71 cm | 64.5 cm | Hidden under a covering of plaster |
| Quality of plaster | Very rough! | Quite smooth in the interior, more coarse on the edge | Not visible |
| Inscription in the interior | Inscription in crayon partially effaced: « (s)tatue du Bx (fo)ndat (eur) ²⁷ » | « Our Good Mother Copy of the original At the Hermitage January 1989 Brother Esteban Martin” | No inscription indicated ²⁸ |

The difference in height, then, between the two statues is slight: about 2 cm. It could also be a result of the small scale character of the moulding that no statue is exactly identical with another and for a certain approximation in the measurements, difficult to avoid. A priori, the two statues could have come from the same workshop and have been roughly contemporary, even if they have not benefited from the same finishing. For example, for one the interior is

hidden by a plaster coating while for the other the material remains in its rough state as on coming out of the mould.

Brother Agustin Carazo, whom I met at the Hermitage in July 2011, told me that when he saw the statue at the Hermitage, before he made a mould from it, it was not in the same state as today, which would explain the difference in the measurements he observed then.

²⁷ These words could very well have been inscribed at the time the statue served as a model for making a copy. They could have served to distinguish the two statues.

²⁸ But on the front of the pedestal is glued a piece of paper seemingly of the XIX century: « It was in front of this statue that the question of the cloth stockings was resolved in the chapel of the Hermitage in 1829 ».

A WORKSHOP AT THE HERMITAGE

But this problem seems secondary when all is said and done, for a passage in the Life of Brother Bonaventure (1804-1865)²⁹ gives cause for reflection. Having entered the Institute in 1830, he became Master of Novices about 1833³⁰ Now,

“one day, Father Champagnat found him at work helping an artisan who was making plaster statues of the Blessed Virgin, and he said to him: Is it not true, Brother Bonaventure, that as the mould is such will be the statue? Well, remember that you are the mould of the Brothers, of the whole Congregation, in fact.”

So between 1833 and 1840 plaster statues of the Blessed Virgin were being made at the Hermitage. The receipt book for the Hermitage, begun in 1835, even provides details with regard to the sale of some of them:

- 27 March 1838: “received for 3 statues: 9 F”.
- 7 May 1838: “received (the price) of the statues: 4.75 F”.
- 25 June 1838: “received for a statue: 0.60 F; from Brother Bonaventure: 1.15 F”
- 8 August 1838: “for one statue: 3 F”.

A last sale is noted on 11 May 1842: “for sale of statues: 5 F”.

So the lesson given by Fr Champagnat to Brother Bonaventure, and the building up of a stock of statues, which very likely were the ones of the Good Mother, could be situated during the course of the year 1837 or at the beginning of 1838

THE QUESTION OF THE MASTER WORKER AND THE MOULD

The expenses register indicates the name of Antoine Robert, plasterer of Saint Chamond³¹ in the phase preceding and accompanying the sale of these statues. For example:

- 23 May 1837: “(given) to Brother Stanislas to pay Robert, plasterer, 40 F”.
- 4 July 1837: “Given to Robert for pay 27.75 F”.
- 5 August 1837: “Given to Robert for plaster and for pay: 18 F”.
- 23 August 1837: “Given to Robert for 4 sacks of plaster at 3 F; a sack: 12 F”.
- 16 January 1838: “Given to Robert for 4 sacks of grey plaster that we have: 12 F³²” at the same time that a purchase of 7 sacks of grey plaster for 6 F is recorded.
- 19 April 1838: “given to purchase plaster: 6 F”.

²⁹ Our Models in Religion, 1936, p. 125.

³⁰ See References to the Letters p. 89.

³¹ Robert is present in the expense accounts from the beginning: on 22 April 1826 the register shows the disbursement of 100 F to Antoine Robert, plasterer in St Chamond and, at the beginning of May, 600 F. These amounts are certainly owing for the development works at the Hermitage. Robert is found again 2 times in 1830 (95 F.) and once in 1833 (26.50 F.).

³² It may be that the same expense has been entered twice.

One will observe that up to 5 August Robert has been paid for a work but that then he is content with deliveries between 5 August 1837 and 19 April 1838, which would be explained by the moulding of statues. And the principal actor in this enterprise seems to be Brother Bonaventure making or having made a mould from Fr Champagnat's statue and producing from it a good number of copies.

So we are in a period when the Institute needs statues not only for the Mother House but also for the schools, and it can be considered that the procure of the Hermitage kept available for the communities this range of statues inexpensive and of a size well adapted to Brothers' chapels and classrooms. On this hypothesis, the statue at the Hermitage would be a copy of the statue of Fr Champagnat and a relic of a model quite widely spread among us that is supplanted progressively by new more fashionable types. In sum, the actual multiplication of statues of "the Good Mother" would only be taking up a primitive tradition. Brother Agustin would suggest a hypothesis of this sort as well.

If one supposed a sack of plaster per statue, which seems a maximum, that would make a collection of at least fifteen statues. Moreover, the receipts accounts show the sale of 11

statues at prices between 2.5 and 3 F each. Such a low prices suggests that the statues produced were of very mediocre quality and unpainted.

THE STATUE OF MACON

Brother Claudino Falqueto pointed out to me the presence of a statue of "the Good Mother" in the town of Mâcon³³ in the mother house of the Sisters of the Holy Angels founded in 1844 but today containing mainly Brasilian Sisters. Having made contact with Sister Maria Theresinha Falqueto, Brother Claudino's sister, I was able to see the statue in question placed in an artificial grotto in the sisters' garden. Painted white, it measures 74 cm with its pedestal, which is not square but round and quite high: about 7 cm. Comparison with the other statues shows that the feet of the Virgin and the hem of the robe have been embedded in this plinth and a tree leaf has been moulded on the hem of the robe, on the plinth itself. Finally, the bottom of the pedestal, completely closed, bears a name engraved in freehand which is probably that of the maker or restorer of the statue: G. Hocpuet. But there is no date and this patronymic seems very rare.

A remarkable biography of the foundress,³⁴ Barbe-Elise Poux (1797-1855), almost a contemporary of Marcellin Champagnat gives us some

³³ 80 km to the north of Lyon.

³⁴ Abbé Jean Ladame, *Educatrice et fondatrice au XIX^e siècle. Mère Marie Saint-Michel Poux*, 356 p.

clues. From the Jura, B.E. Poux founded in 1822 a school at Poligny for the daughters of the middle class. When she fell ill, her pupils undertook “a novena before a statue of the Blessed Virgin and they obtained her immediate cure. The statue was immediately declared miraculous and Sister Franco (the chronicler) tells us that it is kept as precious at the mother house (p. 65)”. But this statue, which is still to be found in the Sisters’ community room, is of stone, smaller than the “Good Mother”, and the Child Jesus has a dove in his hands.

To explain the presence of this relic of the “Good Mother” at Mâcon, another track seems possible: the practice of the month of Mary. In fact, installed in 1831 at Lons-le-Saulnier, a town situated at the foot of the Jura, B.E. Poux continued her educational work with the help of a community of women aspiring to religious life and introduced into her boarding school the practice of the month of Mary up to then unknown in Lons, the exercises being performed in the oratory around a statue of the Blessed Virgin decorated with branches and stars (p. 75). In 1832, the ceremony took place in the parish “in the fore-choir of the church a statue of the Blessed Virgin was placed on a pedestal (p. 83)”.

Her foundation in Lons having failed, B.E. Poux recommenced at Morez, in the heart of the Jura, and also installed the month of Mary there. Her community established, she set up a second house at Mâcon in 1844. From 1845 she had the month of Mary celebrated in the boarding school “Amid draperies and flowers, a beautiful statue of the Virgin was set up” (p. 212).

It appears to me reasonable, then, to suppose that this Macon statue of the “Good Mother” was employed for the celebration of the month of Mary, perhaps from the time of Lons-le-Saulnier. One may even think that the frequent transfers of the statue would have caused damage requiring a restoration of its base. In any case, at present there exists in Mâcon a statue similar to the “Good Mother” of Fr Champagnat and whose model seems to date to the 1830s³⁵.

CERTAINTIES AND HYPOTHESES

It is helpful at this stage to make the point of distinguishing between certainties and hypotheses. For the certainties: the works of Brother Agustin Carazo show that the “Good Mother” in Rome should be dated to about the 1820s. Other statues in plaster of the Virgin are produced at the Hermitage in the years 1837-38.

³⁵ It is useful to note that during the revolt of the cloth stockings in 1829 Fr Champagnat had erected in the chapel a Marial altar strongly lit, as in the practices of the month of Mary.

Let us pass on to the hypotheses. Fr Champagnat must have obtained his statue from a merchant of religious articles while the actual statue of the Good Mother at the Hermitage would have been made in 1837-38 on the initiative of Brother Bonaventure, thanks to a mould taken from Fr Champagnat's statue. This difference in origin would explain the presence of a coat of plaster under the pedestal of the Roman statue and its absence from the second.

It is possible that from this time the statue exists also in a larger version, more adapted to the parishes and certainly more expensive, as the purchase made by Jean-Marie Vianney in the years 1820-30 would testify.

There remains the problem of the painting of the two statues. It is clear that that of the statue of Rome reveals an artist's hand while that of the Hermitage is much cruder. But when does this painting date from? It is, in fact, possible that Fr Champagnat's statue was originally white, and so less costly at a time he had little money³⁶. Moreover, the marble original of Lecomte is white while the colours chosen for the statue (blue mantle bordered with gold designs and white robe) reveal a taste for the medieval tradition still absent towards 1820 but very present in the 1840s.

A work of restoration on the original statue could, then, have taken place

around 1837-38, after which it served as a mould for new statues, and the painter could be Ravery. At this time, he was working on the decoration of the new chapel of the Hermitage built in 1836, and the register of expenses mentions the amounts spent for this important workshop:

- 16 July 1837: "Given to M. Ravery: 300"
- 25 September 1837: "Given to M. Ravery on account: 300"
- 12 September 1838: "To Ravery for account: 300"
- 7 April 1839: "To Ravery for painting account: 100"
- 13 June 1839: "To Ravery in payment for painting etc.: 400"

The painting of the statue of the Good Mother could well have been included in these sums at a time when the Institute, after twenty years of existence, had more means and was concerned to demonstrate its tradition artistically.

CONCLUSION

As always happens, research resolves a certain number of questions and raises new ones. We can say that the Institute possesses two old but quite different statues of "the Good Mother". The authenticity and age of the one in Rome are not in doubt. As for the Hermitage one, although not well documented, it seems to merit

³⁶ Life of Fr Champagnat 1st part, ch. 7 p. 355: « in his room he erected a little altar, on which he placed her statue » and he established the Month of Mary (p. 356).

being considered a rare piece dating from the time of Fr Champagnat and attesting to the Marian devotion of the Brothers, perhaps linked to the practice of the Month of Mary.

In the wider context, it seems that quite soon after the Revolution a statue moulding workshop was set up, supplying the religious art shops with smaller statues on the Lecomte

model. Moreover, circumstances lent themselves to it: after a phase of iconoclasm which destroyed or dispersed the furnishings and fittings of parishes and convents, this plant allowed the restoration of an important element rapidly and inexpensively, while situating itself in continuity with the aesthetic preferences of the eighteenth century which was still close.



Our Lady of the Hermitage. Copy XX s. Photo Binaud

THE BICENTENNIAL HISTORY PROJECT



Michael Green,
fms

In January 2017, it will be two hundred years since Marcellin Champagnat invited a young man, Jean-Marie Granjon, and a fourteen year-old boy, Jean-Baptiste Audras, to take up residence in a small house in Lavalla. Traditionally, we have treasured this moment as the founding event of the Institute. In the two centuries that have followed it, the small seed planted in that small town in France has grown and flowered into a magnificent tree that reaches now into more than eighty countries of the world, and engages thousands of Marists, Brothers and Lay, in the noble project of making Jesus Christ known and loved among young people. Our approaching bicentenary represents a milestone, one which invites us to reflect, to rejoice, and to re-energise ourselves. One way of achieving those things is to undertake the writing and publishing of a history of the Institute from 1817 to 2017.

There is not a comprehensive or analytical history of the Marist Brothers, although there are a couple of short histories that have been written, and

some scholarly studies completed of specific periods of our history. Hiding in our General Archives in Rome, there is a seven-volume, hand-written, unpublished work completed during fifteen years around the time of the centenary in 1917. Its author, Brother Marie Nicet AG, wrote it at a time when the secularisation laws of 1903 and the years of the First World War (1914-18) would have provided a dramatic perspective for the drafting of a commentary on one hundred years of Marist life. But it was never printed and perhaps was not worthy of general circulation. Yet, it is perhaps the only deliberate attempt at a serious global history of the Institute. With the wisdom of hindsight, we can now regret that there was not the decision in 1917 to undertake the writing of an official history more professionally than was done. We are now poorer for that. Whereas there have been some short histories written at different times, they have been little more than informative works, often intended for houses of formation or for schools, and having the aim of doing nothing

more than to give young Brothers and students a general view of the development of the Institute. Certainly, they did not pretend to offer any critical analysis or discussion of issues. Often their intent was primarily to inspire.

Since the 1950s and 1960s, there have been a number of studies undertaken which have brought an academic rigour to the study of our past, an approach that was lacking in works up to that point. The biography of Father Champagnat written by Brother Jean-Baptiste in the mid-nineteenth century was typical of the genre books written before the mid-twentieth century. His approach was hagiographical rather than biographical in the sense that modern readers would find acceptable. Similarly, the approach of Brother Avit, in his major project the Annals of the Institute, was to insert his own judgements and commentary into the narrative. This, together with his anecdotal style and his occasional elasticity with the truth, resulted in a work that may have been engaging to read but was lacking in depth of scholarship. In contrast, for the past half-century there has been a reasonable number of researchers who have approached Marist history as genuine historians. They returned to primary sources and have used their academic discipline to unearth new insights and develop new interpretations. Their focus has been mostly, but not entirely, on the early decades of the Institute. We have the fruits of their research in theses, dissertations, journal articles and, occasionally, published books.

At the same time, a number of Provinces have published their own histories. This has happened especially in the last two decades, when these Provinces have reached significant stages of their story, particularly the centenaries of their foundation. Often these books have been written by professional historians or by Brothers who are skilled to do so. The result has been some excellent publications.

The Institute has, therefore, in the last half-century accumulated a reasonably large collection of valuable studies, research projects, articles, and books that relate to aspects of its history, and the history of various regions. What it lacks, however, is any integration of these or any work that effectively brings together all the research of these decades and offers some global narrative and critical analysis of the major themes that are contained in it. The Marist bicentenary provides a timely opportunity to respond to the challenge of this gap in our scholarship. This will become the 'Bicentennial History Project'.

Between 2011 and 2016, this project will be undertaken in a coordinated way by different people around the Marist world. It will result in what promises to be a significant addition to the patrimony of our Institute: its first comprehensive history.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A WRITTEN HISTORY? WHY DO WE NEED TO DO IT?

Some people may be immediately tempted to doubt the worth of such a project. They may ask: 'Are we going to put a great amount of energy and resources into something that is only going to gather dust on library bookshelves?' It is a legitimate question, one that deserves an answer.

There are two aspects to a history project such as the one that is proposed: first, the *process*, and second the *product*. Both are important. Let us first consider the latter; it is perhaps the more obvious.

The outcome of the Bicentennial History Project is that the Institute will have at least one significant new book – or perhaps two or three, depending on the final decision for the structure of the project. This book (or books) will serve several purposes:

1. It will be an official history of the Marists, one that is wide in its purview and deep in its critical analysis. The benefits of such a work are both short and long term. In the immediate future, it will be of use to anyone who is interested in enhancing his or her knowledge and understanding of Marist history, or some aspect of it. Like any major text, it is not necessarily something that is to be read from cover to cover, but rather a book that is read selectively and for a purpose, usually for research. As such it needs to have an extensive index. In the longer term, it adds to the body of scholarship of the Institute, something that will grow in stature and interest as the years and even centuries go by. Once it is written, it is written in perpetuity – an enduring work of scholarship that successive generations will come to examine and to re-examine. It is a gift to posterity.
2. It will also make a significant contribution to the field of Church history. The development of the Institute has been shaped by the great movements in spirituality, in ecclesiality, and in the missionary imperatives of the last two centuries. It has been a time of extraordinary change for Christianity. The Marist Brothers have been one of the larger apostolic religious institutes that grew out of nineteenth century European Catholicism, and one of the relatively few non-clerical institutes of men. Its size and its spread across the world have brought it into contact with most of the major issues with which the Church has wrestled in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, its early decades interacted with the pendulum swings of French secularism as well as the growing momentum that marked the great 'Marian century'. Its missionary expansion was part of the new wave of European missionary activity of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Its response to Vatican II, both in terms of its at-

tempts at renewal of religious life and its engagement of the reclaimed baptismal rights and responsibilities of the laity, provide a valuable case study for the contemporary Church.

3. More broadly again, the story of two centuries of the Marist Brothers represents genuine social history in its own right. This has been one the most momentous periods of human history: a time that has witnessed social, cultural, economic and political revolutions; the birth of nation states; industrialisation; catastrophic wars; the rise and fall of communism; the emergence of secular democracies; the spread of universal education; globalisation; decolonisation; the communication and digital revolution; migration and intercultural contact; the emergence of post-modern and post-Christian thought; the so-called clash of civilisations; the exponential explosion of human knowledge and technology. The Marist story provides a lens through which to view society at large because it has engaged it so widely and diversely. Specifically, this lens is an educational one. As an organisation whose primary locus of activity has been in the education of children and young people, the Marists bring a particularly interesting prism through which to look.
4. A fourth purpose, albeit one of a lower order, is that of general human interest and even inspiration.

The Marist story can be presented as one a noble human endeavour, one that has been realised by thousands of ordinary people who have collectively achieved extraordinary things. The contribution that over six hundred Brothers' schools made in nineteenth century France, and the men who made that contribution is a story worth making known. The journeys of young men to distant lands, their inventive and sometimes heroic achievements, their setbacks and their successes, are things of inherent and compelling interest. Future generations deserve to know what these people did as educators, as builders, as missionaries, as Marists. In quite a number of countries, the Marist Brothers have played a significant role in the advancement of society, and continue to do so. This is a story to be told; these are stories to be told.

In addition to the physical product of the Project – one or more books – a deeper purpose for undertaking it will come from the actual *process* of doing it. For the same reason that Plato proposed that the 'unreflected life is not worth living', the Institute has much to gain from the depth and breadth of research, the robust exchange of ideas, and the rigorous scholarship that will be invested in this History Project. There are four aspects of this process that can be highlighted:

a) *A longitudinal perspective.*

The Institute is certainly not a group that moves along without extensive self-analysis and discernment. It happens at every General Chapter, in every Circular of a Superior General, in every meeting of a commission or task-force. At the local level there are similarly Provincial and District Chapters, and any number of committees, commissions, and councils. Inevitably, however, much of their work is delimited by time, place, and issues of the present moment. It is an unusual thing to step back and to take in the perspective. Typically, it is not the historian who is invited to be a member of these various chapters and commissions or, if he is invited, he is not there so much as an historian but for some other expertise or skill that he might have.

b) *Attention to the whole story*

As mentioned above, there has been some excellent research and commentary undertaken over the last fifty years. The great majority of this has, however, been focussed on Champaignat and the founding time. The same degree of attention and analysis has not been directed to the late nineteenth century and to the twentieth century. The primary sources of these decades remain largely untouched by scholars; there is much material for critical

analysis. To understand the Marist project in the twenty-first century, it is important to be informed by all of its preceding history, not just that which stopped in 1840. Marcellin was a founder, but he shared that founding with others who carried it on, and kept on interpreting and re-interpreting it. "Marist-ness" today is defined not only by its founding time but just as validly by all that Marists have done, and how they have done, in the many decades since.

c) *An integrated view.*

While some parts of the Institute have been well chronicled in Provincial and regional histories, the Institute as a whole lacks a global interpretation of its history. It will be a profitable exercise for researchers and writers to explore the strands of Marist history through different cultures and times, and to look for thematic convergence and divergence.

d) *An academic rigour.*

A religious institute that has pastoral intuitions as profound as do the Marist Brothers can tend instinctively to predominantly pragmatic and pastoral attitudes and approaches. It is perhaps ironic that a group that is dedicated primarily to education has developed a culture that can be suspect of higher intellectual pursuits.

There is no question that the Marist Brothers have a reputation as outstanding practitioners, the builders of excellent academic institutions, and the devisers of creative and effective programmes for youth. The place of scholarship among its members, however, is not always as highly valued. As a result, the Institute lacks an extensive literature, and has not always been able to bring its own discourse into dialogue with rigorous and contemporary scholarship in theology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and history. The Bicentennial History Project presents an opportunity to redress this insufficiency.

Who is the target readership? For whom is it written?

The focus and scope of the Project will also be informed by anticipating the answers to the above two questions. A further question could be: "Whom would we want to read it?" As well as shaping the History Project as something that will meet the aims that have been already presented, it will also be important to consider an approach that will attract and will engage the intended readership.

The first group of people for whom the work is intended are Marists. This includes the Brothers, certainly, but also the many people who also share Marist life and mission. It is their

story that is being told. It is essential that they know it and that they appreciate it, so they can pass it onto others, especially the Marists who will follow them. It needs to be recognised that this is a wide a diverse range of people: young Brothers and old, lay women and men, educators and youth workers, people from a variety of cultural and academic backgrounds. It would also be hoped that young people – students and youth – would also be able to engage the fruits of the Project in ways that interest and challenge them,

Beyond the immediate Marist 'family' there is a readership that to be found in the wider church and society. The chronicling of two hundred years of Marist history, and appropriate critical reflection upon it, will be of interest to a broad spectrum of church and general historians, and to people generally. They will not be looking for something that is introspective or insular in its concerns, but something that brings the Marist story into dialogue with the deeper movements in church and society. In writing the History, it will be important that the authors are able to do this if their work is to make the kind of contribution that it should.

OPTIONS FOR A POSSIBLE STRATEGY AND SCHEMA

There is yet to be a decision taken on the shape and breadth of the Bicentennial History Project. At its annual

meeting in Rome in June 2010, the Spiritual Patrimony Commission, discussed the matter at some length, and considered various options. Since then, members of the Commission have continued this discussion by email. Some further ideas have emerged. Below are presented three possible schemas for the project, and some suggested ways in which each could be realised.

1. Schema A:

A multi-volume work

One way of structuring the work would be a project of three separate strands, resulting in a three-volume project. Each strand would have a different focus, a different pitch, and would engage readership in different ways.

Volume 1: A **global Marist history**, following a loosely chronological order. Each section or chapter would describe a particular phase or major development in the history of the Institute and its mission. It would be an academic text, following recognised standards and practices in the writing of history, thoroughly referenced and indexed. It is likely that it would be most effectively undertaken by a single historian, working with an editorial reference group. This volume would represent the official history, one that would be intended for the serious reader or scholar.

Volume 2: A book containing **regional histories**, tracing the Marist story in various countries and groups of countries. These would be written by various historians, appointed and supervised by an editor (or editors) of the whole book. The approach here would be lighter, for example through the inclusion of many photographs. This book would be pitched at a more general readership. In its style and appearance it would attempt to engage such a readership. The author(s) of each chapter would be required to follow a pre-determined length and a consistent format. They would not repeat what is already available in histories published by individual Provinces or institutions; they would not have that level of detail. It would be more to give a flavour, a representative feel, for what has happened in each country or region.

Volume 3: A **thematic history**. This volume would be a collection of historical essays, again written by different authors, working under a single editor or editorial team. The aim of this book would be to tell the story of various aspects of Marist life and mission, and to reflect critically on each of them – more specifically than would be possible in Volume 1, and more globally than would be

possible in Volume 2. Examples of such themes could be: the evolution of the characteristics and priorities of the Marist educational mission; the development of the consecrated life; the evolution of the Marist Rule and Constitutions; the development of Marist spirituality; the emergence of Marist lay life; changing customs and practices in the Institute; the Circulars of the Superiors General; the ordination issue; the history of initial formation. These are only some suggestions; an editorial team would need to come up with a final selection. The themes could be approached from a variety of perspectives as well as historical: theological, spiritual, sociological, anthropological. The purpose of this approach is to meet the various the purposes for the Project (in terms of both 'product' and 'process'), resulting in something that as wide a readership as possible would find useful and interesting. It would be a major project, certainly, but one that could be achieved with careful planning and collaborative effort. Its great benefit is that it would involve quite a number of researchers and writers. It would be a project for the

whole Marist world. There would need to be a General Editor of the three volumes, and an Editorial Board.

2. Schema B:

A single integrated history

Another option for the Project would be to envisage a single work. It would follow a pre-determined framework, approved by an editorial board. The approach would be an academic one, with emphases not only on recounting the history of two centuries, but also providing solid critical analysis of it. As single work, it would probably require limited axes for this analysis, so that the text would have integrity and logic.

In this option, there could be a single historian commissioned to write the history or, alternatively, a number of authors who are charged with writing sections of it according to an agreed structure and style. There would be arguments for and against either approach. Depending on the determined length and plan for the work, it could be presented in one or two volumes.

This option provides a more straightforward approach. It would be simpler to plan and to achieve. On the other hand, it is more limited in its reach and its accessibility to a wide readership.

3. Schema C: A mix of genres and media

A third option would be to pursue the History Project on a number of related fronts, and to image a result that could be presented in a more diverse format. Rather than two or three same-sized books, the Project could produce its results in several different ways. One possibility could be:

- An official history, similar to that described in Schema B. Its destination would be library shelves and scholarly collections.
- A high-quality book published in a different style altogether, along the lines of a “coffee-table” edition. It would have a strong pictorial emphasis, include some very brief regional histories, and also some interesting snippets of interest contained in text-boxes interspersed through the book. Its destination would be community room tables, and people’s living rooms.
- A digital collection, published on DVD (or something similar). It would include text, pictures, voice, and video clips. It would be interactive and able to be flexibly used. Its destination would be classrooms and school libraries.

Like Schema A, this option attempts to fulfil as many aims as possible, and to offer something of interest and use to as wide a group as possible. It is, however, the most complex of the options.

There may be other options to consider, or a mix of them. Whichever option is finally chosen, it is likely to require some general coordination in the form of a project team or editorial board.

CONCLUSION

In 1837, when the signs of the illness that would eventually claim his life were already evident, Marcellin Champagnat made an important decision. He appointed Brother Jean-Baptiste to be the official chronicler of the Institute. This was an interesting move by the Founder, for at least two reasons:

1. Despite all the practical matters he would have had at hand and all the pressing challenges that he was facing, this man of action, Champagnat, saw that it was important for the story to be recorded formally and to be reflected upon. Those who were to come later needed to know how it was at the beginning; they needed to appropriate that story as their own. Unlike Colin, Champagnat was no great wordsmith, no man of letters. But he recognised the value of having a written history. Later Marists needed to inherit a legacy

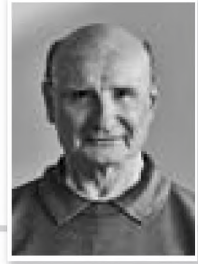
not only of bricks and mortar, or even only an oral tradition and living culture, but also one that had been systemically put to paper.

2. Champagnat chose for this task someone who was able to do it, and to do it well. Jean-Baptiste was in so many ways different from Marcellin: where Marcellin was of robust physique, Jean-Baptiste was sickly and hunch-backed; where Marcellin was at home at the end of a pick or a hammer, Jean-Baptiste was more content with a writing quill and paper. Yet Marcellin saw in this

man someone with the insight and intellect to achieve the task he had in mind, and so to render the Institute an invaluable service.

It is well for us to have the same intuition as Marcellin with regard to our story. The bicentenary of Marist life and mission provides us with a valuable moment to appoint some modern-day Jean-Baptistes. Their approaches may be different and much more inventive, but their intent will be the same. And the fruit of their labours will provide us with something we now lack.

THE MARIST CHARISM IN THE LAND OF MEXICO



Aureliano Brambila
de la Mora, fms

PRESENTATION

The collection of Mexican Marist documents is impressive. It includes, among other things, the three Provincial Archives relating to the Mother Province (the Province of Mexico) and the ones of its two affiliated Provinces – the Province of Central Mexico and the Province of Western Mexico; the monthly publication of the Official Magazine of each one of those three Provinces, initially called “Le Trait d’Union”, which subsequently took the generic name of “Echoes of the Family” (and its logical variations), from 1945 until the beginning of the year 2000; the three volumes of the “History of the Province of Mexico” of the Interprovincial Commission for History; the book “100 Years of Marist Presence in Mexico” by Miguel Lopez Lopez and Luis Jesus Calderon Amaya; the four volumes of the work by Brother Ignacio Martinez Hernandez, “Following in His footsteps”; and the archives of CEPAM.

In light of this huge richness and since we are approaching the bicentenary of the foundation of the Marist Brothers Institute (1817-2017), based on these sources, I decided to develop a project that attempts to narrate the fate of the Marist Brothers’ charism in Mexico, from 1899 to the present – in other words, how this charism fared in Mexico and what Mexico did with this charism. The focus of this work is somewhat *sui generis*, because it shall attempt to stay away from formats that reduce events to mere chronicles and to favour a presentation based on themes.

Lastly, I wish to note that I requested the assistance of Brothers Carlos Toral Gutierrez and Hugo Jimenez Padilla for the review of this work and their priceless collaboration is sincerely appreciated.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The mexican nation

The Marists arrived in Mexico during the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. The strong hand of the central government produced a Porfirian “pax” based on submission. Although it did promote material progress, this was not shared by the entire population. The labour, farming and indigenous sectors lived on the margins, a wonderful breeding ground for revolution.

Despite the immensity of the country, arable land is limited in Mexico. Its coastline, both on the Pacific and the Atlantic and along the Cortes Sea, is over 10,000 kilometres long. Its great potential is still not being exploited to provide all the benefits it can offer. The oil, which is the property of the nation, constitutes its single source of wealth, providing a false feeling of security.

The 1899 narrative by Manuel María Guerra, a Spanish traveller, of the impression he had of Mexico when he visited the Marist foundation in that country the same year, is rather interesting:

“Imagine a territory, sketched on a map before your eyes, with a land expanse of 1,946,292 square kilometres and a population of 12 million souls (11,601,347, exactly, according to the most recent statistics). On this surface that is almost four times the one of the Spanish land on the Iberian peninsula, pour all the blessings from the heavens, all the wonders of nature and the virtues of our race and you will have something that vaguely resembles the Mexican Republic. Located between the centre

and the north of America, to the extent that several geographers have considered it as part of one or the other, with its coasts facing the Pacific Ocean on the one hand and the Atlantic on the other, gathering in the immense core of the Gulf of Mexico, you may find within its domains everything from the tiny hummingbird with marvellous plumage to the huge cetacean harpooned in the icy waves of the great boreal ocean. The average population density is of 15 inhabitants per square kilometre; except for the Federal district, the highest value is recorded in the State of Tlaxcala [...] and the minimum in the territory of Baja California. Of that population, 19% are European, 38% indigenous and 43% are half-breed”.

(Manuel María Guerra, *Un viaje por América*, 1899).

1.2. And the mexicans

The Mexican is an entity composed of indigenous and Spanish components. Naturally, there are also influences from other countries such as France and the United States.

Mexico was a Spanish colony for three centuries. Different customs and mentalities were imposed on the native people, and in order to survive they had to assimilate. Something similar, in different proportions, may be said about the Creole people, who started to distance themselves from the people from the Spanish peninsula.

Since the times of the conquest, Mexicans have suffered from “malinchismo”, an inferiority complex that leads them to underestimate what is their own and to overestimate whatever comes from abroad, especially from powerful countries (such as in

Europe and the United States). However, it is interesting to note that, at the same time, paradoxically, they maintain a deep resentment towards Spain, the United States, and France, certainly because of the wars they have suffered. The price of the Mexico-United States war was huge and disproportionate, no less than half of its territory.

The constant internal revolutions during the 19th century set in place some very specific ideological divisions. This led to a politics obsessed with classifications and discrimination. Groups are mutually labelled as “emissaries from the past”, “home-land-sellers”, and so on.

There is raging secularism (practically an aggressive atheism) in public spheres. The anti-clerical attitude of public authorities has embittered the relationship with believers, who are mostly Catholic.

Mexico has constantly experienced scarce representation or a lack of it in the public political sphere. Mexicans generally abide by the laws that are passed but they do not comply with them, since they deem that these do not reflect the feelings of the majority. They have been processed in centres that are distant from actual reality, from the times of colonialism.

Federalism insists on the importance of whatever is regional, thus it allows local autonomy. The Mexican knows how to take advantage of the discrepancies between the federal and

state governments. The slight appreciation for the Centre is something that always flatters local powers.

The flexibility of the Mexican individual facilitates the acceptance of sometimes opposing issues. His character is not fond of categorical attitudes. He always searches for ways to reach an agreement. He does not cling to principles; he prefers coexistence. His manner of disagreeing is nuanced and conciliating.

In the light of that readiness to coexist with ideological attitudes, Mexicans have in fact learned that anti-clerical attitudes are not simply identifiable with atheism. Mexican anti-clericalism includes many elements of a historic-sociological nature because of the involvement of the hierarchical Church in the processes of conquest, colonization and independence.

The official anti-clerical attitude especially derives from considering the Pope as a head of state rather than a spiritual leader. This perspective has given rise to many misunderstandings. Catholics are seen as people with dual citizenship, Mexican and Vatican; and to be people who, in case of conflict, would prefer to obey the Vatican.

On his indigenous side, the Mexican is inclined towards whatever is numinous and esoteric. His veneration for ancestors leads him to live in a dual world of the living and the dead. He relates everything to mystery.

He believes in values such as family, religion and homeland. In fact, Mary of Guadalupe fits like a glove since, in her appearances, she treated him like a son, spoke of God and asked for a temple to maternally take care of him. It is significant to note that the leader of independence, a priest, used a Guadalupian pennant to initiate the movement of insurgency.

Mexico may be one of the countries, after Spain, Brazil and Australia, that has provided the greatest number of native Marist Brothers to the Institute. The Marian devotion of the Marists was very appealing to Mexicans.

When the period of persecution began, instead of leaving the country, the Marists chose to appear as non-religious. They abandoned the habit, and dressed and presented themselves like lay people.

In the light of the widespread marginalization in Mexico, the assistance to the poor and indigenous people advocated by the Marist charism led Mexicans to gladly accept it. Social integration in formation houses was never an issue. The Guadalupian mysticism had created a favourable ground for it.

The Mexican has a somewhat humorous attitude. Therefore, his personal relations with others are not characterized by much formality. Nicknames and diminutives are part of his daily language. Marist simplicity charmed him.

The Mexican is very obliging and a good host. The welcome offered by the Mexican communities to Brothers visiting Mexico is proverbial. It is a very warm experience. He does not mind taking the boat out provided that his guest feels at ease.

2. ORIGINS OF MARIST MEXICO

Brother Theophane and his Council received several petitions for foundations from Mexico. But it was not until two Mexican priests, Luis G. Romo and Andrés Cárdenas, personally spoke with them to assure them about the political stability of the country

«that they were convinced that the Guadalupian lands would be Marist lands» (Cf. LHMEM, I, 16).

As a matter of fact, at the time the Marist Superiors decided to start a foundation in the country, Mexico presented a very good image abroad. General Porfirio Diaz had pacified the nation with his iron hand. He had skillfully neutralized all the attempts of that craze for revolution which had devastated the entire national territory over and over again. Porfirism attended to the infrastructure by laying extensive railway tracks and telegraph lines. Massive foreign investment came to his aid. Material prosperity was evident. With respect to relations with the Church, even though the Porfirian dictatorship did not remove the Reform Laws, which bore

so strongly on the Church, it at least rendered them inoperative.

Unfortunately, so much material well-being for a few hid from the eyes of the world the decline in the democratic process in Mexico as well as the abandonment of the marginalized people. It was a dictatorship disguised as an elective presidency, and the economy followed the rules of liberalism. The Masonic lodges, both from New York and Scotland, had dominated the Mexican elites practically since the beginnings of independent Mexico in 1824. The university that Don Porfirio established in Mexico City in 1910 was based on principles of positivism inherited from France. The Mexican *intelligenza* would start setting the ground for the furious attacks against Catholicism and any other religion during the first part of the twentieth century. Only a few years after their arrival, the Marist Brothers who had been expelled from France in 1903, had to relive many situations in the country which had welcomed them. However, they faced the situation in a different manner, by entering on an extensive regime of dissimulation.

Brothers Pedro Damian¹, Filogonio² and Anselmo³ left St. Paul-Trois-Châteaux when they were sent by the Superior General to Mexico as founders of the Marist project in that country. They embarked in Le Havre, coming via New York. They then headed for Mexico, arriving on July 20, 1899. A warm reception committee welcomed them and lodged them in the house of the Martinez Gallardo family, on Merced (known today as Hidalgo) Street.

“Therefore, the first Marist Community of the Mexican Republic was established.” (Cf. LHMEM, I, 41).

On August 21, 1899, they opened the doors of the School of the Immaculate Conception, the first Marist school in the Mexican nation.

“On September 25, 1899, five Brothers boarded a ship in Barcelona and after an adventurous journey, they reached Yucatan lands on October 20, 1899. These were Brothers Armancio⁴, Paxentius⁵, Magno⁶, Tomassi⁷ (sic) and Ligorio⁸” (Cf. LHMEM, I, 59).

Once they arrived at the White City, Merida, the “Escuela de San Rafael” was entrusted to them. The Confer-

¹ BONNET, Paul-Antoine, born in Nyons (Drôme, France), on 20/06/1865.

² OLLER CASELLAS, Pedro, born in Banyoles (Gérone, Spain), on 02/12/1877.

³ FALGUERAS CASELLAS, Aniceto, born in Salt (Gérone, Spain), on 16/04/1879.

⁴ BOUILLARD, Anicet-Henry, born in Goudargues (Gard, France), on 21/01/1856.

⁵ CHALOIN, Paul-Jean, born in Saint-Laurent-en-Royans (Drôme, France), on 26/08/1877.

⁶ LLORET MALLAIT, Miguel, born in Perelada (Gérone, Spain), on 19/08/1876.

⁷ It should be *Tommasi*: BONNET, Marcellin, born in Ancelles (Hautes-Alpes, France), on 22/12/1880.

⁸ MASSE, François, born in Lauzet-sur-l'Ubaye (Basses-Alpes, France), on 17/01/1881.

ences of Saint Vincent de Paul guaranteed the necessary financial support. A short time later, the Brothers, on their own initiative, founded in San Rafael a night school for adults, all labourers over 18 years of age. The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul acquired a large building that had previously been a textile factory and assigned it to the Brothers in 1902. That year, the Brothers opened "La Escuela de Artes y Oficios de San Jose", better known as "El Telar".

"All students were boarders; some paid for their room and board, others had a scholarship from the Conferences. There were workshops of carpentry, cabinetmaking, ironwork, mechanics and printing" (Cf. LHMEN, I, 61).

From their foundation, the projects in Mexico benefited from the presence of French and Spanish Brothers, who gave them an extraordinary momentum. Such a boom in people and works led to the canonical erection of the Marist Province of Mexico in 1908, headed by Brother Michaelis.

Of the 175 French Brothers who came to Mexico, 55 returned to their homeland, some to fight for their nation during the First World War, others simply because they had been expelled from Mexico by the revolution and lastly, others to strengthen the Marist communities in France. Two hundred and fifteen Spanish Brothers, who also

belonged to St. Paul-Trois-Châteaux, were sent from Spain.

A local vocations ministry commenced from the beginning. The first Mexicans, Ignacio Vazquez del Castillo Negrete and Miguel Ortega Cetina, entered the postulancy of Tlaquepaque (Jalisco) in February of 1901.

Overall, to the present, Marist Mexico has been made up of: 13% Spaniards, 10% French, 70% Mexicans, 3% Koreans, 1% Cubans, 3% from other countries (Italy, United States, Switzerland, Germany, Canada). Many among them (378) have died as Brothers, others (264) continue to the present day and quite a large number (1020), following their profession, have changed their life option. However, we must admit that the latter have given a large part of their lives to God and have co-operated effectively with the Marist works.

Expressed in percentages, this corresponds to: 23% Brothers deceased, 16% Brothers living, and 61% Brothers who have left. Marist existence in Mexico would not have been possible without them all. They permitted the projects to develop over more than a hundred years. All of them are people who have incarnated the charism of Marcellin and who have conveyed it somehow down until today.

3. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY THE MARIST CHARISM

3.1. Socio-political situations

When I turned 17 in 1950, I asked my father for his authorization to enter the Postulancy of the Marist Brothers. By way of objection, he raised two questions in one: Do you realize that you will be joining an institution that is, firstly, illegal and, secondly, made up of non-priestly religious? Having been a student with the Marist Brothers from the age of 5 years and 4 months, I responded that I was fully aware of both those things.

Now that I have been reflecting on how to tell the adventure of the Marist charism in Mexico, it has occurred to me that this veiled opposition of my father to my entering Marist religious life as a teaching Brother reflected the two main poles of opposition this charism has faced. One, totally open from the government, the other, more subtle, from a section of the clergy. I will discuss at length only the opposition from the government.

It is true that, during the first years of Marist presence, the relationship with the government was completely harmonious, since they had arrived in the times of Don Porfirio Diaz. But this idyllic situation came to an end when the 1910 revolution broke out. The passing of the Mexican Constitution in 1917, with strongly anti-Catholic overtones, greatly reduced religious free-

dom. For instance, Article 3 required all teaching activities (whether public or private) to be totally secular, with a strict prohibition from teaching religious beliefs; Article 5 prohibited the taking of religious vows; Article 27 prohibited seminaries, convents and denominational schools; Article 130 reduced the priestly role to a minimum of sacramental activities.

The road was legally paved for the arrival in 1925 of the government of Plutarco Elias Calles, who openly subjected the Church to a state of persecution. Rome's reaction before such a Federal Constitution of the United States of Mexico was the "Iniquis Afflictisque" of Pope Pius XI, on November 18, 1926, which condemned the said Constitution as antireligious. Inspired by the courageous position of the Pope, the Catholic laity immediately came out in open opposition, even with arms in hand. Then, after an overture of a few bars filled with threats and dark skies, came the socialist onslaught in 1935 with the government of Lazaro Cardenas, which lasted until 1940. From that year until 1994, even though the bearers of the federal executive power (the Presidents of the Republic) were more or less conciliatory individuals, the "persecutory" laws of the 1917 Constitution remained in force as untouchable republican dogmas. This situation lasted until the arrival of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who in 1994 abolished all those laws in an eminently sensible act. With this overview of the issues with the government, let us go into greater detail.

The Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910. Its objective, among others, was to overthrow the dictator Porfirio Diaz. False identification⁹ led the leaders of the Revolution to religious persecution, especially in the educational field. The nineteenth century and its Reform Laws had set the mood for resentment of the Church. Very soon, our works were attacked by the different revolutionary groups. The schools of Merida, Monterrey, Guadalajara and Mexico City had to be shut down. Our formation houses were also heavily affected. As we will see below, these were also forced to move abroad. Brothers could no longer wear the habit or teach. Many foreign Brothers were expelled from the country. Amidst this storm, a few little oases appeared, as in the case of the Preparatoria San Luis Gonzaga, in Mexico City, which thanks to its name change to “Colegio Francés”, could continue its work under the protection extended by the French Embassy.

“When General Antonio Villarreal expelled the Brothers of Monterrey in September of 1914, the school came under the protection of the French Consul, Pedro Lambreton and the building of the «Instituto Científico de la Sagrada Familia» remained occupied for 10 years by the French consulate, thereby avoiding confiscation. The good friends of Monterrey and the consul himself begged the Brothers to return, but it was not until February 1925 that Brother. Theysier¹⁰

came to Monterrey to prepare the opening for the 1925-1926 academic year. When this work was reborn in September, its name had changed.

It was now called the Franco Mexican School”. (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 49).

Plutarco Elias Calles, a revolutionary general from the North of the Republic,

“when he rose to the presidency, attempted to apply to the letter the persecutory articles of the 1917 Constitution” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 48).

In 1926, the Regulatory Law of Article 130 was passed; it authorized state legislatures to set the number of ministers of religion per corresponding federation entity. As expected, the Mexican episcopate objected to the legislation. The response of Calles was the deportation from the country of

“over 200 foreign priests and religious (among these, there were 4 Marist Brothers)” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 48).

All the indignant clamour of society in general and Catholic groups in particular proved useless. Once all the channels of dialogue were exhausted, the Mexican Ecclesiastical Hierarchy decreed the “interdict”, that is, the suspension of public worship throughout the country.

“The intransigence displayed by Calles brought about the «Christer Rebellion (Rebelión Cristera)»

⁹ When Madero started the Revolution in 1910, it was only for political reasons. However, the situation rapidly degenerated when the revolutionaries in the North (States bordering the US), generally affiliated to International Masonry, confused everything. They ended up identifying the Catholics, especially the clergy and the religious, with the Porfirian dictatorship, since they considered them friends and supporters of the General.

¹⁰ It should read *Teyssier*. (Ndt)

in that same year, 1926. The Marist Brothers, as all religious in Mexico, lived in constant fear, relying only on Providence" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 52).

The first Marist school in the Mexican Republic, the Immaculate Conception in Guadalajara (August 1899), received an unpleasant visit on February 16, 1926. The school inspector proceeded to shut down the project through public force. Thanks to the rapid reaction of the parents and the dissatisfaction of Ochoa society, the School of the Immaculate Conception reopened its doors, but under a different name: "Colegio Jalisco".

The school Luz Saviñón in Mexico City was in the eye of the hurricane and therefore did not benefit from the same amount of good fortune. On February 23, 1926, all the Brothers who worked there were taken to the Ministry of the Interior. The foreigners were placed on the train to Veracruz

"with orders to leave the country"
(Cf. 100ADPMEM, 51).

The Mexicans were told to report on the following day to prove their nationality.

On February 22, 1926, the "Rules for Private Primary Schools" were published.

"This included demands to remove religious names from the schools, to shut down chapels, to remove religious images from classes, not to belong to religious orders, to be professionally qualified or at least have a five-year practical experience in teaching, and to follow official programs and use books approved by the SEP"¹¹ (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 52).

The year 1929, under the presidency of Emilio Portes Gil, marks the end of the situation produced by the armed struggle in defence of religion. Neither of the two contenders, the "Christians"¹² and the "Federalists," won a definitive victory. A *modus vivendi* was established between Church and State through an agreement. Unfortunately, such an "arrangement", although apparently good, proved to be disadvantageous for the Church and especially for several lay principals who had taken up arms: once they laid them down, they were painfully murdered one by one.

It is true that

"a great deal of the agreed commitments were not observed. Nevertheless, the Catholic schools, following the debated arrangements, enjoyed a respite that was very well spent" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 53).

However, in areas distant from the nation's capital, some state administrative bodies indulged in persecutory

¹¹ Secretaría de la Educación Pública (Secretary of Public Education).

¹² "Partisans of Christ". Called the *Cristeros*, from an abbreviated form of their battle cry: ¡Viva Cristo Rey! (Long live Christ the King!) during the armed struggle of peasant rebels from 1926 to 1929 in defense of the Roman Catholic Church against a fiercely anti-Catholic Mexican State (NdT).

skirmishes against Catholic schools. For instance, in Merida,

"everything was finally going well when on October 5, 1931, the State Attorney General showed up at the school with orders to immediately shut down the establishment. The parents of the students addressed the Governor with indignation and forced him to cancel the order" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 54).

During this time of truce, a more subtle persecutory strategy was actually being formulated. The weapon the government was determined to use was of a legal nature. Catholic schools would be strangled, based on increasingly Jacobin regulations. In fact, in 1932, the Secretary of Public Education determined that any private school which requested to be a part of the national educational system, had to require its teachers to personally report to the offices of the Secretariat

"to sign all documents accrediting their professional studies and to guarantee they did not belong to a priestly or religious state." (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 53).

At the end of 1934, General Lazaro Cardenas became the President of the Republic. In the educational field, his objective was

"the establishment of a socialist education throughout the country" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 61).

Official school teachers were prohibited from practicing any religion. Once it was unveiled that the new legislation imposed a «socialist education» on the entire school system, both public and private, at the primary, secondary and regular levels,

"the Catholic teachers of the Republic and especially the religious and priests who managed establishments of those three levels determined to close them as long as the government maintained those sectarian laws" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 61)

The Brothers, in agreement with the parents, started organizing "Academias Comerciales" (Business Schools) which had nothing to do with academies or with business. These were small schools in private homes or in former school buildings where about twenty or fewer children came together.

The creativity of Brothers and parents also devised the "clandestine groups". In these catacomb groups,

"students arrived gradually, with some books or notebooks hidden under their sweaters; the classroom was any sort of enclosure of a given home. When the class was over, students came out at a distance and with caution to mislead the police" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 62).

"The Secretary of Public Education ordered a thorough investigation of the FTD books, since many of them were being used in official schools" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 68)

despite their quite unorthodox contents for a socialist revolution. School inspectors were charged with a thorough search of any school using those books. The directors of the schools were exposed to very harsh sanctions. A school could be closed for committing such a "major crime". The federal system of the Mexican republic bent over backwards to find solutions to the many obstacles established by the Government. The States,

whether from conviction or rather pride, would deceive the Centre by allowing in their territory what was forbidden in the same territory. In fact,

“the lack of coordination among federal and state authorities benefitted private schools. The regional feelings of both prevailed over the socialist ideology” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 56).

That was the case for the State of San Luis Potosi, where the former State Governor, General Saturnino Cedillo, gladly accepted the proposal of the Brothers to open a school in San Luis Potosi, covering the three sections of primary, secondary and boarding school. Thus, in a state of crisis, the Potosino Institute inaugurated its courses in April of 1935.

“San Luis opened its doors to outlawed students of the Federal District during the years 1936, 1937 and 1938. When the boarders of the Potosino Institute left on vacation, the high school students from the “clandestine groups” of the capital would arrive at San Luis. It was a wonderful solution for our irregular students and at the same time, excellent advertising for the Potosino boarding school. The exams took one or two weeks and were held with the utmost seriousness” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 65).

“At the beginning of 1937, the Marist schools of Guadalajara came out of the catacombs. The Jalisco School was reborn with two sections under the new name of Colegio Cervantes. Names change, but the Marist spirit remains” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 63).

In light of the constantly increasing number of students, the popular clandestine groups of Mexico, which operated for several years, resulted in

the “Colegios México” of the Federal District, founded in 1938.

I myself entered the Colegio México of Sadi Carnot 121, in February of 1939. I was entering a school which was outlawed but tolerated through mutual dissimulation, both on the part of the civil authorities and the Marist Brothers.

As of 1940, the rise to power of General Manuel Avila Camacho brought about a very famous period of tolerance. The national tension decreased. There was finally a sense of freedom in the air, even though dissimulation had to continue and remained in the country until 1994. Therefore,

“Religion textbooks were not taken to school. It was arranged for the teachers imposed by the Secretary of Public Education to hold their classes during the first hours of the day so that Brothers could teach the religion classes mid-morning. Group prayers were performed in silence or in a low voice so they would not be heard from outside. First Communion were celebrated with full solemnity but always selecting premises located outside of the school” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 73).

3.2. OTHER TYPES OF CONFLICT SITUATION

The World Wars did not affect the works in Mexico as they did in other countries with a Marist presence. The Marists in Mexico were only affected by the First World War through the many French Brothers who had to leave Mexico to enlist in the armed forces of their nation.

"On August 4th, 1914, France decreed a general mobilization and declared war on the "Central Empires". With this declaration, 50 Brothers who had been expelled from their country by the Combes Law were now called up in defence of their homeland. Years later in 1919, the first "Brother Soldiers" returned victorious; unfortunately, 12 of them had died on the battlefield and three had been horribly mutilated" (Cf. LHMEM, II, 2).

The Brothers suffered natural disasters, such as when in May 1900 the School of the Immaculate Conception suffered a devastating fire, caused by a short circuit in the sacristy of the church of Soledad which was separated only by a wall from the first Marist educational institution in Mexico. The losses were considerable. The location had to be changed. The boarding school in Mexico City succeeded in hosting up to 150 boarders. However, the earthquake of July 7, 1911, made the building uninhabitable. The school "México Primaria" suffered bitterly from the earthquake of September 19, 1985. Classes had to be suspended for one month when it became necessary to reinforce its foundation. In Irapuato (Guanajuato), in 1973, the waters of the 'Presa del Conejo' overflowed and flooded the city. At the school, the water attained a height of 1.80 meters on the ground floor.

There were diseases to withstand, some even deadly. We were still at the dawn of the Marist presence in the

Yucatan peninsula when some victims of yellow fever passed away: Brother Crisostomo¹³ on August 8, 1901 and Brother Doroteo¹⁴ on September 23, 1901. It was just the beginning of a number of tragic deaths from the fever. There was a total of 12 victims of that terrible disease. However, the number of volunteers who offered to go to Yucatan was always greater than the number of deaths.

There were also misunderstandings with the students' parents:

"In Villahermosa, Tabasco, the actions of Brother Anselmo and his collaborators were so correct that the School clearly prospered. At the end of the 1903-1904 academic year, as the parents who had been part of the pro-Marist School committee witnessed the quick growth, they imagined exorbitant earnings and deemed themselves entitled to a "distribution of the profits". Faced with this attitude, Brother Michaelis ordered the school to be closed" (Cf. LHMEM, I, 77).

"In Tulancingo, Hidalgo, the first three years of that foundation were spent happily; however, in 1907, a strong rumour, which developed like a whirlwind, suggested an eagerness for profits obsessed the Brothers; an eagerness which, as they said, made them forget about the moral formation of the students. Faced with the inability to speak with the religious authorities, the Brothers saw themselves forced to leave the School." (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 31).

It was necessary to resort to a self-financing of the works since, by law, all pious charity associations that

¹³ JOUGLARD, Alphonse Vincent, born on 23/01/1873 in Romette (Haute-Provence, France).

¹⁴ MARIN PANTALIONA, Julio, born on 21/08/1881 in Camarón (Burgos, Spain).

helped the poor schools disappeared. This took place dramatically in the works of a social nature on the Yucatan peninsula. The Brothers were forced to ask the parents for a contribution, however small. The negative effect of this measure was that soon, despite the scholarships granted, the Marist works imperceptibly started becoming the focus of an involuntary elitism. Education began to be reserved for whoever could afford it, at least in part.

Because of a lack of facilities, some rather inadequate school premises were used. For instance, the Alvarado French School in Mexico City, bordered on a vast wasteland. The wall separating the school yard from that piece of land was used as a target by a group of military for their shooting practice. The resulting noise was distracting. However, that was not the worst of it.

"Unfortunately, one day, a bullet managed to penetrate the joints of the partitions killing the child Armando Linet" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 38).

The Brothers suffered attacks on their premises. In Morelia, the Institute Valladolid was attacked in 1955 by students from official schools, who threw stones at the school windows. In Guadalajara, in 1956, the newly inaugurated Cervantes School was also stoned by young people from official schools. The Marist student body was present and all stayed calm, without repelling the aggression. A total of 360 windows were reportedly broken.

Marist Mexico suffered many losses in numbers. The first 15 years following the closing of Vatican II recorded a significant number of withdrawals of Brothers from Marist Mexico. The number of losses through abandonment of Marist life is around 200. This brought about readjustments in the personnel of the projects and formation houses and even in the number of works. The positive outcome of this phenomenon was greater attention given to the Marist Laity, to train them in Marist spirituality and mission and turn them into suitable collaborators.

The pastoral care of the Provincials for their Brothers has always been very diligent. Throughout the history of Marist Mexico, however, there have been cases of Brothers making community living difficult through somewhat strange psychological conduct, ranging from very mild to very severe. There have been cases in which the Brothers thus afflicted had to be admitted to specialized institutions. The depressions suffered by some Brothers even led them, unfortunately, to suicide, although such extreme cases are certainly limited in number.

In the Mexican southeast, the Marist community of Comitán, Chiapas, included in the ministry of Mons. Samuel Ruiz, was intimidated in February 1982 by a paramilitary group. The Brothers were abused and deprived of the material they used for the evangelization of indigenous people in the area. The press of the Federal District with a national circulation

spread slander about the “subversive” work done by that Marist group in the southeast.

4. THE MARISTS: AGENTS OF EDUCATION

“Soon the families sensed that the hopes they had placed in the Marists as educators were well founded. Very soon, students showed what could be obtained with paternal discipline and dedication to work. ‘Our pedagogical secret,’ said Brother Pedro Damian, the Founder of the Province, ‘is available to all teachers. It consists in always being reasonable with the students; always demand with words and even more through example.’ (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 17).

Lay teachers started appearing in the Marist schools of Mexico in the 1940s. This presence followed an entire evolutionary process. Certainly, at the beginning, they were only found among the gymnastics, music, and extra curricular teachers. However, they soon became also fulltime teachers and assistants, and then heads of groups and faith educators.

There was a significant gap between demand and supply in schools. The number of Brothers was very soon insufficient. It was, therefore, necessary to considerably increase the number of lay teachers. There was an immediate need to care for these teachers in a special manner. Christian animation of the laity was one of the principal tasks of provincial authorities. As from 1974, a large number of classes of all sorts were organized for the lay personnel. This bore fruit. The lay Marists in the school and non-school

projects in Mexico not only collaborate in the daily work of the Brothers, but they also hold positions of responsibility in all fields and at all levels.

The courage and audacity of some Brothers in personally addressing the highest authorities to have a dialogue produced very good results.

“In 1904, Brothers Paul Marie and Pedro Damian paid a visit to the President of the Republic, General Porfirio Diaz, and as they informed him of the status of the Marist projects, he encouraged them to establish more schools” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 27).

“Brother Eugenio Cenoz, in full revolutionary times, succeeded in obtaining a meeting with the President of the Republic to present the situation of the Schools in Mexico City and how much the families wished for those schools to be reopened. The response of Mr Venustiano Carranza was positive. The only safety measure taken was the one to change the initial name into ‘Colegios Franceses’ (French Schools), so as to place them under the protection of the French Government” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 36).

“In the middle of 1922, Brother Victoriano Martinez met with the Governor of the State of Jalisco, Jose Guadalupe Zuno, and asked for his support to have the Marist School of Cocula integrated into the State educational system. His intervention was so effective that by October 4 of that year the much longed for incorporation document was received” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 44).

“The way in which the foundation of the Institute Morelos de Uruapan, Michoacán, was handled in 1963 is striking. By request of Brother Jose Luis Sahagun, Government authorities requested Brothers from the Vicar General (Brother Leoncio V. Lorenzo) to manage a school in that location. In exchange,

they promised to facilitate the entry to the country of Cuban Brothers expelled from their country” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 140).

4.1. APOSTOLIC PROJECTS OF FORMAL EDUCATION

4.1.1. Marist paying schools

The first Marist work established in Mexico was the one located in Guadalajara, Jalisco, on August 21st, of 1899, under the name of School of the Immaculate Conception (Colegio de La Inmaculada Concepción).

The School San Rafael was opened in Merida, Yucatan, in 1899. This was followed by: the School San Ildelfonso in 1901, the School of the Sacred Heart (Escuela del Sagrado Corazón) in 1901, the Catholic School of Santa Ana (Colegio Católico de Santa Ana) in 1903.

In the Federal District of Mexico, the capital of the Mexican Republic, the following were established: the School of the Perpetua in 1900, the Business School San Luis Gonzaga (Colegio Comercial San Luis Gonzaga) in 1901, the Patricio Sanz Boarding School in 1903, the Tacubaya School in 1905, the Popotla School in 1908, the School Puente de Alvarado in 1912, the French School Alvarado (Colegio Francés de Alvarado) in 1915.

In Cuernavaca, Mor., the Marist School of Cuernavaca was opened in 1902; in San Cristobal, Chis., the school of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in 1903; in Tehuantepec, Oax., the School of San Luis

Gonzaga, in 1903; in Tulancingo, Hgo., the Guadalupian School in 1903; in Villahermosa, Tab., the School of Saint John Baptist (San Juan Bautista) in 1903; in Zamora, Mich., the School Santa Maria in 1903; in Cotija, Mich., the Marist School of Cotija in 1903; in Irapuato, Gto., the Guadalupian Institute in 1903; in Leon, Gto., the Institute Sollano in 1903; in Monterrey, NL., the Scientific Institute of the Sacred Family (Instituto Científico de la Sgda., Familia) in 1905; in Campeche, Cam., the School of the Sacred Heart (Escuela del Sagrado Corazón) in 1905; thus the many Marist works continued being established in over 80 cities.

The St. Joseph Academy School of Brownsville, Texas USA, was taken over by the Province of Mexico in 1906, by request of the Oblate Fathers of Mary of that town.

Upon being expelled from Guadalajara in August of 1914, the Brothers were taken to Manzanillo, and sent by ship to San Francisco.

“There, they were kindly welcomed by the Brothers of the Christian Schools who put them in contact with the Bishop of Tucson who was longing to establish a Catholic school for boys. On September 4th, 1914, the school was opened” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 57).

When the ecclesiastical authorities in Texas realized the advantages that Marist education offered in Brownsville, they asked the Marist Province of Mexico to establish a similar educational project in Laredo, Texas. The Saint Joseph’s Academy of Laredo was established in 1937.

On the eve of the separation of the United States Province into two administrative units (1959), the two schools of Marist Mexico on American territory were transferred to the Province of the United States.

When the projects in Yucatan were shut down by the Revolution in 1914, a group of Brothers who worked in Mexico were sent to Cuba. On January 2, 1915, a new school was opened in Havana. When President Calles then closed several works in Mexico, many other Brothers left for Cuba. In 1926, a school assigned by the Paulist Fathers was taken over, that is, the school of the Sacred Heart in Matanzas. Upon taking possession of the diocese of Camagüey, Monsignor Enrique Perez Serantes, who had been a chaplain of the Brothers in Cienfuegos, requested Brothers to establish the Champagnat School of Ciego de Ávila. The Brothers initiated this foundation during the academic year 1929–30. In 1933, the foundation of the Marist School of Santa Clara was decided on. In light of the danger posed for students in attending a Protestant school, the Knights of Columbus requested Brothers to establish the Marist School of Cardenas (Colegio Marista de Cárdenas), with such great results that the courses commenced in September of 1934. The Champagnat Academy of Havana opened its doors in 1931, at the popular Calzada de El Cerro. In 1935, the Champagnat School was opened in Camagüey. The school opened its doors to the waiting crowded audience.

Once the Mexican political situation was settled, that is, at the beginning of the 1940s, Marist Mexico started to re-gather all its personnel located in Cuba.

Mons. Marciano Tinajero, Bishop of Queretaro, was especially interested in the establishment in the city of a religious school for boys. Thus, the Queretano Institute opened its doors on February 13, 1942.

Construction of the building for the Institut Mexico commenced at the beginning of 1942, on a piece of land of 20,000 square metres. It was inaugurated in 1943, with 1,317 pupils.

A Spanish priest, Enrique Tomas Lozano, requested Brothers to establish a school in New Laredo and on September 20, 1943, the Colegio America started operations.

In Ocotlan, Jalisco, the first classes of the Colegio Colon commenced in September of 1945. Thanks to help from the factories of Nestlé y Celanese, and to the many donations received, a new parcel of land was acquired, since the original premises very soon became insufficient.

The school Hidalgo de Cocula was adequately restored in September 1945, thanks to a beautiful solidarity initiative by the student's parents.

"They offered to cooperate according to their possibilities, some with money, others with materials, others with work" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 91).

In Morelia, a group of priests had founded a primary and secondary Catholic school for boys in 1941. Then, in 1943, they opened the Preparatory School section which was incorporated into the Independent University of Mexico. Because of the scope of the project and the increasingly demanding attention that it required, they decided

“to request the presence of the Marist Brothers.

On January 20 of 1946, four Brothers came to take charge of the project” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 91).

Mr. Pablo Sanchez, a former student from the School Luz Saviñón, gathered the former students to ask for their cooperation; he sustained huge expenses in repairing the building, he obtained the promise of three Brothers from the Superiors, and he finally succeeded in getting rid of the union teachers. The official handing over of the School to the Brothers was executed on December 7, 1947.

Classes at the Institute Hidalguense in Pachuca commenced in February of 1948. With the help of the Parents’ Association, some indispensable improvements were carried out: levelling of the land, addition of electricity, water system and the completion of the building. The members of the groups of Acción Católica (Catholic Action), who very soon came to be part of the student body, attended popular catechism centres.

The “Internado México” emigrated from San Luis Potosi to Mexico City. It was established on a large piece of land obtained at a very convenient

price, to the extent that the provincial authorities of the time interpreted it as a gift from Mary. In February of 1949, classes began with an attendance of 300 boarding students.

“The former students of the Guadalupian Institute of Irapuato (1903-1914) had not forgotten the Marist formation received in their childhood, and in the absence of any promise to be provided with Brothers, they started to organize themselves, on their own, to bring them back to their town. On December 12, 1951, they officially handed over to the Marist Brothers the Pedro Martínez Vázquez school” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 97).

In 1955, the School was inaugurated thanks to the enthusiasm displayed by Brother Pablo Aguilar for that project.

The School of Jacona was opened in 1958. The construction and opening of that project was achieved thanks to Fr Jose de Jesus Rojas, the parish priest of that town.

It is interesting to note that, in 1970 in Celaya, the School Manuel Concha provided great assistance to the Diocese by accepting seminarians in their classrooms.

In Mexico City, the School Mexico Secundaria operated from 1941 to 1975 on Merida Street, n. 33. It subsequently moved to the southern part of the City and settled in the former premises of the Internado México, which were soon too small to meet the constant demand for registrations. At present, its student population fluctuates at around 2000 students. It is called “CUM-Acoxpa y Bordo”.

In Guadalajara, the Institute of Religious Sciences (ICRO) was established in 1978 for the formation of catechists.

In 2004, the Marist Universities in Guadalajara, Queretaro and San Luis Potosi, respectively founded their High Schools.

4.1.2. Marist free schools

Since the beginning, the Brothers have relied on generous benefactors who gave them ample support. Among them, Mr. Juan Ortiz Gordoa distinguished himself by assigning to them the gorgeous country home he owned in Tlaquepaque (Jalisco) for a period of twenty years, to operate a Novitiate and a free-of-charge school.

The Catholic School of Maxcanu (1902), southeast of Merida, was requested and contracted by the same neighbours. From the beginning, the society approached the Brothers in full confidence and the registration number very soon exceeded two hundred students.

Parallel to the “Escuela de Artes y Oficios de la Sagrada Familia”, there was a “Free School” in Zamora managed by Brother. Anacleto Maria, which reached a number of 150 pupils.

In Guadalajara, Brother Victoriano founded a semi-free school in 1902. The registration number was so large that when Monsignor Ortiz, Archbishop of Guadalajara, was informed, he made the former convent of the Augustinians available to the Brothers.

In the city of Jacona, in 1903, a group of benefactors assigned a building for twenty years on condition that the Brothers opened a school free of charge for the children of the town.

In 1903, the Guadalupian School of Tullancingo was opened by request of the Bishop. Just as in many other schools, there were paying students and others who attended for free. The free of charge students were practically twice as many as the paying ones.

In Mexico City, the couple Salvador and Luz Saviñon set up a foundation which, among other pious initiatives, aimed at supporting a school for the poor children of the area. In 1904, the patronage of the Foundation offered the School to Brother Michaélis, who immediately accepted it.

In Uruapan, in 1905, some modifications were made to the school building, especially to increase the free section, which attained a number of 250 pupils.

In Sahuayo, on the significant date of January 2, 1905, five Brothers arrived to establish the “Colegio Marista de Sahuayo”. Four Brothers were responsible for the paying section whereas Brother Victoriano took charge of the free section.

Mrs Luisa Garibi de Teran, mother of the future Cardinal of Guadalajara, decided to allocate her fortune to the foundation of a free school. In 1908 she called the Brothers, who then opened the “Escuela de la Purísima Concepción” that same year.

In Monterrey, the Province felt the need to establish a school for the poor. The Archbishop donated a simple but adequate building in the neighbourhood of "Corona" for that purpose. In addition, he provided a property for the Brothers' residence. The school opened its doors in October of 1933.

"In 1942, the long-entertained wish of the Archbishop of Yucatan was in line with the desire of the Congregation to open a free school for poor children. Once the foundation was approved, the «Anexo» of Montejo opened its doors in the San Juan neighbourhood" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 76).

The Schools in Mexico City were developing with great vigour. The Marist presence was indispensable among the less fortunate in the Capital. On February 12, 1951, the Colegio México, free of charge, commenced its classes.

"The issue of illiteracy had concerned all national governments, but it was particularly at the time of President Avila Camacho (1940-1946) that a special emphasis was placed on the problem. The entire nation supported the campaign with significant success. In light of the dramatic lack of schooling in marginalized environments, the Ministry of Education invited the teachers from private and official schools to cooperate with popular education. Immediately, approximately 50 directors of the Federal District formed the "Patronato de Escuelas Particulares"¹⁵, whose objective was to cooperate with the government in this cultural effort. The management of the Patronage was offered to Brother Jose Gonzalez Villaseñor in 1954. The appeal had a great

response, since a few years later the Patronage could rely on over 100 school groups who assisted over 15,000 children" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 105).

In Guadalajara, the School Cervantes Colomos was opened as a free primary school (1954), and the School Champagnat, as a free secondary school (1994).

In Queretaro, the Literacy Centre started as a catechism centre by Brother Gregory in 1950, gradually became an officially recognized free evening school institution. It was given the name of Champagnat School.

During the year 1962 and subsequent ones, several Marist institutions created on their same premises an evening school for people with scarce resources. That was the case in the Mexico Institute of Toluca, in the CUM of Monterrey and the Colegio Mexico of Orizaba.

In Irapuato, the School Pedro Martinez Vazquez opened an evening primary school in 1963, for young people with scarce financial resources.

The Mexico High School (Merida 33), created an evening section for families with scarce resources and it was given the name of Marcelino Champagnat school, in 1963.

A free school called Escuela Tepeyac was also opened in Monterrey in the popular suburb called Independencia, in 1962.

¹⁵ Patronage of Private Schools.

In Juarez City, a free primary and a free middle school were opened in marginalized areas, called Escuela Talamás (1970) and Escuela Montesinos (1984).

In Merida, a free primary school by the name of Escuela Joaquin Peon was opened in a marginalized area in 1971.

In Tijuana, the Escuela de Miramar, a free middle school, was opened in a marginalized area in 1980.

"In Poza Rica, a technical secondary school was founded in 1983, in one of the neediest suburbs of the city. The presence of the school was soon felt in the community since, along with the parish ministry, [the Brothers] formed groups for Saturday catechesis, they animated prayer groups for adults and young people and they worked in catechesis along with the religious who were present in the town. Together with the parents, they worked for the benefit of the suburb by paving the streets in stone, building latrines. . . . Soon, a new project emerged as a response to an identified need, that is, the assistance of disabled children. The educational community built a space within the secondary school where, while care was taken of their disability, they were given the opportunity to coexist with the adolescents from the secondary school. The latter also benefitted since this increased their sensitivity to the problems of the others" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 146-147).

In 1984, the Preparatory Asuncion School was founded in Ixtaltepec.

In Orizaba, Veracruz, an evening primary school (under the name of Colegio Mexico) and an evening middle/high school operate in the build-

ing of the Colegio Mexico, both for young people with few financial resources; they were called "Colegio Champagnat".

"In 1988, the school Miravalles was founded in the Iztapalapa Delegation of Mexico City. It was one of those we call "insertion" schools. It started with groups of first, second and third levels in primary, who were soon joined by a group of pre-primary.

At the same time, primary and secondary literacy groups for adults were created during evening hours. Little by little, the school fully covered primary and secondary classes.

A small group of atypical children (with Down syndrome) joined them and shared the premises with the regular school students.

In addition, the school observed the clear commitment to walk with the suburb"

(Cf. 100ADPMEM, 147-148).

In Monterrey, a popular school was inaugurated as Escuela Franco Mexicano Guadalupe, in 1994.

In Mexico City, at the premises of the Colegio Mexico at Mérida 50, the Brothers established the Basilio Rueda School, an evening secondary school for financially disadvantaged young people.

In Potoichan, Gro., a Preparatory School was founded in 2007.

A "Business Academy" was opened in 1905, in Cotija, Michoacán to meet the desire of the many businessmen in this agricultural area to provide their children with an education of that sort.

4.1.3. Higher education in Marist Mexico

In Mexico City, the Colegio Francés de Alvarado included a business section which trained its students in banking and business matters.

“Year after year, the banks in town fought over graduates of that section because of its excellent professional training” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 39).

However, little by little, the Brothers began to realize that the parents wished for university programs for their children. From 1912, careers such as bookkeeping, accounting, and bilingual secretarial were less followed. It became necessary to start thinking about opening university prep schools.

In 1918, the Baccalaureate Section was established under the name of “Colegio Francés Preparatoria”, which ended up being called “Francés Morelos” or simply “Morelos”.

In Monterrey, during the academic year 1933-34, the University of Nuevo Leon gave its approval for the creation of a Preparatory School. The Franco-Mexican School (Colegio Franco Mexicano), therefore, completed the three levels of teaching.

University teaching in Marist Mexico experienced two quite discreet beginnings; one in Mexico City and the other in Monterrey. In the first case, it appeared at the time the CUM was inaugurated in 1947. The School of Chemistry, open to outside students

and Brothers, had a good number of students, mostly former students of the Frances Morelos Preparatory School. Unfortunately, it could not continue operating since the local authorities of the institution were not accustomed to working with university students. However, the Brothers could benefit, internally, from several of the existing university programs at the CUM: Literature, Mathematics, Chemistry, History, and Geography. On the other hand, thanks to the benevolence of State authorities, the city of Monterrey succeeded in integrating the School of Chemical Sciences into the University of Nuevo Leon, for the benefit of a number of Brothers.

In Guadalajara, with respect to Regular Schools and thanks to the enthusiasm and ample vision of Brother Tomas Zepeda, in collaboration with the religious of the Incarnate Word, the Regular Superior School Nueva Galicia was successfully and officially integrated into the Ministry of Education.

“In the summer of 1951, the intensive classes of the Regular Superior were launched.

As years went by, there were as many as 3,000 teacher-students per summer”

(Cf. 100ADPMEM, 90).

These three foundations were the immediate forerunners of the Marist Universities of Mexico, Monterrey and Guadalajara, presently at their peak. The Marist Universities of Queretaro, San Luis Potosi, Merida, and Tepic immediately followed.

From 1985, the “Normal Queretana” focused on the training of lay teachers, offering degrees in “Primary Education” and “Pre-school Education”.

Marist Mexico refuted that very ironic expression of militant atheism: “You believers teach children to read in your primary schools, but we teach them to think in our Universities”.

In Monterrey, a group of industrialists who were sensitive to social issues offered their labourers and employees facilities, such as adequate housing, comprehensive education and healthy recreation. The Brothers were asked for help. In 1950, we took charge of two of those schools, one belonging to the “Vidriera” (Window factory) and the other to the “Industria del Vidrio” (Glass Industry). All expenses were covered by those respective industries. The housing for the four Brothers placed in those educational projects started being built in 1952, also at the expense of the Monterrey industrialists.

In Guadalajara, a Religious Sciences Institute was opened in 1978 in order to offer catechesis and theological studies for seminarians, religious and lay people. It is headed by a group of Marist Brothers in collaboration with the La Salle Brothers from the ULSA of Mexico City. The institute is known as ICRO (Instituto de Ciencias Religiosas de Occidente) and it received official recognition from the Archdiocese of Guadalajara.

“Following mature reflection, the Brothers in Apatzingan felt that their presence in other places of

the diocese was more necessary. In 1994, after spending 31 years at the head of the school, with the permission of the parents and the blessing of the Bishop, they left the school in the hands of the Sisters Servants of the Sacred Heart and the Poor, and departed for a new work field in Villa Victoria, Michoacan, to join an official school and live as employees” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 149).

This experience lasted until 2001; the Brothers then moved to another location to attend to other more pressing needs.

4.2. Apostolic projects of informal education

In 1901, at the Merida free school of the “Sacratísimo Corazón de Jesús”, the Brothers offered night classes for labourers where they were taught to read and the rudiments of catechism.

The Montejo School cooperated with the National Literacy Campaign launched by the Minister of Education in 1944; in addition, on Sundays it managed several catechesis centres with approximately 300 participants.

In Juxtlahuaca, Oaxaca, a school for catechists was founded in 1976, which trained them for multiple functions within their original communities.

The charitable Sanz couple left a substantial fortune to establish an orphanage in Mexico City (Tlalpan) and it was entrusted to the Brothers (1903). This institution managed to create a very pleasant family environment. Several workshops were or-

ganized for the benefit of boarders: printing, carpentry and cabinetmaking, blacksmithing, tailoring...

Soon after the establishment of the Brothers in Mexico, they began thinking about the creation of textbooks. This began with the translation or production of the books in the FTD Collection. The books of the Marist Publishing house were even sold through official channels.

"The Marist printing press always managed to be up to date with technical progress, that is why its works were greatly appreciated" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 068-069).

In 1935, the Marist press was officially registered under the name "Editorial Progreso". Because of the Mexican persecution, the printing of school texts encouraged the use of pseudonyms such as Rozan, Mario Leal, Hamilton, Godard, Leonardo Lis,...

"It was easy to convince booksellers and teachers that the new covers displaying names of unknown authors contained the previous and excellent FTD books" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 069).

Many Brothers and quite a number of Marist lay people were the authors of the works published by Editorial Progreso.

Since the arrival of the Brothers to Mexico, enthusiasm for sports, especially soccer, has been one of the characteristics of the Marist education.

"In the Marist Schools of Mexico City, the "great sport" started around 1912, when the Preparatory section was founded at the Perpetua. During the first years, the teams were called «Oncenas Colón». When Brother Eugenio Cenoz was at the head of the Sports Club, it was renamed «America», and under this name it made history in the Mexican national sport environment. On the other hand, Brother Serpollet organized the first "novenas"¹⁶ along with the enthusiastic plainsmen of San Rafael and Santa Maria la Ribera, which, before the year was out, became the popular «Club France». The team of Club France and the ones of America were all composed of students" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 039).

In 1933, the Club Deportivo Jalisco was inaugurated in Guadalajara and it operated in the afternoons in the grounds of the Marist School.

The educational value of the Scout Movement led many schools to establish Scout groups, mainly in Merida, Guadalajara, San Luis Potosi, Tepic and Mexicali. In addition, they were used as schools of effective cooperation in social activities.

"Since their arrival in Mexico, the Brothers have transmitted to their students a sense of Church to collaborate with pastors in apostolic movements" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 039).

Groups from the Marian Congregation, from the Eucharistic Crusade, the Vanguardians, the Catechist Legion of Cristo Rey, the ACJM, REMAR, MAS and MARCHA have kept up with Marist Works throughout the Mexican Republic. A great number of vocations

¹⁶ Baseball teams.

of committed lay people, candidates for priesthood and Marist life have emerged, and continue to emerge, from those movements.

The property of El Barrial, acquired by the Marist schools of Monterrey in 1960, has been a blessing for the Marist educational community of Monterrey, since it lends itself to organizing all kinds of movements of reflection, retreats and live-in experiences, and serves as a starting point for a number of excursions through the Eastern Sierra Madre.

The same can be said about the property of the Brothers in Tepoztlan, Morelos, and the Schools in Mexico City. As well as the one of the Azufres for the educational communities of the States of Michoacan and Guanajuato.

The educational communities of Guadalajara rely on two meeting centres, namely Maisonnettes and Chapala. The ones in Merida utilize the premises of Chelem, on the beach. The property in Encarnacion de Diaz frequently hosts Marist educational communities from several locations.

In 1960, the Christianity Workshops reached Mexico and they caused a huge impact in the world of Christian adults. The diocesan ministries took to them with enthusiasm. Prior to this phenomenon of spiritual rebirth in the Church, a group of Brothers from the CUM in Mexico City decided to adapt these workshops for the students of the Preparatory School. They gave them the name of "Christian Life Days".

"They gradually spread among the youth of the school and they were soon extended to several Marist places throughout the Republic. Results were very encouraging. Today, they are held in practically every parish and they have become a great contribution for Mexican youth" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 111).

During the 70s of the 20th Century, the "Audiovision" centre engaged in the production of videos and transparencies for catechesis. Its audience far exceeded the Marist works in the Mexican republic. The diffusion of the Christian message in many parishes and several dioceses also proved to be very beneficial.

In 1975, Champagnat House was built in Morelia, Michoacán, to take in older, sick or ailing Brothers. It includes all the necessary services; some Brothers are appointed to assist them and they are also provided with staff nurses, day and night, in case of emergencies. It is located next to the Novitiate to prevent the Brothers from feeling lonely and to enable them to be in touch with the Novices, just a few steps away. That is beneficial for both groups: older Brothers and Novices.

Marist Mexico is among the pioneer Marist nations that have systematically and closely looked after their lay teachers. Energizing weekly courses for lay teachers were organized from 1974 to 1995. They were replaced by the ten CELMAR modules; one was held over a weekend, the others were covered in one day. The "Formarme" courses are held during the

summer to infuse the Marist spirit into our teachers. In addition, there are weekend workshops called “Modules for Marist laity”. A large group of educational communities have benefited from this initiative.

A movement created by Antonio Gonzalez engaged in building residential homes for poor people with the financial assistance and direct labour of many present and former students. This movement was extended to several educational communities in Marist Mexico.

In 1991, the Potosino Institute of San Luis Potosi instituted Mandatory Social Service for the students of the Preparatory. The young people, in agreement with the Municipality, offered many services on behalf of the community.

At the Marist School of Celaya, the apostolic movements promoted by Ciudad Nueva Marista and REMAR have built many social service homes.

“At the Mexico Acoxpa Marist School, the members of the REMAR Group have significantly promoted spiritual formation and apostolic movements. Dozens of secondary school students devote their Holy Week to proclaiming the Word of the Lord at the Mission of Poza Rica” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 146).

In addition to offering a comprehensive education to the population of Tepatitlan, the Brothers were concerned about the physical well-being of the inhabitants of that city on the Hills of Jalisco.

“In addition to collaborating in the introduction of drinking water, they helped create two auto-transportation cooperatives: «La Alteña» and «Camiones de los Altos»; they even helped in obtaining certain special concessions as well as spare parts and tyres which were in short supply in those times of war” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 077).

The terrible earthquake of September 19, 1985, over 7 degrees on the Richter scale, which caused many casualties and much devastation in Mexico City taught the Mexican people the value of solidarity. Large numbers of volunteers went out into the streets to help those caught under the debris. Many students from the CUM were among those volunteers. In addition, they set up the halls of the school to serve as shelter for stricken people who were homeless. (...)

At the time of the hurricanes that hit the Southeast of the Mexican Republic, the Marist students of Merida and Ciudad del Carmen helped to alleviate the tribulations of the people overwhelmed by so much wind and water.

In 1982, a centre of Marist Spirituality called “CEMAR” was set up in Morelia. Brothers from Marist Mexico and the Provinces of Central and South America came to attend a ten month renewal course. This centre operated until June 1992.

A large group of Brothers act as advisers to the fraternities of the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family. In addition to their weekly or bi-weekly meetings, these groups hold

periodic regional and national meetings. They are committed to carrying out ministries that are in line with the mission of the Institute.

The Centre for Studies of the Marist Spiritual Patrimony (CEPAM) was founded in 1989; it was open to Marist Brothers and laity. More than 290 people from several countries have attended the extended courses, that is, those lasting over three weeks. This centre is still operating today. Its regular courses are offered during the summer and it is presently located in Guadalajara, Jalisco. Many Brothers and lay people from the Marist Arco Norte Region have participated in the courses and they have also been attended by people from Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay) and Spain.

"The news of the foundation of the «Internado Marista de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe» (Marist Boarding School of Our Lady of Guadalupe) in Chiapas, had a strong impact among students. When they learned that the objective was to form indigenous catechists, especially in the tzotzil region, they felt the need to take part in that mission. As a matter of fact, numerous groups of Marist pupils travelled to towns in order to help introduce water in the communities or to provide blankets, clothing or food to the needy brothers. Since then, Chiapas has become a magnet that strongly attracted students" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 110-111).

Year after year, volunteers spend one or two years in Tarahumara. These are usually young people who have completed the Baccalaureate

and are about to enter university. This experience changes their vision of life and society.

There are also volunteers who spend two or three years in the missions in Tanzania. They are usually single but there have also been cases of married couples.

In 1989, the REMAR group was created with the fundamental objective of forming Christian leaders through human formation and social action work; its activities have acquired a major significance in the formation of young people.

In 1994, an insertion community was opened in Guadalajara to host a Community Development Centre; it attends to marginalized children who have not been successful in their Basic formal Studies, free of charge. They are thereby helped in their reintegration.

Many Marist schools in Mexico City, and throughout the Mexican Republic,

"have organized different types of workshops on Human Development in which many members of the Educational Community have participated" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 113).

"In 1997, a new area of apostolate emerged in the Institute Mexico Primaria: assistance for the disabled. A group of 10 pupils received special attention in a classroom and joined the other students during recreation times and for subjects that did not lend themselves to comparison, such as singing classes. A better socialization of these students was thereby

achieved. The other students and the rest of the educational community learned to understand them, to value them and love them. That initiative was extended to other educational communities of Marist Mexico” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 114).

To ensure the health of the Brothers, the Congregation acquired properties such as Bohio in Veracruz, and Enramada on the Pacific beaches (near the area of Chamela, Jalisco), as places of relaxation or meeting places for teachers and students. The use of these premises as holiday places has also been extended to the teachers and the direct relatives of the Marist projects.

Each year, a number of meditation workshops are organized for members of the Marist fraternities and other people. The workshop held during the first four days of the Holy Week is especially popular.

4.3. Missions

4.3.1. National Mission

“On January 6, 1962, the first Marist Brothers arrived in Chiapas. Bishop Samuel Ruiz had expressed his thoughts to the Brother Provincial: «We wish to establish a boarding school where indigenous people may learn to live a more human life. We want them to learn catechism; however, its influence will be much greater when they can add to a well-learned catechism and a Christian life put into practice a secular education as advanced as

possible». Many indigenous people went through the Marist house in groups of thirty, even up to sixty. The formation of the catechist requires much attention since he is the substitute for the priest, who can only visit his congregation once a year. In addition, he needs to acquire skills in nursing, first aid, public spirit, agriculture, crafts such as tailoring, carpentry, saddlery...” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 135).

“The work in the hostel of San Cristobal was carried out in quarterly courses and the sessions were distributed between catechesis, arts and crafts. Subsequently, between one session and the next, visits of animation were carried out in the “parajes”¹⁷ and contacts were resumed with the catechists who had attended the courses. From the initial years, the classes of the hostel were always full, its yards filled with noise, its crops made up of different vegetables; the “escuelantes”¹⁸ graduated from it as good tailors and able artists in leather and wood.” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 136).

“On October 12, 1974, by request of the Bishop, the first conference of indigenous people and for indigenous people was organized and promoted by the Brothers. After listening to the opinions of the different groups, they reached the following agreements: ‘The land belongs to those who work it, equality and justice as to prices, renewal of the education of our children and a healthy life’. Thanks to this conference, our brothers, the indigenous people, realized they had never before come together and they discovered their strength in being united. It marked the beginning of a great movement of organization and awareness” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 137).

¹⁷ Places in the forest or countryside.

¹⁸ Word equivalent to pupils.

In 1961, the Brothers arrived in the Sierra Tarahumara. The Vicariate was entrusted to the Jesuits. They are mainly located in four places: Sisoguichi, Creel, Norogachi, and Chinatu. The Brothers destined for Tarahumara collaborated in the work carried out by the organic ministry of the Mission. In accordance with the plans of the Vicariate, a temporary Marist community was created in Kwechi with the objective of acquiring firsthand knowledge of the Tarahumara culture and characteristics. It was agreed with the Bishop that they would no longer look after the Sisoguichi boarding school. In Norogachi, religious sisters assisted in the running of a primary school for Tarahumarians.

In 1999, a Marist community was established in Pico de Oro (also known as Marques de Comillas, Chiapas) to provide pastoral assistance to the people of that area.

4.3.2. International missions

"In 1971, four Brothers arrived in South Korea, a country with which they were somewhat familiar through their geography studies, but for the rest quite ignorant. They enthusiastically engaged in the task of enculturation, starting with the learning of the local language. The first lesson the Koreans received was the testimony of the Brothers' Christian life; thanks to this, by Christmas of 1972, the first three candidates joined the Marist Community. The missionary work gradually developed. The first experience was in the Diocese of An Dong, where the Brothers made contact with young Koreans through an Academy for English, abacus

and bookkeeping. The intention was to establish a Christian presence in the city's pagan environment. In addition, they managed a home for university students which included a large library where students came to study after their classes were over. In the evening, they operated a school for students preparing for their certificate of proficiency exams. They subsequently worked at a school for the hearing and speech impaired located in Chugju, which they had to leave after several years. A new field emerged: to take on the administration and management of the Damian Hospital for lepers in Yong yu. Several projects were developed with the objective of improving the financial conditions of the patients and their families; these included raising chickens, pigs. . . . On the other hand, special care was given to the children of the lepers, who were abandoned. The project lasted until 1997" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 143),

"The Brothers managed a retreat and residential house in Wong yu for three years and from the beginning, they engaged in teaching Spanish classes in the universities. At present, they exercise their apostolate in Chung-ju, in an orphanage where they look after 80 pupils sent by the government or other authorities. Recently, they have taken charge of a special preparatory school in a location near Chug-ju, for problem students" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 144).

"In 1989, Korea was organized as a District, since it already comprised 25 Korean Brothers and 5 Mexican ones. The novitiate was established in Suwon and little by little welcomed a few vocations. All novices are older than 20 years of age since, prior to entering, they must have completed the national Military Service for a term of three years. The District's main house is located in Seoul. Following the restructuring of many administrative

units, Korea has become a part of the Province of Southern Asia" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 145).

The Brothers arrived in Tanzania in 1991. They took charge of a technical school at secondary level. They taught many subjects in agriculture and other trades. Following the restructuring of many administrative units of the Institute, Tanzania has been incorporated into the Province of Central Africa.

In response to a request from the Brother Provincial of Canada, from 2009 Marist Mexico took charge of the sector of Haiti which was being cared for by the Province of Canada. There are at this time three Mexican Brothers providing assistance in Haiti. The Haitian members in formation do their novitiate and schooling in Mexico, with the exception of the postulants who are still in Haiti.

5. VOCATIONS MINISTRY

Work for vocations started from the beginning. Mexicans enrolled in the lists of disciples of Marcellin from very early on, practically from the very beginning. It started with the young Ignacio Vazquez del Castillo Negrete, from Guadalajara, and continued with 66 more over the first ten years. On August 16, 1899, the School of the Immaculate Conception opened its doors at Avenida Alcalde 2, in the beautiful city of Guadalajara. Nachito Vazquez was among the first students who registered, accompanied by his

mother. However, there was a problem: his age was half a year over the limit set by the rules.

"A close relative then accompanied my mother and his intervention obtained what pleading and tears had not achieved, so long as I behaved. I entered the school on its first day... [Brother Pedro Damian, the founder of Marist Mexico] started to talk to me and four or five other students about the Marist vocation... only two of us entered. There were a few tears on the first evening, but... God gave me strength. What I am relating occurred in a house in San Pedro Tlaquepaque, on February 19, 1901" (Personal notes of Brother Marcelino Luis). In other words, eighteen months after the opening of the first Marist school in the Mexican Republic, there were already two Mexican young men, Marist students, who aspired to join the Institute.

First professed Marist Mexicans:

In 1903: Ignacio Vazquez del Castillo Negrete, Miguel Ortega Cetina; in 1906: Tomas Carvajal Coronado; in 1907: Manuel Hernandez; in 1908: Francisco Casillas Casillas, Agustin Navarro; in 1909: Damian Barrios, Santiago Gutierrez Reynoso, Daniel Paredes Rangel. That is to say, over the first ten years, the French Marist community welcomed 11 Mexican individuals, an average of one per year.

The total number of Mexicans, who participated in the Marist charism through religious profession, amounts to 1200 brothers. It is appropriate to ask ourselves: Why has the Mexican soul been so sensitive to the Marist vocation? It would not be audacious to think that the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary had a great appeal

to such a profoundly Marian population. The Marian notes of the charism are very much in line with the mysticism advocated in Tepeyac¹⁹.

Therefore, the total number of Mexicans who have allowed themselves to be existentially touched by the charism of Marcellin, come from various States: Jalisco (33%), Michoacan (15%), Federal District (14.00%), Guanajuato (6%), Queretaro (5%), Aguascalientes (3%), San Luis Potosi (3%), Yucatan (2%), Veracruz (2%), Nuevo Leon (2%), State of Mexico (2%), Hidalgo (2%), and (less than 2%): Zacatecas, Chihuahua, Oaxaca, Tamaulipas, Campeche, Coahuila, Nayarit, Puebla, Sonora, Chiapas, Baja California, Sinaloa, Morelos, Colima, Durango, Guerrero, Tabasco, Tlaxcala.

Throughout our history, a very high percentage (80%) of candidates for Marist life comes from the Marist Works of Mexico.

Basilio Rueda was the first Mexican to take the helm of the Marist Institute. And he did so for 18 years. Achieving the position of successor of Marcellin was one of the best responses to the

charism of Marcellin from the land of Mexico.

6. FORMATION HOUSES

The first formation house in Marist Mexico was opened in Tlaquepaque, Jalisco; a few postulants took up residence there. That house was soon set aside and another one was opened in Zamora, Michoacan, to which the postulants were subsequently transferred. On March 30, 1903, the first Mexican Marist Brothers took the habit of the Congregation in the Chapel of the Marist School. Shortly thereafter, Jacona, a neighbouring town to Zamora, was constituted as the heart of the incipient Province and subsequently welcomed the Juniorate and the Novitiate. However, once the Revolution gained strength, that house was confiscated and its residents expelled.

"As soon as the Marist Superiors of Mexico noticed the anti-Catholic spirit of the heads of the revolutionary movement, they determined that the only solution was to remove the members in formation from the country and to take them to the

¹⁹ Place of appearances of the Virgin Mary to Juan Diego, a poor and uneducated Indian.

The message of Guadalupe remains relevant: *"know and understand well, most humble of my sons, that I am the ever virgin Saint Mary, Mother of the true God [...] I wish for a church to be erected here, quickly, [...] because I am your merciful mother [...] In order to carry out what my clemency requires, go to the palace of the Bishop of Mexico and tell him that I manifest the great desire of having here, on this plain, a church built in my honor [...] Be assured that I will be extremely grateful and that I will recompense you, because I will make you happy and deserving of recompense for the efforts and fatigue you are going to endure for this mission. There, you have understood my instructions, my humble son, go and make every effort"* (1st apparition, extracts). The essence of the message of Guadalupe is expressed in these words of the Virgin to Juan Diego — and through him to the Mexicans: *"Am I not there, your Mother? Let nothing trouble you. Are you not in my heart? I am taking care of you."* This is how Fr Champagnat saw the Blessed Virgin, our "Good Mother".

Mary presents herself as a Messenger of God, the one preparing for the evangelization of Mexico. Today, in our context, we would say that the Virgin Mary presents herself as the Marian face of the Church... that is why there were so many conversions.

United States. The Oblate Fathers of the Immaculate Heart of Mary offered the Marist Brothers from Brownsville, Texas, their summer house in Port Lavaca to host these young men” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 042).

On February 18, 1915, the Brothers and the members in formation moved to San Antonio, Texas, into another property of the Oblate Fathers. A piece of land of approximately 10 hectares was purchased in that town. They began raising a building to hold a formation house

“which was to be simultaneously a constant pleading and continuous expression of gratitude for the 100 years of the Congregation named «la Casa del Centenario»²⁰. That house came to be a happy reality. The inauguration ceremony was held on January 2, 1917, and it was crowned with the taking of the habit by 5 postulants, the first profession of 6 novices and the final profession of four Brothers” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 044).

However, Providence had different plans. A tornado destroyed the house in 1920, without causing any damage to any of its residents. The message from God was obvious: we must return home, to Mexico. The exile in the United States was over.

At the beginning of 1921, a group entered the Postulancy in Tlalpan. Unfortunately, the house they resided in also hosted a Marist school. That im-

plied reciprocal disturbances and especially the constant risk of school inspections by the government. They thought about obtaining a house destined only for Postulancy and Novitiate. A very appropriate house, also located in Tlalpan, was soon found.

“Each time the students went to Mass in the Parish, they passed by a vast deserted farm with trees and quiet, that the Novices called «la Mansión del Silencio»²¹, or «la Casa de la Soledad»²².

The new owner, Mr. Francisco Llory, a good friend of the Brothers, made the farm available to the Congregation and agreed to have its name changed to «Quinta Soledad»²³. The inauguration took place on September 24, 1922” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 047).

In 1924, the political scene in Mexico was turning ominous again. The men in the federal government were very opposed to religious ideas. The return of radicalism was at hand.

“In anticipation of the violent storms that were closing in on the Church, the Brother Provincial and his Council decided to establish a juniorate in France and a Novitiate in Spain for the members of the Province in formation” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 048).

A Mexican house had been established in Carrion de los Condes in 1912 for Spanish missionary vocations; from then on, it would also welcome

²⁰ The House of the Centenary

²¹ The House of Silence

²² The House of Solitude

²³ Villa Solitude

members in formation sent from Mexico. In 1920, a property was acquired in Pontos, near Gerona (Catalonia), where young European missionaries were formed at the Novitiate and Scholasticate levels. From 1924, these premises would be destined also to accept members in formation from Mexico.

"In 1934 and 1935, when many Marist works in the Mexican Republic were closed, the Brother Provincial sent several Brothers to Europe to strengthen the teaching body of those formation houses" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 067).

In 1936, the Spanish Civil War wreaked havoc especially throughout the area of Catalonia, since it was the headquarters of the Communist militia. The members in formation in Pontos suffered significantly. They belonged to several nations: Spain, Mexico, Cuba, and the United States. However, despite their very difficult situation,

"they continued their formation. On September 8, 1937, several young men took the Marist habit and others pronounced their first vows. Some of them were conscripted. Sadly, 4 of them perished, but the others were able to see the light of Liberation in February 1939" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 068).

By the end of 1939, the European situation began to pose great difficulties to the sending of Mexican members in formation. It was necessary to keep them in Mexico. Thus, Tlalpan was once again reinstated as a haven for Marist candidates. The juniorate was then founded in Queretaro, in the

former "Molino San Antonio". The beginning of 1943 saw the arrival of the juniors emigrating from Tlalpan. At the beginning of 1943, a group of young men started their postulancy in Tlalpan, at the "Quinta Soledad". Among them was a young man of 18 named Basilio Rueda Guzman, who had entered Tlalpan in July 1942 as a candidate. He did his Novitiate in that same place and concluded it with his first religious profession on December 8, 1944.

A large group of Brothers had done their studies in Europe; they needed to validate these studies in order to display their degree of Elementary Teacher for the inspectors of the Ministry of Education. This, along with the need to train professionally the novices located in Tlalpan, led to the foundation of a training school in the city of Queretaro.

"On March 31, 1944, the Governor of the State of Queretaro issued a decree to officially approve the Queretan Regular School" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 084).

On January 5, 1945, the first group of newly-professed arrived at Molino San Antonio, in Queretaro, with the objective of starting their Scholasticate. A great deal of readjustment of space and premises was required.

"However, the buildings of the «Molino» were not sufficient to house the different Sections: School, Juniorate and now the Scholasticate. Therefore, a new building was raised in 1946 for the Scholastics" (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 096).

Thanks to the wise and repeated interventions of Brother Jose Villalon Mercado, who was subsequently and affectionately called “the Marist Bishop”, the lordly City of Morelia became a centre of Marist formation for young candidates. In fact,

“Archbishop Luis M^a Altamirano y Bulnes assigned them the building occupied by the Secondary School of Valladolid, authorizing the Brothers to carry out the modifications they deemed relevant. On February 8, 1947, the juniorate of Nuestra Señora de la Salud (Our Lady of Health) was inaugurated” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 096).

“In 1951, there was an attempt to send ten juniors to Brownsville to allow them to learn English and so they might live with young Americans aspiring to religious life. However, the project yielded no fruit and in 1957, the General Council, in agreement with the Provincial Council, made the painful but necessary decision to surrender the Brownsville and Laredo works to the Sister Province of the United States. Mexico would lose those houses, but the works were saved for the Church and for the Congregation” (Cf. 100ADPMEM, 104).

Following the division of Marist Mexico into two provinces, formation houses were established in each one of them. The Juniorate and the Scholasticate of Western Mexico were set up in Guadalajara (Loma Bonita); the Novitiate operated in Morelia.

During the 1960s, the interprovincial Novitiate was instituted and established in Morelia, Michoacan. The Scholasticates continued separate: one in the Centre, in the Federal Dis-

trict, and the western one, initially in Guadalajara, then in Monterrey.

During the 1970s, all formation houses, including the Postulancy, were placed under an interprovincial regime, with slight changes of location, sometimes in Queretaro, in Guadalajara, and in Encarnacion de Diaz.

In 2008, the Scholasticate was placed under an interprovincial regime and located in Guadalajara.

The attempts in both Mexican provinces to maintain formation houses in their respective national missionary areas, beyond simple Aspirancy or Postulancy houses, have not achieved the desired success up to the present.

7. SOME RELEVANT EVENTS

The establishment of a religious congregation in a country would be impossible without a large number of individuals who, in some way or another, lend their help in an altruistic and selfless manner. These are people who belong to different ecclesiastical establishments; they are members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, lay people or other religious. They are the ones whom we usually call benefactors. Their actual number is impossible to determine. However, we wish to refer in a representative way to the benefactors who have officially been recognized as such through the

granting of affiliation to the Marist Institute. These amount to a number of 52 (39 lay people, 9 of whom are women, 11 members of the clergy, 2 families).

In the year 1959, the number of Brothers in Mexico was 415, exercising their apostolate in 36 school centres with a total of 18,475 students. In the light of those figures, the General Council determined on the creation of two provinces: CENTRAL MEXICO, which would comprise the type "A" calendar schools, (that is, with vacations in December and January, located in the Central Plateau); and WESTERN MEXICO, the type "B" calendar schools (that is, with vacations in July and August, at the borders and on the coasts). The division of the Mexican Marist Province came into effect on December 12, 1959, on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The Province of Central Mexico with Brother J. Jesus M. Rodriguez as Superior, maintained "Quinta Soledad" as Provincial House. In Western Mexico, whose Provincial was Brother Jose Salvador Heredia, the Provincial Residence had to be built in the Loma Bonita Sur Colony, in Zapopan, with additional buildings to host a Juniorate and a Scholasticate.

All in all, from the beginning to this date, 198 works have been opened, of which 128 were closed. There are presently 70 works. With regard to Provincial Superiors: 22 were Mexicans, 5 French and 1 Spaniard.

8. BY WAY OF SELF-EVALUATION

What should be emphasized with respect to the foundation of works:

- The constant presence of extremely generous lay benefactors.
- Donations received; in addition to cash, also real estate properties and land placed at the service of the Brothers.
- The favourable intercession of Bishops and Parish Priests.
- The financial assistance of charitable associations.
- The importance of former students.
- The capacity of Brothers to speak directly with the highest civil, educational and ecclesiastical authorities.
- Higher Education in Mexico is not presented as Catholic, but rather as of Christian inspiration, certainly to avoid falling under the strict control of the higher ecclesiastical authorities. Could it not also be to evade potentially anti-clerical scrutiny, in the light of our national history?
- Marist Mexico has offered its Brothers a wide range of apostolic works, all within the charismatic mission of the Institute, that is, the Christian education of children and

young people. This diversity has made it possible for the personnel to avoid having to move to other Administrative Units to carry out the educational apostolate they feel called to perform.

8.1. On the way to improvement

From the initial years of Marist Mexico, the Superiors have been especially concerned about ensuring a religious and professional formation for their members. As soon as it was possible, the Brothers obtained their degrees as teachers and, whenever circumstances allowed it, they launched into university studies or Regular Higher Education. This ideal of improvement was the engine which drove the organization of the Marist Education Conference in Mexico in 1967, whose objective was a self-analysis of the Brothers' educational accomplishments. The Marist Catechesis Conference in 1996 was especially important. The Conference was developed with the help of many Brothers and a large number of teachers dedicated to catechesis. The graduates of Marist education are evidence of an effort in favour of the improvement of lay teachers in Marist Mexico.

What Mexico received from the Marist Charism?

At the time of the arrival of the Marist Brothers of Champagnat, the Mexican nation received an enormous grace. The simple name of "Marists" was a

reinforcement of all that is Marian and deep-rooted in Mexican hearts. The comprehensive education they offered protected Mexican children and youth from the prevalent positivism and secularism. The importance they attributed to sports, art and joy captivated the soul of the Mexican people.

What the Marist Charism received from Mexico?

A sizable number of Brothers, many of them outstanding, very many pupils and a good collection of priestly, religious and lay vocations. A Brother Basilio Rueda, an authentic philosopher of Renewed Marist Religious Life, who, through his circular letters, achieved a veritable "Summa Theologica" for the times following Vatican Council II.

A great number of the personnel of Marist Mexico have lent their services at Institute Level, such as: Superior Generals (2), General Councillors (6), Delegated Visitors (4), Directors of Spirituality Groups (5), Directors of Special Courses (5), General Administration House Managers (4), Members of International Commissions (4), Members of the Reception Community at the Hermitage (3), General Library of the General Curia (2), Auxiliary Members of Provincial Diagnostic Retreats (3).

And also that Mexican attitude which produces men of hospitality, dialogue and sensitivity; it is a call to attention for the entire Institute about the sig-

nificance of the promotion of priestly and Marist vocations among the student bodies of our own schools. Let us recall the very high percentage of former Marist students among the professed Marist religious men of Mexico. The Marist world has also received the message that it is best to remain in the country when there are social crises and religious persecutions, at any price, even at the cost of a very well simulated secularization. Mexican Marists have been contributing worldwide to the love for the Marist spiritual heritage, by doing translations, organizing courses on the subject, providing relevant materials through the Internet.

9. FROM PAST TO PRESENT, GLANCING TO THE FUTURE

Yes, we will continue the charism of Marcellin as long as we continue responding to the needs and the calls of the children and youth of today. However, to succeed, we must:

- Take new information into account – cultural, religious, social, political.
- Make room for the growing interrelationship within the Society of Mary: Brothers, Fathers, and Sisters.
- Make way for and strengthen the leading role of the laity in the Marist mission and spirituality.

- Implement a process which can help to maintain the core aspects of the charism, setting aside what is only circumstantial.
- Continue explaining our present, while contemplating the past; and continue preparing for the future based on the progress and insights of the present.
- Exploit the huge richness of our charismatic mission, that is, the evangelization through Christian education of youth which covers all aspects, school and non-school.
- Continue being “Weavers of fraternity”.
- Increasingly open up to the internationality of the Institute.
- Continue responding to the “Montagnes of today”.
- Apostolic diversification in the educational field was a success in Marist Mexico: maintain and intensify it.

There is talk about re-foundation. We must not fear that term. It is so beautiful and to the point, just as the one of re-evangelization, so often used by John Paul II. Ours is a work of the Holy Spirit. There is no fear. Charism is like water: it always flows and fills everything on the way; if it gets blocked, the sun comes to its aid and evaporates it so it may come back down as rain, even if it is elsewhere.

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SKETCHING A HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE



André Lanfrey
fms

There does not at present exist a true global history of the Institute even though, from early on, the Congregation produced some works that did this to some extent. So we have, in 1856, the first part of *The Life of the Founder* which evoked in detail the years 1789-1840; and also the first section of Chapter 23 which briefly covers the main events occurring from 1840 to 1856. The *Annals of the Institute* of Brother Avit, completed in 1891 give a chronicle of the whole starting from 1775. But this document was not partially published until 1972 and *in extenso* in 1993.

In between times, the Institute has been content with establishing a detailed Chronology, the first in 1917 (Circulars, Volume 13) and the second in 1976. A third Chronology (up to 2009) has just been published. And we should mention a History of the Institute for use in the houses of forma-

tion published in 1947¹ and the quite recent *Historia del Instituto de los Hermanos Maristas*, edited in Argentina in 2004, which has the advantage of sketching our history from the origins to 2001. Its author, Brother Luis Di Giusto, in his foreword, clearly situates his work as an instrument for the formation of the Brothers.

Generally, from 1856 to the present, the publications mentioned above have been concerned with history only indirectly, their fundamental aim being edification, formation, or succinct information. One may, however, accord a special place to Brother Avit, who did not restrict himself to the role of chronicler. This is probably the reason why his work remained unpublished for so long.

It is also necessary to take into account a *Histoire des Frères Maristes* from the origins to 1930² preserved in

¹ *Histoire de l'institut des Petits Frères de Marie (1817-1947)*, Economat général des Frères Maristes, Saint Genis-Laval, 223 p.

² But the author seems to have worked on it right up to about 1960.

the archives in Rome, whose importance of which Brother Juan Moral has recently reminded us. Its author is Brother Marie Nicet, (Claude-Marie Thomas), a French Brother of the province of Varennes-sur-Allier, born in 1880, who left for Brazil in 1898. Apart from a spell at Grugliasco in 1908-9, he spent his whole life in Brazil and died at Mendes in 1962. Composed of exercise books handwritten in French and currently bound in seven volumes, this history seems to offer a real interest, for it looks at the Institute as a whole and the author, gifted with a critical spirit, seems to have consulted, at least partially, the archives of the Institute. But this work of considerable size (about 6000 pages) seems rather uneven. It is doubtful that its publication has ever been considered.

Apart from this interesting venture, strictly historical work in the congregation began in the years 1950-60 and has been illustrated since by works of quality but mainly limited to the origins. On the history of the Institute after 1840 partial works (histories of provinces, biographies, etc.), often of excellent quality, are not lacking, but are not well known.

In fact, the material for a global history is there but to bring it all together would be a daunting enterprise: first, because it is necessary to master the abundant documentation, and, especially, because writing history is not about reviving the past but about interpreting it afresh again, and being

open to re-assessing presently accepted interpretations.

But can a group such as ours neglect to have such a global view, even if it has its limits? Since 1950-60 we have, in fact, been re-evaluating our origins and this effort must be continued because, far from calling our spiritual identity into question, it contributes to its renewal.

So it is with this strong conviction and some acquaintance with the sources that I am allowing myself to sketch below a possible overall plan for a more detailed history that could be later written.

1st PART: FOUNDATION OF THE BROTHERS' BRANCH

While Fr Champagnat is the founder, his work benefited from the help, decisive though often problematic, of many other players, the principal ones being the first Brothers, the Society of Mary, and the diocese of Lyon. One can also say that he is the inheritor of a certain family milieu and a particular Christian background.

1.1. An inheritance and a precocious vocation

Marcellin Champagnat is the heir, notably through his father, of an intense missionary legacy going back to St François Régis in the seventeenth century, friend of the parish priest of

Marlhes and a veritable renewer of the parish. His activity was continued by the clergy and by the confraternity of the Penitents of the Blessed Sacrament, an association of Christian action and formation, of which J.B. Champagnat was the last treasurer before the Revolution.

Marcellin's vocation as educator and priest appears to have been born after the deaths of two of his brothers and his father in 1803-1804. It is so deeply rooted that his serious learning difficulties and the family's financial problems would prove no obstacle. Around 1810-1812, he states his willingness to "instruct rich and poor". In 1815, he recognizes himself as "slave" of Mary, that is to say, bound to her by a particularly tight bond³. His Marial piety, conventional enough up to then, appears from then on marked by abandonment, as many of his prayers testify.

1.2. The encounter with the Marist project

When he becomes associated with the Marist aspirants, Champagnat has already his own perception of the society and the pastoral needs of his times: "We must have brothers," he says, affirming a Church in which priestly action cannot do without apostolic lay people. The weak impact of his words on the group suggests

his relative marginality. He does not seem either to have deeply integrated the term "Mariist" originating with Courveille⁴; and the image of the tree of three branches (priests, sisters, laity), dear to J.C. Colin, scarcely accords with his idea of a branch of brothers.

Still, he will feel himself profoundly linked by a double vocation: to contribute to the birth of the Society of Mary and, within it, the branch of the Brothers. He has also made his own the Pauline apostolic spirituality of the Second Letter to the Corinthians, which is the inspiration of the Marist consecration of July 1816. He has also, quietly but strongly, shared the utopian vision of a Marial Church inspired by Maria of Agreda, renewal of the primitive Church at the end of time, of which the Society of Mary conceives itself the vanguard.

1.3. Lavalla as an "oratory"

Two major sources permit the drawing up of a history of the foundation of the Marist Brothers: the *Life* of Champagnat, with a very approximate chronology, and the documents contained in *Origines Maristes*.

We know that, having scarcely arrived in Lavalla, Champagnat interprets two meetings as complementary

³ The word « slave » is frequently the translation of the Latin « servus » which can be translated as « servant » or « slave ». It must be understood as a sort of state of vassalage creating a contractual bond, both affective and institutional, between Mary, the « domina », translated in French by « Dame », and her servant.

⁴ He would rather use the term « Brothers of Mary ».

signs: with a dying youth he has to instruct *in extremis*, and with Jean-Marie Granjon, disposed to fall in with his project of setting up an apostolic group. In acting in this way, Champagnat also seems to be following a classical strategy envisaged for their parish ministry by “the friends of the cord”, a society of seminarians at St Irénée: setting up a secret group of young people to form them to “the exercise of zeal”. This was the way Father Lefranc had already acted in 1806 at Coutouvre in gathering around him pious women, among them Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn. So it is to create an “oratory”,⁵ that is, a centre of apostolic action that, at once, and in face of the opposition of the parish priest, Champagnat rents then buys a house, where Jean-Marie Granjon and Jean-Baptiste Audras begin living on 2 January 1817.

Champagnat is not their superior but only their spiritual director and formator. He instructs them, counsels them, shares his projects with them, but they are autonomous. And it is perhaps on the initiative of J.M. Granjon (*Mémoire Bourdin*) that, probably at the end of 1817, the first Brothers begin to take in poor or vagabond children whom they feed and educate, making their house rapidly an official school, to which parents willingly send their children. On Sundays, they go to more remote places to catechize children and adults. After 1820 without doubt, the

village school will be reorganized (Life Ch. 7 p. 72) and a dormitory (little boarding school) added. The Brothers take classes in some neighbouring hamlets, such as Luzernaud and Chomiol.

Apparently, the Brothers of Lavalla are not content with this limited activity: at St Sauveur-en-Rue (from 1820) and Bourg-Argental (from 1822), they reproduce the Lavalla model, doing collections for the poor, evening classes, care of the sick, the repression of dances, and even exhorting the tepid to practice the sacraments. Brother Laurent, alone at Le Bessat then at Tarentaise, is himself an example of this type of life, predominantly apostolic and leaving community life in second place. This does not yet seem to be a congregation but an association of “brothers”, that is to say, pious laymen who are not merely teachers but take on a range of tasks.

At the same time, life at Lavalla and in the several schools is one of extreme austerity, from poverty but also from a concern for mortification, in the tradition of the Desert Fathers and in imitation of La Trappe: no mattresses but straw palliasses, never wine, etc.

This style of life, perhaps advocated by J.M. Granjon more than Fr Champagnat, arouses both admiration and criticism. From 1819, it would seem,

⁵ Term employed in the *Mémoire Bourdin* drawn up around 1830 (OM2/ doc. 754) and very probably coming from Champagnat.

denunciations are made to the ecclesiastical and university authorities. It is certainly in response to these that Fr Champagnat comes to live with the Brothers, probably at the end of 1819. But in 1820, Fr. Dervieux, curé of St Chamond, threatens to have Lavalla closed because it is accused of being a clandestine college. The Brothers' tradition partially exonerates Fr Dervieux from responsibility for this harsh trial, for later, in a better disposition, this priest will render great services to the Brothers. The same tradition unduly blackens the Vicar General Bochard who, keen to form a diocesan congregation of Brothers, has actually protected the nascent work.

In the meantime, the community has filled up with young men coming from Lavalla and the surrounding communes. A superior has been elected – J.M. Granjon evidently – and a teacher (in 1819-1820) has inducted certain Brothers in the simultaneous method, making of them true modern teachers. Around 1820, the work of Lavalla begins to become specialized and to take on a more marked religious and educational character.

1.4. A reorientation around 1822

The sending of Jean-Marie Granjon to Bourg-Argental in 1822 seems to mark a shift towards a life with less emphasis on apostolate and mortification and more on community, suitable for reassuring public opinion and the ecclesiastical authorities. Al-

though still director of the Brothers, Granjon loses his role of master of novices and is marginalised.

His replacement by Brother Louis resolves another problem, for the curé of Marlihes, Fr. Alliot, and doubtless other curés, consider the Brothers' work as a simple house of formation for teachers who are then placed under their exclusive authority. The recall of Brother Louis, a decision to which the latter fully adheres, thus signifies that the Brothers of Champagnat are not simple parish assistants but religious obedient to a superior, even if, at this date, they have no official existence.

About 1820, therefore, the little group of brothers seems divided into two tendencies: at St Sauveur-en BRue and Bourg-Argental, Brothers Etienne Rouméty and Jean-Marie Granjon maintain the style of the first years and at Tarentaise, Brother Laurent seems in a similar situation. At Lavalla, on the other hand, Brother Louis and Fr Champagnat give the work a character much more like religious congregations and with an apostolate limited to the school.

1.5. A highly significant crisis of recruitment

The years 1820-22 are particularly testing, for the work of Champagnat and his Brothers does not seem to be attached to any known model and even offers contrasts of behaviour which blur its image. It has not yet received official support from the Uni-

versity or the Diocese. Finally, curés are asking not for “Brothers” on the congregational model but for teacher-sacristan-choir masters, who are often given the name of “Brother” without in any way belonging to a congregation.

The recruitment crisis Fr Champagnat’s work experiences, therefore, is located on a very precise level: it does not lack candidates prepared to form a traditional teaching role (the testimonies seem to indicate that the number of “Brothers” at Lavalla is relatively high and the accusation of forming a clandestine college most likely comes from this) but once formed, these, put off by a life which is austere and without guarantee of a future, set up as independent teachers or look for a less exacting existence elsewhere. Lavalla is a sort of informal teacher training school (*école normale*) and the early project is threatened by a traditional conception of what a teacher is. But Champagnat is resigned not to take this direction.

1.6. From oratory to congregation (1822-24)

The arrival in 1822 of eight postulants from the Haute-Loire, who want to be Brothers within a congregational model, is not only the occasion for resolving the recruitment crisis and the relative marginalization of Brother Jean-Marie, but it provides a reacti-

vation of the whole project⁶. The decision to receive them is so serious that, around Easter, Fr Champagnat calls what could be seen as a sort of first general chapter where it is decided to receive these young men. In consequence, the house must be enlarged. This is probably also the occasion for establishing a more precise rule which demands stricter obedience to the superior. The formation appears to be more based on a monastic model but without excessive mortification.

Finally, Brother Jean-Baptiste indicates that it is in 1822 that the teaching they were receiving is summarized in fifteen sentences (Life p. 103): piety, love of Jesus and Mary, catechetical zeal, but also an ascetic religious life. Brother Jean Marie, away from Lavalla since 1820, appears to show his disagreement with the new way by running away to the Trappists of Aiguebelle. But the congregational model seems the only way to avoid the project becoming banal.

The Vicar General Bochard has certainly encouraged this change; and the visit of the Brothers of Valbenoite to Lavalla in May 1822 with the idea of a merger, could not have been made without the encouragement of the ecclesiastical authorities. The difficulty is that Bochard wants to unify the nascent congregations of Brothers under the name of “Brothers of the Cross of Jesus”.

⁶ Brother Jean-Baptiste recalls that they wanted to join the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The Marist sources after 1822 no longer speak about problems of recruitment, as if the arrival of the postulants from the Haute-Loire had definitively resolved them. But, in fact, most of these postulants eventually depart so the newcomers from the Haute-Loire only fill a short-term gap. The true explanation for the turnaround of the situation is that, from this point on, the support of Bochard, which is well known in the diocese of Lyon, gives the work a decided boost. From now on, many parish priests direct their young men towards Lavalla, considered as the diocesan hub for popular education. This is why, from 1823, Champagnat, accompanied by two Brothers, is looking for a suitable location to set his work on a firmer footing.

If the arrival of Mgr. de Pins at the beginning of 1824 frees the Marist Brothers from Bochard's control, it does not constitute a revolution. The Apostolic Administrator⁷ does nothing more than confirm what has been realized: a diocesan association of Brothers with its centre at Lavalla. The real novelty is the appointment of Fr Courveille and Fr Terrailon to the Hermitage, which shows that the ecclesiastical authorities, and particularly Fr Barou, Vicar General, are encouraging the birth of a diocesan Society of Mary with two branches: the priests for the formation of the Brothers and inci-

dentally for missions; the Brothers for the schools.

In the same year that the Hermitage is being built, the society of the Brothers is being constituted with the Prospectus of the Little Brothers of Mary, which makes them an educational society under the patronage of the Archdiocese⁸. Champagnat distributes to the Brothers a *Petit Ecrit* (Life p. 128-130) summarising the spiritual and educational doctrine of the Institute.

2nd PART: FAILURE OF A SOCIETY OF MARY OF LYON AND DURABILITY OF THE BRANCH OF THE BROTHERS

From the beginning, there was a fundamental difference between Champagnat and the first Brothers: Champagnat saw himself first of all as part of the project of the Society of Mary of 1816, while the Brothers saw themselves as the branch founded in 1817.

2.1. A Society of Mary according to the brothers

It is probable that in the eyes of Champagnat and Courveille the year 1824 was that of the foundation of the

⁷ Cardinal Fesch is still Archbishop in name

⁸ It is not a diocesan congregation since ecclesiastical opinion is firmly opposed to this sort of institution and de Pins, whose arrival has aroused polemic, cannot go against this current of thought.

Society of Mary, the period 1817-24 having been only a trial. In their eyes, the definitive Society could be constituted with Courveille as superior general and Champagnat as administrator. But, by choosing Champagnat as their superior in 1825, the Brothers revealed that this was not their point of view and that the society had been in existence since 1817, with Champagnat as founder and superior.

Courveille could have contented himself with provisionally filling the role of superior general, which the Brothers were not contesting with him, if the priests had been able to agree on the form to give to the Society of Mary. But Terrailon was opposed to the very monastic views of Courveille and had no confidence in him. As for Champagnat, he seems to have been torn between the two, and at the same time fully occupied with the Brothers, since besides the debts and the management of the schools there was also the opposition of the most senior ones: Granjon, veritable co-founder up to then, and Etienne Roumésy; these do not accept the new form of the work and end up by departing. Even Brother Louis for a time considers becoming a priest.

For the priests, the adventure ends in disaster with the illness of Champagnat, followed by the departures of Courveille and Terrailon in 1826. The work is saved, partly through the fidelity of Brother Louis, first companion of Jean Marie Granjon and always

ready to take on difficult posts (Marlhes, master of novices, Charlieu). A new factor also carries much weight: since 1822, a number of disciples formed in a more classical way and ready to accept the new organization have entered. Brother Stanislas, who also contributes to saving the work during Champagnat's illness, with the help of the ecclesiastical authorities (Fr. Dervieux), is emblematic of this new generation. Finally, once superior, Fr Champagnat knows how to get himself obeyed. The crisis of the reading method, the sewn soutane and the cloth stockings in 1829 marks the end of this difficult mutation of the work of Lavalla into the Brothers' branch of the Society of Mary, and their habit now resembles that of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The years 1817- 1829, then, mark the passage from a work piloted by a priest and a layman, somewhat anarchistic and with an austere view of religious life, to a diocesan religious teaching association. Far from being passive, the Brothers have been able to impose their own vision of the Society of Mary: for them, the society of the priests, coming later, is not central. This is why, in the Life of Champagnat in 1856, (Ch. 3 p.28ff), the consecration of Fourvière of 1816 is hardly mentioned. As for the revelation of Le Puy, so important for the first Marist aspirants, it is trivialized in a terse statement (Life Ch. 13 p. 133): "Fr Courveille claimed to have originated the idea of founding the Marist Society".

While Champagnat accepts an evolution of the work of the Brothers he has not foreseen (*Nisi Dominus*), without, however, renouncing the work of the Fathers, Courveille refuses a society which does not correspond to his revelation of Le Puy (Letter from Aiguebelle). Yet it remains true that the Hermitage becomes a monastery living according to a rule, a result in which Courveille had a hand. Community, cloister, the Rule, and school become the major axes of the project⁹.

2.2. Failure of the Society of Mary of the Hermitage

In 1827, Champagnat observes that the work of the Brothers has survived the storm but he thinks he is not the man capable of bringing about the advent of the society of the priests which he believes essential. It is Fr Séon who, starting in 1827, takes on reconstituting this together with Bourdin and Pompallier, and with the blessing of the diocese. This is the period when the priests of the Hermitage live under the same rule as the Brothers, and are responsible for their training, while at the same time providing mission services.

The revolution of 1830, short but violently anticlerical, weakens the posi-

tion of Mgr de Pins, closely linked to the previous regime, and all of a sudden undermines the project of Christian re-conquest through the alliance of throne and altar. That is doubtless behind a dispute between Champagnat and Séon over the role of the priests within the society of the Hermitage: Séon wants to give priority to the mission, while Champagnat considers that the care of the Brothers is their first task.

The creation of a centre of unity for the Society of the priests in the person of J.C. Colin at the end of 1830 marginalises Champagnat's interpretation: from now on almost all the priests of the Hermitage recognize the model of Belley as theirs. In 1832 they install themselves at Valbenoîte, while Pompallier, closer to Champagnat and the diocesan authorities, goes off to Lyon to take the first steps in setting up the Marist Third Orders of men and women.

Champagnat finds himself once again almost alone with the Brothers. For some years, there is a coolness: the retreats of the Brothers are preached by the Jesuits. Yet in 1834, Champagnat tries to bring back into the fold the Marist Fathers established at Valbenoîte by offering them the house of La Grange-Payre, quite close to the Hermitage.

⁹ It is also a factory, an agricultural colony, a boarding school, a retirement home for elderly men and a missionary centre.

2.3. A congregation of brothers flourishing but fragile

The Hermitage has remarkably survived the troubles of the 1830 revolution thanks to the sang-froid and flexibility of Champagnat, but also because the work already rests on a solid spirituality (humility, zeal, Jesus and Mary...) and a strong identity established between 1817 and 1829. Supported by the diocese and stimulated by the Guizot Law of 1833, which imposes the establishment of a boys' school in each commune, it experiences rapid development. From now on, Fr Champagnat figures as founder and educational specialist. J.C. Colin, who seems for a start very reticent with regard to the work of the Brothers ("your Brothers"), gradually becomes more favourable ("our Brothers").

But the work is fragile because Champagnat has still not obtained official authorization and, aided only by two priests (Besson and Matricon), he lacks teams for formation. So he has to resolve the problem by resorting to expedients, which will become lasting: associating himself with Fr Mazelier of St Paul-Trois-Châteaux and choosing collaborators among the Brothers: Brother François, and also Brothers Louis-Marie and Jean-Baptiste.

In 1836, the fact that Rome gives recognition only to the priests, who see themselves given the title of Society of Mary, creates a serious problem: if the Brothers are not of the So-

ciety of Mary, who are they? The problem is provisionally resolved by modifying the formula of the vows, from now on made to the Superior of the Marist Brothers' branch but "according to the Constitutions of the Order". Another partial response is given by the Rule of 1837 which is more like a set of customs than a rule but answers an urgent need. The "Principles of Reading", first teaching manual of the Institute, strongly affirms the teaching identity of the Institute.

2.4. Impossible integration with the Society of Belley

In making his vows at Belley in 1836, Champagnat accepts a Society of Mary which has not been constructed according to his views. At the same time, through his person, it is the work of the Brothers that is implicitly recognized. Moreover, the departure for the mission of Oceania includes Brothers, for the original mystical conception of the Society of Mary transcends the canonical definition. The following year, Champagnat renounces his office of superior of the Brothers but is immediately reappointed by J.C. Colin: from now on, they are a branch of the Society of Mary.

After several tentative moves to assert authority, J.C. Colin wisely accords the Brothers great autonomy and it is significant that, in 1839, he asks them to elect a Director, reserving for himself the General Superiorship. In fact, Colin is not too sure

what to do with this work which does not seem to him to enter into the original S.M. project. His attempt to clarify the situation by creating a single corps of auxiliary Brothers of the Fathers is quickly cut short. He is also offended when, a few weeks before the death of Champagnat, the civil society for the property, set up to take over the inheritance, includes only the Brothers, and especially when the act has been passed in St Chamond and not in Lyon with M. Berloty, notary to the Fathers. For all these reasons, he envisages a time for handing back the branch of the teaching Brothers into the hands of the Archbishop of Lyon. But through his Spiritual Testament, Fr Champagnat, who has never conceived of his work outside the Society of Mary, makes him his spiritual and institutional heir.

It is in 1844 that Colin envisages separating the Brothers of the SM and in 1845 that the Fathers' Chapter takes the decision. But it is necessary to wait until the Brothers have obtained legal authorization (1851) and the Generalate of Colin has ended (1854) for the Brothers' independence to become effective. The root reason for the separation is an old one: the Fathers see themselves as the centre of the Society, but at the Hermitage the Brothers consider themselves as the centre. They wish to be of the SM but without giving up their own tradition. The great number of Brothers (several hundred) under the control of some dozens of Fathers can also seem an unreasonable responsibility.

3rd PART: INSTITUTIONALISATION AND EXPANSION (1840-1903)

Fr Colin and the first superiors of the Brothers have to get down to a tough task: to give a civil and canonical statute as well as a doctrine and « definitive » rule to a body in rapid expansion.

3.1. Syntheses of Marist spirituality

Fr Champagnat died without having completed his work: no definitive Rule, no canonical or official authorization. The government of the Congregation is not well defined: it seems to have functioned as a triumvirate, Brother François, as Director, seemingly only enjoying a primacy of honour and, often ill, not having as much authority and dynamism as his two assistants, Brothers Louis-Marie and Jean-Baptiste. In 1841, a letter of Brother Louis-Marie reports the severe criticisms of Fr Colin with respect to the government: the work is heavily indebted, the superiors are too severe, and there are numerous withdrawals: "You are on voyage each in your own direction, you can't seem to agree with one another". Yet it is under the Generalate of Brother François that the Institute obtains two decisive results: government approval (1851) and the beginnings of Roman approbation (1860). However, the two assistants appear to have been for a long time partisans of a closer union with the Society of Mary,

while Brother François seems more cautious.

On the spiritual plane, foundations are laid: in 1848-51, Brother François publishes, with the help of Brother Louis-Marie and Fr Matricon, a long circular in four parts on "The Spirit of Faith", the first synthesis of Marist spirituality, strongly inspired by Champagnat's teaching, although he is never cited. The heart of the circular is the idea that, as a Christian, as an educator, as a religious, and as a Marist, the Brother must live the spirit of faith.

In 1852-54, the publication of the *Common Rules*, the *Rules of Government* and the *Teachers Guide*, strongly influenced by the instructions of Champagnat, which are still in many memories and have been copied, give the congregation at last a precise body of laws. But the *Annals of the Institute of Brother Avit* testify that this work of institutionalization has not been carried out without serious conflict with regard to the interpretation of the tradition.

The *Manual of Piety*, certainly used by masters of novices for a long time but printed only in 1855, gives in its second part, in 13 chapters, the "Qualities of a good Brother" consisting of piety, love of Jesus, devotion to Mary, and zeal. This exposition of Marist spirituality is closed by a series of 52 sayings from Champagnat which summarize the primitive teaching: in particular, 15 sayings can be found there which Brother Jean-Baptiste dates

from 1822 (*Life* Ch. 10 p. 103 ff).

Finally, the *Life of Champagnat*, published in 1856, presents him (preface) as a founder of an order in the tradition of the Desert Fathers, St Benedict and St Francis. The first part of the work, historic, largely confirms an oral tradition which tends to excessively blacken certain partners (Courveille, Bochard), diminish the role of J.M. Granjon, and give scant importance to the history of the Society of Mary before 1817. The second part of this *Life*, more doctrinal, shows us Champagnat under different aspects:

1. the spiritual man imbued with joy, the spirit of faith, confidence in God... ;
2. the ascetic obedient, mortified, poor, humble, pure... ;
3. the "father" loving his disciples, forming them, correcting them;
4. the man zealous towards the poor and a great educator. In sum, although a priest, Champagnat appears as the perfect example of the Brother, who is invited to follow the Rule which conserves his spirit.

After 1860, Brother Jean-Baptiste, using the corpus of manuscript documents which has served in the drawing up of the fundamental texts, provides other books such as *Biographies of Some Brothers* (1868), *Opinions, Sayings, Conferences and Instructions* (1868), *The Good Superior* (1869), which complete and update notably the doctrine established in the years 1852-56. He is also, it would ap-

pear, the major artisan of works of spirituality combining the early spirituality with his own teachings. These are: *The Principles of Perfection* (1865) and the *Directory of Solid Piety*, which take up and develop the contents of the *Manual of Piety*; the *Meditations on the Passion and on the Names of Our Lord* (1870), and finally, a posthumous work, (1875) the *Meditations on the Mystery of the Incarnation, on the Virtues of Jesus Christ and on the Eucharist*. On his death, in 1872, Brother Louis-Marie recognizes in him the legislator of the congregation and a second founder, unfairly minimizing the role of Brother François who has had, in the preserving of the spiritual memory of the Founder, a much greater role than that commonly recognized¹⁰.

3.2. Becoming an order/generalate of Br Louis-Marie

In 1840 the congregation has about 280 Brothers, 826 in 1851, 1681 in 1861, 3600 in 1877 and around 5000 in 1903. This dynamic growth is firstly the fruit of a mystique of the original name: Champagnat considered that every postulant, having been sent by Mary, must be received, and sent away only if he did not enter into the spirit of the society. The maintenance of this tradition obliges the congregation to great expense, a rapid formation, and very many departures and expulsions. It is already a cause of dis-

cord between Champagnat and Courveille in 1825-26. Basically, the real entry into the congregation is perpetual profession of the three vows, after a short period of novitiate and some years during which the Brother pronounces temporary vows, then, starting from 1840, the single vow of obedience, from which he can easily be released.

As numbers of professed Brothers needed for positions of direction are always insufficient, and as the senior Brothers are diluted in a mass of juniors different in spirit and often better educated than them, in 1855 the Superiors institute a vow of stability which reserves eligibility for chapters and important posts to Brothers chosen for their good spirit and great ability. So the Congregation quickly comes to operate at three levels: first, an unstable mass of young executants; second, the Directors, in principle professed; and third, an elite, guardians of the spirit of the Institute. In the end, a quite fluid whole, halfway between a confraternity and a religious order at a time when Canon Law has not yet given the congregations a clear status. The Brothers of the Christian Schools function the same (they have "employed novices" without vows) but their civil and canonical status is more solid.

In addition, the Marist Brothers are still perceived by the ecclesiastical au-

¹⁰ The fact that his cause of beatification has been undertaken while no one, it seems, has thought of one for Brother Jean-Baptiste, may appear as a tardy recognition of his work.

thorities as a branch of the Society of Mary wrongfully separated from its trunk – a third order, really – and able to claim the status of an independent order. The great number of defections, moreover, tends to support this interpretation. The Archbishop of Lyon, part of the Marist Fathers, and perhaps the Roman Curia consider that the Marist Brothers are not capable of governing themselves.

The problem is clearly posed in 1860 when Mgr. Chaillot, the Roman consultant, having examined the Constitutions, declares that they are too centralized and that power could degenerate into despotism, the Superior General being appointed for life and the Assistants governing the Provinces directly. Summoned to make the Constitutions less centralized, the Superiors, with the accord of the great majority of the capitulants and following the advice of Mgr. Parisis, go on, right up to 1903, to make use of oblique methods of maintaining a rigorous centralization, which seems to them indispensable for the cohesion of the corps they have in their charge.

To counter this suspicion and the problem of perseverance, the Superiors seek to diminish the number of departures by persuading the Brothers that fidelity to their vocation is a rigorous duty involving their salvation. Nor is it by chance that, in the *Life*,

Champagnat is presented as founder of an order.

The Superiors are hesitant to reform the initial formation of the Brothers. Hence, in his Circular of 1867, Brother Louis-Marie considers that the essential part of this formation, after a very short novitiate, is incumbent on the Brother Directors who, however, have neither the time nor often the capacity for it. However, the falling off of vocations imposes, from 1867 on, the foundation of juniorates, allowing earlier recruitment and a longer formation. The veritable explosion of juniorates after 1876 will constitute a revolution in recruitment and formation.

So if initial formation remains weak under Brother Louis-Marie, he announces from his very first Circular as General (1860) a policy aimed at restoring regularity, piety, and charity in the Congregation, which he promotes by a series of Circulars throughout his Generalate, largely appealing to the memory of the Founder. If one adds that he built the new mother house at St Genis-Laval, Provincial Houses and boarding schools, Brother Louis-Marie may be seen as a veritable re-founder of the work: the one who made it pass from a rather fluid entity to the status of a solidly organized congregation. Nevertheless, a certain authoritarianism causes some disquiet among the Brothers.

3.3. Defensive, internal crisis, world expansion

After the short Generalate of Brother Nestor¹¹ (1880-1883), Brother Théophile (1883-1907) continues the tradition of Brother Louis-Marie in a much less favourable climate, since the advent of the secularist republic creates continually greater difficulties for the Congregation.

In the face of this, he develops works in Europe and outside it, in the old Christian countries and the mission lands. The first expansion having been towards Oceania, internationalization towards the English-speaking countries follows very quickly: the province of the British Isles, first non Francophone Province, is erected in 1873. All together, the perspective is as much defensive as expansive: The Gospel must certainly be proclaimed, but it is also necessary to keep the young Brothers out of military service, prepare eventual safe havens, develop new zones for recruitment, spread education and French culture. In short, the Institute makes little distinction between mission, European expansion, and concern for security.

Brother Théophile takes strong action against a party which denounces his dubious schemes involving the as yet unapproved Constitutions. But

there is also a crisis of conscience within a body whose cultural level has risen sharply and whose members aspire to apostolic orientations more in keeping with the spirit of the times. Moreover, there is now a dissociation between teaching and catechesis; between profession and vocation, and the teaching religious wonders whether he is first of all religious or first of all teacher. The establishment of an *école supérieure* (scholasticate), of the second novitiate, and the Great Spiritual Exercises before profession, as well as an opening to post-school and extracurricular education provide a partial response to these problems. The introduction of the cause of the Founder in Rome in 1896 also forms part of the arsenal of measures aimed at responding to a crisis of identity. But there remains a certain divergence of interpretation of the Marist identity between the head of the congregation and the Brothers in the schools.

3.4. On the life of the brothers: some exceptional sources

The crisis I have spoken about above becomes evident when the official literature of the Institute is crossed with letters or documents coming from the Brothers of the rank and file. However, letters, testimonies and other manifestations of the thought of the

¹¹ His election seems to show a desire to break with the policies of Brother Louis-Marie. But he does not have time to lay out a clear strategy.

Brothers remain relatively rare. We can partly make up for this handicap with the help of Brother Avit's Annals of the houses, full of very precise and very often quite mundane information about the life and evolution of hundreds of schools during the nineteenth century up to about 1889. One observes notably the progressive widening of the gap opening between the Institute and the general population, the latter becoming more and more aligned with the secularist Republic and more concerned with social ascension than with catechism. After 1880, in many communes, the Brothers, supported by the conservative party, have to struggle every inch of the way against the Republican school. But they themselves are often not unfavourable to social aspirations.

Another source allowing us to follow the Brothers as individuals are the abundant biographical notices. Certainly, this type of edifying and somewhat stereotyped literature needs to be interpreted with care, but many of these notices are richer in information than they at first appear¹². Such sources are particularly precious for avoiding a history of the Institute that is too idealistic and centred only on the exceptional people.

4th: SECULARISATION, INCULTURATION, TRADITION

In France, the Church appears as the central base of resistance to the secularist state, and the congregations as the spearhead of her action. So they come to serve as the scapegoat for a Republican and secularist State which is still hesitant to launch a full-on assault on the Church.

4.1. Secularisation as a breach impossible to close

For the Marist Brothers, the twentieth century commences under the banner of secularization since in 1903 the French government imposes on them dissolution or exile. But the word "secularization", employed in its wide sense, could sum up in itself the whole history of the twentieth century, since almost everywhere the congregation is faced with secularization and even a secularism that is multifarious and ongoing. The two world wars, civil wars (Spain), persecutions (Mexico), totalitarian regimes (Germany) or authoritarian governments (Turkey) affect the Institute almost everywhere and profoundly.

As for secularization in the restricted sense, after 1903 a basic debate arises, one that is quite similar to that which unfolded at the Hermitage in 1824-26 about the nature of the work: religious teaching order or apostolic

¹² These notices have been entered on computer by Bro. Louis-Richard.

“oratory” with some defined contours? In fact, faced with the dilemma of exile or definitive secularization, a significant number of Brothers choose a paradoxical course: fictional secularization, that is to say, maintaining the congregational connection without exterior signs. Although its agents do not theorize about it, this attitude betrays a novel conception of the basics of religious life: not firstly a community defined by a rule, a habit, a community, but the free choice of a person who thinks to continue to carry out his commitments at the cost of the traditional supports of religious life. And this strategy shows itself to pay off: a good part of the works are maintained, for example in France and in Mexico, and the fidelity of the secularized Brothers does not fail.

It will have to wait for 1920 for a Chapter to recognize the merits of the French secularized Brothers, without, however, making examples of them. But the war of 1914 with hundreds of Brothers mobilized (about 950) creates another form of secularization. Even the most shattering events, however, have no effect on the doctrine of the preservation of the spirit of the Institute. What of the spirit of that period? It is the spirit of Fr Champagnat and the first Brothers, says Brother Stratonique (see his Circulares). But isn't it rather the spirit of the times of Brother Jean-Baptiste and Brother Louis-Marie that prevails?

Brother Diogène, in his circular of Christmas 1923, tentatively tries to distinguish the essential from the ac-

cidental in religious life by basing himself on the example of the Brothers living in countries experiencing revolutions and persecutions, who have known how to preserve the essentials of their identity. But he goes no further. Also, in 1940 (under Brother Diogène) the French Brothers are summoned by the Superiors to put on the soutane again at a time when the war is accelerating secularization. And in 1945, Brother Marie-Odulphe, Vicar General, offers the following programme: “Restore everything in the spirit of the Venerable Founder by the cult of the Rule.”

4.2. The time of the provinces

We very often forget that 1903 was marked by the end of the problem of the Constitutions, the Chapter having precipitately accepted the Roman Constitutions and therefore a Superior General elected for a determined period as well as Provincial Major Superiors. Thus, in 1903 the provinces of Australia, Notre-Dame de Lacabane (French-Spanish), Canada, and Spain are created; then in 1908, South Africa, Syria, Colombia, Constantinople, China, Mexico, and the Brasils: Northern, Central and Southern. In 1911, the Province of the United States is born, and in 1916 that of New Zealand.

Even if, in practice, the Assistants maintain for a long time a very centralized tradition, the Provinces (or the groups of Provinces dependent on a particular Assistant), take on very

different physiognomies. Moreover, the wars, revolutions, and troubles of the twentieth century bring with them difficulties of communication and impose particular solutions. Even in countries at peace, national educational policies impose constraints and evolutions (diplomas, programme, etc.). It is true that the exile of numerous French from 1903 was able to reinforce for a time the expansive aspect of the French model, but their progressive or abrupt retreat (the Brothers mobilized or expelled) certainly permits amalgamation between Marist spirit and culture in various countries.

The years 1903-1914, therefore, mark a basic change in the Congregation which does not appear to be very well documented. It appears that too much importance is attached to the effect of the departure of numerous Brothers from France, viewed in retrospect as a providential event having permitted an expansion which, in fact, had started earlier; and too little to the institutional and cultural mutation of the Congregation which allowed it, through a fairly rapid decentralization, to become inculturated in numerous countries. It is not by chance that, in 1909, the Bulletin of the Institute is created as an organ of liaison for a body wanting to maintain its cohesion despite its geographical and cultural diversity.

The extraordinary growth of the Institute up to about 1965 witnesses to the success of this internationalization, even if certain provinces (Con-

stantinople, Syria, China), too tied to the colonial context and with faint possibility of putting down roots in the countries concerned, experienced failure or limited success. This global success was doubtless due to "the spirit of the Institute" but also to the ability to decentralize and diversify which, in 1903, it did not yet have. For all that, we saw above that this brilliant stage in the history of the congregation left aside one basic problem: how to adapt to a world under rapid secularization without denying the spirit of the Institute?

A general history of the Institute must, therefore, in our opinion, give a notable place to this process of the internationalization of the Institute, first as a prolongation of the French provinces, then becoming rapidly autonomous through the creation of new administrative units.

4.3. A phase of transition (1946- 1967)

Brother Léonida, Superior General from 1946 to 1958, is a typical example of a French Brother perfectly acclimatized to the cultural universe of Latin America. Nevertheless, in his Circulars he appears as a classic worrier, very conscious that the rapid growth of the Institute has been accompanied by a certain weakening of the Marist spirit. The Chapter of 1958, which takes on the programme of reviving the spirit of the Founder through more intense fervour and more efficacious zeal, appears to wish to respond to his questionings, certainly shared by many.

To a certain measure, the chapter succeeds in this *aggiornamento* before the term has been coined, since it nuances the communitarian framework of the Institute, notably in authorizing individual meditation and spiritual reading. In his circular of 1960, Brother Charles-Raphaël, who is presenting the new Common Rules, introduces the word “spirituality” destined to replace the old notion of “spirit of the Institute” and justifies a spiritual freedom hitherto regarded with suspicion. Finally, in recalling that, with Champagnat, the apostolic concern chronologically preceded the intention of founding a congregation, he affirms that the Marist Brothers are an apostolic order. But the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and socio-cultural change overtake this tardy and perhaps overly cautious reform. The XVI General Chapter (1967-68) will have to completely re-found the face of the congregation.

5th: DECONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION (1968-2010)

The Institute finds itself suddenly grappling with two concomitant events: the socio-cultural revolution and the Second Vatican Council which, by their combined explosive force, constrain it to undertake under pressure a systematic change.

5.1. A turnabout of tendency

In his circular of 1968 (in 5 parts), Brother Basilio drew up a balance of the first session of the Chapter in stating that, for the first time, the latter had experienced a veritable confrontation between two tendencies he qualified as follows : spirituality versus psychologism, and structure versus freedom. It was an elegant and nuanced way of saying that the spirituality-structure party is the one of tradition and that of psychologism-freedom the one of opening.

This analysis can also serve for defining the history of the Congregation, if not from its origins, at least from the Chapter of 1852-54. It was from that time, by means of the vow of stability, that the spirituality-structure party, as one might call it, that of the spirit of the Institute in the language of the time, took control of the Congregation to keep it up to 1958. The psychologism-freedom party, if it remained without official voice, was not without means of action: the turbulent history of certain Chapters shows that some of those elected did not follow the conservative views of the majority.

It would perhaps be necessary also to evoke the basic problem posed by the double identity of the Congregation as a religious order and an educational society and thus giving rise to a double hierarchy: that of the spirituals and the guardians of the spirit of the Institute (major superiors but also masters of novices, various forma-

tors) and that of the pedagogues represented by the Brothers teaching at all levels, the directors of the main establishments. These two hierarchies, theoretically unified at the top by the vow of stability, overlap only imperfectly and, in a measure that requires closer study, their cultures are quite different from the fact that their rapport with the world is not the same. It was at the time of secularization in 1903 that this relative dichotomy became most obvious, the major superiors being most opposed to a secularization designed to save the schools, and the directors or teachers becoming secularized in name in order to keep them.

Whatever the case, the Chapter of 1958 had already shown a clear advance of the tendency favorable to an evolution. If it became dominant in 1967-68, it was not simply through a sudden conversion following the Council, but also because a tradition existed which considered one could adapt without denying oneself. At base, it was a spirit of the Institute that could find equal legitimacy in the authority of Fr Champagnat with the one put in place in 1852-54.

5.2. Lucidity of Br Basilio

One stroke of good fortune the Institute had in this turnaround was to have, in the person of Brother Basilio, a Superior General who knew how at the same time to take the line of rupture without throwing the past overboard. After the second session of the

Chapter, 1 November 1969, he declared in fact:

"You can be sure that we are moving towards less legalistic forms of life; apostolically more daring; more inserted in a growing professional socialization; with independent and exteriorly freer forms".

And he added that such a change "will finally end in crises of vocation" for "it is not simply a question of level but of style and even of system". He returned to this idea in the circular of 1 July 1971 in speaking about a necessary "institutional conversion" of the congregation.

In my opinion, these words remain topical. The years 1967-68 marked the close of a past of the Institute that could be divided into two periods: a first very turbulent phase of foundation (1817-1852) and a second (1854-1958) dominated by the tradition or rather by a certain tradition. It appears, nevertheless, that beneath these divergences one can detect the permanence of a strong mystique inspired by the origins and capable of dynamizing the Institute, despite unquestionable insufficiencies and a real institutional failure to act.

The prophetic word of Brother Basilio, announcing a process of re-foundation, appears to precisely position itself in this mystical depth cleared of a certain narrowness, and his doctrinal Circulars contributed to bring about an period of profound renewal, even though they arrived in a context that was not immediately receptive of them.

5.3. An overhaul overtaken by a crisis of identity (1958-1976)

The efforts of the XVI General Chapter (1967-68) and of Brother Basilio were in fact thwarted by a generalized calling into question of the tradition. In a few years, the effective strength of the Institute suffered massive losses with the withdrawal of numerous Brothers in temporary and perpetual profession as well as a fall off in recruitment. It was a structural crisis with both internal and external causes. Even if it was a worldwide one, it was certainly expressed in different ways according to place.

5.4. Resistance, redeployment, deepening (1976 - 2009)

The most recent part of our history is also the most difficult to write because we are involved in it. For another thing, the mass of events is still hard to disengage from the axes bearing on the future. Most often, the Institute appears torn between necessity and project; between strategic response and search for renewal.

In the decade 1970-80, the identity crisis eases but its consequences are considerable: it is necessary to move towards fusion of Provinces and administrative readjustments. The closing of establishments, some going back to the time of Fr Champagnat, are very numerous. At the same

time, the Institute engages in a policy of redeployment by creating new formation centres, sometimes on the continental scale, notably in the countries of the South, and tries, not very successfully, to maintain or re-establish recruiting structures in the countries of the North.

Spirituality becomes a central subject (Circulars) and so too the concern for initial and ongoing formation. The numerous conferences and meetings show that operating in network has replaced centralization. This process seems to weaken the provinces, while the national, regional or continental levels insert themselves as intermediary places between them and the general administration. We can, perhaps, propose a first phase of this lengthy deconstruction-reconstruction (1976-1993) as the time of stagnation, questioning, experimentation.

Should 1994 be dated as beginning a new phase of the history of the Institute? The latter, having published the new Constitutions, regulated the problem of the priesthood, re-centred its existence on community and spirituality and being open to participation of lay people, it seems that it has from now on the task of incarnating in its practices the main axes of its renewed identity. This is an eminently long task, which the Chapters of 2001 and 2009, the multiple sessions of formation, Mission *Ad Gentes*, the renovation of the places of our origins, the general restructuring of the Institute, all attempt to carry on with perseverance in a world difficult to read.

In any case, we can say already without much risk that the phase 1967-2010 has marked a decisive mutation in our history: a changing of system and an institutional rupture, as Brother Basilio announced very early.

CONCLUSION: SOME AXES OF A MUTATION WITHOUT PRECEDENT

Perhaps we can try to define some major axes of this rupture which is still in course.

1. From 1976 to 2010, the Institute achieved a globalization very different from that of the years 1880-1914. The first was more an extension out of the central base while the latter presents a multipolar appearance produced by the tidal wave of decolonisation. We are also present at the overturning of geo-ecclesiastical hierarchies: to simplify, a North weakened in the long term and a dynamic South. Even if the command centre remains, it is more promotional and less prescriptive.
2. Spirituality is the basis of the identity, even if continuity with the preceding concept of spirit of the Institute is strong. The circulars of the Superiors General have built up a conceptual framework which allows us to say quite clearly what the spirituality issuing from Champagnat is. For all that, if the term "spirituality" has become domi-

nant, one is still far from a school of spirituality in the strict sense of the word. The difficulty comes in part from the fact that the label "Marist spirituality" does not belong only to the Brothers, who have to enrich it with the support of the other branches of the Society of Mary.

3. Another fundamental change is the upsetting of the connection community-apostolate. In numerous countries, the traditional schema amalgamating religious community and educational community is challenged. The director of the school is no longer automatically the superior of the community; and the latter can group Brothers who are involved in different activities in different places. The notion of community project, then, becomes central but delicate to manage. Whence, in many Provinces, the birth of two camps: those of the schools and the partisans of a wider apostolic overture. But many other scenarios certainly exist.

Paradoxically – but the paradox is perhaps only apparent – at the moment when the community seems to be falling back on its spiritual identity, Marist spirituality is more sharply affirming itself as apostolic, strongly qualifying the monastic model which had served as structural framework from 1824 with the construction of the Hermitage. In a certain way, and certainly in different degrees according to provinces, the Institute has

relived the times of the apostolate, characterized by community and a certain degree of anarchy, fervor, and paucity of structures, of the first years at La Valla. Even if the extreme phase of this tendency appears past, the community founded on monastic uniformity and the school no longer appears as the only type. Keeping everything in perspective, our style of community has moved away from the monastery and towards that of the Jesuits.

4. Rapport with the world and the Church has become quite different, to the extent that the congregation, conceived as a closed world forbidden to lay people, and especially to women, no longer has legitimacy. In particular, Vatican 2, which rejected the notion of the Church as a perfect and hierarchical society to define it as the "People of God", fundamentally upset the relationship of the Institute with the priesthood and the laity. Nevertheless, this lack of clear boundaries between inside and outside; between above and below, has been a not negligible factor in the identity crisis. And still today, if the image of fortress, so well illustrated in the architecture of former General and Provincial Houses has become obsolete, how to be linked without dissolving or becoming the plaything of multiple equivalent units?

5. The hierarchy-individual relationship has been completely trans-

formed. Henceforth, group cohesion is generated less by a Rule and a hierarchy than by each member's conviction. To put it rather bluntly: spirituality has replaced the Rule and the individual has stolen a lead over the group. Or, to use a classic image: the collective carapace has been replaced by an individual vertebral column. But this primacy of the individual and the spirituality is very demanding and some experience "the fatigue of being oneself". To a certain extent, the Institute suffers from an excess of individualistic utopia and a deficiency opposite to that of the years 1854-1967: a certain institutional weakness.

6. The decline in numbers of religious appears as a serious tendency and it can be asked if the time of the congregations is not behind us. Whence the urgency for those who can conceive themselves on new bases: such as a spiritual movement which reclaims a powerfully inspired Founder, and is channelled by a group that is delimited and legitimized by a continuity that is apostolic in some way, and disposed to accept various forms of life.

Let us note that to envisage Marist life on the paradigm of a religious order or of a large ecclesial community rather than a single congregation is only leading us back to the original Marist project of the tree of three or four branches, which was then forced by the Church of the period to become

canonically established in distinct specialized congregations with specific functions. The emergence of a Marist laity, and indeed of clerics and religious sisters, implicitly or explicitly linked to the spiritual-

ity of Champagnat, seems to be pushing us towards a reactivation of the Marist branches conceived in a totally different ecclesiological and cultural universe in the years 1816-1840.

HISTORY PROJECT OF THE INSTITUTE: BIBLIOGRAPHY

According to the Archives of the Marist Brothers (AFM)



Juan Jesús
Moral Barrio fms

INTRODUCTION

In attempting to get the history project of the Institute started, it should be immediately obvious that it would be well to begin with one's own house, with the internal archives, before treating the depositories and bibliographies from outside. Before heading for other places, we need to review what the fidelity of our Brothers, has accumulated with much care of and hard work over these two hundred years. A sustained search has permitted the selection of documents and books on which the patina of time can already be seen with its tracks and signs.

This small bibliography represents what exists in the General Archive of the Institute in Rome. It is not intended to be exhaustive. Besides, it is certain that everything will not be of equal importance and significance in the eyes of each historian. My sole purpose has been to put at the disposal of investigators a useful, prac-

tical, and at least valid instrument for the delicate and intense task of reducing the many facts and events of the two hundred years of the Institute to some hundreds of pages. Preference has been given to what has been published or semi-published, that is the works that have been printed by a publishing house or those that have had a reasonably extensive distribution via photocopies.

The general bibliography occupies a section relative to publications that cover the entire Institute or several Provinces of it. I have not included one source of documentation and historic data that is very valid and faithful. I refer to what was known in its time as "The Green Pages". They form a whole collection of volumes of the Institute's history covering the years 1959 to 1972. They are grouped by years and by Provinces, and placed in alphabetical order.

Preference has been given to the Provinces in order to facilitate the search for data relating to the history of the administrative units, with priority being given to the houses or to persons.

Many other documents that directly or indirectly relate to the history and the life of the Congregation could fig-

ure in this bibliography, but if they have not been received in the General Archives we are unable to include them in this list of sources.

The Commission on Spiritual Patrimony has been informed and has made use of this report in their visit to the General Archives.

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