

I – Marist Beginnings

The Mandate Given to Marcellin Champagnat by His Companions in 1816.

An essay on the history of the tradition¹

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In the many lectures I have given over the last 25 years on the Society of Mary, I have for the most part, as requested by confreres, stressed the essential points of Father Colin's thoughts and the distinctive elements of Marist spirituality. The audiences – at least I hope so – will have benefited, but it is evident that acting this way allows for a simplification of things, which, in a certain sense, goes against the rigorous requirements of a historian's method. Furthermore, the continual repetition of one man's interpretations and summaries sets up a danger of diminishing a complex reality, which would have gained from being discussed from many different perspectives.

I am particularly heartened by the initiative which has led to this colloquium, and I would like to take advantage of it, freed from this concern to illustrate for you Father Colin's central vision and its reality, to address a very specific and very limited point in the history of the Marist project, by using a well-defined method.

This method, used widely by scholars of the New Testament since the masters of form criticism, consists of taking into account when one studies a narrative or saying, the living tradition which transmitted them before they were put into writing. When it is about logia or actions of Jesus, the effort to go beyond the Gospel text includes a considerable amount of hypothesis and is often based on very tenuous clues. Despite this, the method undeniably benefited the exegesis of the Gospels. Even more so, one can expect valid results from the scrutiny of more recent texts, when explicit and dated evidence of the tradition's history, which preceded the writing of the text under study, is available.

A particularly interesting case in my opinion is the account given by Brother Jean-Baptiste Furet, Fr Champagnat's first biographer. It relates the circumstances that led to the crystallisation of the decision in the soul of the young seminarian from Marlies to devote himself to the founding of a congregation of brothers, for which he already had the idea and desire. The author, who was not lacking in literary ability, summarised everything in a formulaic dialogue that we are going to look at in a moment. Such a narrative does not represent the faithful and literal reproduction of what was then said, this is quite clear especially when one knows that it was written 40 years after the fact and that the author had not witnessed it. A critical approach is required, but at least two are possible.

The first, which is related to the most traditional historical criticism, intends to establish, in a given case, the credibility of the evidence and the likelihood of what is recounted. It is a matter of an essential but limited procedure, which usually leads to a certain reticence, more or less favourable according to the case, and which as such does not bring much to the understanding of the fact itself.

The second critical approach that of scrutinising the tradition's history prior to the text, puts us in the presence of conscious or unconscious positions, of which the text represents a belated expression. We see how people react and thereby we infer psychological and spiritual dispositions. The object of the exercise is not only to find out if what the author said is true, but to better understand the manner in which the actors, prior to the author, and probably each in his own way, lived or perceived the facts. In that sense even if in this study we do not find ourselves in the presence of an actual spiritual discourse, the method will lead us into the core of the

¹ This talk was originally given at the colloquium on Marist Spirituality in Rome in 1984 and published as Jean Coste, *Le mandat donné par ses compagnons à Marcellin Champagnat en 1816. Essai d'histoire de la tradition*, in *The Study of Marist Spirituality*, Rome, 1984, 7-17. This translation was done by Elizabeth Charlton, Wellington, based on a rough draft provided by Fr David Kennerley, reviewed by Fr Gaston Lessard and Fr Ed Keel, in 2017.

different visions that a Colin and a Champagnat could have of the Marist oeuvre. It is thus a spiritual story in the truest sense that we are going to study.

I

Let us begin by rereading together Brother Jean-Baptiste's well-known text:²

"In the plan of the new Association, none of these Fathers had thought of teaching Brothers. Father Champagnat alone had conceived the project of their establishment, and he alone implemented it. He often said to his Confreres: (A) "We must have Brothers, we must have Brothers to teach Catechism, to help the Missionaries, to run schools for children". No one objected that it would be good to have Brothers; but as their Institution was not part of the plan for the new Society, little importance was given to the continual repetition, we must have Brothers. Finally he was told: (B) "Oh well, you take care of the Brothers since you thought of it". He readily accepted this mission; and from then on, all his wishes, all his plans, all his labour had but one goal the creation of this work."

The author of this text, Jean-Baptiste Furet, was nine years old in 1816 at the time the dialogue occurred. He joined the Marist Brothers only in 1822 and published his book in 1856, 40 years after the first aspirant Marists had left the Major Seminary at Lyon.³ Clearly one cannot avoid asking, from the perspective of the most classical historical approach, how much can be believed in what he writes and one must challenge his tale with trusted facts from other sources.

In fact, in this case, the confrontation is downright positive. In effect his account tells us three things:

- a) That among the seminarians of Lyon a project of a Society of Mary was formed which did not provide for a branch of Brothers;
- b) That Marcellin Champagnat himself, had the idea of a congregation of brothers, and insisted on its inclusion in the project;
- c) That the group finally accepted the idea and mandated Champagnat to look after the branch of Brothers.

Each of these three elements is clearly confirmed elsewhere:

a) The idea of a Society of Mary, brought to the major seminary of Lyon by Jean-Claude Courveille, was symbolised by the image of a tree with three branches.⁴ One can discuss whether or not there had been a "vision" of this symbolic tree,⁵ but there seems to be no doubt about a threefold structure early in the picture. Yet these three branches were not, as may have been believed,⁶ those of Priests, Brothers and Sisters. Brother Zind has shown that such triads, found frequently at the beginning of the 19th century in new religious foundations, represented the outcome of a complex process.⁷ On the contrary, the tripartite model was traditional in the major medieval foundations (Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites), in which we find the first order (that of men, priests and lay Brothers); the second order (that of Sisters) and the third order, laity who strive to live the spirituality of the first two orders. The Marist project would also have these three orders or branches and that the Third Order was one of them emerges clearly from texts, such as those published in *A Founder Speaks*, docc. 2 §2; 78 §2.

b) That Marcellin Champagnat had had the idea of teaching Brothers before going to the major seminary is borne out by his oft-repeated tale of his unhappy childhood experiences⁸, out of which was born the conviction of the need of educators for country boys;⁹

² OM 2, doc. 757, 2.

³ For more on this person, see OM4, p. 284-285.

⁴ OM 2, docc. 425, 12; 591, 2.

⁵ OM 2, docc. 655,2; 714B, 3.

⁶ For example, see *Annales Avit*, p.31.

⁷ P. Zind, *Les nouvelles congrégations de frères enseignants en France de 1800 à 1830*, Saint-Genis-Laval, 1969, p.110.

⁸ OM 2, doc 755, 1, and the references indicated there.

⁹ *Ibid.* and documents indicated at OM 2, p. 756.

c) This branch of Brothers proposed by Champagnat was added to an already planned project of a society. Champagnat himself states this. To convince Vicar General Cattet of the necessity to support the creation of a team of Marist priests, in 1828 he did not hesitate to assert: “the society of Brothers cannot positively be regarded as the work of Mary but only as a branch subsequent to the Society itself.”¹⁰

Brother Jean-Baptiste's account squares well with what is known from other sources in relation to the introduction, at Marcellin Champagnat's request, of a branch of teaching Brothers into a project which originally did not include it. The biographer invented nothing, and had neither motive nor means to do so. But that does not satisfy us. We must now ask from whom did the author acquire the various elements of his information and try to find out by whom and how they were transmitted before being combined forty years later in the text we are studying. In fact it is clear that here we have a simplified literary presentation reduced to a terse dialogue of a confrontation between the Marist project and Champagnat's idea which must have taken place in several stages and with many more nuances. Like all historic accounts this one has the interest of summarizing positively a particular situation and awareness matured only by time. Let us try to discover the trail by separately looking for the evidence of each element that makes up our dialogue.

II

Element A

Champagnat often said “We must have brothers”.

1. The first confirmation of this initiative of Champagnat is found in some notes taken by scholastics at Belley in 1840 in the course of some history lectures on the origins of the Society of Mary given by Father Pierre Convers, a priest of the diocese of Belley who joined the Marist aspirants from this diocese in 1830: Father Champagnat “exhibited the desire to be responsible for the branch of Brothers.”¹¹

2. The second confirmation is found in a section devoted to the Little Brothers of Mary in an account about the origins written by Father Denis Maîtrepierre. He also was a priest of Belley and joined the Marist aspirants in 1830 and became, in 1836 one of Father Colin's main assistants in the government of the Society. As such he had encouraged the writing of memories about the Society and was among the most well-informed confreres. Here is what he says:¹²

“The thought of founding them was conceived at the Major seminary of Lyon at the same time as that of the Society. In joining the first founders, Father Champagnat said to them: “I have always felt a particular attraction for an establishment of brothers. I, very gladly, join you. If you consider it fitting I will take charge of this branch,” and he was given charge. “My early education was lacking,” he said, “I would be happy to provide for others the advantages of which I was deprived.”

3. The third testimonial comes thirteen years after the publication of Brother Jean-Baptiste's book, but it should not be set aside for it comes from Father Colin himself, and it is clear that he did not depend, for a matter in which he was directly involved, on what a biographer had written second hand. In 1869 amongst other memories he recounted to his secretary, Father Jeantin, to record the beginnings of the Society he said:¹³

“Father Champagnat, assistant at Lavalla, devoted himself to the foundation of the institute of Marist Brothers. The idea of this institute was his alone. Affected by the difficulties he had in getting an education, he said to his confreres at the major seminary: “We must also found teaching Brothers.”

4. We also learn from Father Jeantin, who became Father Colin's biographer after having been his secretary that this declaration of Father Colin was not an isolated one. Father Jeantin tells us that Colin did not just say once that the idea of teaching brothers came from Champagnat. He was

¹⁰ OM 1, doc. 185, 2.

¹¹ OM 2, doc. 748, 3.

¹² OM 2, doc. 752, 53.

¹³ OM 3, doc. 819, 17.

anxious to highlight the fact, to which he appeared to have attached some importance. We read in the chapter dealing with the Brothers:¹⁴

“After some details dealing with the history of the origin and development of the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary we have to tell the part played by Father Colin in this oeuvre. One of his first pre-occupations when he spoke of this congregation was to attribute the origin and development to his revered confrere and friend, Father Champagnat. “It is he who never stopped repeating at the seminary at Lyon, ‘We must also have Brothers! We must also have brothers’.”

Leaving till later the commentary on this first series of testimonials let us pass immediately to the second.

III

Element B

“You take charge of the brothers since you had the idea.”

1. The first confirmation of the mandate received by Marcellin Champagnat in 1816 is to be found in almost telegraphic but extremely precise and precious notes which Jean-Antoine Bourdin gathered at the Hermitage between 1828 and 1831. This young priest of the Lyon diocese, one of its Marist aspirants helped Father Champagnat and had him tell the story of the beginnings of the Institute of Brothers. At the beginning of these notes we read:¹⁵

“A branch long foreseen by Father Champagnat and then entrusted to him at the major seminary.”

2. The second testimonial comes from Marcellin Champagnat himself. During the 1837 retreat, a year after his religious profession as a Marist priest he was asked by Father Colin to give an example of religious obedience by handing in his resignation as Superior of the Brothers, the office to which he was going to be immediately re-appointed. The first sentence of the act of resignation is extremely explicit about the mandate received at the major seminary:¹⁶

“I pass purely and simply the branch of Marist Brothers which had been entrusted to me in 1816 into the hands of Father Superior General of the Society of Mary.”

3. A third confirmation is in Father Maîtrepierre’s account already reproduced in the preceding section (II, 2). After having told how Champagnat insisted at the major seminary on the necessity of a branch of brothers, the narrator added: “And he was given charge.”¹⁷

4. The last testimonial is given by Brother Sylvestre in the memoirs written long after Champagnat’s death, but which echo those of Brother Stanislaus who had been one of Champagnat’s closest collaborators. After having cited the text of Brother Jean-Baptiste from which we started, the chronicler added:¹⁸

“Father Champagnat took those words as an order from heaven and thought only of making them a reality as soon as possible. Such is what Brother Stanislas and other brothers told me about the origin of our congregation in the person of our founder.”

IV

Such are the elements of tradition, few in number but diverse enough and explicit enough. They are prior to Brother Jean-Baptiste’s book and with the exception of the last one they are independent of him and put before us one or other of the two statements from which the famous dialogue was composed and which is our concern.

An observation must be immediately made, which is the key to this present study. The evidence on element A (Champagnat kept saying “We must have brothers”) all comes from either Father Colin or from people near him who through him learned about the facts of 1816: Father Convers and Father Maîtrepierre were members of the group from Belley, and Father Jeantin his

¹⁴[J. Jeantin]. *Vie du T.R.P. Colin*, t. 2, p. 406.

¹⁵OM 2, doc. 754, 1.

¹⁶OM 1, doc.416, 1.

¹⁷OM 2, doc. 752, 53.

¹⁸Frère Sylvestre, *Mémoires, vie du P. Champagnat*, édition photocopiée G. Michel, p. 9.

secretary. In contrast, the evidence for element B (“You take charge of the Brothers since you had the idea”) comes from Father Champagnat or from people near him who through him learned about the facts of 1816; Father Bourdin who was the first to record his memories and Brother Stanislas. As for Father Maitrepierre we are not surprised at finding him in the second group as well as in the first since we know that not only was he a collaborator of Father Colin and often heard him speak but he also heard from Father Champagnat various memories of the beginnings which he recorded exactly in the section “Little Brothers of Mary” in his account of the origins.¹⁹

So, we find ourselves faced with two very distinct traditions: the first, which reflected Colin’s thoughts, was dependent on him and was transmitted by the fathers of the Belley group. What was known and repeated in this environment was that the branch of brothers was the idea of Marcellin Champagnat and no other. The second tradition was dependent on Champagnat and transmitted by those who had been in contact with him at the Hermitage. The fact that was reinforced there was that Champagnat had not worked at the Branch of the brothers on a simple personal inspiration but in accordance with a mission and with a received mandate.

Let us try to place ourselves at the start of each of these two traditions and try to understand them from within, by asking ourselves what would have been the preoccupations on the matter of both Colin and Champagnat.

Colin. We have seen that he loved to repeat that it was Champagnat who had the idea of Brothers and him alone. Why this insistence?

Firstly without doubt because that was an undoubted fact, a statement constrained by the most elementary honesty and justice. Clearly, however, there is something else.

One of the reasons, which come to mind immediately and which we consider valid at least in part, seems to have been Colin’s concern to exclude the idea that the Brothers’ branch had come from Jean-Claude Courveille, who had had the first idea of the Society of Mary, a Courveille idea. Colin as we know, never named the latter, but by insisting on the fact that the idea of Brothers came from Champagnat, he could have had, among others, the intention to remind those able to understand that they would have been on the wrong track if they thought that this too were an Courveille idea. The main role that this latter tried to play at the Hermitage, signing among other things, the first prospectus of the institute²⁰, could potentially lead to confusion. It was not Courveille but Champagnat to whom we owe the idea of this new branch.

However, it seems to me that Colin’s main preoccupation when he insisted that the idea of the Brothers be attributed to Champagnat must be different. What he essentially wanted to say, what he wanted everyone to know was that the idea came from Champagnat... and not from him, Colin. He had no responsibility in this matter and did not want anyone to give him any. In final analysis, the teaching Brothers were never in his plan. We will come back at the end to this crucial point; without pausing longer here, let us now try to see things from Marcellin Champagnat’s point of view.

Champagnat. We have seen how he emphasised the mandate he had received in 1816 to concentrate on the brothers. In this case too we ask: Why this insistence?

From the start let us note that it would have been out of character for Marcellin, as far as we know, to attempt to give himself importance and to emphasize his personal intervention. We cannot imagine him going about saying, “It is I, Champagnat, who had the idea of Brothers”. On the contrary, we understand clearly that he felt the need to emphasise the mandate he received. One of the fundamental points of all Christian spirituality, whether religious or priest, since the Counter Reformation, was as we know, “to do the will of God” and to have some certain sign that what one did was in conformity with that will and not just the product of some purely personal desire.

In fact, we know that if Champagnat worked at the founding of the Brothers, it was because he was convinced that he was doing the will of God. In his drafts of letters from 1827 to the Archbishop’s house a sentence recurs with moving insistence: “I have always a firm conviction

¹⁹ OM 2, doc. 752. 53-58.

²⁰ OM 1, doc.108.

that God wants this work; but perhaps He wishes it to be done by others.”²¹ In a rare moment of doubt like that, what sign could he have that God wanted not only the work itself but that he, Champagnat, should accomplish it?

Would it be a personal revelation to him in this sense? Certainly not. He forcefully rejected the idea of all extraordinary intervention, or marvels in the origins of his institute.²² Could he invoke an explicit order from his hierarchical superiors? Not likely. His initiative as founder had met with opposition from his Parish Priest and the Vicar General Bochart and he was even threatened with ecclesiastical censure.²³ Sure, Archbishop de Pins had afterwards helped him and recognised him as the “principal founder of the Brothers”.²⁴ But his was a benevolent protection, coming afterwards, not a mandate to establish.

One sole fact could assure the founder that in beginning to work for the founding of the Brothers; he had not taken it upon himself; it was the mandate received from the group at the major seminary: “The branch of Brothers which was entrusted to me in 1816”²⁵. It was extremely important for Champagnat to be able to prove to himself and to others that he was not an Illuminatus or presumptuous and that while going ahead in a very personal manner with a foundation which was his idea, he was doing what he had been told and was fulfilling his mandate.

Thus, around Colin on the one hand and around Champagnat on the other, two traditions were formed and transmitted about what had transpired at the major seminary concerning the Brothers. One side emphasised the fact that the initiative came from Champagnat; on the other, that Champagnat only began his work once he had received a mandate. The merit of Brother Jean-Baptiste lies in his having combined these two traditions. He had met them both while listening to Champagnat and while collecting the evidence of the Brothers and priests after 1841 in accordance with the explicit order he had received.²⁶ It is he who to our delight condensed them into a significant dialogue, reducing to its essential elements the interaction that took place at the major seminary between the respective preoccupations of Champagnat and the other Marist aspirants. Even if a tape recorder could have been hidden in the shrubs around the country house where the group held its meetings, we would hear today in listening to the tapes neither Champagnat’s literal phrase nor his friends’ replies. But the essential elements of the confrontation seem to have been summarised with great accuracy both psychological and historical.

And so, like historical criticism itself, tradition criticism invites us to give a real value to Brother Jean-Baptiste’s text. In any case the interest in the present study is not to have “saved” the work of Champagnat’s biographer. It is to have enabled us to penetrate more deeply the psychological and spiritual context of this mandate given one day by a group of seminarians to one of their companions. Let us now come more explicitly to this crucial point.

V

For Champagnat, as we have seen, the words which Jean-Baptiste condensed in his “You take charge of the brothers since you thought it up”, were received as a true mission, the sign that he could and should labour at the work, the idea he had presented. Twenty-one years later at the moment of tendering his resignation he will recall this mandate, which conferred upon the lengthy labours undertaken for the foundation, their legitimacy, their guarantee and the firm conviction that they were according to the will of God.

For the others, for his companions who had uttered these words, what reach did they have? Was it an explicit, intentional mandate which committed them in regard to the one who received them? Was there not rather on their part only a phrase extracted, in a way, by the insistence of

²¹ OM 1, doc. 173, 16; cf. 8 and 13.

²² OM2, doc. 440.

²³ OM1, doc. 286, 2; OM2, doc 757, 7-9.

²⁴ OM1, doc. 110, 2nd.

²⁵ OM1, doc. 416, 1.

²⁶ OM2, pp.730-731 and 764-765.

their companion? To an uninitiated reader, the end of Brother Jean-Baptiste's text gives rather this second impression: the words "incessant repetition", "little importance", "in the end they finished (sic) by saying to him", "oh well" all contribute to introduce the famous, "You take charge of the brothers" as the outcome of a process in which tension and weariness had more influence than a duly matured decision to entrust Champagnat with an actual mission. The point of the account seems to be to underline the contrast between a certain flippancy shown by the group in face of the idea of founding Brothers and the seriousness with which Champagnat received the invitation to go ahead. Thus started to appear what would be one of the leitmotiv of the book: the presentation of the founder of the Brothers as a man who knew how to work on his own without being discouraged in the midst of indifference or opposition.²⁷

This nuance so clearly expressed by Brother Jean-Baptiste in his account, had he perceived it in the evidence he had gathered? That is very difficult to determine. But we should be personally inclined to think he did so. In our opinion the same Champagnat was able at the same time to rely on the words that had invited him to labour on the oeuvre and to remain clear sighted about the fact that really the order had been given by weariness and stated with only half-conviction. He had enough acuteness and humour to let it be seen while telling his story, without however presenting his seminary companions in a bad light.

In any case it is a fact that nothing in the preserved documentation indicates that his eleven companions were ever aware of giving him a mandate. For the most part this argument a silentio has little value, in view of the fact that none of them has any writing in which an allusion to this fact can be found. We have accounts of the origins by Déclas and Terraillon²⁸, but the origin of the branch of Brothers is not mentioned. There remain two people about whom we are better informed and on whose attitude we can reason more convincingly: Courveille and Colin.

About Courveille we know that in 1822 he founded some Brothers at Epercieux and that he then described himself to a school inspector as the "sole Superior of the so-called Brothers of Lavalla". The assistant of this latter parish, Champagnat, was according to Courveille no more than one of his agents.²⁹ Two years later Courveille signed as "Founder and Superior General" the first printed prospectus of the Little Brothers of Mary.³⁰ All this goes to show that he hardly considered Champagnat as officially responsible for that branch.

Such a claim to supplant Champagnat or to deny his decisive role in the foundation of the Brothers is not to be found with Colin, who on the contrary insisted that all the merit of the founding of the Brothers was owed to his confrere. It is a fact however, that Colin never mentioned an official mandate given to Champagnat. After having recalled that the idea of the brothers came from Champagnat alone, Colin could have added, "And this idea, we made it ours, requesting him to bring about its implementation." Not only do we find no such words in his declarations, but at least once, in a solemn occasion and in writing, the founder of the fathers believed that he was obliged to state clearly that even after the major seminary he had not considered the teaching Brothers as part of the project of a Society of Mary such as he saw it then. We must pause a moment to consider this crucial text.

Father Colin dictated these words to the coadjutor brother Jean Marie, his secretary, on 13 August 1870. The General Chapter was then in session and a commission on the Constitutions was endeavouring to clarify the still controversial, historic questions about the origin of the Rules of the Society. Father Jeantin, a member of the commission and a man trusted by Father Colin, thought it wise to write to the latter in order to have him clarify a few points. The second of these points concerned the identification of the branches which were in the early project of the Society. In his circular printed the preceding 6 May, Colin had declared the fourfold composition in the plan presented to Rome in 1833: Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and Third Order. How to reconcile that with the well-known image of the tree with the three branches? And where did the contemplative

²⁷ See especially Chapter 11 (= OM2, doc. 757, 3-16) and Chapter 12 (*ibid.* 17-26).

²⁸ OM2, docc. 551, 591, 750; OM3, doc. 798.

²⁹ OM1, doc 75, 13.

³⁰ OM1, doc. 108.

branch come in, since he had spoken of it at least once as being part of the first idea? Here is the reply dictated by the Founder:³¹

“The four branches presented to Rome forming one and the same society under the authority of the same Superior and rightly rejected by Cardinal Castracane are those of the priests to which the servant Brothers belong, the teaching Brothers, the religious Sisters and the Third Order.

The teaching Brothers were never, before God, in my original plan of the Society; if later they were admitted this was by kindness and in recognition of the services which they rendered to us and especially at the request of Father Champagnat and his brothers. The priests, the Sisters and the Third Order were in the original plan as were the servant Brothers under the name of Joseph Brothers.”

The first statement presents no difficulty. We know from the text in the *Summarium* still kept in the archives of the Sacred Congregation for Religious that in 1833 Colin presented a society with four branches: Fathers, teaching Brothers, Sisters and Third Order.³²

As to the second statement according to which the teaching Brothers were not part of Colin's original plan, we have shown in a long note in *Origines Maristes* that it refers without possible doubt to the project of the Rule of Cerdon.³³ When Colin mentioned his early plan, he was not referring to Courveille's and when he said that the Champagnat Brothers were admitted only “later”, “in recognition of the services rendered to us”, it is quite clear that he was not thinking of an approval occurring at the major seminary, when the Champagnat Brothers did not yet exist. Colin's original plan is that which was committed to paper between 1817 and 1820 and the little that has been kept of that confirms that there was no question of teaching Brothers. Not only were the latter never named there, but the word *fratres*, in the three cases where it does appear,³⁴ clearly refers to the servant Brothers living with the Fathers. Moreover, in the passages referring to the goods of the Society it is question of only two communities that of men and that of women³⁵, that means, obviously, that of priests and servant Brothers living with the former and that of the Sisters. The latter are named with regard to the election of their Prioress General.³⁶ Such being the case, it would be difficult to maintain that the absence in the Cerdon Rule of a mention of the teaching Brothers was accidental. The latter truly were not part of Colin's original plan and in declaring it unambiguously in 1870, the Founder of the Fathers thus did not, more or less unconsciously, distort reality. Rather, when called upon to say what his first idea had been, he did not hesitate to reveal that he had made a place for the teaching Brothers only later and for reasons of convenience. He would not have expressed himself so if he had remembered an explicit mandate given to Champagnat in 1816.

Besides, if we re-examine the relations between Colin and Champagnat from the major seminary until 1833, and notably the letters of the former to the latter which have been kept, we clearly come away with the idea that Colin never really made the idea of a branch of Brothers his own, fully and heartily. For him the Brothers were a personal idea of Champagnat, no doubt respectable and useful but relative to which he did not intend to be personally concerned. It is typical that the Marist Brothers were always referred to in the letters at this time as “your Brothers”.³⁷ At least once immediately after referring to “your Brothers”, Colin spoke of the Sisters and spontaneously said, “our Sisters”.³⁸ It is not much, but in the light of what is seen elsewhere the fact is significant.

Neither Courveille nor Colin consequently seem to have been aware of a mandate having been given to Champagnat in 1816 and so we are obliged to conclude that the words used by the group to tell Champagnat to take charge of the brothers whatever their exact formulation were taken more seriously by him, than they had been on the lips of those who said them. The history of

³¹ OM3, doc. 844, 2-3.

³² *Ant. Textus*, vol. 1, p. 65: s, 3.

³³ OM 3, p. 624, note 4.

³⁴ *Ant. Textus*, vol. 1, h, 2, 14, 20.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, h, 17, 18; g, 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, g, 4.

³⁷ OM 1, docc. 169, 2; 182, 4; 212, 1.

³⁸ OM 1, doc. 169, 2.

relations between Fathers and Marist Brothers began on an equivocation of which it would be a mistake to minimise the scope. Certainly, the immediate, official reason for the abandonment of the view of two branches having the same Superior General after 1842 was that the Roman Curia objected to it. As long as dogma or intangible rules are not in question the Curia shows a great pragmatism and undeniable plasticity. The Marianists' existence is there to remind us that Rome did not refuse to approve a religious body in which priests and laymen are much more closely united than was suggested by Colin's original plan. Let us say without fear, if Colin had from the beginning, in his ideal plan, in the rule he drew up at Cerdon, in his manner of dealing with Champagnat, considered from the bottom of his heart and unreservedly the Brothers as Marists he would have been in a position to present to Rome a more organic structure than the rather slender one found in the 1833 *Summarium* and to obtain its approval. I would be tempted to think that the equivocation born in 1816 of a branch essentially more admitted than really wanted has weighed heavily on the subsequent relations between the Fathers and Brothers and can be found at the root of many psychological reactions on both sides. Being aware of it can have a therapeutic effect for each helping to move beyond some obstructions and to avoid certain naivety in the idyllic celebration of the original, large Marist family.

Within the scope of the spiritual history which interests us here, the preceding developments can help us situate the two founders, Colin and Champagnat, with regard to each other. That one looked after a priestly branch while the other looked after a lay branch certainly already explains many differences. However, the true split appears to me to be more profound: Champagnat is the man who saw with great realism a definite need, the need for religious educators in the countryside and he accepted to work at it to the extent that he thought he was doing the will of God, the will which the mandate received and the attachment of his creation to the great Society of Mary were sufficient guarantee for him. With Colin, we are on altogether different ground. At the start with him there is not the perception of a precise pastoral need but that of spiritual demands, of a way of being and acting with reference to Mary, of a church to be reborn. With that in mind, priests are truly essential, as the instruments of divine mercy and the faithful, all those with whom it is necessary to begin the Church again. These are the only ones of whom Colin speaks with a dash of life in the 1833 *Summarium*.³⁹ The two pages dealing with Brothers and Sisters on the other hand, rival canon law for dryness.⁴⁰

In that there is no accident due to external circumstances. In fact, even if the Sisters were themselves without any doubt part of Colin's original plan we know how much he never truly succeeded in expressing their vocation in a positive way, stating frankly that he did not want them to spread widely; all his ambition being "that they be occupied in much prayer for the Society".⁴¹ The tragi-comic story of his quarrels with Mother St Joseph, her efforts to remove this congregation from the responsibility of the Superior General of the Fathers show clearly enough that he had not succeeded, mainly because of his psychological difficulty in understanding women, in giving this branch its rightful place in his idea of the Society of Mary. As for the Brothers, they were Champagnat's affair; he had the idea.... Admittedly during a great part of his Generalate he helped and from on high directed these two branches, the Sisters and the Brothers but we would not make him out to be the inventor of an order with four branches which he would have been credited with conceiving and leading for as long as possible. He was not the man for such a heavy and diversified structure. He was a man of a vision which essentially concerned priests working to remake the Church and the faithful who on the last day would form the latter. The very strong revival of the theme of the Third Order at the end of his life,⁴² compared with the absence of all regret concerning the Sisters and Brothers obtaining administrative autonomy, is from this point of view truly significant.

It was, however, into the hands of this man, of whom Champagnat could not be more aware, was on a different plane from his own but in whom he recognised the one superior general of the

³⁹ *Ant. Textus*, vol. 1: s, 11-56 and 109.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, s, 96-102 and 103-108.

⁴¹ Mayet 1, 51 (reproduced in CMJ, p. 155, note 23).

⁴² See OM 3, doc. 846, 18 and 36; *A Founder Acts*, doc. 396, 5.

Society of Mary that in 1837 Champagnat handed over “the branch of the Brothers entrusted to me in in 1816”, before making the same Colin two and a half years later the trustee of his spiritual will.⁴³ These acts of religious loyalty were so much the more moving in that their author knew very well how much in reality he had always been and remained alone in carrying the responsibility for this part of the work of Mary.

⁴³ OM 1, doc. 417, 9.