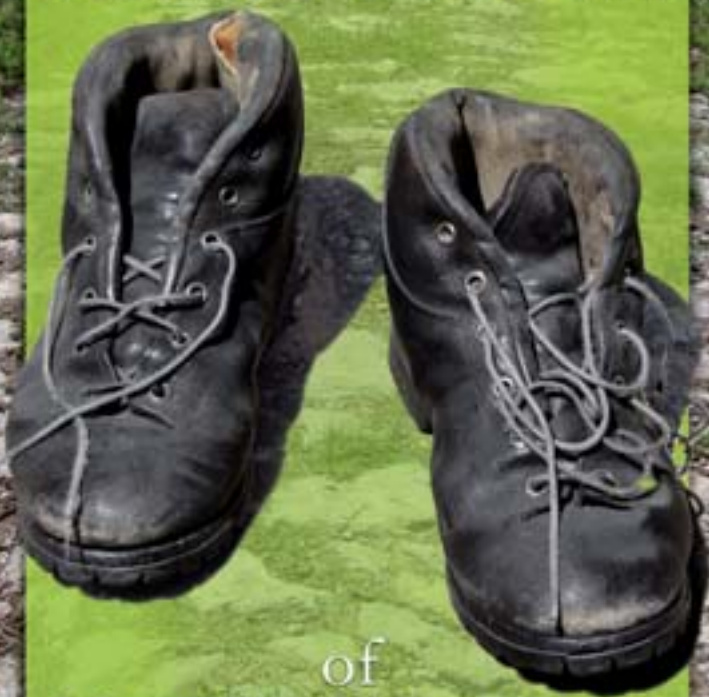


Brother Alam Delorme

# MARVELLOUS COMPANIONS



of  
Marcellin Champagnat



Brother Alain Delorme

**MARVELLOUS COMPANIONS  
of Marcellin Champagnat**



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## Presentation

This book is a follow up to “OUR FIRST BROTHERS, Marvelous companions of Marcellin”. It offers a cursory biography of our brothers, many of whom knew Father Champagnat personally and others, whose exemplary lives remain inspiring today.

In the first place we have those whom Brother Jean-Baptiste presents in his respected work: “Biographies de quelques frères”, and who had not found a place in the first book. It includes the following brothers: Jean-Chrysostome, Damien, Leon, Nivard, Elisée, Nicetas, Ribier and Urbain.

Along with them we have Brothers Philogone and Malachie, outstanding personalities from the Province of Aubenas. This Province holds an important place in the life of the Institute, dating back to 1844, the year the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Vivier merged with the Little Brothers of Mary. The same can be said of Brother Aidant who joined the Little Brothers of Mary from the Province of Beaucamps.

The heroic lives of Brothers Jules-Andre and Joseph-Felicite who died in Peking in 1900, complete, in a way, the life of Brother Marie-Candide, founder of the Marist Mission in China and who is included in the first book.<sup>1</sup>

It also seemed appropriate to include a brief biography of Brothers Nestor, Theophane, Stratonique and Diogène according to the book,

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<sup>1</sup> Delorme, A. *Our first brothers, marvellous companions of Marcellin*, General House, Roma 2009, p. 272-296



“Nos Superieurs”(Saint-Genis-Laval, 1953). These men guided the Institute after Brothers François and Louis-Marie. Thus we have covered the first century of the existence of our religious family, starting with some knowledge of the brothers who played a significant role from the beginning.. This very short list must not lull us into forgetting the large number of “unknown and unskilled” brothers who have joined our Founder in heaven, having found their place and their way of making of the Institute what it is today. But we had to limit ourselves.

We hope this book will be of assistance especially in houses of formation where the young brothers discover the action of God and men in the foundation and development of Marcellin Champagnat’s project. It can also be helpful to all Marist laymen and laywomen who interest themselves in our story.

Without a doubt, the world of today is very different from the one inhabited by the brothers whose memory we call forth here. However, if it is true that a tree lives through its roots, our acquaintance with those who, in the past, contributed to the strengthening and the growth of the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary, might enlighten our way, as we prepare to celebrate the bicentennial of its foundation.

May the reading of these pages help us in the deepening of the charism of our Founder which remains ever valid today. May the Virgin Mary remain for each one of us, the way that leads to Jesus, who is the all of our life. (Const.7)

Frère Alain Delorme

## OUR THANKS

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*Brothers Philip Ouellette and Charles Filiatrault for the English version.*

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## Abbreviations

- AFA Archives des Frères Maristes. Rome
- ALS Avis, Leçons, Sentences. Ed. 1927.
- AVIT Annales de l'Institut. 3 volumes. Rome, 1993.
- BQF Biographies de quelques Frères.  
Ed. Em. Vitte, Lyon 1924.
- B Bulletin de l'Institut des Petits Frères de Marie.  
1909, Vol. I et suivants.
- C (CSG) Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux.
- Ch Chronologie. Rome, 1976.
- Const. Constitutions and Statutes, Rome, 2011.
- L Lettres du Père Champagnat.  
Vol. I, Brother Paul Sester, Rome 1985.
- N Notices nécrologiques. Vols I and II (1890-1900)  
Lyon, Imp. X. Jevain.
- NS Nos Supérieurs. Ed. Économat Général,  
Saint-Genis-Laval, 1953.
- R Répertoire, Vol II, Brs. Paul Sester and  
Raymond Borne, Rome 1987.
- RD Registre des Défunts.  
Archives des Frères Maristes. Rome.
- RPC Registre des Projets de Constitutions.  
Archives des Frères Maristes. Rome
- RVT Registre des Vœux Temporaires.  
Archives des Frères Maristes. Rome
- V Life of Marcellin Champagnat. Bicentenary Ed.

# COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS







**1**

**Brother  
Jean-Chrysostom**

**or  
Authentic  
virtue  
(1803-1841)**





In his *Biographies de quelques Frères*<sup>2</sup> Brother Jean-Baptiste gives very few details about the life and family of Brother Chrysostom. That is why we transcribed the data found in “Répertoire des Lettres”<sup>3</sup>.

“Jean-Louis Doche was born in Designy, Upper Savoy, around the year 1803. He was the son of François and Marie Borcier. He entered Notre Dame de L’Hermitage on February 25, 1829, and received the Religious Habit on August 15 that same year. He privately took the three religious vows for three years<sup>4</sup>. Without completing the normal time prescribed, he made Perpetual Profession privately on October 2, 1831 prior to the official ceremony that took place on October 10, 1836.”

As is the case for most of the first brothers, nothing is known about their assignments the year following the Novitiate. Everything

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Baptiste *Biographies de Quelques Frères* p. 69-79

<sup>3</sup> *Répertoire des Lettres*, Vol. 2, pp. 286-288.

<sup>4</sup> Archives de Frères Maristes, *Regitre des Vœux Temporaires*. Rome, 1, p. 16

seems to indicate that as early as October, 1831, he was assigned to assist Brother Étienne at Bourg-Argental. This is confirmed by Brother Avit who indicated his presence in this school during the course of 1832, and he notes: '*...Brother Étienne passed on the responsibility to Brother Chrysostom who had succeeded very well with beginning students. As director, he contributed greatly to the operation of the school.*'<sup>5</sup>

In October of 1834, he directed a small group of brothers who took charge of the school at Sury-le-Comtal. It included Brothers Charles and Denis. The list of assignments for that year confirms what Brother Avit recorded in the annals of that establishment. He ends with a statement by the pastor, Father Metton, who at that time was also responsible for the school:

*'...Three days prior to All Saints Day, the good brothers who we anxiously awaited, finally arrived. They began teaching in the early days of November even though the walls were still damp. Because of the dampness, we were concerned about the health of both teachers and students. Divine Providence must have been involved because no one became ill. School has now been in session for two months. Three brothers are hardly sufficient. There are 180 students divided among the three of them. Furthermore, a large number of students must work during the day, so they come for instruction during the evening. Classes are given by the director who, for their benefit, carries on after normal classes in spite of feelings of fatigue and weariness.'*

Brother Avit also adds: '*The Brother Director whom Father Metton praised was none other than the gifted Brother John Chrysostom, born Louis Doche, from Savoy. He began by teaching beginning students at Bourg-Argental. He was then appointed as director of*

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<sup>5</sup> *Annales de Bourg-Argental* 213.85, p. 5



*the community before going on to found the school in Sury. Given the time and circumstances, he was a very capable individual, very religious and totally committed. As in Bourg-Argental, he succeeded very well. At meals, he avoided meat, cheese and several other foods and did not permit the cook to replace them with dishes that his stomach might better tolerate... He soon weakened because of over-work and a lack of nutrition. Added to his weak stomach condition were other medical issues, such as rheumatism and leg problems. Although at the beginning, Father Metton may have held him in high regard, this good Brother was no stranger to medical problems. After approximately three years, he had to withdraw from school and retire to the Hermitage.'*<sup>6</sup>

As is noted in the post-script of the Circular of February 4, 1840<sup>7</sup>, he had been told by his doctor that his illness was terminal.<sup>8</sup>

His last few years of life included visits to his family and trips to other places where he could rest. Brother again notes at the Hermitage: '*...he spent three years in dreadful suffering which he endured courageously. He died on January 24, 1841.*'<sup>9</sup>

The Funeral Mass was celebrated by Father Besson, S.M. on January 26.<sup>10</sup>

One of the benefits of making use of the writings of Brother Jean-Baptiste is that they put us in touch with Father Champagnat. Thanks to the various conversations that he included, they help us deepen our understanding of the Founder.

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<sup>6</sup> Archives de Frères Maristes, 213, 76, pp. 6-8

<sup>7</sup> Paul Sester, *Lettres du Père Champagnat*. Rome, 1985. 318, Vol. 1, p. 582

<sup>8</sup> Paul Sester, *Lettres du Père Champagnat*. Rome, 1985. 249, du 8 avril 1839, Vol. 1, p. 481

<sup>9</sup> Avit, *Annales de l'Institut. Décès de F. Jean-Christosome*. T. 2, pp. 46 and 47

<sup>10</sup> Archives de Frères Maristes, *Registre des Défunts* 1, p. 20, n. 65

Even though every word may not be his, they certainly convey his ideas on various topics. We owe a great deal of gratitude to Brother Jean-Baptiste, for his writings are the basis of our present reflections, but in a condensed form.

“During the winter of 1827, a member of the clergy from Savoy came on a visit to the Hermitage. He was very moved by Father Champagnat, the brothers, and by the peace, order and tranquility that he found there. Upon his return, he spoke highly of his visit to a group of young people that would meet regularly with him on Sundays. They would have discussions on various religious topics to deepen their faith and help them cope with the turmoil of the outside world.

Louis Doche, born in Designy in the canton of Rumilly, was among the active participants of the group. He became deeply interested in the discussion about the recent visit to the Hermitage and resolved to act upon it immediately. A few days later, he made his way to the Hermitage and was warmly received by Father Champagnat. Six months later, he took the Habit and was given the religious name Chrysostom.”

The qualities that he most demonstrated during his Novitiate were his religious attitude, his obedience to the will of his Superiors and his ability to successfully carry out the tasks that were assigned to him. He was later sent to Bourg-Argental to teach beginning students. He succeeded so well that he was soon assigned to teach more advanced students and was made director.

Brother Chrysostom was an excellent teacher. Under his guidance, students progressed rapidly in basic skills and in religious virtue. He left deep and lasting impressions on the communities of Bourg-Argental and Sury. The schools there would never surpass the success that they enjoyed while they were under his direction.

Father Champagnat followed him closely and rejoiced over his



successes in teaching . However, he was not completely satisfied with one aspect of his spiritual development. He found him putting too much importance on non-essentials at the expense of his interior life. He suggested to him that he actively pursue the basic virtues.

As he continually returned to this topic, and the Brother did not quite understand the meaning of basic virtues, he one day asked the Founder:

- Father, do you doubt my commitment to the Institute or my attachment to my vocation?
- No, Brother, I look upon you as a true child of the Institute, and I have never doubted your attachment to your holy vocation. Why do you ask?
- Because your constant reminders of pursuing the basic virtues troubles me and leads me to think that you doubt my vocation.
- You are making false assumptions because you do not know the meaning of basic virtues... I will try to clarify what I mean. That will put you more at ease, improve our relationship and make you more open to what I mean when I speak of basic virtues.

There are three aspects of basic virtues that are similar, yet quite different: placing a high value on basic virtues, striving to possess basic virtues, and achieving a basic virtue.

1° They are called basic virtues because essentially they are the basis for all of the other virtues. That is why one cannot place a high value on a basic virtue and achieve it, without, at the same time, owning the others as well. Specific or particular virtues are limited in scope. They have as their objective the practice one

virtue. For example, one may practice chastity or self-mortification without at the same time practicing humility or poverty. One may practice self-denial without practicing obedience, etc... However, one cannot truly be attracted to the love of Jesus-Christ without at the same time imitating His humility, His obedience, His patience, and His zeal for promoting the coming of the Kingdom of God. If one is passionate about the pursuit and practice of one of the basic virtues, all of the others are included. Practice makes perfect.

2° The essence of a basic virtue is that which makes it what it is; for example, to see Jesus-Christ in the person of a Religious Superior is to achieve the essence of a basic virtue. To see Jesus Christ in our neighbor or to find our neighbor in the heart of Christ, as St. Francis de Sales would have it, and to firmly believe that Our Divine Savior holds in His heart the good and the less than good that we do to our neighbor is to go to the essence of the basic virtue of charity...

3° We say that a person is solid in his practice of virtue when it becomes a habit with him and that he exercises this virtue easily in spite of obstacles and contradictions that may arise from the temptations of the world, the flesh and the Devil.

- Father, I don't quite understand. Could you help me understand how to go about acquiring a basic virtue?
- That's easy! You know that you have acquired a basic virtue when it affects everything you do. It is always there. It weathers the storms of life and never weakens."

Father Champagnat went on to further explain the matter which we here summarize:

1° "In our avoidance of sin, it strengthens us. 'The more a person



advances in virtue,' St. Augustine tells us, *'the fewer faults that person commits, and the more easily they are forgiven.'* St. Gregory writes: *'The avoidance of minor faults is a certain sign of a virtuous person.'* St. Chrysostom observes: *'Sin never enters the heart of the upright as a friend. It enters as an outsider who is simply passing through and who is quickly sent on his way.'*

- 2° A basic virtue safeguards the soul. One who has a basic virtue is one who firmly believes St. Francis Xavier when he says: *'In this world, there is but one good and one evil. The only good is to be saved; the only evil is to be eternally lost. What is necessary for me, therefore, is to gain heaven and avoid hell.'* A certain sign that one possesses a basic virtue is that it takes every means to save its soul.
- 3° When a person has a high regard for his vocation and loves his vocation, a basic virtue protects him and safeguards his soul. A vocation is nothing short of the sum total of all the means that God has made available to a person to lead it to perfection and to eternal life. To live and to value one's vocation is, therefore, to love and value the will of God. It means being faithful to grace and using the means that He has given us to work towards our salvation and to advance in perfection...
- 4° A basic virtue is one that demonstrates fidelity to religious exercises. For one who is truly religious, prayer is both a need and a pleasure. Rather than lessening prayerful encounters with God, the various distractions, challenges and daily concerns that we face, become so many occasions for us to deepen our relationship with God. Because of them, we recognize our need for His enlightenment and His grace.
- 5° A basic virtue is reflected by fidelity to the Rule. St. Augustine notes that the rule is reflected in the one who observes it. It measures and reflects our progressions or regressions in the spiritual life. It is also an indication of how pleasing or displeasing

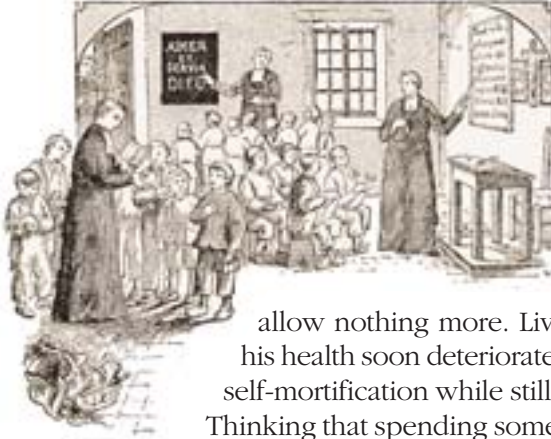


we are to God. The Religious who fails to observe the Rules is a bad Religious.

- 6° A basic virtue bears up with one's neighbor. 'The better part of perfection', writes St. Francis de Sales, *'is to bear up with the imperfections of our neighbor.'* The cornerstone of a basic virtue is the love and acceptance of one's neighbor.
- 7° Basic virtue responds to duty. The Religious who possesses basic virtue values his responsibilities regardless of their relative importance. He does everything possible to carry them out because he knows that he is fulfilling God's will.
- 8° Finally, solid virtue responds to the needs of the ailing, the elderly, the infirmed and those facing challenges of every kind. St. Francis de Sales noted: *'Gusty winds can extinguish small fires; they also intensity greater ones.'* Similarly, those who are weak in virtue soon give up. Those who are strong in basic virtue overcome life's challenges and endure courageously."

Father Champagnat's teachings were not without benefit for Brother Chrysostom. He fully committed himself to the practice of the basic virtues and devoted all of his energy to the imitation of Our Lord, especially in His humility, His obedience, His zeal for the coming of the Kingdom of God, the leading of children to holiness and his love of the cross.

One might even say that he overemphasized his efforts at self-denial and self-mortification. He had a rather delicate constitution that tolerated neither meat nor cheese and he would not permit himself to take many of the foods that made up the common meal. As long as he was at the Mother House under the direction of the Superior, care was taken to replace foods that he could not eat with others that he could eat.



However, when he became the director, he was free to choose, and he totally neglected his health. He would only choose from what was provided at table. At times, this consisted only of bread and vegetables, and he would

allow nothing more. Living on such a restricted diet, his health soon deteriorated, perhaps due to his extreme self-mortification while still totally dedicated to teaching.

Thinking that spending some time at home might improve his condition, Father Champagnat sent him home to spend a few months with his family. In spite of all the care that his parents provided, he felt ill at ease and longed for community life.

A rumor had been circulating among the brothers that he was abandoning his vocation and that he would not return. Father Champagnat wrote to him to advise him of what was being said, and asked to clarify the situation.

He received the following reply: *'I am promptly responding to your request for a clarification in order to put an end to the false rumors and ease the pain that they may have caused you. I have not forgotten the instructions you gave me about solid virtue and how it can be recognized and maintained. Although I am far less than perfect, I long for basic virtue and would like at all price to die in my holy vocation. At no time did I ever wish to remain with my family. I am lonesome here and feel like a fish out of water.'*

Far from being restored to health, his stay at home actually weakened his condition. By way of testing and purifying him further, God permitted other ordeals to come upon him, such as severe

chest and leg pains from which he suffered terribly. In the midst of all of these trials, he remained not only steadfast, but joyful and contented. He approached God in deep prayer often repeating the invocation ‘God, come to my help. Give me Your grace and do with me what You will.’

In his circular announcing the death of this outstanding Religious, Brother Francois expressed best what we have alluded to concerning patience under trial and holy dispositions at the hour of death:

“Very dear Brothers, on January twenty fourth, at four o’clock in the evening, God called our dear Brother John Chrysostom to Himself. For the repose of his soul, you are asked to carry out as soon as possible what has been prescribed in the Rule for Professed brothers.

The Society has lost an outstanding Brother. Young people have lost a capable teacher. Heaven, however, has gained a new member for its Elect. God has found a special place for him by having him endure for three years the crucible of pain and suffering, giving him the grace of endurance proportionate to what he suffered. He was assailed by a powerful lung ailment that gradually undermined his health. His condition became acute during the last few months of his life. He endured all of his terrible sufferings heroically. He could not sleep and could remain in the same position only for a short while. He had a constant and terrible cough. He had deep wounds all over his body with an abscess on his left knee that caused him to slip in and out of consciousness. In spite of all of these woes, he remained completely faithful to God and submitted himself fully to his will. He would continually pray: *‘Lord, all You want for as long as You want, even ten or more years, if that is your holy will. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, have mercy on me.’* At times he would say: *‘Dear Brothers, I am so fortunate! I prefer these last two years of my life more than all of the others put together. How*



*good it is to die in the Society of Mary! His communion with God was almost constant. He could hardly sufficiently express all of the sentiments that he had in his heart.*

Such was his attitude when he died in the Lord. Dear Brothers, the pain of living without pleasure is well worth the pleasure of living without the satisfactions that this world has to offer. Let us live our religious life to the full!”



## **Praying with Brother Jean Chrysostom**

As we come to the conclusion at our first glance into your life, Brother John Chrysostom, you who had the good fortune of having Father Champagnat as your mentor, we join you in prayer:

- You were a young man searching for God and you were captivated by the words of your pastor as he described meeting the brothers on his visit to Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage.
- We know very little of your personal background and that of your parents prior to when you reached twenty eight years of age. We do know that you left High Savoy and met Father Champagnat on February 25, 1829.
- Father Champagnat enjoyed meeting you and did not hesitate to admit you to the Novitiate which you began on August 15, 1829.
- You were remembered as a happy, fervent and obedient religious, one who was always successful when carrying out the tasks assigned to you.



- At Bourg-Argental, you were responsible for beginning students before being assigned to more advanced pupils. Everyone delighted in your successful accomplishments.
- On All Saints Day in 1834, you started a school at Sury-Le-Comtal. Brother Jean-Baptiste affirmed that you left lasting impressions at both Bourg-Argental and Sury-Le-Comtal. The quality of your administration at both schools would never be surpassed.
- Your life bears witness to the wonderful care Father Champagnat had in forming you in the basic virtues. He wanted you to be as excellent in those areas as you were in education.
- Your questioning of the Founder reveals your free and straightforward nature as well as your willingness to follow his directives. His responses to your questions are relevant even today.
- You suffered from digestive ailments that prevented you from eating meat and cheese. This condition, added to your heavy workload, led to a rapid decline in your health.
- You spared no efforts in helping your students. You even added an evening class in order to assist students who wanted to learn but could not attend regular classes because of work.

- You followed your own Way of the Cross during your three years in the infirmary at the Hermitage. It was there that you went to your eternal reward on January 24, 1841. Brother Francois announced your passing away in his Circular and praised your total trust in God and complete submission to His Divine Will. Your courage never failed you.

Brother John Chrysostom, may this brief review of your life be for us an occasion to give thanks for your generosity in responding to the Lord's call. May it also encourage us to fully renew our efforts in our daily commitment to the Christian education of youth.

Amen

# COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS







**2**

**Brother Damien**

**or**

**the  
veritable  
child  
of the  
Institute  
(1799-1844)**





In nine pages, Brother Jean-Baptiste chronicles the biography of this brother. He sub-titles it “the veritable child of the Institute”.<sup>11</sup>

Jean-Marie Mercier was born in Saint-Just-la-Pendue (Loire). His biography does not include his date of birth nor the profession of his parents. But we do know according to our archives that Jean-Marie was born in 1799, that his father’s first name was Damien and that his mother was Benoite Rozier.

Brother Jean-Baptiste highlights the fact that even while in the world, he was a pious, modest young man and very faithful to all the responsibilities of a true Christian. This can be confirmed by a question that he asked after having attended Mass that had just been celebrated by Father Cholleton, the Vicar General of Lyon. “*Sir, teach me how to love God and please tell me what I must do to love him perfectly.*”

When the priest asked him who had told him to ask such a question, the young man replied: “*Nobody in the world; it’s my guardian angel, who during Mass, told me in the depth of my heart: “Go see that priest and he will tell you what you must do to love God”*”

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Baptiste, *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, p. 60-68

After having engaged him in conversation, Father Cholleton detected in him a profound sense of and disposition for religious life, wrote a letter for him to Father Champagnat , and told him: “Go to the Marist Brothers, and there they will teach you how to love God”.

Armed with this letter, the young Mercier made his way to the Hermitage during the month of October in 1824. We are aware that at this time, the Hermitage was in full construction. Furthermore, we know that the young man now in his twenty-fifth year arrived on October 31<sup>st</sup>. He asked to speak to Father Champagnat and gave him the letter.” And Brother Jean-Baptiste transcribes the dialogue which follows as though he had been a witness.

“What are you doing here?” asks Father Champagnat.

– *I have come to love God with all my heart, responds the postulant.*

– What are you going to do to love God with all your heart?

– *All that you wish. I am in your hands and am ready to obey you in everything.*

– What a wonderful disposition. How long is that going to last?

– *My entire life, if it so pleases God.*

– Have you been thinking of being a brother for a long time?

– *Yes, for the past several years, I feel attracted to leaving the world in order to serve God more faithfully*

– What is your profession, and what have you done until today?





- *I was a miller. I would go to private individuals with a donkey to fetch the wheat and take it to the mill to have it ground.*
- So, it was in guiding a donkey that you found the treasure, that is a religious vocation.
- *My work which exposes me to many dangers, in fact, did not repulse me from the world.*
- Isn't it true that it is because you dislike work that you are coming to us?
- *No, rather because I desire to serve God and love him perfectly.*<sup>12</sup>

Father Champagnat, satisfied with his responses welcomed him to the novitiate. A few months later, on April 3, 1825, he gave him the religious habit and the name Brother Damien”.

Our archives indicate the date of his first private vows as the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 1826, the date of his diploma as October 14, 1828 and the date of his perpetual profession as October 1836.

*“During the twenty years that Brother Damien lived in religious life, continued Brother Jean-Baptiste, he was forever the model for all the brothers, but he differentiated himself in particular by a great sensitivity of conscience and an extreme horror of all sin. He also*



The church of St-Just-la-Pendue

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<sup>12</sup> Jean-Baptiste, *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, p. 60-61

*showed a complete fidelity to the Rule, an ardent zeal for the Christian instruction of poor children and a love of the Institute which stopped at nothing.*

By way of illustrating how sensitive was his conscience, the biographer reproduced a dialogue between Brother Damien and Father Champagnat.

One day, having come to see Father, he said to him:

- *“Is it possible, Father that a religious can become so familiar with venial sin, that he could commit it without remorse?”*
- *That would not be very possible* answered Father.
- *And the consciences of these brothers, resumed Brother, how can they be at peace? Then he went on, as for me, when I have the misfortune of committing some faults, I have the feeling that I have swallowed some poison and until I have been able to confess myself, I can neither drink, eat nor sleep.”*

“In fact, as soon as he had the misfortune of committing some faults, he would go looking for his confessor . One day his confessor told him to be at peace in this kind of situation and simply to humble himself before God: *But Father, answered the Brother, can one take too many precautions to free oneself from an enemy such as sin? I cannot find peace until I have vomited it out and that the blood of Jesus Christ has flowed over me to wash me.*”

As regards the certainty that Brother Damien was faithful to the Rule, we have this report from Brother Jean-Baptiste: On a particular occasion a few brothers were mocking him for his scruples as they attempted to drag him along with them on a visit for which they did not have permission. After having defended himself during several



St-Just-la-Pendue (Loire) – General view

moments, he yelled out at them with an energy, a toughness and an ardor that made them blush. “*Heaven and earth would have to get involved to force me to break the Rule.*”

The brothers who were with him would say:

*“Brother Damien does not need a clock in order to get the exercises started on time; he has such an instinct for regularity that he guesses the hour and is always ready at the moment it is time to begin the exercises.”*

“During the winter of 1835, he almost died from typhoid fever. In a moment of delirium it seemed to him that he was in judgment before God, and the devil who was bringing to mind all the faults of his life was threatening to drag him into a profound abyss of fire. He imagined, seeing at the same time, his Guardian Angel who was presenting to God a long list of all the children whom he had instructed and prepared for their first communion. The Holy Spirit who was prostrate before the throne of Jesus Christ, said to him in offering him the list: *“Lord, would you allow to perish this brother, servant of your divine Mother, who has prepared and won over for you so many children?”* Our Lord, in accepting this list, threw a severe glance at the devil who quickly hurled himself into hell along with the book in which he had written the sins of the brother.

This kind of vision made such an impression on the brother’s spirit that once he was cured, he could hardly think about it without trembling. This brought more zeal in the instruction of the children. Later he drew up a list of all those to whom he taught catechism

and prepared for first communion, which he carefully saved. He would say: *‘It will serve me well at the judgment seat of God.’*

This last statement reveals for us the image that Brother Damien had of God. It allows us to realize that his first Christian education had persuaded him that God was more a judge than a father. No doubt, the teaching of St Alphonsus Liguori that had influenced Marcellin Champagnat at the major seminary, was not known by the pastor of the young Mercier’s parish.

One day, Brother Damien went to see Father Champagnat and asked him if it was permitted for a Marist Brother to love his Institute more than all the other Religious Congregations.

- *Yes Brother, replied the Father, the same as it is for a child to love his mother more than a queen, even if his mother were a simple country woman. So, you really love your Institute?*
- *Very much, very much.*
- *And why do you love it so much?*
- *For four reasons. First reason: “I love my Institute because God loves it.*
- *How do you know that God loves it?*
- *I see it, everybody sees it.*
- *That does not say very much to me nor does it explain how you know that God loves the Institute.*
- *It is certain and quite visible that he loves it because he blesses it and makes it prosper in such an admirable way. When I*



*entered we had two or three schools, today we have more than forty; at that time there were fifty of us, and today, we are almost three hundred; in those early days we were without a novitiate; at present we have a perfectly organized novitiate. Isn't all that a sign of God's blessings and proof that He loves the Institute?*

- *Yes, I must admit it; now, let us see your second reason.*”

In passing, let us note that the style of the biographer highlights the Founders ability to raise questions that helped Brother Damien to express his thoughts.

- *Second reason: “In the second place I love my Institute because it is my family and my all. Isn't it reasonable that I should love it as much as a well bred child loves his family and his possessions?”*

*Third reason: “I love my Institute for reasons of gratitude, that is to say, for all that I owe it... It is the Institute that has made me all that I am. How could I not love it?”*

- *All of that is true. Now let us get to the fourth reason.*
- *Finally, I love my Institute, in light of all that I expect from it.*
- *And what are you waiting for?*
- *That it may continue the good that it has done in me so far that it may continue to take care of me in sickness and health, that it may guarantee for me an honest existence, that it may preserve me in my vocation, that it may pray for me after my death and that it may deliver me from purgatory.”*



After that, Brother Jean Baptiste checked on the retreat notebooks where Brother Damien recorded his resolutions and the intimate sentiments of his soul. He shows how all this, revealed his love for the Institute.

*“In order to truly love my Institute,*

- 1° I must give it all my affections, consequently detaching myself more and more from my parents and from all I left in the world.*
- 2° Make a greater effort to catch its spirit and to form myself in its method of teaching.*
- 3° To work without reserve at becoming capable of fulfilling its end...*
- 4° In the details of my behavior, to prefer always the good and the advantages of the Institute to my personal good and to my particular personal interests.*
- 5° To contribute, as much as lies in me, to the maintaining of regularity, piety and a good spirit of unity among the brothers...*
- 6° To fulfill in as perfect a way as possible the task that will be confided to me.*

“These are the rules of conduct that the good brother had prescribed for himself in order to witness his love of the Institute.”

Next, in a long account, he expressed his point of view on those who, it seemed to him, did not love the Institute. We summarize them here:

*It appears to me that those who do not love their Institute and are not its genuine children, are:*

- 1° Those who are too attached to their parents, and who visit and write to them too often.*



- 2° *All those who, in the details of their behavior, in the discharge of their duty, in their contacts with outsiders, deviate from the spirit, the methods, the customs, the ways of giving life to the Institute....*
- 3° *Those who, for lack of zeal, neglect their perfection and their education.*
- 4° *All those who, are too taken up with themselves, too preoccupied with their health... who refuse a difficult position that would demand much devotedness.*
- 5° *All those who sabotage the Rule, who introduce abuses in their communities, who are not regular and exact in their responsibilities, except when they are checked on by the superiors.*
- 6° *Those who waste the goods of the Institute or allow them to go bad or get spoiled rather than take care of them.*
- 7° *All those, finally who discharge their job out of duty like servants or workers. God forbid that I should have anything to do with them or imitate them."*

The biographer continues:

The zeal of Brother Damien for the instruction of children, his daily mortifications and his dedication to the Institute, ruined in a very short time the resilient health with which nature had blessed him. Since he was not taking care of himself whatsoever and since he deprived himself of everything, he caught a cold which degenerated into consumption which made him suffer horribly for three years.

Despite his weakness, his exhaustion, his continual sufferings and tightness of chest, which did not allow for any moments of respite, he never stopped following the common diet and participating in all

the exercises of piety with the community. Instead of resting in the infirmary as his condition required, he was busy all day doing something useful such as serving the sick, collecting wood, putting the tools away, and putting everything back in its place.

His solicitude made him think of everything. In the midst of a cold winter night, he remembered, while making his rounds during the day, having seen a brazier, in one of the apartments adjacent to the bakery, which he felt could cause a fire if it were not removed. Without hesitation, he got up to make sure that everything was safe. He arrived at the very moment when the fire had burned everything that was around the brazier and was starting to spread to a pile of wood that was close by and could have caused a huge blaze.

Always calm, always resigned, always looking for more mortifications, he bore with heroic patience his perpetual sufferings, and no one ever heard him complain or look for relief. Far from it, he even refused what was offered him. A few days before his death, when it was no longer possible for him to swallow, the infirmarian brought him an orange. He refused it energetically saying: *“Brother, why this expense for me? I am reaching my end. This orange cannot relieve me nor prolong my life. It is, therefore useless to waste the goods of the Institute. Give this fruit to another sick person who has need of it; as for me a herbal tea will do.”*

The violent and ongoing sufferings did not prevent him from meditating on the sufferings of Jesus Christ or dialoguing continually with God. Fixing his gaze almost continually on the images of Jesus and Mary, he multiplied his acts of confidence, of gratitude, of love and of resignation. It was a beautiful display of edification to see him overwhelmed with suffering, and nevertheless always cheerful, always contemplating, always fingering his rosary beads and kissing the cross and pressing it to his heart, while professing to Jesus that he wanted to love him without measure.



A few moments before dying, he cried out with sentiments of joy and ineffable love: *“Thanks be to God, I have nothing but Jesus, but He is all I need. Oh, how rich I am, how happy I am on this bed of suffering with this treasure!”*

It was the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1844. Brother Jean-Baptiste added the following:

*Brother Damien had left such a fragrance of virtue and benediction on all that had belonged to him that for a long time, when the sick were approaching their final end they requested to be placed in Brother Damien’s bed where he had breathed his last. It was their hope that their own death would be as happy and precious in the eyes of God if they themselves passed on from earth to heaven in his bed.”*

Brother Jean-Baptiste ends this short biography with a prayer:

*“Oh Brother Damien! Oh veritable child of the Institute! Do not forget the requests that so many brothers, and especially the author of these lines have asked of you in the eyes of Jesus and Mary and to which you made yourself responsible with such tenderness!”*




## **Praying with Brother Damien**

Brother Damien, we are here to pray with you by recalling a few events of your twenty-five years as a Marist.

- We know very little of your family or of your childhood. Nevertheless, the question which you asked of Father Cholleton reveals the quality of your spiritual life. *“Sir, teach me to love God and tell me what I must do to love him perfectly.”*
- Your heart listened to your Guardian Angel. You called him “My good angel”, and you attributed to him the inspiration to pursue your vocation with the visiting priest.
- Thanks to your question, we now know from Father Cholleton’s answer, the appreciation that he had for Father Champagnat and his Institute: *“On my recommendation, go to the Marist Brothers, there they will teach you to love God.”*



- When you presented yourself to the novitiate on October 31, 1824 you were a twenty-five year old miller who expressed to Father Champagnat your desire to *“love God with all your heart.”*
- Your answers to the Founder’s questions gave evidence of your spirit of righteousness and simplicity. These won over his trust, and he welcomed you as brother on April 3, 1825. On October 14, 1829, you obtained your Elementary Diploma and in October of 1836, you pronounced your perpetual vows.
- Brother Jean-Baptist wrote that you were a model for everyone with regards to your sensitivity of conscience, your total fidelity to the Rule, your love of the Institute and your ardent zeal for the Christian instruction of poor children.
- In a short time your extreme austerity and your all consuming work shattered the health you had previously enjoyed. The infirmary at the Hermitage welcomed you.
- In your sickness and retirement, you spent your time serving the others and making yourself useful by taking care of such chores as picking up wood and putting away the tools.
- Calm and resigned in your ordeal, you meditated on the sufferings of Jesus and communicated with God.



Those who visited you were struck at seeing you always happy and rapt in prayer.

- For years afterwards, memories of you were a blessing in the infirmary at the Hermitage where you died on January 22, 1844.
- Today, we return to the prayer with which Brother Jean Baptiste ends your biography:

“Oh Brother Damian! Oh veritable child of the Institute! Do not forget the requests that many brothers and especially the one who is writing these lines gave you to take to Jesus and Mary and which you so graciously agreed to do so!”

Amen.

COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS





3

**Brother Leon**

**or**

**Love  
of  
One's  
Vocation  
(1813-1856)**



A biography of Brother Leon can be found in “Biographies de Quelques Frères”.<sup>13</sup>

According to Brother Jean-Baptiste, Brother Leon Denis Velly was born in Lyons on March 7, 1813. However, according to the basic diploma that he received at Valence on September 4, 1840, his date of birth was listed as April 19, 1812.

Like many people living in Lyons at the time, his parents worked at home as silk weavers. Those who did so were called “canuts”. History teaches us that they revolted in 1831, protesting against their poor working conditions and that they were severely suppressed.

Leon and his brothers assisted their parents with their work. The day after his First Communion, young Leon went to the chapel at Fourvière to turn over to Mary the resolution that he had made of avoiding mortal sin. It was during this visit at the foot of the altar at Mary’s Shrine that he had the inspiration of becoming a Religious.

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<sup>13</sup> *Jean-Baptiste, Biographies de Quelques Frères* édition 1924, pp. 103 à 110 et édition 1868, p. 130 à 139.

He once told his mother, who was trying to better understand him, that he wanted to become a Trappist Monk. As his mother resisted the idea, he affirmed: *“Mother, whenever I hear the bells ringing from Fourvière, I always hear an inner voice telling me: ‘You are not of this world, and I want you to become a Religious.’ So it is useless to object to what I intend to do, for I am convinced that God and the Blessed Virgin will give me the strength to carry it out.”*

Sometime later, as his parents continued to disapprove of his intentions, he left them suddenly and went to the Trappist monastery of Aiguebelle. Seeing how young and frail he was, the abbot tested him resolutely at first. However, the young candidate was so convincing in demonstrating that God was calling him and that he had a vocation that the abbot relented and accepted him as a Novice.

Filled with joy, Brother Leon gave himself completely to God. As his motto, he chose: *“Fidelity to the Rule, even in the letter of the Rule.”* Had it not been out of obedience, his tendency towards self-denial would have been excessive. Notwithstanding, his frail constitution prevented him from staying in the monastery for very long. In spite of himself, after seven or eight months, he had to withdraw to the infirmary. Having remained there for a month and not showing any signs of improvement, the abbot suggested that he return home to his family.

Devastated by such a suggestion, he begged on his knees that he be permitted to die with the Trappists because that is what he wanted most in life. The abbot was so moved and edified by Leon’s constant desire to enter the Religious life that he advised him to go to the brothers at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, and he gave him a letter of recommendation for him to present to the Superior, Father Mazelier.



Brother Leon tearfully left the Trappist monastery and arrived at Saint Paul where he was well received, thanks to the letter of recommendation that he had received. Father Mazelier quickly perceived that he had before him someone very special. In order to restore him to full health, he prescribed complete rest and gave him the minimum of light assignments.

At Saint Paul's, as with the Trappists, Brother Leon was characterized by his religious attitude, his observance of the Rules, his modesty, his self-denial and his love for his vocation.

From every point of view, Father Mazelier was pleased with him, and finding that he was enthusiastic about the Christian education of youth, gave him the responsibility of the parish schools. He accomplished this task with great success. Students he found at first to be misbehaved, undisciplined, and ignorant soon changed. They became well-behaved, docile, punctual and very religious.

After having reorganized the classes at Saint Paul's and trained brothers to continue the work, he was sent to Barjac where the school was deficient and in need of a director who was strong and well organized. He succeeded in re-organizing and strengthening the school system not only at Barjac, but at Vans and Côte-Saint-André as well. Soon, a religious atmosphere of peace, order and tranquility prevailed at all of these locations and religious instruction prospered.

Brother Jean-Baptiste often referred to the holiness of Brother Leon who was noted especially for his fidelity to observing the Rules, his spirit of self-denial and his love for his vocation. He wrote: *"With him, there were no half-measures in his service to God. He tried to be always faithful to God's will and had a high regard for all of the Rules and observed them faithfully down to its least detail."* Demonstrating his point, he related a conversation Brother Leon

and some of the brothers had when he brought them to task for breaking silence during free time of a recollection. *“One of them complained that he was too harsh and that it was possible to be a good religious without following minor prescriptions of the Rules as long as the vows and the basic articles of the Rules were respected.”*

Brother Leon replied that he was mistaken and pointed out the passage from Scripture: *“He who is faithful in little things can be trusted with greater things.”* He added that observing articles that appear of lesser importance was necessary *in order to reach the state of perfection in our vocation to which we are called.*”

“Brother Leon’s love of self-denial was not less import to him than was his fidelity to the Rules. When advised to lessen his commitments and take care of his health, he answered: *‘Perfection is more important than health. It is better to live a fervent life in a spirit of self-denial than it is to spend eighty years pampering and taking good care of ourselves.’*

When the doctor prescribed that he bathe in thermal water in order to cure his painful rheumatic condition, he pleaded with his Superiors to excuse him from this directive from the doctor saying that hot baths, thermal waters and other such treatments may be good for other people, but was not appropriate for those called to the religious life.” His biographer further notes: While walking in the community garden with a few brothers who had come to see him, one of them said: *‘... with this currant and quince, you must, no doubt, make excellent jellies’ These delicacies may be suitable for the sick and for people living in the world; however, we religious must learn to live without.*”

“He loved his vocation so much that he called it his treasure. While talking about how special the call to the religious life was with two of the brothers that he was working with, he began to ask questions about the religious life. He asked the youngest one:



– ‘Do you love your vocation?’

He replied:

– “I love it more than I love my parents, and the proof that this is so is that I left them in spite of everything they did to discourage me from entering.’

He asked the same question to the second, and he replied:

– ‘I prefer my vocation to everything the world has to offer.’ Brother Leon responded: ‘How fortunate you are that God has given you such a gift. As for myself, I value my vocation more than I value my life. I would be willing to give up my life and every ounce of order to preserve it.’”

Brother Jean-Baptiste then quotes entries from Brother Leon's retreat journal, adding: "I am certain that you will enjoy reading the following: *"I must love my vocation.*

*1° Because of its excellence. It is for me a real treasure. Jesus said to His disciples: 'Come, follow me, and I will give you a treasure in heaven.' It has the excellence and value of martyrdom. According to Saint Bernard, it is a continual martyrdom.*

*Because for me, it is great means of salvation. Souls living in the world are like trees planted in arid ground, where dew from heaven falls rarely and very sparingly when it does; religious, on the other hand are like trees that blossom, blessed by the Lord. Planted in watered gardens where streams of living water flow, they produce fruit every day of the year.*

*I must love my vocation because it is a mark of predestination. Saint Paul teaches this with authority when he states: 'Those he predestined, he called; those He called, He justified, and those he justified He also glorified.' (Rm.8:30) It is the most certain sign of predestination because that style of life is most closely imitates the life of Jesus-Christ and compels us to perfectly imitate his virtues.*

*2° I must work faithfully and untiringly at my vocation to the religious life because it a gift that requires my co-operation. God's gift is a treasure that must be protected so that the Devil may not bear it away. If my vocation is a tree of life, I must nurture it; water it, care of it. As St. Peter says: 'Brothers, you have been called and chosen: work all the harder to justify it by your actions...' (2 Peter 1:10)*



3° *By its very nature, a vocation is a condition that is fixed, stable and permanent. Therefore, I must be solid as a rock in my vocation. Being faithful to one's vocation is a duty, a commandment and a lifelong commitment. Everything depends on it, the welfare of my students, my striving for perfection, and my personal happiness.*

*I therefore resolve every day to ask God, through the intercession of Mary, for the grace of fidelity to religious observance and to my vocation so that at the end of my days, I may celebrate with the upright in heaven."*

In order to guarantee his perseverance, he asked to be admitted to the vow of Stability. With great joy, he pronounced his vow during the retreat of 1855 which, in fact, would be his last.

Brother Leon never enjoyed excellent health. For him, real life was in heaven. Yet, his death came as somewhat of a surprise, as it does for many. He was very committed to the community of "la Côte", and his health seemed to measure up to the demands required of its administration. Nevertheless, following a drop in temperature, his rheumatic condition spread to his lungs bringing about a serious condition.

He saw death coming, yet did not fear. Trusting in God, he abandoned himself completely to His Divine Mercy. His final days were acts of thanksgiving during which he expressed his trust, his love, and his resignation. He died peacefully in these sentiments on April 26, 1856, at "la Cote-Saint-Andre", at age 43.





## **Praying with Brother Leon**

After having hastily discovered your life, we approach you once more in prayer.

- We know almost nothing of your childhood in Lyons, living in a “canutes” family of modest means.
- We learn from history that a revolution of silk workers occurred in 1831 and again in 1834, protesting against unjust working conditions. Their revolutions were violently suppressed and for many, at the cost of their blood. Fortunately, you and your family had already left Lyons before the conflict actually occurred.
- You tell us that it was at Fourvière, at the foot of the altar, the day after your first communion, that you first had the inspiration of becoming a religious.
- Not having the support of your parents, you run away to the Trappist monastery of Aiguebelle. Because of your pleads of supplication, and in spite of your young age, Father Abbot receives you as a Novice.
- You become a fervent Novice who wants to remain faithful to the Rule, down to its least detail.



However, your frail constitution does not permit you to follow the demands of monastic life for very long, and you had to withdraw to the infirmary.

- The Abbot wanted to send you home to regain your health. However, wishing to acknowledge your desire to remain in the religious life, he gives you a letter of recommendation for Father Francois Mazelier, Superior of the Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, not far from Aiguebelle.
- Father Mazelier welcomes you and provides great care for your health. You recover and he entrusts you with the task of re-organizing the classes at Saint Paul's. Through your intelligence and commitment, you succeed at your task marvelously well.
- He asks you to do the same at Barjac, a little neighboring community along the banks of the Gard River. There also, your zeal and knowledge of education is recognized by great success. Saved in our archives is the diploma (Brevet de capacité), that you received at Valence on September 4, 1840.
- After having served in Les Vans in the southern part of l'Ardèche, you were assigned to La-Côte-Saint-Andre, in Isère. The school had been founded by Father Champagnat and prospered greatly under the direction of Brother Louis-Marie who was later to become Superior General.
- In that setting, On April 26, 1856, you went to your eternal reward trusting in God and His Divine

Mercy. You had just turned 43.

- Although we lack specific dates regarding your commitments to various educational involvements, we like to think that you knew Father Champagnat and that you were among those brothers involved in the joining of the Brothers of Saint-Paul to those of Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage in 1842.
- During your early time of formation, Brother Jean-Baptiste was your Superior. He continued in the role as Brother Assistant until you died. He knew you well, adding credibility to his observations about you. He noted that your holiness was based on your great fidelity to observing the Rules, your love of self-denial and your deep attachment to your vocation.
- He selected entries from your retreat journal that reflected your feelings and convictions:  
*"I must love my vocation, it is a treasure.  
In it, I must remain undeterred, strong as a rock."*
- During the retreat of 1855, you joyfully took the vow of stability as a pledge of your fidelity to your vocation. That vow had been introduced only a short time earlier during the third session of the Second General Chapter held on May 6, 1854.

Thank you Brother Leon for your fervent and generous life. May we learn from your example how to follow Christ.

Amen.

COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS



**4**

**Brother Nivard**  
**or**  
**the**  
**Resolute**  
**Spirit**  
**(1827-1858)**



In his “*Biographies de Quelques Frères*” Brother Jean-Baptiste presents the biography of Brother Nivard, or the resolute spirit.<sup>14</sup>

It is necessary to note right from the start that, more than just a biography of this brother, it is above all a dissertation on the resolute spirit which occupies two-thirds of the text. In this eighteen page document, the name of the brother does not appear until page twelve.

Brother Jean-Baptiste begins by affirming that the resolute spirit is compatible with cheerfulness and holy joy. To support his thesis, he gives numerous examples from the lives of the saints. Then, after having made the distinction between the resolute spirit and the superficial spirit, he takes ten pages to develop the principal characteristics of the former. He presents twelve of them.

1. The resolute spirit has sound principles and holds on to them.
2. It never acts without reflection.
3. It considers that one’s august pursuit is one’s salvation.
4. It fears sin, only.

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<sup>14</sup> Jean-Baptiste, *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, édition 1924, pp. 111 à 128, et édition 1868 pp. 140-162.

5. It does not compromise with one's conscience.
6. It values its calling and works hard at carrying it out.
7. It does not always trust itself.
8. It is dependable in all things.
9. It loves discipline and regularity.
10. It loves study and work.
11. It is discrete and lives in a spirit of recollection.
12. It is good and just with regards to everyone.

After this well structured development, the biographer presents Brother Nivard as a model of a resolute spirit by recalling certain episodes of his life: his first communion, his entrance into the novitiate, his profession and his preparation for death.

Such a presentation clearly indicates the intention of Brother Jean-Baptiste when he published his book in 1868, nearly fifty years after the death of the Founder. At that time, the Institute experienced a rapid numerical growth, but many brothers were also leaving because of a rushed formation and not enough concern with the new demands of a society in rapid transformation due to the industrial developments and the railroad. That transformation did not fail to affect community life, and Brother Jean-Baptiste was conscious of it. He had expressed his concern to Brother Louis-Marie, the Superior General when he noted: "*the flooding of community life with a bourgeois lifestyle.*"<sup>15</sup>

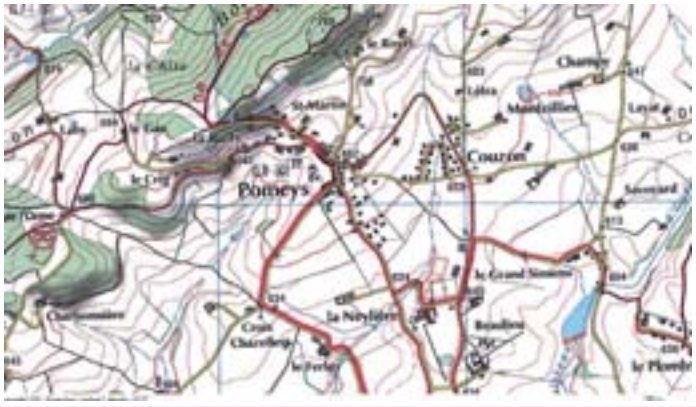
The biography of Brother Nivard offers him the occasion to make a long presentation on the resolute spirit, a basic and indispensable component in the perseverance of the brothers in their vocation of apostles to the young.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux* du 8 avril 1872, Vol. 4, p. 280-283



Our brother  
Nivard born  
Jean-Marie  
Grange  
al Pomeys  
10 April 1827



Without a doubt, this explains the length of the text and the insistence of the author on basing himself on the Scriptures and the examples of the saints.

Ten times he cites the words of the Bible and gives the examples and comments of numerous saints: Anthony (Desert Father), Macaire of Alexandria, Gregory Nazianzen, Basil, Sulpice Severe disciple of Saint Martin, Francis Xavier (twice), Francis of Assisi, Bernard (7 Times), Louis Gonzaga, Nicholas of Tolentine, Teresa of Avila, Augustine (twice) Ambrose, Thomas Aquinas, (twice) Ignatius, Paul, Cyprien, Dosithee, Philip Neri, Leonard, John Chrysostom,, Fidele, Francis de Sales, Louis king of France, Joseph Calasanz, Isidore, John Climaque. He also cites a few ancient authors: Ausone, Plutarque, Origin as well as two contemporary ones: the Jesuit Louis du Pont and the Viscount of Bonald.

After his dissertation on the resolute spirit, Brother Jean-Baptiste writes: “Brother Nivard was born, Jean-Marie Grange, in Pomeys (Rhône) the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1827, and was a remarkable example of a resolute spirit. *As the prophet says, all the beauty of the daughter of*



*Zion*, is found within. This text can be applied to Brother Nivard and we can say without fear of exaggeration that the entire beauty of his soul, the entire strength of his virtue was internal and hidden to the eyes of the world. Certain facts which will be recalled will prove without a doubt that such is the case.

### **1. His first communion**

After almost two years of preparation, Jean-Marie is given permission to receive his first communion. But he was torn between two intense and profound sentiments: the ineffable joy of receiving Jesus Christ and the fear of not being sufficiently prepared for this great moment. His parents encouraged him not to wait any longer. It was at that moment that he resolved to leave the world and to become a religious. His parents were not opposed to this desire of his, but encouraged him to reflect seriously on the matter before following through on his plan. After taking time to reflect and pray, Jean-Marie asked his father to accompany him to the Hermitage to discuss his admission.

As they drew near to the brothers' house, Jean-Marie, whose father was reminding him how difficult religious life could be and how disappointing it would be if he failed, said to him: "Father, put your mind at rest concerning my future. The sacrifices of religious *life do not scare me. I have only one fear, that of failing in attaining my salvation and of losing my soul. At all cost I want to be a religious...*" On finishing these words he grabbed the bell rope and pulled it so as to call for the door to the brothers' house to be opened.

We would have liked to have known more about the father and the date of his separation with his son but the biographer says nothing and simply continues his commentary.



## 2. After his novitiate

Jean-Marie made his novitiate with great fervor after which he was assigned to the schools where he succeeded quite well. He was noted for submitting himself entirely to his director and for his quiet affability towards his confreres. Brother Jean-Baptiste, the Assistant who guided him, was surprised to learn that Brother Nivard did not ask to make his profession once the time was up. When asked if he had any doubts about his vocation, he replied, *“If I have not asked to make my profession, it is, simply because it is the most important step left for me to make. I can therefore never prepare myself too much. It is not simply sufficient to pronounce the vows, one must live them.”* The following year he made his profession, and two years later, he was named director.

“He was preparing himself to take charge of the next post that had been assigned to him when Brother Assistant, Brother Jean-Baptiste, heard that he had let slip some indiscrete words during a conversation and so called him over and said to him, *“You are not yet prudent enough in your words, and so, to punish you concerning that matter, I am appointing you as assistant director rather than director. This will give you more time to form yourself by learning to be more discrete in your words.”* “*I am ready to do your will,*” replied Brother Nivard. Such was the spirit of submission and humility of this excellent brother.

A year before his death, he had a premonition of his approaching end. He lost all taste for secular studies and gave himself over entirely to pious matters and to ascetical works. He wrote to Brother Jean-Baptiste who forgot to keep the letter anonymous: *“I do not know what will happen to me,”* he said, *“but I find myself completely changed. I am in a hurry to give myself to God and to work solely at my perfection.”*



*Church  
of Pomeys*

Actually, after the resumption of classes, he was obliged to ask for a replacement and to go to Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux for medical treatments or rather to prepare himself for death. For eight days, he prepared himself for his general confession. He submitted to his confessor a series of questions that only a timorous soul capable of understanding the importance of salvation, was able to make.



Then he declared: *“Placing all my confidence in the infinite merits of Jesus my Savior, who washed my sins in his blood, I am without any anxiety and I am in profound peace.”*

From the time of this confession until his death, that is to say, during almost two months, his life was a continual communion with God. Brother Assistant, to whom he had declared having nothing on his conscience that was causing him sorrow, asked him if he might not be attached to something that he might now be regretting.

*“Nothing,”* he said, *“keeps me attached to this world, and I leave it without any sadness; but right now I do have a profound regret.”*

- And what might this regret be?
- *“It is of not having loved God enough. Thanks be to God, during my whole life I feared sin, but I did not act sufficiently out of love. Oh, how I regret at this moment, the six years I spent studying history, literature and other fields that are not absolutely necessary for a brother; how I would be so much happier and content, at this hour if I had utilized my time in studying Jesus Christ and in loving him! No, I did not love God enough, and at this moment it is my one regret. He pronounced these words with such emphasis and with so much energy, that it made such an impression on me that I will never forget it.”*

Here again. Brother Jean-Baptiste speaks in the first person. In recalling these observations of Brother Nivard, we cannot help but believe that Brother Assistant addresses himself indirectly to all the brothers so as to keep in mind all the new demands of society and the legitimate concerns of being professionally prepared as educators. However, could it be that too many brothers dedicated too much time to the study of secular sciences and not enough to the study of Jesus Christ?

He goes on to mention that Brother Nivard had a small patrimony of five to six thousand francs which he wanted to dedicate entirely to good works. He divided it therefore into three parts: one for the brothers' residence, another for the Propagation of the Faith and a third for stipends to have masses said for the souls in purgatory. In vain, was an attempt made to have him leave some to his parents: *"My parents can do without my goods and have no need of them to live comfortably. My desire and my intention of disposing of it the way that I am doing, is to obtain the greater glory of God, to do what is most pleasing to Him and the most useful for the sanctification of souls."*

The biographer, by way of bringing this memoir to an end relates the following: "They came to tell me one morning that he was in his agony and that he had lost consciousness. I ran up close to his bed to see for the last time.... I was reassured anew that he was no longer speaking, and did not recognize anyone. I was about to leave when to the surprise of everyone, he called me over in his dying voice, and he made a sign to the brothers to leave me alone with him. *"My dear brother,"* he said to me in a feeble voice, *"I know you love the brothers and that you make a strong effort to preserve them in their vocation. Oh, I beg of you, redouble your zeal and charity, show yourself good and considerate towards those who are tempted*



Baptistery of the church of Pomeys



*to abandon their vocation; extend to them a helpful hand, for to preserve them in their vocation is to assure their salvation. One needs to be in the situation I now find myself in, that is, faced with death and at the gates of eternity, in order to understand the blessings of one's vocation and the happiness of dying in religious life. I beg of you, I beseech you, be good and compassionate, do everything in order to preserve the young brothers in their vocation."*

These were his last words; he bowed in an attempt to show his respect, and a few moments later he breathed his last breath while pronouncing the holy names of Jesus and Mary.

Nothing can convey the profound impression made on me by the words and prayers of this good brother. Were I to live a hundred years, I would never forget them.

This is who Brother Nivard was. I have seen many brothers die; at that supreme moment, I never saw any in better dispositions. Brother Nivard was a resolute spirit and, the way in which he conducted himself in the eminent circumstances of life, is for us unimpeachable proof."

Brother Jean-Baptiste forgot to record that the precise date of Brother Nivard's death was December 14, 1858. He was 31 years old.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux* Vol. 2, p. 366 et Vol. 13, p. 296



## **Praying with Brother Nivard**

Even though we know very little about your life, we come to pray with you to give thanks to God for the gift of your vocation as a Little Brother of Mary and for your generous response.

- You were born at Pomeys, a village of the Monts du Lyonnais, very close to La Neyliere, on April 10, 1837. Brother Jean-Baptiste tells us nothing of the social condition of your parents.
- From the days of your youth, you gave witness to the quality of your spiritual life by the care you brought to the preparation for your first communion. It was at that moment that you heard the call to religious life.
- Your father accompanied you to Notre Dame de l'Hermitage. In order to test you he pointed out the sacrifices involved in religious life. You reassured him and asked to be admitted. It appeared that you entered after the death of Father Champagnat.



- Brother Jean-Baptiste tells us that you made your novitiate with fervor and that most probably you were accompanied by the saintly Brother Bonaventure. He highlighted your spirit of obedience and your good character. He affirmed that you succeeded quite well in the schools to which you were sent one after another, but he does not name them.
- He recalled how he delayed your nomination as director in order to teach you how to be more prudent and discrete in your words.
- He maintained that yours, was a delicate conscience and that your passion to be all for God made you prefer knowledge of Jesus Christ over the knowledge of profane studies.
- On your death bed, you confessed having only one regret: that of not having loved God enough. Brother Jean-Baptiste recalls this confidence with deep emotion.

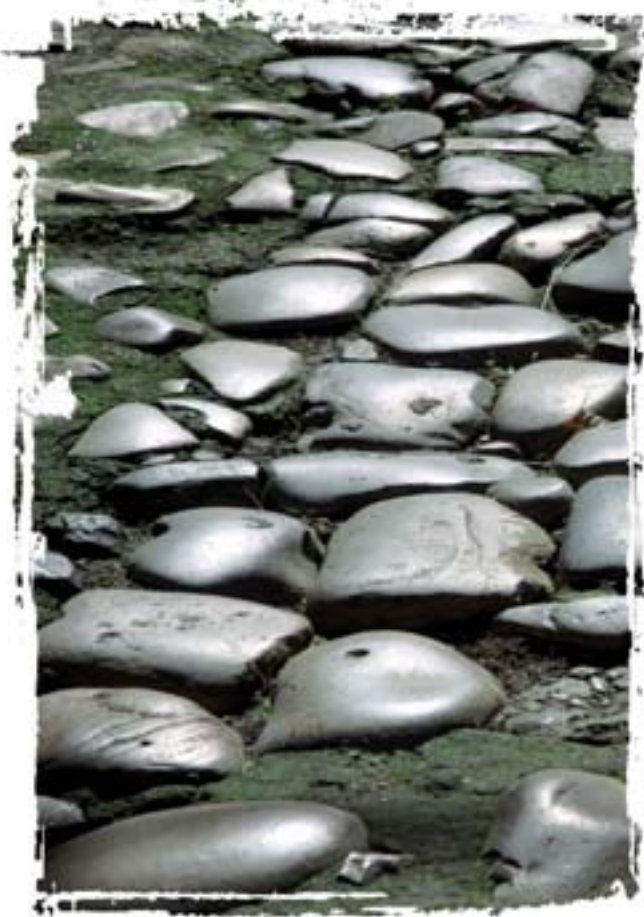


- Neither did he forget your last and spontaneous prayer:  
*“I beg you, I implore you, be good and compassionate, do everything to preserve the young brothers in their vocation”.*
- Brother Nivard, you died in the prime of life, but your life was fire and light in the service of God and youth. May we, after your example live our following of Christ with fervor.

Amen

COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS



5

**Brother Élisée**

**or**

**a loving,  
sustaining,  
enlightened,  
piety  
(1828-1859)**



Brother Jean-Baptiste does not give any title to this biography in his edition of 1868. The one which appears above, shows up in the table of contents in the 1924 edition.<sup>17</sup>

There is no indication either of the date of birth of the brother nor of his death. In the Spanish translation of Brother Anibal Cañon, we find an extract of the photocopy of the birth of the young Soboul Auguste Claude. He was born on August 22, 1828, the son of Étienne Soboul, 32 years old and of Marianne Charbonnier, 24 years old, in the town of Chazeaux, in the department of l'Ardèche. With the passage of time, we note that the error in the family name (Saboul) is corrected.

The biographer did not preoccupy himself with including the date of birth of brother Elisée because he was more focused on highlighting his prayer life. Moreover, he was the Assistant to the provinces of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and Aubenas, the result of the union effected in 1842 and 1844 respectively between the brothers of Christian Instruction of the diocese of Valence and Vivier, and the Marist Brothers of the Hermitage. He corresponded during a

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<sup>17</sup> Jean-Baptiste, *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, édition 1924 p. 384.

period of ten years with Brother Élisée, who entered the novitiate of La Begude, near Aubenas, on May 3, 1849 at the age of 21 and who died at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux on May 27, 1859. He also knew the parents of the brother as seen from certain passages of the biography. The three sons of the family became Marist Brothers and the two daughters became Sisters of Charity of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul.

Thanks to the painstaking research of Brother Anibal Cañon, we know some details concerning the two brothers of brother Élisée. The oldest whose name was Eugène (in religion, Brother Calétrie) died in Aubenas in 1903. The youngest, Félicien Romain (Brother Isméon) died in Pontos in 1919. It is in Pontos in Spanish Cataloña that the Aubenas novitiate had taken refuge during the expulsion of religious from France in 1903. Brother Anibal Cañon was able to interview two brothers who had known Brother Isméon. Brother Candido Álvarez (Feliciano) remembers him as a mathematics professor and director of some influential schools. Brother Avelino Suarez (Salvator) affirms that the story is told that Brother Élisée, as a child, went to confession to the Cure of Ars who told him that his vocation was to join the Marist Brothers.

Brother Jean-Baptiste personally knew the parents of Brother Élisée. He writes: “The mother and father were two noble souls, among whom there are few. Each year at the time of the Retreat, they would come to visit their sons, to encourage them and recommend that they dedicate themselves at becoming fervent religious. They would ask Brother Jean-Baptiste, the Assistant, who presided over the retreat: *“Are you happy with our children? Do they love God?”* These were their first questions.





Then at the same time, they would offer Brother Assistant, twenty francs. *“Would you please have two novenas of Masses said for them during your retreat in order that God might lead them to be good, pious, fervent religious and grant them the gift of perseverance. After all, it is the one thing that we desire and that we ask for them.”*

This kind of behavior had no other evident motive than their deep spirit of faith since they were able to live an affluent lifestyle and could have arranged a comfortable life for their children in the world.

Brother Élisée possessed all the virtues of a good religious; but he distinguished himself particularly by a profound humility, a solid piety which was quite affective and by an extreme fear of sin. The biographer recalls the self-assessment of the brother: *“I am suitable only for the service of others, for washing the dishes, for cleaning the furniture and appliances: that is what is best for me. If people really knew me, they would leave me in the kitchen all my life.”*

It became necessary to use some gentle pressure to help him decide to take charge of an institution. According to our archives, this was the school of Gémenos in Bouches-du-Rhône, where he replaced Brother Duclas, after the retreat of 1855. *“Nothing surprises me more,”* he would write a few days later, *“than to find myself director; honestly, when I think of it, I blush with shame at seeing myself so helpless in this place.”* With these sentiments, he remained in the middle of his brothers as the servant of all and did not command anything of them except by his example and his prayers. After the example of the saints, he was continually looking for ways to discover the virtues and qualities of his brothers. While giving an account of his community to the Superior – in this case, Brother Jean-Baptiste – he always had something good to say about his brothers; everyone was doing better than he was and these sentiments kept coming back unceasingly in his letters: *“The brothers are pious, regular, committed to their duties. I alone, continue to drag myself in God’s*



service and am full of faults. I am also baffled at seeing myself at the head of the others. Poor brothers! What kind of example do they have before them! They have a right to complain at having such a director. If some brothers left certain tasks unfinished, he would blame himself, and while informing the Superior, he admitted to being the most irresponsible. At the same time he would look for all kinds of pretexts to excuse the brothers and minimize their guilt.

Later on, Brother Jean-Baptiste included a quotation from Saint Bernard on piety and fervor and went on to affirm that Brother Élisée put it into practice daily: *“He made of his work a continual prayer.”* He included the testimony of Brother Léon, whose biography he also wrote. “Brother Léon, for whom he had cooked at Vans, said of him, at the time of his profession, *“Brother Élisée deserves to be admitted to vours, since he is the most pious brother that I have ever known. His piety has three very rare qualities: it is loving which gives it a lighthearted joy, and nothing can change it. Secondly, it is sustaining, and thirdly, it is enlightened. These three adjectives appear much later in the text, but they do appear in the table of contents as mentioned earlier.*

Brother Léon continued his testimony by giving two anecdotes: “One day when I proposed that he be dispensed from the Office



because he was sick, he said to me, *“Please I beg you, let me say my Office since prayer heals me and I do not feel any pain while I am praying.”* On another occasion, wanting to dispense him from an exercise of piety because he was overworked, he said, *“Prayer gives me the energy that I need to do my work, and without it, I assure you, I would not be up to my assignment.”*

Next Brother Jean-Baptiste quotes Saint Francis de Sales who, although overextended with work in the administration of his diocese, never dispensed himself from his exercises of piety. Returning to Brother Élisée, Brother Léon had this to say: “Many times I surprised him in the kitchen, deep in recollection and praying in a loud voice, while doing his work.

One day I said to him:

- *“You are alone Brother Élisée, and yet I thought I heard you talking to someone”*. With a gentle smile, he said to me,
- *“Before you entered, we were four, but now that you are here we are six.*
- *How is that?*
- *The good Lord, my guardian angel, the devil, me and now that you are here with your guardian angel we are six. I have to defend myself from the devil, and that is why I talk silly nonsense to him; I need strength to defeat him and avoid sin; I address myself to God and my guardian angel in order to get help; don’t be surprised therefore at hearing me talk...”*

In order to justify Brother Élisée’s third quality of piety (it is enlightened) Brother Léon declared: “...he replied quite wisely one day to a brother who was defending himself from having to take care of some sick children under the pretext that he needed all his free time to complete his exercises of piety:



- “First, do everything that is demanded of you; then you can do your exercises if time remains. And, if I do not have any time left? - If you do not have any time left, be satisfied in offering to God the duties that are demanded of you by obedience.”

Brother Jean-Baptiste quoted Holy Scripture in applying it to the life of Brother Élisée. *“I would rather lose everything and suffer all illnesses rather than commit sin, says the wise person.”* *“The privilege of the Blessed Virgin which I envy the most,”* he once said, *“is to have lived without having committed any faults and having traveled the roads of life, full of mud, without having dirtied oneself. Since I have been in religious life, I have honored in a particular way this privilege granted to our good Mother, in order that she might obtain for me the grace of being preserved from mortal sin.”*

Since on many occasions he would let slip some comment expressing his desire to die, Brother Assistant (Jean-Baptiste) feared that this desire might proceed from some ill founded motive, and he, therefore, tried to combat it. But realizing he was getting nowhere, he ended up accusing him of cowardice and asked him what were his reasons for desiring death so much. The good brother answered him:

*“I desire to die for three reasons: 1° It is better and more advantageous for me to avoid sin than it is to live; 2° I am becoming aware that the longer my life is, the more numerous are my faults; 3° I am a tree without fruit. God showers me with grace and gives me with extravagance all the means for perfection, and I do not become any holier. You tell me that it is possibly a mistake to desire death so much: Well, imagine that a man who is carrying a heavy load for a long time, runs the risk of dropping this load. Would you find it unacceptable for that man to be freed of that burden? Well! I am that man. The burden of my temptations, of my faults*



*and of my sins, weigh on me like a mountain. Is it not fair that I should ask to be unburdened by death?*

- But are you not afraid of death and what follows?
- *Yes, I am afraid of death, but I hope much more in God's mercy. Ten years or twenty years more of life, far from lessening my fears will do nothing more than increase them, because I keep on adding new faults to the old ones.*"

His prayers for death were answered. During the month of February of 1859, he caught an unrelenting cold. Since he did nothing to fight it, but instead continued teaching with the same zeal, his sickness quickly became terminal. He was obliged to retire to Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and prepare himself for death. His father came to visit him, and thinking that he was not as sick as he really was, left some money to have a novena of Masses said for the cure of his son. Brother Assistant said to Brother Élisée: *"According to the wishes of your good father, we are going to have a novena of Masses said for your recuperation; unite yourself to us. - Most willingly, he answered, I will pray to the best of my abilities, and I will offer these Masses to obtain a good death, and the grace of dying soon."*

In fact, he died during the novena in a most Christian disposition, invoking the holy names of Jesus and Mary all the way to his last breath.

The biographer did not think it necessary to give the precise date of his death. It was May 27, 1859.<sup>18</sup> Brother Élisée had not yet reached his 31<sup>st</sup> year.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux* Vol. 2, p. 370



## Praying with Brother Élisée

Brother Élisée, at the end of a hurried discovery of your Marist vocation, we come to pray with you.

- Brother Jean-Baptiste, your biographer, does not give us any details of your childhood. Yet, he personally knew your parents who were excellent Christians, and as he said, “noble souls.”
- He knew you and your two brothers from the time you entered the novitiate of La Begude, in 1849. At the same time he came to know your two sisters who joined the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul.
- Thanks to the regular correspondence you maintained with Brother Jean-Baptiste, he was able to help us come to know some interesting details concerning your spiritual life.
- It is thus, that he declared that *you distinguished yourself by a profound humility, a solid and affective piety and an extreme fear of sin.*



- You hoped that you might spend your life serving the brothers as cook and you experienced a great hesitation in accepting the direction of the school at Gémenos, after the retreat of 1855.
- As Director, you were at the service of your brothers. You always had something good to say to the Superior, about each one, during the community evaluation.
- You made of your work a continual prayer and you insisted with Brother Léon, your Director, who wanted to dispense you of your exercises of piety because you were overworked: “Prayer gives me the energy I need to do my work.”
- Your piety was enlightened according to the same brother who remembers your response to another brother who did not want to care for the sick children, under pretext that he needed all his free time to complete his exercises of piety. “First, do everything that is demanded of you, then you can do your exercises if time remains.”
- You had a fondness for Mary Immaculate to whom you asked for the grace of being preserved from serious sin.

- Brother Jean-Baptiste shared a conversation that he had with you where he accused you of cowardice for your strong desire to die young. After having listened to the three reasons that you gave him to justify this desire, he added that your prayers were quickly answered.
- Having been transported to the infirmary at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, your father came to visit you, where he thought you were less sick than you really were. He gave Brother Assistant some money to have a novena of Masses said for your cure.
- To Brother Assistant who asked you to unite your prayers to those of the community, you declared: *“Most willingly. I will pray the best I can and will offer these Masses to die a holy death and one that will come soon.”*

Thank you Brother Élisée for your generous and fervent response to following Christ in our religious family. May our life of prayer, after your example, be as loving, sustaining and enlightened as yours.

Amen.

# COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS



6

**Brother Nicéas**

**or**

**devotion  
to the  
Blessed  
Sacrament  
(1833-1864)**



This brother belonged to the Province of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux whose Assistant was Brother Jean-Baptiste. The latter, therefore, knew him well and accompanied him in his Marist life. Focusing on the lived experience of this brother, he puts him forward as a model of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. At the same time, he insists on his steadfast perseverance in his vocation as a brother despite the opposition of his parents and the invitations of the clergy, among them, the bishop, that he become a priest. The edition of the 1868 “*Biographies de quelques frères*”<sup>19</sup>, in the title, gives only the name of the brother. One must go to the table of contents of the 1924 edition<sup>20</sup> to read: Brother Nicéas or the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.



Brother Nicéas was born, Pierre Faure, in Montbrand (Hautes-Alpes) on December 12, 1833, and was admitted to the novitiate of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, on July 20, 1851.

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<sup>19</sup> Jean-Baptiste, *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, édition de 1868, p. 234

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Baptiste, *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, édition de 1924, p. 384



After a brief presentation, the biographer reports that, from a very young age, Pierre had the idea of leaving the world to become a religious, that he liked being alone, that he liked to read books of piety and to pray. His confessor, the vicar of the parish, invited him to learn Latin and gave him lessons for a few months. But the young man did not feel called to the priesthood and abandoned his Latin grammar lessons, saying that it was not exactly what he felt called to do.

- *“What do you want to do, asked the vicar?”*
- *“I want to leave my family and become a religious.”*

His parents, who, with pleasure, would have liked to see him study Latin and would not have backed off from the sacrifices necessary to prepare him for the priesthood, did not want to hear any talk of religious life. *“You are free to leave us if you absolutely want to – they told him – but you will be on your own, and you will not inherit any of the family goods.”* This declaration brought on bitter grief for the postulant. He took some time to pray and see if he might not win over his parents. All his efforts having become useless, he no longer knew what to do, and he began to get discouraged.

At this point, Brother Jean-Baptiste relates at great length, a horrible dream in which the young man sees two corpses in their caskets: One was a religious, dressed in his cassock, the other was of a worldly man who had lived in the pleasures of the world, far from God. The first had a very angelic face, a sign of eternal glory. The other had horrible features, a sign of damnation. At the same time as our young postulant was looking at these two dead people lying in their caskets, a voice said to him: *“Choose, you will be one or the other: The lot of the sinful man awaits you if you stay in the world; on the contrary, you will have the happiness of the religious if you are faithful to grace and to the voice of God who is calling you to religious life.”* Being awakened suddenly by this kind of vision, and trembling with fear, he threw himself on his knees, promising God to leave everything behind, to follow Jesus Christ and to serve him faithfully.



Once daylight came, he went to see his confessor and begged him to indicate a community that might welcome him. The priest spoke to him of the Little Brothers of Mary and gave him a letter of introduction for the Brother Director of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux.

Armed with this letter and the approval of his parents who finally acceded to his insistences and tears, he made his way to Saint-Paul, arriving on July 20, 1851. Brother Assistant of the Province ( Brother Jean-Baptiste ) who was living in that community, had no difficulty understanding that the vocation of this new postulant was of the best kind, and that the Institute would find in him an excellent candidate.

Pierre Faure was thus received without any difficulties. With his countenance radiating with happiness and joy, he threw himself at the feet of Brother Assistant, thanking him with effusiveness for the grace of admitting him into the Institute.

The biographer then writes: “Very quickly he found himself among the most pious, the most fervent in the novitiate and was noticed for his tender love of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. That love was the virtue of his entire life.”

Interrogated one day on the reasons that must lead us to love our religious vocation, he answered: *“I love my vocation because it obtains for me the joy of assisting at Holy Mass every day, of receiving Holy Communion often and of making frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Among other things, a religious is made to love God, to imitate Jesus Christ, to meditate on His holy life and to daily study His doctrine and His example.”* The mysteries of the life of Jesus were, in fact, the regular subject of the good brother’s meditation.

After having finished his novitiate, he was sent to La Seyne-sur-Mer, for a level two class under the supervision of the excellent Brother Urbain. The latter, would say, a short time later, in giving an account

of his brothers to the Superior: *“Brother Nicéas has distinguished himself among all my brothers, for his piety, his punctuality to the Rule and his total obedience... I do not believe I am deceiving myself when I say that his prayer is continual, and that he is practicing in an admirable way the holy exercise of the presence of God.”*

Two years later, Brother Nicéas, asked to make his profession. Brother Urbain supported his request by affirming: *“I am not surprised that Brother Nicéas has asked to make his profession even though he is barely of the required age... Ever since I have known him, he has struck me as being as solid as a rock in his vocation.”*

Later, Brother Jean-Baptiste records a long conversation of Brother Nicéas with a brother who was writing to the Superior to complain of some triviality. In an attempt to heal this despondent spirit, he confided a secret to him: make of all your grief a spiritual bouquet to offer the Blessed Virgin. To the brother who claimed never having heard of such a spiritual bouquet, he answered: *“I know a brother who, every evening offers to the Blessed Virgin all the acts of virtue that he had occasion to practice during the day. If he is asked to do something difficult, he does it without complaint and thus gathers a flower of obedience... Throughout the day he gathers flowers of patience, of gentleness, of mortification... In the evening, he gathers them all and offers a bouquet to the Blessed Virgin asking her to refine the virtue that each flower represents. Now, tell me, would it not be better for you to do the same rather than annoy your Superiors?”*



The biographer adds that this brother benefited much from this lesson and



others of the same kind. He continued by praising this practice: *“Beautiful and holy practice of the spiritual bouquet! Marvellous secret for having peace with everyone! Admirable enterprise for amassing a treasury of merit in order to grow unceasingly in virtue! Who had taught Brother Nicétas this secret? Jesus Christ himself.”* He wrote in a spiritual direction letter: “When I meditate on the life of Our Lord, nothing touches me more than these words: *Jesus was silent (Mt 26,63). Jesus was led to death like a lamb to the slaughter (Is 53, 7; Act 8,32)*, and these other words of Saint Peter: *Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten (1 P 2, 21-23)*... I took the resolution of meditating often on these examples of my Savior and on imitating them as often as I could; something told me at the bottom of my heart that it is there, the true means of loving Jesus.”

During that time, Brother Nicétas was named director of the establishment in Pontet, not far from Avignon. One thing that was most agreeable to him was the fact that the brothers’ house was next door to the church, which allowed him to make frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. He wrote to Brother Superior (Brother Jean-Baptiste): *“I feel happily obliged to visit often, Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, since He is next door to us, and we are neighbors. Moreover, since there are only two other houses in this village, and the people find themselves spread out in the countryside, the Blessed Sacrament is always alone; I consider myself responsible for visiting Him, for adoring Him and offering my homage in the name of all the inhabitants of this parish.*

Next, Brother Jean-Baptiste reproduced three pages of retreat notes of Brother Nicétas with references to his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. The brother outlined the reasons as to why he had a great devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist. He enumerated six and ended with these words: *“True devotion to Jesus consists in*

*meditating daily on these mysteries and their blessings, in attending piously holy Mass, in receiving frequently and fervently the Holy Eucharist and in visiting often the Blessed Sacrament". Brother Assistant declared: I often found myself amazed, when he shared with me the lights and sentiments that God gave him on our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I can assure you that the Eucharist was the habitual interior preoccupation of the good brother; it was at the foot of the altar that he drew all the graces and the virtues that we admired in him and which made him a saintly religious.*

Next the biographer recalled the terrible attack Brother Nicéatas experienced in a visit to his family, after ten years of absence. Since they had created huge difficulties in letting him enter religious life, he had seldom written to them and had not asked to go visit. Since he believed they had resolved that issue, he requested permission to go visit them, and his request was granted.

His parents were delighted to see their son and were edified by his virtue, his piety and his detachment from the world; but that did not deter them from concocting a plan to tempt him to leave his vocation. Realizing that he would never consent to remain in the world, they pressured him to begin studying Latin and to embrace the priesthood. In order to convince their son, they enlisted the aid of the parish priest and the Canon of Gap who happened to be in the area. Brother Jean-Baptiste recalled the responses of the brother to those grilling him. They reveal a spiritual maturity and an attachment to his vocation as brother.

The Canon, on seeing that he was unable to win over the young brother, begged him to accompany him to Gap, under pretext of showing him the cathedral and other monuments in the city. During a visit to the bishop's residence, the bishop, who had been informed ahead of time, invited the brother to become a priest, and he offered to help get his dispensation of his vows from Rome, and offered him to study tuition free, in one of his seminaries. Brother Nicéatas, seeing himself



entreated by the bishop himself, was shaken in his own firmness; but he answered that he did not want to do anything without consulting his superiors. *“If you speak of this matter to your superiors,”* someone said to him, *“they will find a way to hold on to you. Since the bishop is in charge of everything, why not transfer without telling them?”* The brother answered by saying that his conscience did not allow him to operate in this manner. He promised to do so at his upcoming retreat and that he would be at the disposition of the bishop at the beginning of October, *if the Superiors give him their blessing.”*

The Canon promised to write the brother to remind him of their conversation and asked for a private address so that the letter might not fall in the hands of the Superiors. Brother refused declaring, *“God forbid that I should hide anything from my Superiors...please address your letter to the brothers’ residence; I cannot accept it unless it arrives through the proper channels.”*

In fact, the letter did arrive since they were intent on attracting the good brother to the diocesan priesthood. Brother Nicetas, a child of obedience, submitted everything to his confessor and superior. Both told him that he should stay in the vocation to which God had called him. Even though the good brother saw this decision as the expression of God’s will for him, he needed every ounce of virtue to submit himself to it. The assault that had been leveled against his vocation left him in turmoil for several days; but his piety and his confidence in God soon led him to a state of calm, peace and serenity of soul. One day while he was before the Blessed Sacrament, he said to Jesus, with great simplicity: *“My Jesus, you know that I seek only your will; if you want me to be a priest, take me; if your desire is that I remain in my vocation, give me peace of soul and holy joy that I used to enjoy before this miserable trip which has caused me so much trouble.”*

At that very moment, a divine light pierced his spirit, dispelled all his troubles, gave him full certitude that he was in the right vocation

and filled him with joy. A few days later he wrote to Brother Assistant: *“I thank you for having held me back from the precipice; today, I clearly realize that I am where God wants me to be and that the exhortation made to me was a trap set by the angel of darkness who was capitalizing on my weaknesses. (Ps.90,6) Oh! how excellent is a religious vocation, since the devil tries so hard to make us lose it!*

Having returned to his habitual calm after the storm, the brother continued to grow and become more perfect in piety and the virtues of his holy state.

A short time later, his health which had not been strong, began to weaken considerably, so much so that he had to be removed from the classroom and given full rest.

It was a great sacrifice for him not to be able to teach catechism to the children. On occasion he was heard to complain lovingly to God and to say to him: *“My God, by taking my class away from me, you have taken away my sweetest consolation, which was to make your divine Son known! I realize that I was not worthy of that ministry. Now that you have taken it away from me, so be it.”*

The biographer adds that, in order to compensate for this loss, he redoubled with zeal the formation of his brothers in piety and prepared them to raise the children well. The above remark leads us to believe that Brother Nicetas had remained in his school. His confreres were witnesses of the examples of virtue which he constantly gave during his sickness. One of them declared: “There would be enough to fill a volume if we wanted to record all the acts of virtue that had become ordinary to him; his patience, his resignation, were admirable. *My God, he would often exclaim, may your will be done!*”

One thing was bitter for him and was an immense sacrifice, and that was that he could not attend Mass, nor could he receive frequent



communion. Since his condition worsened every day, with frequent vomiting and since he feared his death was approaching, he moved to Saint-Paul during March of 1864. Brother Assistant of the province arrived a few days later, and he was extremely edified by the sentiments of piety, of humility and of resignation of the brother. This was probably Brother Eubert, who was responsible for the province from 1863 to 1873. The biographer then recorded how Brother Nicé-*tas* returned to the subject of his life and how grateful he was for having been preserved by God in his vocation. He ended with these words: *“Oh! how I would love to see gathered around my bed all the brothers who are wavering in their vocation; I would convert them all and would anchor them forever in their holy state!”*

Brother Jean-Baptiste ends the biography of Brother Nicé-*tas* by underlining how he manifested his charity towards his brothers up to the very last moment: he did not want them to stay up all night to watch over him. Besides he enjoyed being alone, in order to more freely communicate with the Lord Jesus. *“Almost continually, he had his eyes fixed on his profession cross, which he had placed before him, and which he would affectionately kiss while saying: My Jesus, I love you.”*

It was in the exercise of love that he expired on April 12, 1864. The night before he died, while saying his good-byes to Brother Assistant, he said to him: *“O my dear brother, how happy I am! I die in the love of Our Lord and with the full confidence, that what was said to Mary Magdalene, will be said to me: Many sins were forgiven him because he loved much.”*

His death reminds us of the death of Brother Louis, Jean-Baptiste Audras, on August 3, 1847.






## **Praying with Brother Nicéatas**

Brother Nicéatas, we come to pray in your company, using as a starting point, some elements of your biography that we have just covered.

- Brother Jean-Baptiste gave us simply the place and date of your birth. He told us nothing of your family situation nor of your childhood. He affirmed that from a very early age, you gave thought to a religious vocation, and that you loved solitude and prayer.
- The assistant pastor of your parish and your confessor encouraged you to study Latin and gave you some lessons. But you informed him rather quickly that you were not interested.
- Your parents, who would have willingly allowed you to enter the seminary, refused to let you leave to become a religious. They even threatened to disinherit you.



- Because you were influenced by their attitude, you began to get discouraged.  
After experiencing a frightening nightmare, you decide to leave all to follow Jesus.
- You were received at the novitiate of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, July 20, 1851 by Brother Jean-Baptiste who was responsible for this Marist province. He immediately discerned the quality of your vocation.
- From the time of your formation, you were perceived as being fervent and for having a tender love for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- At La Seyne-sur-Mer, where you began your apostolate, Brother Urbain, the Director, observed to your Brother Assistant: “If I am not mistaken, his prayer is continuous. Ever since I met him, he has impressed me as being as solid as a rock in his vocation”.
- You knew how to skillfully help the brothers get beyond the petty disagreements of community life and to offer their daily sacrifices to Mary, as a spiritual bouquet.
- After being named Director of the school in Pontet, you were overjoyed at being able to



make frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament in the parish church next door. In some of your retreat notes, you give the reasons for this devotion.

- With much sadness, you resisted the combined assaults of your parents, the parish priest, the Canon and even the bishop who wanted to see you become a priest.
- Thanks to your spirit of obedience to your confessor and your superiors, you rediscovered the calm after the storm, and you found, once again, the joy in your vocation as a Little Brother of Mary.
- You died prematurely at age 31 in the *“holy exercise of love”* with full confidence in God’s mercy.

Thank you Brother Nicétas for your fervent vocation. May it be for each one of us a renewed call to love Our Lord with generosity and joy.

Amen.

COMPANIONS


MARVELLOUS





7

**Brother Ribier**  
**or**  
**the**  
**interior**  
**life**  
**(1817-1867)**





The biography of this brother takes up thirty pages in the 1924 edition of the *“Biographie de Quelques Frères”*.

Victor Coudère was born at Sablières (Ardèche) on October 4, 1817. Brother Jean-Baptiste knew him well, having been Assistant of the province of Midi since the union of the Brothers of Viviers with those of Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage, in April 1844.

Brother Jean-Baptiste began the biography of this brother with a long introduction in which he sets in contrasts, the old man, child of Adam, and the new man, baptized in Christ. In order to highlight this distinction, he cites the Curé of Ars: *“Two cries rise up from man, the cry of the beast and the cry of the angel.”* Where he develops it, *the cry of the beast are the passions, sin, and the cry of the angel is prayer, and the desire to love, to see and to possess God.*

He continues by emphasizing how divided the heart of man is. *“Man has two masters who fight over the realm of the heart: God and the devil... He has two models: Jesus Christ and the devil... He has two secretaries: the devil and his good angel... The life that we inherit from Adam leads us towards external things... The life that comes from Jesus Christ opens our heart towards God alone: it is the interior life. The two spirits that are in man are constantly fighting: it is that struggle that produces virtue...”*

Brother Jean Baptiste continued his presentation before reaching a conclusion: Our Brother Ribier had been a model of this interior life, and it is through the exercise of this hidden life and his complete union with God that he rose to the solid virtue that we have admire in him. What follows is a copy of a letter from the pastor at Sablière, written the same year that Brother Ribier died. It gives a great oversight of the human environment and the spiritual development of this brother.

Sablières, December 26, 1867

Reverend Superior,

I thank God for the wonderful idea, through God's inspiration, to put out a "Notice" on the life of the pious Victor Coudère, known in religion as Brother Ribier. Having heard of your project, I take the liberty of sending you these few lines, which, while not revealing anything new, might confirm what you already know.

I come to testify that the Coudère family is one of the most honorable families of the parish; several of its members have been the first magistrates of our town and governed it with as much justice as wisdom; but what has always characterized this family is its piety and its attachment to the faith. If a secret disturbance took place, the people as a group would say: *"We do not know who the perpetrator of this crime is, but we know quite certainly that it was not the Coudère family"*.

In his childhood, Brother Ribier was a model of piety through the regularity with which he frequented the sacraments, by his recollection in the holy places,



by his avoidance of companions who could have turned him away from his responsibilities and his diligence in doing all that his parents expected of him.

The vocation of Brother Ribier is a divine vocation. For a long time, he reflected on his leaving home, but did not dare reveal his holy plans to his father; his presence was needed in the house.

His father, who counted on him as the eldest son to continue the family name, invited him to settle down; but the young Coudère did not respond to these suggestions except by a profound silence. A few days later he went to throw himself at the feet of Our Lady of Bon Secour at La Blachère: and Mary, through the voice of a holy priest, confirmed him in his project of leaving behind the world and helped him realize that God was calling him to become holy in the saintly haven of the Marist Brothers in La Bégude. It is on leaving this sanctuary that he directed his steps towards your solitude where you treated him with great kindness.

On returning from his pilgrimage, he prepared his “trousseau” in secret. When everything was ready for the departure and being a submissive and timid child, he did not dare reveal his resolution to his revered father. Finding himself ready to carry out this painful duty, he greeted his father who broke down in an avalanche of tears. Then, bowing to the designs of Divine Providence, his father said: *“I did not expect heaven to ask of me such a huge sacrifice; but, may God’s will be done.”* And so, with much pain, the father con-



sented to give up this son on whom he had placed such great hopes and who had all the qualities to realize his hopes. Victor, full of joy, consoled his father by telling him that his brothers who were more robust than he was would replace him with greater advantage. He went so far as to suggest the one who continues to replace him today. I must add, in all earnestness, that in his rare visits to his family, my parishioners were very edified by him. Several of my young parishioners have been attracted to your community, having been influenced by his virtue and graces from above.

Signed: Martin Ferrand, pastor

Once Victor had obtained the consent of his father, he went off to La Begude where he was received in the novitiate on February 13, 1845. It did not take long to discover that he was a man of sound judgment, active, clever and exceptionally capable. What particularly endeared him to the Brother Director of the house was that he was a brother whom he could trust, who was alive with an excellent spirit, who was entirely devoted to the Institute and who had already been formed in the handling of the temporalities of the community. After having given him the religious habit and the name of Brother Ribier on July 2 of the same year, he entrusted him with the responsibilities of the kitchen and the care of all the provisions of the house. He fulfilled that important role for nearly fifteen years with an exceptional devotion.

In presenting the biography of this excellent brother, we are not producing a list of remarkable accomplishments from a human point of view nor of external activities of great fanfare, or activities that would strike the imagination, or attract the attention of others;



no, we have no such things to tell. The life of Brother Ribier burst forth quietly in the interior of a religious house: it was a modest, constant, and peaceful life... Brother Ribier had been a saintly religious. He rose to the highest perfection, not by grandiose actions, nor by grand exterior activities, not even by great austerities but by means of the practice of the virtues of the interior life.

Citing the Prophet King: “*God is admirable in his saints*” (Ps. 67, 36), the biographer continues by enumerating eight secrets of the interior life:

1. fidelity to grace
2. fidelity to the little things
3. purity of intention



Sablères

4. care to do the ordinary activities well
5. union with Jesus Christ
6. good spirit
7. devotedness to the needs of others
8. the mind of the saints

It is by following these practices faithfully and continually that Brother Ribier was able to rise to highest heights of perfection. A few details on each of these points will suffice to help us understand the merits and virtue of this excellent brother. These details form twenty pages of the Notice. Here are a few by way of illustrating each of the eight secrets mentioned above.

### **1. Fidelity to grace**

One day, Brother Ribier responded to Brother Assistant – probably Brother Jean-Baptiste – who was asking him what he found most painful in religious life: *There is nothing in particular that is painful to me; but when we hold fast to assuage our conscience and to refuse God nothing, we are obliged to go against nature and to keep it ceaselessly on the altar of sacrifice. So, this continual sacrifice had its cost, but it was necessary in order to be faithful to grace.*

### **2. Fidelity to the little things**

Fidelity to grace necessarily includes fidelity to the little things, and for a religious, punctuality to all the observances of the Rule. Our Brother Ribier showed himself a model in this regard... Nothing cost him when it came to observing the Rule because he was always moved by supernatural motives.

*“Let us love God, he would say, and we will find nothing painful; let us do everything to earn heaven as worldly people do to accumulate money, and the practices of our Rule will be pleasant.”*



### **3. and 4. Purity of intention and the care to do the ordinary activities well**

Brother Ribier responded to a brother who asked him what were the means to succeed in one's employment: *"You must give all your attention to your employment, doing it as perfectly as you can, but especially do it to please God and to count on him to mend and correct all that you might not do well.*

The holy exercise of the presence of God, the short prayers often repeated, and the prayer of the hour, kept Brother Ribier in a continual state of fervor and in union with God; these things made it easy for him to have purity of intention and gave great value to all his actions.

### **5. Love of Jesus and union with His mysteries**

It was especially before the Blessed Sacrament of the altar that Brother Ribier loved to express his affection and his gratitude. *"Oh! how good Jesus is to us,"* he would exclaim at times! *"He is always in our midst, and He is in the Blessed Sacrament day and night. How can we think of that without feeling enflamed with love and without telling Jesus internally: I love you; yes, I love you with all my heart?"* Those times, when he served as porter, he would spend dinner and afternoon recreation time in the chapel, overwhelmed by Our Lord Jesus in the Eucharist, the lover who attracted him... He was convinced that every beat of his heart was an act of love, of adoration and of gratitude.

### **6. and 7. The good spirit and devotedness to one's neighbor**

Brother Jean Baptiste relates the praises of brothers and lay people who spent time with Brother Ribier, attesting to the holiness of this

brother. He adds: these praises were as flattering as they were true. Brother Ribier was, in fact, a saintly religious: he had all the virtues of his state in life.

His filial spirit gave him a limitless confidence in the divine mercy. He went to God in love: *“Jesus is my brother; he would say; God is my father, the Blessed Virgin is my mother. The great Saint Joseph is my protector. Can we fear, can we not love and thank God when we think of these truths?”*

In his own words, the biographer sums up the attitude of Brother Ribier, regarding his superiors: *“with them, he acted like a well brought up child with his father... As it states in the Rule, he manifested to them his entire soul... A veritable child of the Institute, he truly possessed the family spirit. The Institute had become his own. He was interested in everything that could benefit it; he prayed for its prosperity and growth; he begged for vocations and the perseverance of the brothers and the success of the schools.”*

He did not indulge himself; it was a pleasure for him to be able to serve the sick... His rectitude and good character gave him a particular grace and talent for this ministry of charity. The biography cites a recollection of Brother Louis Marie, Superior General: *“I will never forget with what piety, with what incomparable gentleness Brother Ribier, one day, exhorted a dying brother in the infirmary of La Bégude.”*

Ultimately, he endeared himself to all of his brothers by means of his good character and his inexhaustible charity. After his death, the general comment was: *“He was the friend of everybody. He did not upset or hurt anyone of those who lived close to him. By his charity he was a saint.”*

Brother Jean-Baptiste next takes up the subject of holy joy, underlining *“the soundness of the holy joy that flooded his soul,”* and



he raises the question : *“What causes a religious to be unhappy?”*  
He answers by giving five reasons included below:

1. The temptation to go against the Superiors in bad spirit.
2. A willful temptation which stops progress in virtue.
3. A tightly closed heart or the lack of openness.
4. A difficult and touchy spirit that feels hurts and offended for no reason.
5. The abuse of grace; being lukewarm, the lack of a filial spirit towards God.

Brother Ribier had none of those defects. Rather he possessed all the opposite virtues. He was happy in his holy state, acknowledging that God was filling him with consolation and giving him the hundredfold that he had promised.

#### 8. The mind of the Saints.

Brother Ribier had a very limited education. He could barely read and write; nevertheless, he was admitted to the vow of stability. He had better than average knowledge; he had the mind of the saints, and that to a high degree; it was for that reason only that he was allowed to take the vow of stability.

Here also, the biographer poses a question which he answers at great length.

*“What is the mind of the Saints?”*

- It is the gift and the aptitude of using God’s creation, well...
- It is a profound, affectionate and practical knowledge of Jesus Christ...

- It is the understanding of God's ways in the direction of souls...
- It is true, filial and enlightened piety...
- It is the secret of knowing how to use our sufferings as a foundation to raise us up to God...
- It is the science of spiritual warfare, the intelligent struggle with the devil's temptations...
- It is the ability to draw good from evil...
- It is to keep the body subservient to the spirit so as to keep it in its place...
- It is the gift of fraternal charity in all its fullness...
- Finally, the mind of the saints is the gift, the grace of going promptly, surely and graciously to God. It is the practice of virtue that one does amicably, agreeably and simply.

So now we recall what we have said of Brother Ribier's fidelity to grace, the care that he gave to doing the ordinary things well, his union with Jesus Christ, his filial piety, his purity of intention, his good spirit, in order to be sure that he had this science of the saints, such as we have described. We will mention two or three points of this tableau that we have not touched on earlier.

From the beginning, the biographer insists on the spirit of mortification of Brother Ribier. He writes: It is the method of the saints that taught him to be hard on his body and to reduce it to servitude...

Eager to practice mortifications, not so much to avoid purgatory as to imitate Jesus Christ, he would take his teas and infusion without sugar, or anything else that might indulge one's taste. He even refused lozenges or licorice that might have soothed a serious cough...



Even though he suffered much, he never complained. He was afflicted with a cauterized sore, a very painful hernia, swollen and stiff legs for nearly nine months and lame from childhood. The house doctor referred to him as the “refuge” of all miseries. Despite so many infirmities, he was always joyful and content. The biographer gives many other examples that witness to his spirit of mortification. “In the same spirit of penance, he never remained idle. Up till the end of his life, he remained occupied in making rosaries; the last one he made took him eight days of painstaking work.

Finally, the mind of the saints, as we have said, is the gift of going promptly, surely and gently to God. It is the practice of virtue becoming pleasant, agreeable and easy with one’s neighbor. What makes the practice of virtue painful and difficult?

1. A bad character that we have failed to change...
2. Scruples, by narrowing the way to heaven, wasting God’s love...
3. The failure to know Our Lord...
4. Ackwardness in the fight against temptations, for lack of a well formed conscience...
5. Touchiness which makes for difficult relationships with others...
6. The lack of generosity...

Our excellent Brother Ribier had none of these faults. He had the happiest of dispositions, for community living and it made him loved by everyone. He had an upright conscience, that was well formed and subtle but not scrupulous. His conscience feared sin and avoided it with diligence but it was never troubled nor alarmed by delusions.

He had a filial spirit, and conducted himself as a child of God, not as a servant or a mercenary. He had good sense, good family spirit and charity towards his brothers all of which controlled him



and led him quite naturally to the social virtues which guaranteed good relationships with others. Finally he had a tender, grateful and generous heart which was never compromised. He belonged entirely to God. He loved Him without measure, and he was a witness to God's love and glory.

Brother Ribier had a fount of rare qualities which made for a solid and attractive virtue. All his confreres proclaimed the holiness of his life. He alone did not recognize his virtue because he saw himself as a nobody and a great sinner. He gave up the last word and move to everybody, even to the youngest novice. He had chosen the last place and he did that everywhere. Completely enfolded in love, he rendered his soul to God, February 9, 1867 at the age of fifty.

Brother Louis-Marie, Superior General, at the end of the Circular of February 9, 1867, adds three pages on Brother Ribier, putting his life in parallel with the saintly Brother Bonaventure.

Here is a reprint:

“The excellent Brother Ribier, whose death we learned of this very day on which I finished this letter, has left the community of La Begude in total admiration of his piety and fervor which accompanied him to his last moments. *“Our good Brother Ribier, writes Brother Malachie, has just left us to go to heaven, today, Saturday, February 9.*

*He had asked God to do his purgatory here on earth and had asked the Blessed Virgin to die on a Saturday or on one of her Feast Days. Both were granted him. During the past ten days he had been between life and death, suffering very much, being able to take only a little water diluted with a few drops of white wine; But he was always calm, always edifying and with perfect resignation.*



*In a particular way, he directed me to tell Reverend Brother Philogone, his Assistant, as well as Brother Jean-Baptiste, that he would not forget them in heaven, and that he can not thank them enough for all their goodness and graciousness towards him. After his death, everybody ran to the infirmary to get something of this good brother, to keep as a relic."*

From the time of his entry in 1845 and his entrance into the novitiate, Brother Ribier was assigned to the community of La Begude, where for twelve years he was responsible for the kitchen and then for the last ten years was the doorkeeper and in charge of temporal needs. And, what I wrote to you in a previous Circular concerning Brother Bonaventure and his eighteen years of manual labor; what he was for the Hermitage and Saint-Genis-Laval, our dear Brother Ribier was on every count and with the same perfection during twenty-two years, for the house at La Begude. Brother Ribier had the same piety, the same goodness of character in virtue, the same steadiness and the same simplicity. In his employment, he had the same dedication and the same devotedness. In his entire comportment, he showed the same regularity, the same honesty of intentions, the same correctness in doing everything in accordance with obedience to the Rule or to the Superiors.

The two of them were full of tenderness and deference to everyone and had toughness and severity for themselves alone. Both of them loved their Superiors as their own fathers, all the members of the Institute as their brothers, the Institute itself as their heritage, their family. It would not be possible to exaggerate their interest in the Congregation, their affection for all its members, and their good spirit in all things. What we have said of Brother Bonaventure's excellent character, we can also say of Brother Ribier and even to the letter. Their tenderness and goodness was fundamental. Their graciousness, good manners, kindness, considerations, and a readiness to oblige was never contradicted. Brother Ribier too, spent twenty-

two years in community without confrontation with anyone, without hurting anyone, without causing pain to the least of his brothers.

Both of them were men of wise counsel, always ready to encourage to virtue, to console those in sorrow, to lead all those who came to see them to appreciate their vocation. They loved their Superiors, and the religious spirit. I will never forget the piety, and the incomparable gentleness with which our dear



*Sablières. Churche*

Brother Ribier encouraged a dying brother in the infirmary of La Begude. I could hear him from the room next door, without his seeing me. I could not get over the pious sentiments and the admirable courageous thoughts of resignation that he knew how to suggest to his confrere. “Oh! How I would love, I said to myself, to be accompanied in death by a brother as good, as pious and as full of the spirit of God!”

What is special about these two brothers, true models of authentic Little Brothers of Mary, is that without drawing attention to themselves, living apparently a very simple, a very ordinary life, both of them reached the heights of perfection. They left to all their confreres such an example of holiness that at their death, everyone wanted what had belonged to them. This is what happens at the death of the saints.



Ah! May it please God that these two good elders who are leaving us, implore our good Mother, in the interest of the Congregation, that she send to all of us worthy successors!...

These individuals were an incomparable treasure in the Mother House, and in the Provincial Houses. Their prayers, their virtues, their good examples become for all, a source of benediction.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux*, Vol. 3, p. 363-366



## **Praying with Brother Ribier**

With you, Brother Ribier, we come to pray for a few moments by reflecting on your human and spiritual journey in the family of the Little Brothers of Mary.

- You were born in 1817, the year of foundation of the Institute, in a profoundly Christian family. Your father was the mayor of Sablières, your home town, in Ardèche. It is also the countryside where Saint Thérèse-Couderc, foundress of the Cenacle Sisters was born at La Louvesc.
- According to the testimony of your parish priest, you were a pious obedient and hard working child. You did not dare mention to your father, your attraction to the religious life, since you were the oldest and your presence seemed necessary around the house.
- While on a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Bon-Secour at La Blachère, you received the confirmation of your vocation, and you asked your pastor to go speak to your father.



- Your father responded by weeping: *“I did not expect that Heaven would ask of me such a big sacrifice; but may God’s will be done.”* On February 13, 1845, you entered the novitiate of La Begude at age twenty-eight.
- Very quickly you showed yourself to be a man of sound judgment, lively, clever and capable of everything. The very year of your arrival, the Brother Director entrusted you with the kitchen and the responsibility of the house provisions.
- You reached the perfection of charity by a very modest life, totally given to the service of the brothers by the humble work of cook, bursar, doorkeeper and assistant infirmarian.
- You loved to repeat: *“Let us love God and we will find nothing difficult. To gain heaven, let us do what worldly people do to accumulate money and the practices of our Rule will be sweet.”*
- Jesus, present in the Eucharist was the lover that attracted your heart. You spent long periods of time in the chapel to adore Him, to speak to Him of your love and gratitude.
- You loved all the brothers, and you looked upon the Institute as your very own. You prayed for its prosperity and its growth and pleaded for vocations. You entrusted to Mary the perseverance of the brothers and the success of the schools.

- You served the sick with pleasure. Your virtue and your good disposition gave you the grace and a particular talent for this ministry of charity.
- You had very little education, knowing barely how to read and write. Nevertheless, you were admitted to the vow of stability, for, as Brother Jean-Baptiste said: *“You had more than secular knowledge, you had the mind of the saints.”*
- This mind of the saints taught you the spirit of mortification. You never complained and despite your infirmities you were always happy and cheerful.
- Your happy personality made you beloved of everyone. Your heart belonged to God and you loved him without measure. Your virtue was *“most solid and likeable”* says your biographer.
- After more than twenty years spent cooking, taking care of the house, helping in the care of the sick, your death, like that of Brother Louis was an act of love. And everybody said of you: *“He was the friend of everybody. He never caused anyone pain. He was a saint in his acts of charity.”*

Brother Ribier, thank you for your witness of an exemplary life. May it motivate us to follow Jesus with fervor, by serving all our brothers and sisters with joy.

Amen

COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS





**8**

**Brother Urbain**

**or**

**good  
judgment  
joined  
to  
the spirit  
of faith  
(1827-1857)**



Jules Toulouse, known in religion as Brother Urbain, was born in Sumène, a small village in the department of Gard, in the south of France on July 30, 1827. He died in Saint Bauzille, not far from Sumène, on June 14, 1857.

This biography interests us, not so much for its length – more than forty pages – as for its content. As a matter of fact, it is made up of numerous extracts from letters exchanged between Brother Urbain and Brother Jean-Baptiste who was the Assistant responsible for the Province of Midi from 1842 to 1860.

As in Brother Ribier's case, the name of Brother Urbain is not followed by a title in the edition of 1868, and the edition of 1924 mentions it only in the table of contents<sup>22</sup>. In the Spanish translation, Brother Anibal Cañon, reinstated it for "*Reason and faith*". It would seem to me more appropriate to sub-title it "*Brother Urbain or the Good Director*".

The author of the book "Our Superiors", published in 1953 by the Econome General of Saint-Genis-Laval, wrote with good reason:

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<sup>22</sup> Jean-Baptiste, *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, édition 1924 p. 385

*The biography of Brother Urbain is a real treatise on the responsibilities and duties of a director*".<sup>23</sup>

In fact, Brother Jean-Baptiste commits himself to highlight the dominant qualities of this brother as an educator of children and formator of his brothers. Let us remember that in the Marist vocabulary of the time, the word director evokes the one responsible for a primary school with ordinarily two or three classes. He is reinforced by two or three brothers, one of whom is a young brother just out of the novitiate who must familiarize himself with teaching and at the same time serving as cook for the community. This first year in a school was considered an extension of the novitiate. Every director was therefore held accountable for accompanying the young brother in his first days as an active religious. It was a delicate assignment, and certain directors neglected it.

In 1869, the year after publication of the *“Biographies de Quelques Frères”*, Brother Jean-Baptiste published *“Le Bon Supérieur or the qualities of a good Brother Director in the Spirit of Venerable Father Champagnat”*. In the introduction, he recalls the dream of Father Champagnat in which he saw some men dressed as half-brothers and half-soldiers, pulling rocks from the house of the Hermitage and throwing them at the young brothers working in the garden. The Founder, having asked Brother Jean-Batiste what he thought of the dream, the latter declared; *“The totality of this vision leads me to believe that, if ever our beloved Institute were to perish, it would be the fault of our Superiors and the negligence and bad example of brothers directors. We must therefore commit ourselves more and more to the formation of good directors and to entrust the leadership of our houses to men with solid virtue.* Then, he indicates as to the practical means Marcellin Champagnat used to guarantee the accompaniment of the directors,

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<sup>23</sup> *Nos Supérieurs*, Économat général de Saint-Genis-Laval 1953, p. 37.



especially the instructions that he gave them during the two months of vacation, in September and October at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage. "Le bon Superieur" records all these instructions.

In "*Avis, Leçons, Sentences*" can be found several pages referring to brothers directors and their role as formators of the young brothers.<sup>24</sup>

Already in the *Life* (edition 1989), Brother Jean-Baptiste had chronicled the care with which Father Champagnat formed the brothers directors.<sup>25</sup>

The biography of our Brother Urbain begins by underlining the fundamental role of his mother, "*a woman of wise and enlightened piety*", in the awakening of his vocation. Brother Jean-Baptiste the Brother Assistant who directed him, asked him one day what he thought of his vocation. Brother Urbain gave him this remarkable response: "*I look upon it as a recompense for the piety of my good mother and for me as a guarantee of my salvation....*" Nothing was said of his father.

He was received in the novitiate of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux during the month of March of 1843. He was approaching sixteen years of age. His soul was gifted with the rarest of qualities: noble of spirit, intelligent and broadminded; a sure and profound judgment; a good, delicate and generous heart; a strong, constant and docile will, and finally, an ensemble of qualities which gave him the happiest character and the best disposition to do good.

One could say that Brother Urbain never had a childhood. At fifteen years of age he had the maturity of a fully developed man.

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<sup>24</sup> *Avis, Leçons, Sentences*, édition 1927, p. 27-39

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Baptiste *Vie de Marcellin Champagnat*, édition 1989, p. 452-455 et p. 460-473, 2<sup>ème</sup> partie.



Sumène, a little town in the Gard Department, in the south of France

From his entry into the novitiate, he gave himself fully to God and to living the Rule. *“My heart,”* he would say, *“was made for God. I feel it, and it must be all God’s. My personal will must not enter this religious house...”*

The foundation for Brother Urbain’s virtues was his extreme horror of sin. One day he confided to Brother Assistant, “I always have in mind this thought of Saint John Chrysostome; *“Nothing is to be feared but sin; there is truly only one horrible evil, it is sin.”* This horror of sin led our Brother Urbain to believe that he would be safeguarded from sin if he lived far from the world so, he started thinking of becoming a Trappist.

Having made this desire known to Brother Assistant, the latter gave him this response; *“My dear brother, nowhere can we be more out of danger than where God wants us. If therefore, you are being*



*called to instruct children in our Congregation, as I believe you are, you will more readily preserve yourself in God's grace and the flight from venial sin, than if you were in "la trappe" contrary to God's designs.*" Brother Jean-Baptiste asked the brother to meditate, during several days, on the word of Saint Paul: "*Woe to me if I did not preach the Gospel*" (1Co.9,16) and another from Saint Francis Xavier where he declares feeling obliged to go evangelize Japan. He also encouraged him to read the life of Saint Jean Brito who considered his departure for India as the road to heaven.

Brother Urbain, a child of obedience, meditated deeply on the three points suggested to him, and this meditation removed forever, the thought of going to "la trappe". A few weeks later, he declared to Brother Assistant, "*My class has become so dear to me that I consider it a small paradise, or better still, like the road that leads me straight to paradise.*" He then made the resolution to ask to make his profession, and that favor was granted to him a short time later.

The biographer wrote, that up until that point, Brother Urbain lived the purgative way. The fear of sin, the fight against temptations, the war against his passions, scruples, the fears concerning his confessions, all occupied him and filled all his religious exercises... At the retreat of 1848 a grace of enlightenment was given him which transported him into a new world. Thus, he alone understood clearly the goal of religious life and the designs of God on him, which led him to say: "*My God, until now all I had was the religious habit and my religious name... May you be eternally blessed for the light you have allowed to shine in my eyes and for all the wonderful things that have been revealed to me in my meditations on the end of man.*"

The meditations which transformed him are found in his notebook of spiritual notes and entitled *the three titles of possession*. Here they are as we were able to read them. And on more than three pages, Brother Jean-Baptiste transcribed the notes of Brother Urbain. Here is the wording of these three titles

*1° First Title of Possession:*

I am God's property since He is my Creator and He drew me out of nothing. It is solely out of love, an infinite love, that He created me.

*2° Second Title of Possession:*

I am God's property because He is my Savior and Redeemer

*3° Third Title of Possession:*

I am God's property since He is my blessedness. The predestination to blessedness is the grace of graces.

What follows are the ten resolutions which the brother took to thank God for having revealed to him the truths which he expressed.

After the retreat of 1848, Brother Urbain was named director of the establishment at Barjac in Gard. This school, neglected for a long time, was in need of an intelligent and energetic director to raise it up again and return it to its former state of influence. The local authorities did not lose time in realizing that the new director was up to the challenge. Brother Urbain needed only a few weeks to control the children, to give them a love of work and a love for their school.

He remained four years in Barjac, from 1848 to 1852. During that time, he had with him several young brothers who tested his patience, but he succeeded in correcting them, in forming them and in affirming them in their vocation, by dint of zeal and devotedness. One of them, especially, having a very bad character, gave him much trouble in reforming him. Brother Urbain followed him, warned him, at times reprimanded him, but seeing that his efforts were useless in bringing about change, asked to be rid of him. Brother Assistant, intent on forming Brother Urbain to be a man capable of leading others, wrote him the following letter, a good lesson for all young directors.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jean-Baptiste *Biographies de quelques Frères*, Edition 1924, pp. 243-245



This letter enumerates the more common faults of young directors. Brother Jean-Baptiste surfaces a dozen and finishes this way; “*See, Brother Urbain if you might not find the cause of your discouragement.*”

The letter had a sobering effect on Brother Urbain’s spirit; he read it and meditated on it to the point of learning it by heart. One could say that it was for him the door that opened to the science of man’s behavior. Since he was an avid learner, this letter was followed by several others whereby the Brother Assistant committed himself to forming him in the very difficult art of governing others. This correspondence is very long and cannot be included in its entirety in this biography, but we think it will please the brothers and even be useful to them to include some of the essential details.

The pages that follow bring a response from Brother Urbain in which he takes account of the progress that he has made in his manner of directing the brothers following the last letter of Brother Assistant. He also lets him know the fears that he has in facing the responsibilities of his assignment. Brother Jean-Baptiste wrote him a long letter on the particular responsibilities of the Superiors. The reading and meditating on this letter frightened Brother Urbain, more than we can imagine, as seen in his response:

*“My dear Brother Assistant, your last letter terrified me, and I must add, discouraged me. Twice the letter fell from my hands, and it was at the third reading only that I was able to get to the end.”* He ends by asking to be relieved of his job as director.

Brother Assistant answered him: “*My dear Brother, I expected from you a response such as you sent me. In this letter I hope to calm your emotions and dispel your exaggerated fears.*” The long response of Brother Jean-Baptiste<sup>27</sup> brought to light in fifteen points, the principle duties of a Superior. Brother Urbain, who was always

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jean-Baptiste *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, édition 1924, p. 250-254.



docile, meditated on this letter and a few days later wrote: “*I thank you for the description you sent me on the duties of a Superior... I promise you that I will dedicate myself to putting into practice those wise teachings; they would make of our young brothers, saintly religious if they were understood and protected by all our directors. You spoke to me of an all powerful Superior. Who is he? I believe that we would have to go pretty far to find him....*”

– “My dear Brother, answered Brother Assistant, I call an all powerful Superior:

1° he who has solid virtue and always gives good example everywhere...

2° he who has a good character, who is affable, polite, calm...

3° he who accommodates himself to the desires and tastes of his subjects...

4° he who measures the task and divides it according to the strength and aptitude of each one...

5° he who asks of his subjects only what they can give...

6° he who is tactful, , who is industrious and does not take advantage of another’s weaknesses...

7° he who respects and honors his subjects...

8° he who loves his brothers...and becomes their servant...

9° he who remains in the background and allows everyone the opportunity for rejoicing in their successes...

10° finally, he who prays much for his subjects.

Every Superior who conducts himself thus, will be all powerful and will do whatever he wants with his subjects.

Now, these things I have spoken of, are they difficult to do? No, not for someone who has good sense and is virtuous.



“Brother Jean-Baptiste continues his letter by underlining the fact that *“the direction of souls is a matter of prudence, of moderation, of wise administration, of delicate precautions, of kindly attention and good process. He who lacks tact, who has a heavy hand, a hard heart, a difficult character, who puts aside right reason to allow himself to be dragged into flights of imagination and moods which are not proper to a Superior.*”

This letter, along with all those we made reference to, and many others that followed, contributed in no small way to the formation of Brother Urbain. He became one of our best gifted directors. By his good sense and good spirit, he exercised over all his brothers a gentle influence and an authority to which all acquiesced without realizing it.

A young brother wrote: *“It would suffice that I be left alone with Brother Urbain for a short while for me to become a reasonable person and a good Religious.”*

Brother Nicéas rejoiced and considered it a great blessing to have been formed by Brother Urbain and at not having any other director.

Brother Nivard who spent two years under his guidance at La Seyne felt that those years had been more profitable for his formation than all the time spent elsewhere.

Brother Urbain had a particular gift for injecting himself into other's spirits and winning over their confidence: he was admirable in making good use of each one's weaknesses....He had the gift of striking some harsh blows against faults and vices without hurting the guilty party.

The biographer ends by giving some examples of how Brother Urbain succeeded in correcting a brother of his melancholy, another of his pride and his disobedience, a third of his lack of modesty and a fourth of his lack of piety and religious spirit.

On one occasion, he was delegated to make a house visit in order to reconcile spirits and smooth the way through certain difficulties between the director and the brothers, at the end of which he wrote this report: *“The brothers of this establishment appeared to me to all have good will. After having seen each one personally and having listened to their complaints, I remain convinced that only one thing is lacking: they need to be more reasonable. In fact, all their difficulties come from their touchiness and trivialities, that a judicious person would tread underfoot. Therefore I contented myself in recommending that they meditate on these sayings of Saint Paul: Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another (Col 3, 12). For those who felt less guilty, I recommended (Rm 15, 1) You who are wise, support the imprudent. You who are strong, support the weak.*

Brother Urbain said on another occasion, “Experience teaches us that the brothers who are not united will fall into discord out of condescension and leniency and more often still because they are not reasonable enough and do not understand this sublime saying of Jesus Christ; *Do to others as you would have them do to you.* (Lk 6,31)

Brother Urbain had a heart of gold; he had for all his brothers the goodness of a mother which led him to foresee all their needs. “It was not necessary to tell him that one was sick, “says one of them, “he guessed it and from that moment on the short term nursing began. He took charge of the class or the employment of the sick brother, he made the bed, carried to him the proper medication, cheered him up and edified him by a pious and joyous conversation...”

*“He instructed us with great patience, says the same brother, without ever being disheartened. Always calm, always cheerful, he adapted himself to our way of seeing and understanding things.”*



It was by that kind of behavior that he won over hearts and became the Master of other's wills. The brothers liked his authority because it was paternal, and his words and his actions were all on the side of reason, of justice and charity. His moral authority was no less evident with the children. Even the local authorities accepted the moral influence that his sound judgment and modesty gave him over all; likewise, he was never refused anything which he asked, for the good of the school.

In 1852, he was removed from Barjac and chosen to go found a school in La Seyne-sur-Mer, a city of eight to ten thousand inhabitants. He arrived with three confreres on October 13; the fifteenth of the same month, the schools opened, and the installation of the brothers took place with great solemnity. The pastor, M. Deblieu and the mayor of La Seyne, M. Barry, founders of the establishment, showed great goodness towards the brothers and provided constant protection.

The brothers found the children in a most deplorable state with regards their religion; they were all extremely ignorant and did not know their catechism nor their prayers. The first time that an attempt was made to make them pray they all burst out laughing... They did not know the way to the church, nor the fact that it was the feast of All Saints, and even though Brother Director had recommended that they come to the services, not one single child in his class paid attention to his recommendation and not a single one came to Mass; they went to play in the woods.

This sad state of affairs, far from discouraging Brother Urbain fanned the fire of his zeal; his powerful, simple, fluent instructions, his point of view full of reason, of goodness, of soundness, his patience prevailed over every obstacle. After barely a few months had passed, the children had changed; the prayers, the rosary were said properly and with regularity.

Brother Urbain, was asked by certain friends of the school, to modify the program which followed the School Guide; this change would have diminished the number of prayers, so he rejected the request. Discord arose between the teachers and the brothers whom they accused of denigrating the secular subjects and of brutalizing the students. This alarmed the parish priest who came to see Brother Urbain to ask him for some concessions in the spirit of the country. They asked him to give less time to teaching cat-



Sumène

echism and to give up some practices of piety. Brother Director answered him: *“Our establishment cost you much sacrifice... it is by the cross that you founded it; today Jesus Christ involves us in this cross and you, you are becoming alarmed! And this grace that God is giving me, this grace of being blamed, of being criticized, of being slandered, is a definite pledge of His protection, and consequently of success; after all, every project marked by the sign of the cross, grows and does good.”*

The venerable priest, astounded, edified and reassured by such conversation, withdrew in the hope that God would bless a religious so full of the spirit and that the task confided to him would prosper. His hopes were not misplaced: the children, far from being held back by the slanderers of the brothers, came in greater numbers to the point where four new classrooms had to be added to the existing ones.



This success was not realized without pain. It was the result of the zeal of all the brothers and the wise administration of Brother Urbain. Fully devoted to his class, he never walked in without having scrupulously prepared his lessons and all his work. When one of the brothers called his attention to his qualifications and his many activities, suggesting that he could dispense himself from all his preparations, he replied: *“Experience has taught me that after a good preparation, the explanations that I give are much simpler and clearer and at the same time, more profitable for the students. If you want to become a good teacher, never enter your class without having foreseen what you will do and say...”*

Brother Urbain won over the children, taking control over them, guiding them and correcting them of their faults even during catechism class... It would be hard to say with what care he prepared the children for their first communion. He, himself, took the responsibility for the instructions for the preparatory Retreat, and he had a particular gift for interesting his listeners and securing their attention.

But who had given Brother Urbain, the gift of teaching, the secret of pleasing and of touching hearts? The Holy Spirit. It was in prayer and meditation that he always prepared his catechism. He studied especially the crucifix, and it was at its feet that he meditated the children's instructions.

One thing that contributed most to the public's respect for the brothers was their ability to establish discipline in their classes. Brother Urbain committed himself to making it a strong point in his classroom and those of his brothers. But he wanted this discipline to be paternal; he knew by heart the chapter of the School Guide and everything relating to it, and he would comment in every way possible to his brothers. One day a brother asked him how to discipline the children and at the same time win their confidence. He

answered: *“always be reasonable with your children and do nothing that would shock their good natural sense or appear to harm their sense of justice. If you do so, you will obtain from them all that you want.”*

To the question of a brother *“But what does reasonable mean to the children?”* Brother Urbain responded at length:

- *It is to measure the assignment of the child in keeping with his capacity and age...*
- *It is to lead the children with motives founded on reason and religion...*
- *It is to avoid with care all bias and to show respect for everyone.*
- *It is never to impose too strong or humiliating a penance...*
- *It is to conduct oneself with them in such a way as to never be wrong in the eyes of their parents...*
- *It is to remain calm and considerate when a child lacks respect...*

In a word, to be reasonable with the children is to conduct oneself with them like a good father; it is to have for them the solicitude of a mother; it is to treat them in everything the way that we would want to be treated.”

Brother Urbain was so impregnated with this principle that after having read and meditated on the manuscript of the School Guide on which he had been asked to share his sentiments, wrote: *“The Guide, as a whole, seems to be quite good, but to my point of view, there should be a chapter on the formation of the young brothers, and a section on discipline that is fatherly. If I were free to express a hope I would add that paternalism and reason must appear in all the pages of this book.”* The wishes of the good brother were kept in mind and a chapter on the formation of the young brothers as well as the essential quality of good discipline were added to the Guide.



The cumbersomeness of directing a big house did not prevent Brother Urbain from working seriously at his own sanctification. It was the first thing that he busied himself with... Prayer for him was happiness. *“It is there, he would say, that I console myself in my afflictions, that in my tiredness I relax, that I find the strength when I am weak, the light in my doubts and the help in all my needs.”*

He saw as one of his first duties, the formation of his brothers in piety. *“I will never forget,”* writes one of his confreres, *“the priceless and solid instructions that he gave us on Our Lord, his life, his virtues, his Passion, the Holy Sacrament of the altar... He was superb in his instructions; we never got tired of listening to him; the half hour went by too fast...”*

The love of Jesus was his great virtue. *“The greatest good that we possess on earth, he would say, is Jesus Christ in the Holy Sacrament. The Blessed Sacrament is the treasure of every good religious, it is the magnet that attracts them.”*

Brother Urbain lived in a continual fervor. The biographer declares that, to be convinced, one only has to read the various regulations written by Brother in view of insuring the sanctification of his days. Since the regulations are long, he gives only the one concerning the life of union with Our Lord. Beginning in the morning he would say with the Prophet King: *“Today, o my Jesus, I begin to serve you... Today I truly want to love you...”* This prayer is followed by eight resolutions which he called the rules of the day<sup>28</sup>.

He lived in a permanent union with God. Mass was priceless. He called holy communion, his life and his treasure. The greatest moral suffering of his entire life was caused by the inability to

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Jean-Baptiste *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, édition 1924, p. 270-271.



receive holy communions during his illness. The biographer refers to a conversation that Brother Urbain had with the curate who offered to bring him communion and to a gentleman from the village he expressed his joy at having communicated that morning.

Brother Urbain was only thirty years old and he was ready for heaven, writes Brother Jean-Baptiste. He had always had a weak chest and a heavy work load undermined his health. He wound up with a very bad cold that took him to his grave.

He did not like to call attention to himself. In the village, they knew that there was a Brother Urbain who was greatly virtuous and very gifted among his brothers, and the children would often speak about him, but many did not really know him. From the moment the news of his illness was known in the village, all the people of distinction came to visit him. Each and everyone argued as to who might bring whatever might assuage him. Soon the pantry was full of all kinds of sweets. Several women absolutely wanted to make themselves responsible for bringing teas, broths, creams that the doctor had ordered. The parents of the children insisted strongly that the school be closed in order that the brothers have nothing to do but to nurse the sick brother and do all in their power to restore him to health.

During his lengthy illness, he was admirable in his patience, his resignation, his piety and his humility. Never did he let slip a complaint or miss a humorous moment. Always cheerful, always happy, everything given to him and done for him to alleviate his pain, he found very good. The brother who was specifically responsible to nurse him, astounded by his joy, his calm and the resignation he showed in the midst of great sufferings, said to him one day:

- My dear brother I admire your patience. What is your secret for suffering that way, without losing your cheerfulness?



- My dear brother, responded Brother Urbain, sickness is a grace... What is best to do is to offer one's pains to the good God, and to receive from him everything that happens to us.

The body of Brother Urbain was on a bed of pain but his soul had settled in the heart of Jesus. During his entire life, he had had a great devotion to the divine heart. It is no doubt to reward him for his love of the Sacred Heart and the Holy Eucharist that Jesus came to get him on the feastday of the Body and Blood of Christ, the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, 1857.

Brother Urbain ended his life with one regret, that of not being able to give his last breath in the novitiate infirmary. He died in Saint-Bauzille, where he had been sent in the hopes that the country air would renew him: that regret was the only one he brought with him to the grave.

Brother Jean-Baptiste reported these last words of Brother Urbain expressing this regret in the chapter titled: "The infirmary or sweet death".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Jean-Baptiste *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, p. 332-333



## **Praying with Brother Urbain**

Brother Urbain, we join you in prayer in order that remembering your short but full life, we might be motivated in our own daily journey.

- Brother Jean-Baptiste wrote nothing of your father, nor of your childhood, but affirms that your mother had a wise and enlightened piety. You, yourself attested to the fact that she played a significant role in the development of your vocation.
- You entered the novitiate at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux in March of 1843. At fifteen years of age you manifested a great maturity with a beautiful ensemble of qualities among which we find a happy character and a good heart.
- Your ardent desire to be all for God started you thinking of becoming a Trappist. Brother Jean-Baptiste convinced you that it was better to stay where God called you. Afterwards, you considered your class as your little paradise.
- During the retreat of 1848 the Lord flooded you with his grace, helping you understand that you belonged entirely to Him and He wanted to share His love with you. Your life was transformed.
- In the four years you directed the school at Barjac, from 1848 to 1852, you formed yourself as director and as formator of the young brothers in your



community, following the advice of Brother Jean-Baptiste in his correspondence with you.

- He wrote, that you became one of our most accomplished directors. With your good sense and good spirit, you exercised over your confreres a gentle influence, gaining their confidence and drawing forth the best of each one.
- Your good heart made you attentive to the needs of your brothers for whom you had the goodness of a mother, knowing how to adapt yourself to their way of seeing and understanding things.
- In 1852 you founded the school at La Seyne-sur-Mer. In a few months, with the help of your collaborators, and thanks to your zeal, your prayer, your understanding and your good organization of the classes, the children came to the brother's school with great delight.
- You knew how to win over the hearts of the children, all the while having authority over them; you directed them and corrected them of their faults by means of the catechism class. You had a particular gift for gaining their attention.
- Under your guidance, the discipline that the brothers knew how to establish in their classrooms contributed much to their earning the esteem of the people of La Seyne. You insisted that his discipline be paternal.
- You were so impregnated with this principle that you succeeded in having a chapter added to the School Guide, on the formation of young brothers and a section on the paternal character of discipline in our schools.

- You were a man of prayer; for you, to pray was happiness. It was restful, a time of renewal and of light. You saw as one of your main duties, the formation of your brothers to piety.
- You lived in continual union with God. For you, Mass was without price, and you referred to communion as your life, your treasure. To be deprived of communion was one of your greatest losses.
- During your sickness, the people of La Seyne showed the respect, the attachment and the affection they had for you. You received many visitors since many wanted to bring you what might offer relief.
- During that long period of trial, you were admirable in your patience, resignation, piety and humility. Always joyful, always satisfied, you found everything done to relieve your sufferings to be good.
- Your only regret was to die far from your brothers. The doctor thought that relocating to your hometown and its fresh air would have helped restore your health.

Thank you Brother Urbain for your life given over entirely to your brothers and your students.

In a special way, we confide to your intercession all the brothers directors and those responsible for the formation of the young brothers. May your example inspire and help them in their daily responsibilities.

Amen

# COMPANIONS

# MARVELLOUS






9

# **Brother Philogone**

**Assistant  
in the  
province  
of Aubenas  
(1826-1895)**





The following text is a summary of the biography which appeared in the *Notices Nécrologiques*.<sup>30</sup>

Jean-François Bonin, the future Brother Philogone was born May 25, 1826, in Montrevel (Isère) in an honorable agricultural family. His father Jean and his mother Melanie Moulin had five children, two boys and three girls.

In 1835 his father died tragically at the age of thirty-four after a serious accident. With great courage and solid faith, the mother assured the education of her five children among whom, Jean-François, the oldest, was not yet five years old. In a small publication entitled “The Story of a Mother” Brother Philogone recorded everything that this admirable mother showed of common sense, of heart and confidence in God in bringing up her children.

Jean-François was very gifted. At eight years of age, he knew by heart the entire catechism of the diocese of Grenoble, which his mother had taught him. He was approved to make his First Communion at ten years of age. His mother was so happy to be able to accompany him to the altar rail, and she consecrated him once again to God and to the Blessed Virgin. She then sent him as a boarder with the Marist Brothers at Viriville.

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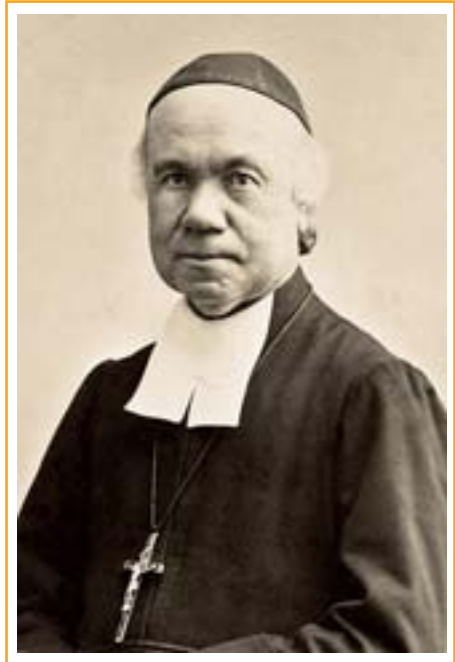
<sup>30</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1, pp. 127 à 162



Melanie Bonin, who raised her children with the goal of giving them all to God, experienced great joy when Jean-François spoke to her about his desire to become a religious.

She prepared his trousseau, and she herself brought him to the novitiate at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage on September 26, 1841. He was welcomed by the saintly Brother Bonaventure, the master of novices. Full of good will, the young fifteen year old received the habit of the Little Brothers of Mary and the name Philogone, on February 6, 1842.

After a fervent novitiate, he was sent to one of the establishments to continue his formation and to be the cook. The anonymous biographer recounts: "When he was ready to report to his new assignment, the brother director who had come to get him, noticing how small he was, declined to accept him and presented to the Superior his respectful refusal saying, that this young brother would not be able to fulfill his assignment, since he would have no authority and would be ridiculed by the children. *"Try him out,"* was the response: *you will see how he will come through marvelously well. He will be very useful to you, even in the classroom, and once you have seen him at work, you will be very happy and will not want anybody else."* Despite this wonderful endorsement, the brother director still had trouble deciding, but eventually agreed to try





him out. Soon, he was able to realize how, in fact, the little brother was indeed a prodigy, so much so that when it came time to change him, the brother director did everything he could to retain him.

It is without a doubt, recalling this event in which his small size was at play and which he experienced in his first assignment, that led Brother Philogone, once he was named Assistant to write to a brother who complained that his staff was remarkably small:

*“My dear brother,*

*It is true, the staff that makes up your community is remarkable by its size. This reminds me of a time when we were five in my community. We totaled one hundred years between us, and I was the oldest. They would say: it is remarkable; and they would look at us and eye us up and down. As you can see, you are not the first to be remarkable.*

*To be remarkable is sometimes a great privilege. I hope it will be so for the three of you and that the three of you will be remarkable. How? By your piety, your seriousness, by your zeal for bringing up the children in a Christian way; in a word, by the sanctity of your lives.*

*With all these reports, organize yourselves in such a way that the people might say in all truth: We have three truly remarkable brothers, we have never had any as remarkable: they are three saints”.<sup>31</sup>*

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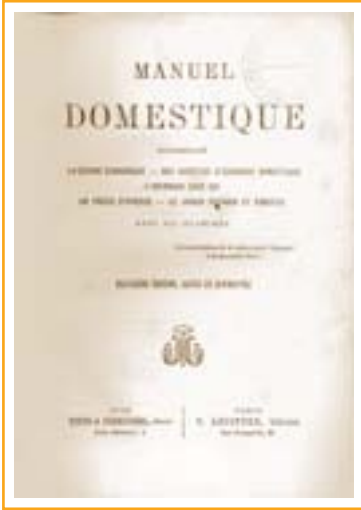
<sup>31</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 131

In 1844, Brother Marie-Lin who was born in Marlhès and was formed by Father Champagnat, and who left behind the reputation of being a saint, was the director of the boarding school in Usson, a market town in the mountainous region of the Loire. He requested a brother capable of teaching drawing, geometry and surveying in order to give more prestige to the school which needed it. They sent him Brother Philogone who was assigned the top class. For ten years, five of which he was director, he showed himself to be a remarkable teacher and an excellent educator. He was also quite adept as the administrator of the house, seeing to all its needs. To his brothers, he was more than a father, in fact, he was more like a mother. It was at this time that he had the idea of putting together a book entitled “Manuel Domestique!” that would have much success some years later. This book offered much help to families in their daily lives. In fact, it included the following areas: simple food preparation, recipes for economical living - home infirmarian – the hygienic handbook – the kitchen garden and orchard.

In 1855, Brother Philogone took charge of the boarding school at Neuville-sur-Saône. He was to remain there only fifteen months, that is, just time enough to supervise a new construction which was completed by October of 1856.

At the beginning of 1857, he was called to assume the position of master of novices and director of the Mother House of the Hermitage. Having been professed since the retreat of 1847, he had also pronounced the vow of stability at the retreat of 1856. In August of 1858, the Mother House was transferred to Saint-Genis-Laval and at the General Chapter of July 1860, Brother Philogone was elected Assistant for the Province of Aubenas which had its novitiate at La Begude. He assumed his responsibilities at the retreat of 1861 which was presided over by Brother Jean-Baptiste. He was thirty-five years old.

On assuming his responsibilities, he could not ignore the profound and affectionate veneration that surrounded Brother Jean-



Baptiste. The latter was difficult to replace, but Brother Philogone carried himself so well that the change was hardly noticeable. The brothers did not delay in appreciating the qualities of their new Assistant and they transferred to him the filial affection they had had for his predecessor. An observer who knew him well spoke of it this way: "The more we saw him the more we got attached to him. He inspired respect by his qualities of spirit and heart, by his simple and noble exterior, and by his soft and penetrating look... Behold the perfect man, one would say, behold a saint..."

Brother Philogone focused all his attention on forming his brothers in the image of Father Champagnat, making of them saints and good educators of youth. But his solicitude was not limited to that alone: he extended it to a thousand details of temporal matters, for he wanted perfection in all things. One of his great concerns was to provide for his Province, a novitiate that could replace the one at La Begude, which had become totally insufficient. After several attempts and a long wait, the novitiate was transferred to Aubenas on September 7, 1878, and the house was solemnly blessed the 29<sup>th</sup> of the same month, by Reverend Bonnet, bishop of Viviers, to the great joy of Brother Assistant and the community.

The special knowledge of construction that Brother Philogone had shown in the building of the novitiate had earned him a reputation as an architect. On many occasions, he was called upon in the construction of schools and religious monasteries. Two good examples were the convents of the Sisters of Saint Joseph at Aubenas and the Sisters at Ruoms. He lent his services freely and with dedication to all who called on him.

To these varied abilities, he added a powerful and remarkable organization skill, and for that the Province of Aubenas owes him much. On his arrival, he had noticed certain weaknesses in the method of education which made the brothers task difficult and hurt the progress of the students. Therefore, he dedicated himself to the formation of the young brothers in good teaching methods. He worked hard at forming them in everything that a good education of children demanded, and he taught them the means of success.



Full of zeal for all that pertains to divine worship, Brother Philogone gave special attention to the execution of good chant. A great admirer of Dom Pothier, he introduced his methods in Aubenas. On many occasions, he was seen exhausted and upset by the poor retreat exercises but had enough energy in his voice to give music lessons to all the assembled brothers. In church, a well sung hymn would uplift him and would manifest itself with tears..

God visibly and generously blessed the zeal, the works and the devotedness of Brother Philogone. He had the consolation of seeing proof of his success during his lifetime. Not only was he given the joy and satisfaction of being respected, listened to, loved by his brothers and to see a good spirit reign among them, but he was also a happy witness of the extraordinary development experienced by the Province under his government. At his arrival, there were forty-nine establishments and about two hundred brothers; at his death the number had reached ninety-four establishments, and the number of brothers, almost five hundred fifty.



By the time he reached 68 years of age, he had become weakened by incessant work, and was suffering from headaches and insomnia. Nevertheless, he continued to meet the demands of his position. On Thursday, January 10, 1895, having a few errands to take care of in Lyon, he left after dinner, but a cold spell came over him. He travelled about twenty minutes on the streetcar without being able to get rid of the chill, he did his errands and came back to Saint-Genis, shivering all the way home. He was diagnosed as having acute bronchitis, which eventually led to his death on Monday, January 21, 1895. His unexpected death caused a profound impact in the entire Institute and especially in the Province of Aubenas where the dear Brother Philogone was so beloved.

The virtues of Brother Philogone are many. Here is a résumé of what his biographer wrote.

### **Model of intense faith**

Brother Philogone constantly put into practice these words from the lives of the saints, “The just man lives by faith.” To his old and saintly mother, who endured much suffering and who complained that she could no longer dedicate herself to the works of piety and charity as she once did, he would say, *“You still have a heart to love God, the will to serve Him and do his adorable will and your voice is beautiful. Well, continue to sing: singing soothes one’s sufferings and rejoices the heart. Sing, sing and you will safeguard your voice for heaven; there also, we sing, but we do not suffer.”*

At La Begude, during the retreat of 1876, he received the news that his mother was seriously ill. He was encouraged to visit her and say his last good-byes. But he continued to occupy himself with the needs of the assembled brothers. When her death was announced, he wept bitterly, so profound was his sorrow.

## **Model of piety and fervor**

After the example of Father Champagnat, he was always attentive to the holy presence of God, and he made prayer, his whole life. He desired to communicate to all the brothers his love of prayer. *“It is the means,”* he would say, *“of putting a little bit of wood on the flames of love by which we must burn for God.”*

## **The love of Our Lord Jesus Christ**

The heart of Brother Philogone was aflame with the love of Jesus. That love, inspired him with an ardent zeal for the sanctification and salvation of souls and made him eloquent and persuasive in everything that he said and wrote to the brothers. He spoke to them often of the Sacred Heart. When he was tired and overwhelmed with work, and could no longer respond to every letter, he invited those who were interested, to find a response in the heart of Christ. *“The Sacred Heart is responsible this one time to give you an answer. Therefore, every morning, speak to him, listen to him... Repeat at every opportunity during the day: “Jesus meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.”*

Like Marcellin Champagnat, he had such a great devotion to Mary that she was, in all truth, his Ordinary Resource, and that in the Province, everything was done with her and by her. He went to her with the simplicity, the confidence, the abandon of a child with regard to its mother. *“How many novenas were made in La Begude and Aubenas!”* said a brother of the Province... How many times the Brother Assistant was able to say *“the hand of our good Mother is there! How many rosaries he recited on the road from Aubenas to La Begude!”* For him, to speak to the Blessed Virgin was a need and a joy. Seeing his animated appearance and hearing his convinced tone of voice, one felt that the heart was speaking.



Next, the biographer presents, in a dozen pages how Brother Philogone, in imitation of the Divine Master, practiced obedience, detachment, poverty, mortification, humility and charity. We will reproduce a few passages here.

## Obedience

While he was having the house in La Begude renovated in order to establish a juniorate, if someone offered an observation that such and such a plan would be better than another, he would reply: *“Yes, but the Reverend Brother Superior approved it this way; to do otherwise would have to be approved.”* And if the suggestion was truly better, he would ask for a new authorization.<sup>32</sup>

“If Brother Philogone knew how to obey, he also knew how to command. *“What he ordered,”* says a brother, *“was so clear, so exact, so reasonable, so just, that no one would have ever thought of disobeying.”* And also, when one is guide of another’s heart, as he was, he could expect full compliance.<sup>33</sup>

## Detachment

The good Brother Assistant, of happy memory, practiced detachment admirably in all things. Detachment from his family: he rarely saw the members of his family even though that would have been easy for him since his sisters who were religious, lived in Lyon. Detachment from worldly goods: in this he followed the example and tradition of Father Champagnat and the first brothers. Detachment from the pleasures and comforts of life and all that had to do with sensuality... He avoided very well everything that would have called attention to himself.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 149

<sup>33</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 150

<sup>34</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 150



## **His love of poverty**

“In the spirit of poverty, he made his trips on foot when the distance was not too long, such as the trip from Aubenas to La Begude (about 4 km)... He brought about an extreme attention to economizing, even to something as small as a sheet of paper or a match, thus putting into practice what he recommended in his *Manuel Domestique* on matters economical.<sup>35</sup>

## **His mortification**

“Justifiably alarmed at the weakened state of health of the Brother Assistant, Brother Malachie, director of La Begude, took the responsibility of having him follow a personal diet, which he agreed to do... But soon alleging that he was feeling better, he got permission to resume his place in the community dining room.

Just then, the bishop of Viviers, having come to La Begude, Brother Malachie said to him:

- *“Your Excellency, scold our Brother Assistant who does not want to let himself be treated medically...”*
- *“You are right my good Brother Malachie,”* said the bishop and turning to the Brother Assistant, he added: *“you must take care of your health, which is so precious to your Congregation and to my diocese. Brother Malachie. I beg you, look after him.”*
- The Brother Assistant, after having thanked the bishop said to him: *“But Your Excellency, I am feeling fine... My needs are being exaggerated...”* And he changed the topic of conversation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 151

<sup>36</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 152



## His humility

Like Mary, he took every care to hide anything that could have attracted attention of the public. He loved to live in the midst of his brothers and overlooked by the world, not wanting to be set apart in any way, but rather, to be looked upon as one of them. On some occasions, he was taken as the aide to Brother Malachie, the Provincial Director, who appeared older and better known. (At least it was so for a number of years). Often they travelled together, and Brother Malachie was taken to be the Superior... Brother Philogone delighted himself by laughing at these mistakes... In his humility, he enjoyed himself at being unrecognized and he voluntarily hid himself under the notoriety of Brother Malachie, all along saying to him jokingly: *“Truly Brother Malachie, you are unkind to me; I do not want to go with you anymore since you receive all the attention.”*<sup>37</sup>

## His charity

*“What struck me the most,”* says a brother, *“is that every time that I had the pleasure of seeing him, his big heart put everyone at ease and captivated those who drew close to him.”* In that, he possessed a trait that resembled our pious founder. Like him, he loved his brothers more than a tender father could love his children; like him he could guess their pain and their needs and he hastened to provide for them or to comfort them. He could not withhold his solicitude for the sick and his compassion for those who suffered. The brothers never stopped praising him. *“I will never forget, says one of them, the care he lavished on me when I had wounds on my legs. He came to where I was at the time and dressed my lacerations with maternal sensitivity and tenderness.”*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 153

<sup>38</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 156

Brother Philogone had a particular tact in figuring out the needs of a soul, in reviving a weakened courage and in putting back on the straight course, those who had strayed or who were ready to abandon it.<sup>39</sup>

This ardent and active charity which he had for the brothers, inspired in him an untiring, hard working, vigilant zeal, to bring about in them a union, a peace, a regularity... to preserve them in their vocation.

“... Brother Philogone, was without contention , one of our religious who best practiced the little virtues, which Saint Francis de Sales speaks of and which our pious Founder gave us, as the best means of fostering peace and unity. Everyone who knew him, and who lived with him had been able to observe and admire his adept and humble spirit, his heart given to tenderness and compassion. He was well balanced in soul and character, polite, courteous, affable in speech, full of holy joy and possessing a likeable and religious joviality. Such was the good Brother Philogone.”<sup>40</sup>

### **His gratitude**

Gratitude is a virtue that is the mark of a noble soul and a good heart. Brother Philogone practiced it to a high degree. How many times he let slip from his mouth, or better still, from his heart: *“Let us thank the good God! Let us be grateful to God!”* A brother from the house of Aubenas, remembers the farewell hymn of gratitude at the end of all the retreats, the Magnificat, which Brother Philogone entoned before the departure. It was the entire province that gave glory to God, with and through Mary.” How happy should this

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<sup>39</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 157

<sup>40</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 158-159



province be at having had during thirty-four years, such a holy religious to lead it!"<sup>41</sup>

“What is left to us now, writes the biographer, is to reproduce some letters which complete and crown these testimonies.” Five letters are preserved: one from the Archbishop of Lyon, another from the bishop of Viviers, one from a Jesuit, one from a Canon of Aubenas, and one from the Assistant of the Society of Mary. All are addressed to Brother Theophane, Superior General.

Here is the beginning of the letter from Father Ed Coulange, S.J.

“It is with profound emotion that I learned of the death of our dear Brother Philogone. He was so modest in what he deserved, so supernatural in his manner of seeing and doing things, so good for everyone. It would seem to me, Reverend Brother, that he must have given you the sweet consolation of seeing develop before your eyes, as much as that is possible, the ideal of the Little Brother of Mary. The great esteem that I have for Brother Philogone need not exaggerate the eulogy that I offer today. My sentiments are also the sentiments of our Fathers who knew him, especially Father Crull who, last August, gave, under the presidency of this good brother, the retreat to your brothers of Algeria. When I informed him of this death, he said to me: *“What a loss! So much modesty joined to so much intelligence!”*

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<sup>41</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 1 p. 159-160



## Praying with Brother Philogone

Brother Philogone. we are delighted in being able to join you in prayer in order to thank God, through Mary, our First Superior, for the marvelous gift he made to our religious family, in you.

- You were born in a profoundly Christian family, whose life was tested by a serious accident which caused the death of your father, when you were not yet ten years old.
- Your mother was the strong woman, spoken of in the bible, full of faith and courage in her effort to educate her five children, of whom you were the oldest.
- From birth she offered you and your siblings to God and to Mary. She was the one who taught you your catechism and accompanied you in your preparations for your first communion. In her memory, you wrote later on: *"The Story of a Mother"*.
- It was in the boarding school of the brothers in Viriville, where your mother had entrusted you, that you experienced your first desire to become a brother. Overjoyed with your choice, she prepared your trousseau and accompanied you to Our Lady of the Hermitage on September 26, 1841.
- In the school of the saintly Brother Bonaventure, you became a fervent novice, and on February 6, 1842, you received the habit and took the name, Brother Philogone.
- At the end of the novitiate, you were sent to a community as cook and at the same time, you began to learn how to teach. The director of the school where you were assigned created great difficulties in accepting you because you were small in stature.



- After several weeks, he had learned to appreciate you, so much so, that he did not want to let you go when it came time for a change of assignment at the end of the school year.
- At Usson, where you stayed for ten years, you showed yourself to be an excellent educator, a capable administrator and a competent director. Despite the multiplicity of jobs, you found the time to compose the “*Manuel Domestique*”, a book that was very valuable with the families.
- After a brief time as Director at Neuville-sur-Saône, you became master of novices and director of Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage. You arranged for the transfer of the Mother House to Saint-Genis-Laval, all before being elected Assistant for the Province of Aubenas, in July, 1860.
- In that post, you replaced Brother Jean-Baptiste at the summer retreat of 1861 at La Begude. He had occupied that position since 1844, the year of the union with the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Viviers and our Institute. He had learned to win the hearts of the brothers.
- Despite your youth (35years old) and the difficulty of following an exceptional brother, you dedicated yourself fully to the formation of the brothers in the image of Father Champagnat, that is to say, making them saintly religious and good educators.
- One of your great concerns was the construction of the house at Aubenas to replace the one at La Begude which had become much too small. You yourself drew the plans for that huge building which was blessed on September 29, 1878, by the bishop of Viviers.
- Thanks to your qualities as organizer and under your leadership, the Province of Aubenas experienced much

growth. You also had the satisfaction of seeing yourself well respected, listened to and loved by the brothers. Your unexpected death was a great ordeal for them.

- Like Marcellin Champagnat, attentive to the presence of God, you made of your whole life, a prayer. You used to say, *“It is the means for putting wood on the fire of love, so as to burn for God.”*
- You spoke often to the brothers of the Sacred Heart, inviting them to recite during the course of the day: *“Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.”*
- Mary was your Ordinary Resource. Your confidence in her was complete and when you spoke of the good mother to the brothers, your face became animated, and they sensed that the words came from your heart.
- You were an obedient religious, detached, a lover of poverty, disciplined, humble and full of kindness towards all. With an admirable zeal, you accompanied your brothers in their fidelity to their vocation.
- You practiced the little virtues, so dear to our Founder. Those who knew you, appreciated your forbearance, your solicitude for the brothers, your wonderful character, your affability and your joy which radiated from your person.

Brother Philogone, you loved to thank God for His blessings. It is our turn to give Him thanks for your holy life. May we, after your example, become a little more faithful disciples of Jesus, every day.

Amen

COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS








**10**

**Brother  
Malachie**

**Director  
of the  
Provincial  
House  
at Aubenas  
(1811-1894)**





The first volume of our “Notices Nécrologiques” presents the biography of Brother Malachie in an obituary of fifteen pages. Here is a condensed biography of this brother who played such an important role as master of novices and director of the Provincial House at Aubenas, in conjunction with Brother Philogone, Assistant General.

Jean-Marie Bajas known in religious life as Brother Malachie was born in Mardore in the diocese of Lyon and was director of the provincial house at Aubenas.

After this abrupt opening, the anonymous biographer reprints extracts of letters of condolences received from various clerics on the occasion of the death of Brother Malachie. Among them is the bishop of the diocese of Viviers and the father Abbot of Our Lady of the Snow monastery. Included in these extracts are pages from the “**Semaine Religieuse**” of the diocese, maintaining that *“it is a shortened biography, but very well done and with perfect exactitude.”*

Unfortunately, these pages say nothing about the family of the young Jean-Marie nor of his childhood and his youth, nor how he came to know the Marist Brothers. The announcement simply permits us to ascertain that he entered the novitiate in his thirtieth year.

“Born the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1811, in a very Christian family, Brother Malachie, responding to a strong heartfelt attraction to the call of God, entered religious life the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1841. . . . Having attracted the attention of his superiors very early on, he was called after only thirteen years of profession, to the position of provincial director and to the important and delicate role of master of novices, a position he held for forty-six years. . . The Novitiate he was asked to direct was situated in the very modest house of “La Begude,” the birthplace of the future establishment of Aubenas. It was the heroic era of the small community. . . Neither the material difficulties nor the contradictions and the ordeals were lacking at the outset. . . The active and farsighted master of novices knew how to confront everything with a spirit of faith which remained the unchanging and inspiring rule of his life. At the same time, he was blessed with a practical common sense which he possessed to a very high degree and which remained one of his dominant traits until his death.

On every point, he was an accomplished religious. He zealously observed the Rules of the Institute with meticulous care, both in their spirit as well as to the letter. Discreet in a gentle way, and possessing strength of character, our dear Brother Malachie was not only a sure guide for his novices, but wise in giving spiritual direction. He was also the “father” by his compassionate solicitude, the model in his religious observances and one who always spoke the truth. Those who, on life’s journey, met this fervent disciple of Father Champagnat, never forgot this person so serene and so calm, who witnessed a happy mixture of modesty, of sweetness and strength.





He inspired instinctively a sense of respect which reflected his own spirit of holiness, so visible to the observer. He was the man of God, judging all, both men and things in the pure light of faith with his simple forthrightness but at the same time with a practical correctness which amazed the wise ones...”

At the conclusion of the article in the *“Semaine Religieuse”*, we find this testimony given by the chaplain, Father Benoit who lived side by side for thirty-three years with Brother Malachie. It consisted of a tribute given in the presence of all the Brothers of the province on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Brother Philogone, Assistant General and of Brother Marie-Xavier and Brother Malachie, in September of 1891. The speaker ended by saying: *“I call on everyone listening to me: is it not true that Brother Malachie was always a living Rule and a reliable and authentic counselor? When the time comes, be assured that the Master will give you the reward promised to the good and faithful servant.”*

The biographer goes on to ask, *“What did our dear Brother Malachie do to merit this general admiration and respect from those who know him, especially his brothers who have known him and consider him a saint? He answers his own question with these words: “He was, after the example of Our Lord, in the middle of his community, as one who serves.”*

To the preceding remarks we should add a few salient attributes and show that Brother Malachie, gifted with an upright spirit, serious and of sound judgment was an eminently practical man, be it as a religious, as a director, a formator or an administrator.

## **1. As a Religious**

“He had become so well identified with the Rule that he had emerged as one with it. That is why, after his death, the senior broth-

ers who had lived with him would say: *“In order to construct a wise Rule, it would suffice to give an account of the conduct of our dear Brother Malachie.”*

During his time in La Begude , every day for thirty-two years, at eleven o'clock, he would give music class to the novices. While fulfilling the role of director and procurator simultaneously, he would go shopping on foot, especially on Saturdays to Aubenas, four kilometers away, with his shopping bag under his cloak. He was always back on time for his music class and to have dinner with the community, thus avoiding disturbing the cooks. With the aim of forming the brothers in plain chant, every Sunday, he would have a rehearsal of the Office of the day.. He was always the first one up in the morning and the first one in the chapel for the singing of the *Salve Regina*: he would intone it and sing the prayer. The community exercises were insufficient for his fervor, and so, every day at three o'clock especially after a procurator and a master of novices had been named to help him, he would add personal practices such as the rosary, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the Way of the Cross.

Full of consideration and kindheartedness, he always had *“something for a rainy day”* in order to meet an unforeseen need or to simply please someone. That is exactly what quickened his hour of death. He wanted to attend the funeral of the pastor of Grospierres and there caught a cold. The following day, even though he was tired, he said: *“A brother so and so is tired, but he loves dandelions, I am going to pick some”*. He caught another cold, which led to a more serious illness. Five days later, he turned over his beautiful soul to God.

Humility and mortification, twin companions of charity were equally the birthright of Brother Malachie. During a period of thirty-two years, his community of La Begude was housed in totally inadequate quarters and during the annual retreat the sleeping conditions



were dreadful. The majority of the brothers slept on straw mattresses spread about on the floor and very close to one another like a very bad hovel, simply covered with hollow tiles resting on rafters through which fresh air came through. This kind of dormitory had the appearance of a huge bed with a variety of bedspreads. Stepping inside on a summer evening was like entering a steam room, so hot had the tiles become from the burning sun. On rising in the morning, one experienced the coolness of a heavy dew. In the house there was a single room to spare, reserved for the retreat director. The confessors took rooms outside. When the Rev Brother Superior General arrived, Brother Malachie would leave him his room and his bed. Except during the community exercises, he spent his day a bit everywhere, in the hallways, in the parlor, in the infirmary, and around the kitchen. The brothers who had to speak with him found him wherever they could. That was fine for the daytime, but for the night? At night, once everybody was asleep, he would go down to the stable, throw together some straw and lie down on it.

To his ordinary responsibilities were added now and then, long and laborious trips. Since there was only one Assistant and one Visitor for Saint-Paul and La Begude, Brother Malachie was sent here and there to reinforce Brother Visitor. Since the means of communication were poor, these excursions were made on foot. In order to avoid expenses, he would provide himself with bread, cheese and some beverage and take his meal on the way thus avoiding having to stay in a hotel or inn.

## **2. As director and formator**

Brother Malachie always presided over the community exercises, the recreations and the meals as well as the Office and the time of meditation. He knew that this was the way to avoid disunion and to keep everybody in a spirit of order and peace. He was the guardian of the Rule and the practices of the Institute, and he formed all the



*Aubenas. Boarding College of the Immaculate Conception*

brothers of the Province. He was faithful to the Rule and the practices in what concerned the Lenten and Saturday fast. Until his death and despite his eighty-three years of age, he always wanted to fast.

Brother Malachie, with his clear-headedness, understood that to form true disciples of Father Champagnat he would have to mold them according to the Rule and the spirit of the Institute. More strict with himself than with his brothers, he led more by example than by command. It was customary that if the leader of the Office made a mistake, he would have to kiss the floor in front of the director. If it happened that Brother Malachie, on resuming the Office, in his turn made a mistake, he would come down from the presiding chair and in turn kiss the floor like a simple novice.

He was rather lenient in judging the faults of others but more demanding with regards to the practice of charity. Without pampering anyone, since he was the enemy of all that was sensuous, he was full of attention for the brothers, especially for those who were arriving or those who were leaving. He made sure they were served



properly, and he anticipated all their needs for the journey. But he was adamant against abuses such as trips and useless visits, the extras, the extravagances and the superfluous expenses. He would take a moment during the annual retreat to make some strong recommendations on these subjects

### **3. As administrator**

His foresight covered everything both in the spiritual as well as in the temporal realm. In the community, he would anticipate the feast and ceremonies of the Church; he would point out the spirit and fruits to be drawn from them, the hymns that needed to be learned, the spiritual reading that needed to be done and the subject matter for the particular examen and the meditation. At the time of the retreats, he would call for the preparation of everything needed to fittingly receive the brothers and the retreat directors. He would go from room to room in the house to make sure that everything had been properly prepared.

As concerned the house supplies for which he was responsible during thirty-two years, a period of time unsurpassed by any other procurator, he would purchase them at an opportune time so as to guarantee good quality and affordable prices: food, beverages, linen, clothing, utensils, sacristy materials, silage, etc. Everything was done perfectly.

Once these supplies had been purchased, he watched over their usage and utilization. Every day he would make the rounds of the house and the courtyard to make sure that everything was being used and that nothing would be lost due to forgetfulness or negligence. From a financial point of view, he was extremely careful. At certain times, one would have thought that he was somewhat miserly. Not at all. What was necessary, he gave out generously, both what pertained to food and to clothing. Both for reasons of



economy and good dress, he never bought what bordered on extravagance, but he bought articles of good quality.

It was this kind of administration that permitted Brother Malachie, despite his lack of resources during his last years as administrator, to realize certain savings which helped in the acquisition of the property of Aubenas. For him, a penny was a penny. He regulated the flame in a lamp or in a stove, and like Mme la Comtesse de La Grandville, he used everything, a small piece of cloth, a log lost in the field and he saved matches.

A quality that we cannot gloss over in silence was his straightforwardness, and his delicate conscience. His straightforwardness was such that he never assumed in others any duplicity or concealment. This forthrightness, known by all who had any dealings with him, won their esteem and confidence. That is why the brothers themselves always received in good measure what was due them from Brother Malachie. Finally, he himself declared that he always acted in such a way that there would be no need for remorse after any action.

He declared it one last time on his death bed probably without ever doubting it. He had just received the last rites in the presence of all the senior brothers who had crowded into his bedroom, and he wanted to suggest some reflections, even though unable to do so in presence of the entire community as he had wished. *“Fifty-three years ago,”* he said, *“I joined the Institute. That time has gone by very fast. If at this moment I had one regret, it would be that I have not loved God enough and of not having done all the good that I should have done... I always acted in a way that I believed I should. If I had to start over again, I would do it the same way.”*

These are words of a *saint* which reveal the rectitude of his conduct and the purity of his intentions. Fully alert, he received the last



sacraments, and he expected to die almost immediately. The following day he was, completely astounded, and he said to Brother Assistant (Philogone): “I don’t understand it! I was expecting to die, and I’m still living!” He spent the next few moments intimately absorbed with God and reciting some Hail Marys, stressing in a special way the words: *Pray for us now, and at the hour of our death.*

Then, a little while later, in the presence of the brothers gathered in prayer around him, he fell asleep peacefully in the Lord.

Happy the Little Brother of Mary who, on the threshold of eternity can say, as Brother Malachie did: *If I had to start over again, I would do it the same way*

N.B. The house at La Begude where Brother Malachie lived for thirty-two years belonged to the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Viviers and had been founded by Reverend Vernet, Vicar General of the diocese. Since this congregation did not succeed in growing, the founder turned it over to the bishop before his death. The latter, realizing how successful had been the union of the Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux with the Little Brothers of Mary in 1842, asked Brother Francois if they could do the same with his brothers.. The union was effected in 1844. Under the direction of Brother Jean-Baptiste who was the Assistant until 1860, the new Marist Province took the name of the Province of Aubenas. Starting in 1878 this province experienced rapid growth as had the Province of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these two provinces had respectively, eight hundred and nine hundred religious. They were responsible for numerous Marist foundations across the world.



## **Praying with Brother Malachie**

Brother Malachie, we want our prayer to be a moment of communion with you, you who were a true disciple of Marcellin Champagnat, and an incomparable player in the magnificent development of the Province of Aubenas during the first fifty years of its existence.

- Except for the date and place of your birth, we know nothing of your childhood and youth, nor of your parents. Neither do we know anything of the origin of your vocation nor the circumstances that acquainted you with our religious family. You entered religious life at the age of thirty.
- We are also unfamiliar as to where your apostolic life began. The “Semaine Religieuse” of Viviers simply announces that after only thirteen years of profession you were called to be Provincial Director and master of novices.
- You were to exercise those functions during forty-six years, thirty-two of which were spent in La Begude. You faced, with courage, a multitude of difficulties,



always watchful to foresee the needs of the brothers and witness to a life of service.

- The house of La Begude was poor and too small for the number of young people in formation. On occasion you went to sleep on straw in the stable and gave your bed to a visitor.
- In September of 1878, the novitiate was transferred to the new Provincial House in Aubenas, built according to the plans of Brother Philogone, Assistant General. Thus, hundreds of brothers were formed by you.
- You were a consummate religious who loved the Rule of the Institute. Your benevolent heart tempered your no-nonsense character and the novices encountered in you not only a wise, reliable guide but also a good father.
- Your biographer writes that “those who spent time with you never forgot your serene appearance whose features reflected a mixture of modesty, sweetness and strength. This reflection of holiness inspired respect on the part of all. Your uprightness and practical sense astounded the very wise.”

- Just like Father Champagnat, you loved a well celebrated liturgy. At eleven o'clock every day, you taught a class of music to the novices, and every Sunday, to form the brothers in plain-chant, you held a rehearsal of the Office of the day. Every morning you intoned the *Salve Regina* and sang the prayer.
- In your service of administrator, you generously gave to the brothers what they needed and you bought good quality. Thanks to your financial management and despite limited resources at your disposal, you realized enough savings to purchase the property of Aubenas.
- On your death bed, you declared the following to the brothers present: "I have been in the Institute fifty-three years, and the time has gone by quickly. I always acted the way that I thought I should. If I had to start over again, I would do it the same way."

Thank you Brother Malachie for your saintly life, given entirely in the service of the brothers. May Mary bolster our fidelity in the same way she accompanied you in the following of her Son.

Amen

COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS



**11**

**Brother Aidant**

**Director  
of the  
Beaucamps  
Provincial  
House  
(1820-1900)**



In volume 2 of the “*Notices Nécrologiques*”<sup>42</sup> one can read the biography of Brother Aidant. It introduced us to a brother who was formed by Father Champagnat and Brother Bonaventure and who played an important role in the development of the Provincial House of Beaucamps where he was director for thirty-eight years. This house consisted of a novitiate, a boarding school and a day school.

The anonymous biographer points out that “*one of the great joys of Brother Aidant was to have seen the Institute flourish, grow and spread throughout the world. In a particular way he had the distinct pleasure of seeing the development of the Northern Province to which he dedicated the major part of his life.*”<sup>43</sup>

A resumé of this biography follows. We have kept those passages where both Father Champagnat and Brother Aidant have something special to say.

Brother Aidant, Etienne Feuillet, who died at Beaucamps October 28, 1900, was born in Saint-Didier-sur-Chalaronne (Ain), April 21, 1820.

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<sup>42</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 2, pp. 374-389

<sup>43</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 2, p. 381



His father, Pierre Feuillet was a tailor, and his mother , Marie Dessaigne, ran a small haberdashery. They were remarkable, not only for their perfect integrity but for their faith and their piety. During their twelve years of marriage, they had three boys, the two oldest having died in childhood. The third, Étienne, outlived both parents.

His mother, a courageous and fervent Christian, experienced countless ordeals. During her married life she suffered from several illnesses. First, she lost her voice for eighteen months, followed by rheumatism which forced her to walk with crutches for five years. She left one crutch at Notre-Dame de Fourvière and the other at Saint Gengoul, where after two pilgrimages she undertook with great confidence to ask for healing.

One more affliction had been reserved for her; the loss of a huge sum of money which had been given to her by her family and which she felt she had placed in secure hands. When it came time to withdraw it for the education of her son, the trustee had become insolvent.

Étienne was barely three years old when his father died. His mother focused all her affection on her only child and enveloped him with much solicitude. The child responded so well to her care that he soon became her consolation and her joy. He made a fervent first communion on May 3, 1833, and was confirmed the same day by Msgr Devie, bishop of Belley.

When his mother felt it was the moment to help plan his future, she made several proposals; going into the business of haberdashery, or becoming a tailor or any other profession. He did not feel inclined towards any of these. He began to pray, especially reciting the rosary in order to know the will of God for him. About that time, the Marist Brothers opened a school in Saint-Didier, and from the beginning, Étienne was one of their students.



Brother Director, on seeing how diligent he was in school matters and how dedicated he was to his assignments, did not hesitate to manifest his trust in him by putting him in charge of ordinary chores usually assigned to the smarter students. After having observed him for a while, he discreetly asked him about his plans for his future and whether or not he might like to be a Little Brother of Mary, some day. Étienne accepted the offer and decided to tell his mother. After this first declaration of her son, she felt her heart break; but after a few questions and objections which had as motive to better probe the disposition of her son, she thought that she heard the call of God, and she consented to his departure which was set for March 23, 1837.

On the eve, as if to delude herself and to soften the sadness to be caused by the separation, the mother said to her son: *“Tomorrow morning, you will go to the brothers as usual, all the while saying to me: “Mother, I am going to class”.* He understood what that meant and actually the next morning after taking breakfast, he took his books, his notebooks and his school bag and after having kissed his mother, he said to her: “Mother, I am going to class.” She did not say anything but quickly went into the next room, closing the door, undoubtedly, to give full release to her tears. One understands her sorrow and the sacrifice she was making: she had but that one son, he was only sixteen years old, but he could have given her much support. As if God wanted to reward her here on earth, she saw from this moment on, her health improve and her small business grow along with her resources.

For his part the young man loved his mother and fulfilled all the responsibilities of a good son. Therefore, he was heavy hearted that day as he made his way to the brothers. Brother Director was waiting for him and together they left for the Hermitage where they arrived on Holy Thursday for the Office of Tenebrae.

## **The Novitiate – The Teacher**

The following morning, Good Friday, Étienne was presented to Father Champagnat who, after having questioned him for the motives that moved him to embrace religious life, wrote his name down in the register along with the conditions for his admission and then handed him the pen so he could affix his signature. The Father, on seeing the writing, said to him, “You write better than I do.” Proud of the compliment, the young man replied: “If the feather had been cut English style (it was a goose feather) I would write much better.” With that banter the Father smiled, and after having given the postulant some encouragement, he entrusted him to the pious Brother Bonaventure, the master of novices.

Being privileged to make his novitiate under the tutelage of this brother that all the novices revered as a saint was a favor that our postulant appreciated very much and for which he thanked God all his life. He considered, greater still, the privilege of spending these blessed days under the gaze of the venerable Founder of the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary, and to listen to his instructions, full of ardent faith and spiritual fervor; to listen in the confessional, to the words that came right from the heart, that captivated the novices and affirmed them in their vocation. He remembered the words and examples of virtue of the venerable Father Champagnat, an impression and souvenir which he recalled in his deposition for the Cause of Beatification of the Venerable Founder: a clear, concise, document, dated at Beaucamps, February 2, 1889.<sup>44</sup>

On August 15, 1837, Étienne Feuillet put on the religious habit and changed his name to Brother Aidant.

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Témoignages sur Marcellin Champagnat, *Enquête diocésaine*, Rome 1991, p. 152-166.



His time in the novitiate was spent with great fervor. He would say, *“the saintly Father Champagnat had known very well how to inspire his first disciples to piety, recollection, mortification, love for the Rule, silence, work, and that he put all their dedication to the task of sanctification.”*

After the retreat of 1837, Brother Aidant was sent to Marllhes as a cook, like all the brothers when they left the novitiate. Beginning with the month of October 1838, he taught consecutively at the school of Saint-Martin-la-Plaine, at Craponne and at Cote-Saint-Andre. He acquitted himself with great success in the diverse tasks asked of him, thanks to his upright judgment, his calm and firm personality, his tact, his good will and his devotedness.

### **The Director - The Master of Novices**

In September of 1843, Brother Aidant who was now twenty-three years old made his profession and was named director at Saint-Martin-en-Haut (Rhône). After two years, he was sent to Saint-Laurent-de-Chamousset (Rhône) in the same capacity, where he stayed until 1850.

He was called to the bedside of his sick mother in January of 1849, where he had the anguish of seeing her die. At the same time, he was edified and consoled by the perfect resignation with which she accepted death, considering herself happy at having given her son to God. Brother Aidant always considered himself tremendously blessed by heaven at having had such a mother.

In 1850, Reverend Brother Francois named him director of the Mother House of Notre Dame de l’Hermitage. Two years later, he was put in charge of the novitiate of Vauban (Saône-et-Loire), which unfortunately closed three years later for lack of candidates.



*Beucamps*

At that time, the house at Beucamps (North) which had been founded fifteen years earlier by the Count and Countess of Grandville and which housed a novitiate, a boarding school and a day school, was in need of a director who would be at one and the same time, an exemplary religious, prudent and wise, and a man of authority and organization. Brother Aidant who was judged capable of meeting these requirements, took over on May 28, 1855.

He faced this complex task with much courage. With correct judgment, a forthright conscience and the spirit of faith that defined him, he understood that he was the first who had the responsibility for teaching and practicing all that might contribute to the preservation of the Institute and the perpetuation of the spirit of our saintly Founder whom he had known. What sustained the courage of Brother Aidant, besides his faith, his piety, his tenacity and his confidence in God was his dedication to the Institute. He put at its



service all his zeal, and all the gifts received from heaven, and the sixty-four years of his life. What was also a great encouragement to him was the confidence that his superiors placed in him. Already by 1846, while he was hardly twenty-six years old he was director of Saint-Laurent-de-Chamousset. Brother Francois had such a high appreciation of him that he commissioned him to visit the establishments in his district. The three successors of Brother Francois extended to him this same esteem and confidence.

The brothers who lived close to Brother Aidant and under his guidance – and the number is large – would not be lying if they said that he left among them the reputation of having been a good and saintly religious. They did not forget to mention that under an austere and cold exterior, he hid a heart and social qualities, which in intimate moments revealed themselves beautifully and led to loyal friendships.

Let us add that due to his knowhow, his consideration and his practice, and full of tact and civility, in no small way was he able to interest benefactors in contributing to the house in Beaucamps and obtaining from them generous gifts for which this house of the Northern Province, owed, to a great extent its development.

On April 13, 1887, Brother Aidant had the pleasure of celebrating his golden jubilee. In response to the congratulations that he received, he offered a few comments.

*“It is the first time that the provincial house of Beaucamps celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of religious life of one of its members and that honor falls on your poor servant who has just completed a half century of happiness in the Society of the Little Brothers of Mary... I assure you my very dear brothers that I am deeply touched by this manifestation of fraternal greetings. I offer you my expression*

*of deepest gratitude... My most ardent wish is that all of you will have the opportunity one day of participating in a celebration such as you are offering me today."*

A proof that Brother Aidant was held in high esteem by the brothers of the Institute was that he was elected to all the General Chapters starting with the one held at Notre Dame de l'Hermitage in 1852 until the last one held at Saint-Genis-Laval in 1893

### **Brother Aidant in his retirement**

During the vacation of 1893, the Superiors felt that Brother Aidant who was now 73 years old, deserved a few months of rest. Having previously been replaced as master of novices and director of the boarding school, the Superiors replaced him as well, as director of the provincial house, the only duties he was still involved in.

While submitting himself obediently to this decision, he became depressed, wondering how he would now use his time profitably, as he had done so well in the past. In this situation, the Brother Superior General who respected him and loved him very much, consoled, encouraged and let him choose where he might like to retire.

After the retreat of 1893, Brother Aidant handed over the direction of the house to Brother Agathon and taking advantage of the permission that had been granted him, he took a trip to the west of France and spent a few days at the provincial house of Notre-Dame de Lacabane. On returning to Beaucamps, he said to his successor: *"For forty years I welcomed you to the novitiate. Would you, in turn, welcome me into your house? I will not be bothersome and will not meddle in your affairs. All I ask of you is a little corner of the house where I can prepare for death during my retirement and in an atmosphere of contemplation."*



As he had said, he satisfied himself with a small room in an isolated part of the house and never meddled in the affairs of the administration. Being unable to put up with having nothing to do, despite his age and his declining eyesight, he knew how to make himself useful by offering to carry out different chores such as working in the garden or in the woodworking shop.

In the last years of his life, he suffered an affliction which forced him to practice patience and submission to the will of God: his eyesight was diminished gradually to the point that he was unable to read or write, which for him was a terrible privation. Some very kind brother became his lector and secretary. He was particularly happy with readings from all the new circulars that covered topics about the Institute which he loved so well.

On December 26, 1899, he wrote to a Brother Assistant: *“I have a feeling that my eyesight is diminishing more and more and that my strength is declining little by little which tells me that the end approaches. As for the rest, age is hot on my heels and is pushing me to the door of my eightieth year. Since the time I entered the Congregation, I have seen a large number harvested by death: I never claimed that I could avoid it. The five who died suddenly in our midst alert me to the fact that I must keep myself ready...”*

In fact, death did not delay. Brother Aidant saw it coming with the serenity of the just. Fully alert, he received the last sacraments, and he was ready when it arrived on October 28, 1900. He was able to present himself with confidence before the Sovereign Judge whom he had served faithfully; those who knew him well were able to say of him, that he was an exemplary religious.





## **Praying with Brother Aidant**

Brother Aidant, after having discovered several traits of your personality and having rapidly covered some stages of your life, it is a joy for us to pray with you.

- You were barely three years old when your father died. Your mother, who had lost her two oldest children, transferred all her affection to you and knew how to pass on to you her courage and her faith.
- You attended the village school which the Marist Brothers had just opened. When the brother Director asked you if you would be interested in becoming a Little Brother of Mary, you answered “Yes.”
- Your mother allowed you to leave even though you were her only support. With a heavy heart, you left her to make your way to the Hermitage accompanied by Brother Director. It was Holy Thursday, March 23, 1837.
- The following morning you met Father Champagnat who was delighted to welcome you and to confide you to the saintly Brother Bonaventure. During your entire life you never ceased thanking God for having been accompanied by this special master of novices.



- You considered it a great favor to have known the Founder. It was with great joy that you recalled his words and his example in the deposition you prepared on February 2, 1889, as affidavit for the cause of beatification.
- After the retreat of 1837, you were sent to Marlhès as cook, and in 1838, you began your teaching assignment with success, thanks to your natural gifts and your devotedness.
- After your profession in September of 1843, you became director of several schools during a seven year period. In 1849, your saintly mother left you for heaven. You felt this pain most deeply.
- In 1850, Brother François, Superior General, confided to your care the Mother House of Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage and two years later named you master of novices at Vauban, en Saône-et-Loire.
- In 1855, you arrived in Beaucamps in the north of France where you directed a house which included a novitiate, a boarding school and a day-school. You succeeded in fulfilling this complicated task very well, thanks to your spirit of faith, your good judgment and a forthright conscience.
- You were convinced that you were the first who had to teach and practice all that might contribute to the development of the Institute and the preservation of the spirit of Father Champagnat with which you had been imbued while at the Hermitage.

- The numerous brothers who came to know you bear witness to the quality of your religious life. Under an austere and cold exterior you hid a heart full of goodness. By your tact, your consideration and your know-how, you won over the friendship of everyone.
- The confidence of the brothers was evidenced in your election to every General Chapter starting with the second one held at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage in 1852 until the one held in Saint-Genis-Laval in 1893.
- The celebration of your Golden Jubilee of religious life on April 13, 1887, was the occasion for many brothers, to express their gratitude to you. In 1893, you accepted with docility to be replaced as director of the Provincial House.
- You stayed there discretely, without embarrassing your successor in any way, You made yourself useful in diverse manual jobs such as working in the garden and in the woodworking shop, even when your eyesight was poor. This latter debility was for you, an occasion for practicing patience and for submitting yourself to the will of God.
- With much confidence, and with the serenity of the just, you saw your death approaching on October 28, 1900. Those who knew you have testified that you were an exemplary religious.

Thank you Brother Aidant for your life given in the service of authority, especially in the service to the brothers of the Province of Beaucamps where you were able to attest to such a magnificent growth. May your fidelity stimulate our own and may your prayer always sustain us.

Amen

COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS



A large, dark blue brushstroke graphic that forms a partial frame on the left side of the page, extending from the top edge down to about the middle of the page.

**12**

**Brother  
Jules-André**

**China  
Martyr  
(1863-1900)**





A biography of the founder of our mission in China, Brother Marie-Candide, was presented in volume I of “*Nos Premier Frères*”<sup>45</sup>. Much should also be said of Brother Jules-André, an exemplary missionary to China. His life merits the attention of the entire Marist Family, and especially those who are involved in mission “Ad Gentes”; we all could honor him and continue to keep his memory alive.

A hand-written biography of this Brother can be found in “*Notices Nécrologiques*”.<sup>46</sup>

Born on July 17, 1863 of a religious family, Brother Jules-André, whose baptismal name was Marie-Auguste Brun, came from Saint Vincent-de-Reins which is located in the Rhône district. His mother, Véronique Longère, was a holy woman who raised her son with a great deal of faith and love. Her son was good, gentle, affectionate and religious.

The local school was directed by the Brothers, and the young student soon drew the attention of the principal by his excellent behavior. He was gifted with above average intelligence, loved school and possessed good judgment.

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<sup>45</sup> Alain Delorme *Nos Premiers Frères*, p. 272-302

<sup>46</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol 2, p. 304-323

At age 13, he told his mother that he wished to become a Marist Brother, more specifically, a missionary brother. Although she recognized her son's call as coming from God, she waited several months before speaking about it to her husband. As he had only one son and one daughter, he resisted at first. He eventually relented and allowed his son to pursue his call.

On April 3, 1877, young Auguste entered the Novitiate at Saint-Genis-Laval. He was barely 14 years of age and his basic attitude had not changed. He listened carefully to the instructions of the Master of Novices, was compliant, and progressed rapidly in spiritual formation. At the end of his Novitiate, the young Novice, whose name in Religion was Brother Jules-André, was assigned as teacher and as cook in Saint-Foy-l'Argentière and in other neighboring schools.

In April of 1883, he was assigned to the Mother House at Saint-Genis-Laval where he remained for ten years, teaching and studying at the Novitiate and at the Scholasticate where he left excellent and long lasting impressions.

Sixteen years elapsed from the time Brother Jules-André entered the Novitiate, and he still wanted to become a missionary brother, but never expressed his desire for fear of appearing rude or arrogant. In 1892, additional brothers were requested from China to support Brother Marie-Candide. The year before, Brother Marie-Candide and five other brothers had begun the first Marist mission in China. Answering a letter sent to him by his Superior requesting that he consider going to China with other brothers, Brother Jules-André sent him the following response: *“Not trusting myself, I never asked to go to the missions, and I am not requesting to do so now. However, if the Lord were to choose me to lead others and spread His Word, I would be very happy to do so. It is something that I have wanted to do for quite some time. If you decide that the Lord wants*



*me to go to China, I will do so. I am convinced that with His grace and with the protection of the Blessed Virgin guiding me, I will succeed. They will help me to give fully of myself as a missionary.”* After having received his letter of obedience and the confirmation of his nomination, he wrote the following: *“I thank you and the Sacred Heart of Jesus for my appointment. I never dared to hope that the favor of being a missionary would ever be granted to me. How I now wish to be a good missionary, one who is zealous, and one who is fully committed to striving for perfection!”*

After having spent a few months in London in order to improve his English, Brother Jules-André left for China in July of 1893. Upon his arrival, he was assigned as teacher in Shanghai. On September 27<sup>th</sup> he wrote the following: *“I am very happy to be in China and I thank God for this grace every day.”* A few weeks later, he wrote: *“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus kindle my poor heart with zeal, and a thirst for souls, that same thirst that consumed Him on the Cross and on our altars.”*

Brother Jules-André was filled with the desire to save souls and taught his classes accordingly. In order to be more effective as a teacher, he tried to exemplify in his own life what he talked about in his classes.

On May 17, 1894, he wrote from Shanghai: *“The Lord and Our Lady should be thanked for the graces and protection that we have received during the past year. The year has been a memorable one in terms of the intellectual and spiritual development of our students. They have made great strides in knowledge and in virtue. The number of students has increased to 208, and we have a wonderful family spirit.*

*Our Brother Director has been like a father to us and I could never say enough of the brothers. They are dedicated, religious, happy, charming and delightful. Our relationships with the students could not be better.*



*Even though I have the best students in the world, I am the only one struggling in the classroom. The proof that they are good students is the fact that they love the Blessed Virgin and celebrate her in a very special way during the month of May.”*



Humble and withdrawn, Brother Jules-André would have been quite happy living in God's presence, hidden and unknown in his classroom. However, Divine Providence would have it otherwise. He was appointed to replace Brother Élie-François, the beloved Brother Visitor of the District of Peking, who died on May 7, 1896, and who was the second to have died within a period of five years. His predecessor, Brother Marie-Candide died on May 3, 1895. Humbled by the appointment, he wrote: *"I am quite apprehensive about my new responsibility. It is not a question of saying: 'I accept.', or 'I do not accept.' For a religious, that approach is not be acceptable. I am relying on Our Lady. She will lead me."*

Upon arriving, he rose to the occasion and resolutely assumed his new responsibility. In his dealings with the local authorities, with the brothers and with everyone else, he showed remarkable prudence, tact, and foresight. Noted as a man of action who liked innovations, he did not waste time trying to begin new projects that were already successfully in place. Always forward-looking, he spent his energy creating ventures that would promote the extension of the Kingdom of God by the establishment of schools for Christian education throughout China.



Unfortunately, his plans would not materialize; for, in 1899, bands of extremists, better known as Boxers, began looting and killing Christians. At the time, there were 48 Marist Brothers in China. Those who suffered the most during the Rebellion were the 7 in in Tiensin and the 15 in Peking.

The author of the biographical account provided details of the siege of Petang, a district of Peking. Within its confines were the cathedral, the residences of the Lazarist Missionaries and their compound. It was there that hundreds of Christians, including eight Marist Brothers, sought refuge. The siege of Petang lasted for 64 days. Among those killed were eleven defenders and four hundred refugees.

After having provided for the brothers as best he could, Brother Jules-André entered Petang on July 14, 1900. Upon his arrival, he began writing about the event which he entitled "Prisoners!", and sent his account to Brother Superior General. On a daily basis, he described the dramatic events that were taking place, events that were to last for two months. He and the brothers tried to maintain community life as much as possible. His spirit of faith and trust in the Lord was often reflected in the personal journal which he kept. He constantly lived in the presence of God. However, while in Petang, he not only demonstrated his strong religious convictions, but he also became a "soldier" as well. He did not carry a gun, but provided all sorts of services in the face of bullets and the ravages of war.

Brother Jules-André was not able to continue giving his written account of the final events of the siege, for he became one of its casualties. Here is how the Brother who replaced him completed the entry:

"The night of 11<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of the month of August had been relatively calm. With Brother Visitor, we attended morning Mass at 5:30, followed by a second Mass which was offered in thanksgiving. Suddenly, at the Elevation of the Host, a tremendous explosion rocked

everything around us. Some of the helpers at church rushed towards the doors to assist those crying for help outside. We heard gunfire. The mine that had just exploded created a crater 7 meters deep and 40 meters wide. It destroyed several nearby buildings burying 80 people in the rubble which included children, catechumens, and some Italian soldiers. Among them was a woman who was half buried and desperately calling for help. No one dared approach her as the Boxers were still firing their weapons in that direction. Ignoring his personal safety, Brother Jules-André courageously crawled to her assistance trying to avoid a hail of bullets. At the moment he was about to drag her to safety, a bullet ripped through his chest. He started to recite the Act of Contrition. Hardly had he completed five or six words when he became silent. Not long after, he was returned to the chapel. A priest was brought in, but unfortunately it was too late. He could only confirm that he had died, and then he uttered these words: “...our

*dear Brother Jules-André has died. He was a victim of love and of commitment.”*



Boxers

And so it was that this valiant worker in the vineyard of the Lord gave up his life at age 37. After having lived an exemplary life as a fervent and obedient religious, he died spreading the Word as a hero and as a saint. He was loved by the brothers who praised him and wept over him. He deserved the beautiful eulogy made on his behalf by Msgr. Favier, Bishop of Peking: “*He was truly a great man. During the siege, he demonstrated courage, intelligence and commitment that are without parallel.*”



The author of his biography then transcribed a letter from Brother Faust which well illustrates what he had just written about the love and affection the brothers had for Brother Jules-André. He presented some of his virtues beginning with extracts from the letters written by Brother Jules-André, all of which were dated. Here are a few examples.

## **I - His Virtues**

### ***His Humility***

August 13, 1896

Brother Jules-André had just been appointed Brother Visitor. He wrote: *“The annual retreat is upon us, and I have not been able to prepare for it. Nevertheless, I do hope that in spite of being a flawed instrument, or should I rather say, because of it, God will grant us the grace of having an excellent retreat... God often chooses the weak in order to confound the powerful.”*

The Year 1896

*“Generally, I am inclined to live a hidden life, one that is unobtrusive and humble. As this was the case for our Venerable Founder, I feel that it should be the case for the entire Congregation as well.”*

March 27, 1898

*“I can't say that I was pleased with your letter because it only increased the responsibility that I have which is heavy already. It seems to me that a Religious should obey... What I find consoling and encouraging is that what I lack in talent and ability will be supplanted by the power of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, our Venerable Founder and all the saints.”*

### ***His Spirit of Faith and His Confidence in God***

March 14, 1893

*“No doubt God is with us during these troubling times just as he was during the time of Father Champagnat. He will sustain us. If God blesses Cha-la-eul under the wise leadership of the humble and virtuous Brother Marie-Candide, I have no doubt that through prayer and humility, our brothers will obtain God’s blessings for all of our schools in China...”*

October 18, 1897

*“Everything is going well in Nantang. That’s not surprising for we are trying to spread devotion to the Sacred-Heart.”*

November 18, 1898

*“I am convinced more than ever that when we address our prayers to Our Lord and to Our Lady, they are always answered, especially when they are in our best interests.”*

### ***His Love of Our Lord – His Devotion to the Sacred-Heart***

London, January 11, 1893

*“I was very happy to learn that devotion to the Sacred Heart is flourishing at the Novitiate which is like a garden of religious life, where the most beautiful virtues blossom with ease. I was also happy to learn that the same is true of the Scholasticate and that the spirit there could not be any better.”*

January 11, 1897

*“Since I’ve been in Cha-la-eul, I have had the good fortune of receiving Holy Communion four, five and even six times per week. I have grown because of it.”*



### ***His Wish to Progress Spiritually***

March 27, 1898

*“With this new duty that you have given me, I have one more reason to get close to God. I commend the care of all of the brothers of China, their undertakings and the children confided to their care to Our Heavenly Father through the Sacred Heart of Jesus and our dear Mother, Mary. I unceasingly ask them for the grace of holiness for everyone, that our loves may be in perfect harmony with His will and that China may be converted... I also ask you to pray for me personally, that I may be magnanimous like Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Theresa and Venerable Father Champagnat.”*

### ***His Filial Devotion and Obedience***

August 16, 1895

On a visit to France to be with his mother who was critically, Brother Jules-André who was at the point of exhaustion wrote to his Brother Assistant requesting that he might spend more time with her in order to ensure her complete recovery. He concluded his letter with the following: *“As you well know, I will do whatever you want me to do. Should you think that my request is inappropriate, or should you have need of the least of my services, a single word from you would be sufficient for me to comply.”*

November 6, 1897

*“Dear Very Reverend Brother Superior, I come before you with all of your Little Brothers from Cha-la-eul, from Nantang and from Tientsin, to offer you my devoted best wishes for a holy and happy New Year... May this New Year bring you the joy of seeing the religious fervor of your Little Brothers and their zeal in spreading the Kingdom of God. May we all be one step closer to seeing the advancement of the Cause of our Venerable Founder and may our Institute witness an increase in holy and fervent vocations.”*

### ***His Zeal, Courage and Generosity***

London, May 20, 1893

*“Not long ago, I received a letter from Brother Marie-Candide advising me not to be overly optimistic about the situation in China, especially about positive developments. Having been forewarned, I know that I must be stable and patient. I hope that with God’s help I will not be lacking in either one. I am counting on the help of the Sacred-Heart, Our Good Mother and on Venerable Father Champagnat.”*

Cha-la-eul, May 11, 1898

*“We must give of ourselves and make sacrifices; in fact, we must make lots of sacrifices, so that God will help us begin new schools in China and thereby promote the coming of His Kingdom in this poor country which is more and more eager for the coming of His Kingdom.”*

Shanghai, September 24, 1898

*“We don’t know if he died of natural causes or otherwise, but the sudden death of the Chinese Emperor came to us as a shock, and we are all worried. The situation is critical, and I am going to Peking because the brothers there are in danger, and that is where I ought to be... Whatever may happen, we know that we are in God’s hands...”*

December 16, 1899

To the Very Reverend Brother Superior: *“...It seems to me that at this time, God is calling us to accept offers to open new schools here in China thanks to the zeal and dedication of the brothers. Of course, this would depend on how well they conform to what is prescribed in our Constitutions... I often think of the urgent requests that come from T’ai-Wan, Canton, Nanning and Tang-tcheou.”*



## ***His Abandonment to Divine Providence***

Cha-la-eul, May 126, 1900

*“We do not know what the future holds, but we rely completely on God’s Providence. We recite the “Memorare” for peace in our area every night. Christians have fled. The Sisters have just informed me that they have been requested by the Bishop to leave for the city. We are replacing them in their convent and taking care of their orphans. May God protect us, or if be His will, may He give us the strength to endure until the end....”*

Cha-la-eul, May 29, 1900

*“We are still alive thanks to the protection of God, Mary, our Good Mother, and no doubt of Saint Michael who is the special patron of Cha-la-eul... The Boxers wanted to storm Cha-la-eul and set it ablaze. Fortunately they were prevented from doing so by the local governor who came with some of his men. We believe that we were saved by Saint Michael and his angels. The local inhabitants who are non-believers claimed to have seen their faces on the outer walls of the compound before the Boxers retreated to the main road.”*

## **II. His Gifts as Administrator**

Although Brother Jules-André was noted for his virtues and his quest for perfection, he was also a gifted administrator. He had a great deal of common sense, and this helped him to distinguish what was essential from what was un-important in various situations. When faced with a problem, he instinctively knew the advantages and disadvantages of the situation and had foresight to take the proper course of action.

Before making a final decision, he would consult with others, pray and reflect and then proceed prudently. In every situation, his reserve, discretion and gravity indicated that he was spiritually mo-



tivated and acting out of duty. He had the ability to successfully resolve a wide variety of internal matters with the brothers. Others also sought his advice, and he was respected by all.

His many letters testify to the fact that he focused his attention on the development of the mission of the Little Brothers of Mary in China. He was convinced of their power to improve the lives of so many who depended upon them.

Like his Divine Master, he was moved with compassion at seeing so many children struggling in the darkness of ignorance, much like sheep without a shepherd. He would always be enthused when faced with the possibility of opening yet another school. He never ceased repeating how important it was to send more brothers to help with the mission. He wanted brothers who were capable, or at least willing, to try to consider coming to China.

He was convinced that more than anywhere else, people in China, valued knowledge and virtue. He also felt that the younger generation looked down upon those who did not know the basics of the Chinese language. He insisted that the brothers not only learn Chinese, but also other modern languages as well, especially English. He thought that the curriculum being offered in our schools would be greatly improved if the brothers were to come with skills in language as well as being knowledgeable in math and science.

Among the things that he wanted most were the opening of a Novitiate, the promotion of new vocations, the formation of good catechists and the creation of a center where resources would be available to promote all of these endeavors.

Brother Jules-André did not live to see all of his hopes and dreams come true. However, we are convinced that in due time, they will come about. As for him, the time had come for him to re-



ceive his eternal reward, and it must have been quite special for he left a tremendous legacy of love, zeal, and self-sacrifice. His generosity in promoting the coming of the Kingdom of God will serve as an example for all those dedicating themselves in our own times to the evangelization of China.

The biographical account that we have followed ends here.



*Memorial painting dedicated to the Brothers killed in China by the Boxers.*



## Praying with Brother Jules-André

Brother Jules-André, we are indeed fortunate to be able to pray with you as we admire your life as a missionary that ended with your heroic giving of your life out of love.

- You were born in a religious family and went to the local school run by the brothers. It was there that you first thought of becoming a Brother, a Marist Missionary Brother.
- Your mother supported you in your vocation by her own personal religious commitment. She also influenced your father to allow you to follow your call even though you were the only boy in the family. On April 3, 1877, you entered the Novitiate at Saint-Genis Laval.
- You entertained the thought of becoming a missionary during the first fifteen years of your religious life. In 1892, Brother Theophane, the Superior General, asked you to leave for China.
- You replied: “Yes! How I want to become a committed, zealous, fervent and holy missionary.” You went to London to study English.
- On September 27, 1893, upon your arrival in China, you wrote to your Superior: “I’m in China! Every day, I thank God and you for my being here.”
- You enjoyed your work among the brothers and among your students whom you described as “... the best in the world.” You were eager to save souls, and you were happy to bring the “Good News” to your classroom. You tried to become more authentic by trying to become a saint.



- The mission in China began in 1891 and everyone was shaken by the death of its founder, Brother-Marie-Candide in 1895 as well as by the death of his successor the following year. You were asked to follow in their footsteps as Brother Visitor of the District by your Superior, and you responded: *“You have asked me to go, and I will go. I will do my very best.”*
- You responded to the challenge with skill and ability. Being a man of action and imagination, you initiated several projects that would create schools for the Christian Education of Youth in China and thereby helped spread the coming of the Kingdom of God throughout that vast empire.
- You would not see all of your undertakings completed for on August 12, 1900, at age 37, you gave your life at the siege of Petan by coming to the rescue of a young catechumen who was half buried under the rubble caused by a mine explosion.
- After having lived as a fervent, obedient and excellent Religious, you died as a hero, a true disciple, and a holy man. The brothers loved you, sang your praises and wept over you. The Bishop of Peking said of you: *“He was truly a great man who during the siege demonstrated courage, intelligence, and commitment far beyond the call of duty.”*
- You left intimations of your spirituality in the many letters you wrote:
  - *Humility: “Generally, I tend to live a life that is hidden and unknown because that is living according to the spirit of our Venerable Founder. We are all called to imitate him.” (1896)*

- *Confidence in God: “Those matters that are entrusted to God and Our Lady in prayer eventually turn out for the best, especially when they are in our best interest.”* (November 14, 1898)
  - *Love of Our Lord: “Since my arrival in Cha-la-eul, I have had the good fortune of attending four, five and even six Holy Communions a week.”* (January 11, 1897)
  - *Advancing in Holiness: “Please pray that I may be generous, that I may be magnanimous like Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Theresa, and Venerable Father Champagnat.”* (March 27, 1898)
  - *Zeal: “We must make sacrifices so that we may be able to begin new schools in China and to spread the Kingdom of God in a country that seems to be more and more receptive to the truth.”* (May 11, 1898)
  - *Abandonment to Divine Providence: “We do not know the future, but we know that we are in God’s hands. We recite the’ Memorare’ every night, that we may live in peace.”* (May 26, 1900)
- In your letters, you stressed the importance of sending more brothers. You wished that they learn Chinese and become capable teachers. Your biggest dreams were to begin a Novitiate in China and to form good catechists.

Brother Jules-André, we confide into your hands our mission “Ad Gentes” Program which includes not only China, but all of Asia. We offer to you all of the dedicated brothers and lay people who are involved. May your life continue to be a source of encouragement for all of our missionaries, and may you protect and sustain them day by day.

Amen

# COMPANIONS

# MARVELLOUS



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13

**Brother  
Joseph-Félicité**

**China  
Martyr  
(1872-1900)**

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Brother Joseph Felicite was a companion of Brother Jules-Andre. He died a few days before him on July 18, 1900, at the siege of Petang in Peking. The biographical account that we are about to summarize ends with: “In keeping with the ardent wishes of our hero as well as those of his mother, we conclude our account noting that the youngest of his six brothers, François Planche, entered the Juniorate at Saint-Genis-Laval on December 10, 1900. ‘The way of the Just shall be blessed.’ Ps. 111<sup>47</sup>

François was born on May 22, 1888, and became a novice on February 2, 1904. In religion, he received the name that his Brother had before him and followed his footsteps as a missionary to China. When the missionaries coming from Europe were expelled by the Maoist Regime in 1950, he returned to Saint-Genis-Laval working in the vineyards. He died on January 28, 1974, at the age of 86, sixty nine of which were as a Professed Brother. An abstract of his life succinctly states: “*He was a saint.*”

Brother Joseph Felicite, whose legal name was Joseph Planche, was born on February 4, 1872, in Étable, a village in Savoy which

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<sup>47</sup> *Notices Nécrologiques*, Vol. 2, p. 342



came under French jurisdiction in 1869. He was the third in a family of ten children, 7 boys and 3 girls. His father, Pierre Planche, died in 1899. Pierre raised his entire family on his income as a carpenter. He was a steady, hard-working man who took his work and his religion seriously. He was long admired by local residents who elected him as municipal councilor. His mother, Françoise Graffon, was deeply religious and had a great influence on her family, particularly in the area of their educational development.

When Father Braissand arrived as pastor of the parish at Étable, Joseph was ten years of age. He was moved by Joseph's behavior when he came to religious instruction. He wrote: *"A new student drew my attention. It was Joseph Planche. He never missed class, knew his catechism thoroughly, and was very receptive to all of my instructions. I soon asked him to serve as an altar boy, a duty that he continued to perform until he went to Saint-Genis-Laval."*

After having prepared him for his First Communion, and observing his excellent dispositions, I advised his parents: *"Joseph must not remain in the world. I believe that he would make an excellent Religious. I realize that you cannot afford to pay for his tuition, but if you wish, I could place him in a Religious Community where you will have nothing to pay."* They appeared to be quite receptive to my suggestion and said: *"Father, he is yours! When the proper time comes, you can have him go wherever you want."*





*As for the child himself, he wanted nothing more than to follow my proposal. The religious vocation within him was like a precious jewel that continued to be transformed throughout the two years following his First Communion. Frequent reception of Holy Communion brought him new insights. Later, as his pastor, I was just about to write about him to the Superior of a missionary organization when Brother Édouin, a Marist Brother who I had never met before, came to the door. He asked me if I was aware of any young men in the parish who might be considering a religious vocation. I immediately mentioned Joseph and directed him to his home so that that he might meet his parents and Joseph as well.*

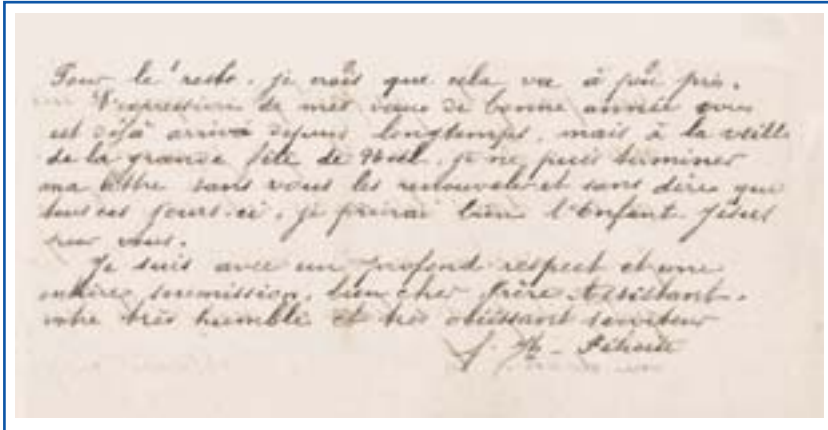
*Everything went well. The Brother returned very happy with his visit, and the decision was made that the future martyr was to leave for Saint-Genis-Laval the following month. Although he surpassed his peers in intelligence and hard work, he preferred to remain hidden and unknown... When I sought to encourage him and congratulated him on his nice disposition, he merely lowered his head and did not respond. He was happy serving at Holy Mass. Although he lived the furthest away, he was always the first to arrive. This invariably made me happy.*

Joseph entered the Juniorate at Saint-Genis-Laval at the age of 13. It was under the direction of Brother Marie-Candide, a holy religious, and an excellent teacher who was soon to leave for China in order to found a mission there. After the Novitiate, Brother Joseph-Felicite was sent to Grandris to do some manual work, before being sent to Nantua on his first teaching assignment. There, his director reported: *“Upon his arrival, Brother Joseph-Felicite demonstrated a spirit of zeal and dedication that would continue to typify his behavior. Convinced that nothing was more important than giving good example to his students, he was always beyond reproach and set new standards of excellence in everything.”*

Soon afterwards, Brother Joseph-Felicite asked to leave for the missions. Father Braissand wrote: “When he had decided to leave for China, he came to see his parents. After having received Holy Communion, he spent most of the day praying at church. I spoke to him about the challenges that lay ahead: the difficulties in travel, the frustrations of living in a foreign country without knowing the language, etc... As far as he was concerned, all of this amounted to nothing. He had a passionate wish to dedicate the rest of his life to the Christian education of youth in China. That evening, after Vespers, he bid farewell to his childhood friends who had gathered in the courtyard. Upon re-entering, he said: *‘My friends are happy living with their parents. They have everything. I am about to let go of everything, including my parents and my friends. I will never come back and may even be martyred. However, I would never exchange my lot for theirs.’* Having said that, he left full of joy without even shedding a tear.”

To the Assistant who had written to him about his pending departure, Brother Joseph-Felicite sent the following reply, dated February 17, 1891: *“I can’t tell you how happy I was upon receiving your letter. The happiness I felt may have been all too natural, because how can a person feel what is truly supernatural... I can already see the Chinese children extending their arms out to me, and I can’t even speak their language!”*

After the farewell ceremony at the Mother House at Saint-Genis-Laval, the first group of Marist Brothers going to China left for Marseilles. It was made up of Brother Joseph-Felicite, four other brothers, and their director, Brother Marie-Candide. They were to board a ship on March 8, 1891. Before leaving, our young missionary wrote the following to his parents: *“Farewell, dear parents. I dare not say: ‘Until we meet again’, because only God knows if I shall ever return. However, if we do not see one another here on earth, I am certain that we shall do so in heaven.”*



*Testimony on Brother Joseph-Félicité*

Upon arriving in China, the brothers were put in charge of the Franco-Chinese school of Nan-t'ang, named after the city in which it was located. In 1893, the number of missionary brothers grew. Brothers Marie-Candide and Brother Joseph-Felicite withdrew from the school at Nan-t'ang in order to take up the direction of an orphanage with other brothers. It was located in Cha-la-eul in the neighborhood of Peking. Twenty-five orphans, ranging in age from 7 to 25 were waiting to be cared for. The orphanage was a center for children with special needs, both physical and psychological. Drawing from the wellspring of the riches of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, existing negative factors were soon overcome, and an atmosphere of love and compassion prevailed. Coming from difficult backgrounds, the children quickly felt loved and supported and enjoyed the emotional hospitality and family spirit that had long eluded them.

Perhaps due to the overly conscientious care of brothers who were ill, Brother Marie-Candid himself contracted typhus and died on May 3, 1895. Brother Élie-François who succeeded him as director and Visiting Brother, was also its victim and died in May of 1896. Following this additional bereavement, Brother Joseph-Felicite was

given charge of the orphanage, a duty that he performed admirably well for three years. He benefited a great deal from the good example that he had received from his former director at the Juniorate, Brother Marie-Candide. Like him, he demonstrated the care of a father and the affection of a mother towards those entrusted to his care. All of his letters reflected the love and devotion he had for his children.

Brother Joseph-Felicite was only 19 years of age when he left for China. One month after his arrival, he wrote the following letter, dated June, 2, 1891, to his Brother Assistant: *“I cook and teach third level French. Although I enjoy cooking, I prefer teaching. I have 40 young Chinese students in my class, more than half of whom are unbelievers. I often pray for them but I am not allowed to proselytize... We must be patient.”*

Upon arriving in China, Brother Joseph-Felicite had a twofold purpose: personal sanctification and the salvation of souls. Faith and purity of intention were the hallmarks of everything that he did and are reflected in all of the letters that he wrote to his Brother Assistant. His retreat resolutions echoed the same sentiments. Brother Joseph-Felicite wished to be a saint at all cost. For him, personal sanctification came through numerous daily activities. Here is how he described them in a letter dated February 8, 1895: *“I’m always running from one activity to another. Sometimes, I am supervising the students in the courtyard, then I am in the garden overseeing the students carrying buckets of dirt, and again in the laundry, or taking care of the linens in the tailor shop, then in the shoe shop, etc.. I am interrupted a hundred times a day trying to solve one problem or another in Chinese. Everyone needs attention, and I must act as translator for everyone.”*

Likewise, in his last letter before he died, dated May 19, 1900, he wrote: *“As for myself, I am doing well. That’s fortunate because I can’t afford to rest. My life is somewhat like being the manager of a large farm back home: overseeing the workers in the fields and else-*



*where, mending cassocks on the sewing machine, instructing the Chinese brothers who are teaching French, teaching the children catechism twice daily, as well as preparing the postulants, handing out compensations to the workers, keeping records, etc... Such is the way I spend my time. How fortunate I would be if I were to offer each activity as an act of love of God, but I often forget to do so. Yet, there is still a time that I look forward to, and that is when I wake up the brothers in the morning and have time to make the Stations of the Cross.*

Brother Jules-Andre, the Brother Visitor, summarized his impressions of Brother Joseph-Felicite in 1897 in a brief and telling statement: *“He was a mature Religious.”* Yet there were times when, he manifested a certain self-deprecation and even discouragement. He looked upon himself as an obstacle to progress. Soon afterwards, however, he would regain his composure as can be seen in a letter he wrote on May 14, 1899: *“Shall I discontinue? No, because I would like to lead at least ten thousand young Chinese into paradise. However, I feel undeserving, and I lack holiness...”* His wish to save souls strengthened his zeal and permitted him to undertake numerous apostolic tasks and to endure all kinds of sufferings.

Before leaving from Cha-le-eul in 1893, he wrote: *“One other thing that I would like to do when we have more brothers and when I can better communicate in Chinese is to do as Brother Laurent did, namely, to accompany the priest when he goes on mission so that I can prepare the children for First Communion. There are communities with a population of three or four hundred believers who see the priest for only one month throughout the entire year. If my dream were to come true, I would seek nothing more, for I would have accomplished what I wished for ever since I was eight, nine, or ten years old. Then, I would be a real missionary. Dear Brother Assistant, please let me know if I can continue to entertain this dream of mine.”*

Brother Joseph-Felicite was warm and affectionate by nature. It is reflected in this letter dated September 3, 1899: *“Since you ap-*

*pointed me as director at Cha-La, it seems to me that I will be here for the rest of my life. The young orphans here are really in need of someone they know, especially those who have no family. They need someone to care for them as would a father, someone to provide for their physical and spiritual needs. I love them and hope to become such a person.”*

His warm hearted disposition, combined with his social skills, contributed greatly to the development of family spirit and feelings of gratitude. Truly religious and apostolic, he always demonstrated these qualities wherever he went. Such was the case when writing to his parents on July 6, 1895. After having told them that he had contracted typhus, received the Last Sacraments, was not given any hope of recovery but being subsequently miraculously cured, he ends his letter with the following: *“For the last few days, I have been able to take up my responsibilities once again. Poor children! How happy I am to be*



Brother Joseph-Félicité is 2<sup>nd</sup> from left



*able to provide physical and spiritual care for them. They have been without a teacher or director for over two months. I was not the only victim of the disease. The youngest member of our community was bedridden three days after I was, and another Brother followed in sickness the next week. All three of us received the Last Sacraments and for a time all three of us were between life and death. However, we finally recovered and started to feel happy again, especially our good director, Brother Marie-Candide, who took care of us with love and devotion that cannot be measured. That, however, was not the end of our troubles. God called our Brother Director to Himself. He was like a father to us. I have little doubt that he gave his life in place of ours, much like the Good Shepherd who gave His life for His sheep.*

After having been told on June 8, 1898, that he was given the responsibility of the direction of Cha-la-eul which included 200 persons, Brother Joseph-Felicity added: *“There are only four of us to care for all of them. Couldn’t Jules, François, or someone else come to help us? Come on, brothers! What are you waiting for before fighting for Jesus-Christ? Isn’t that the point of the invitation of Our Divine Master: ‘The harvest is great, but the laborers are few?’ Certainly if you knew how much God needs you in His service, you would not hesitate to leave everything and follow Him. Doesn’t that call for a response, brothers?”*

At the age of 28, Brother Joseph-Felicite was still young and could reasonably have expected to continue doing good in China for many more years to come. However, a terrible persecution broke out in China in 1900. When he saw that the orphanage was threatened, he followed Msgr. Favier’s advice that he should find a safe-haven for the children as soon as possible. He returned some forty of them to their parents or to courageous believers but didn’t quite know what to do with the remaining 120. The Mission could not provide for their security, and it fell upon Divine Providence and a single Chinese Brother to provide for their care as best he could. When he received

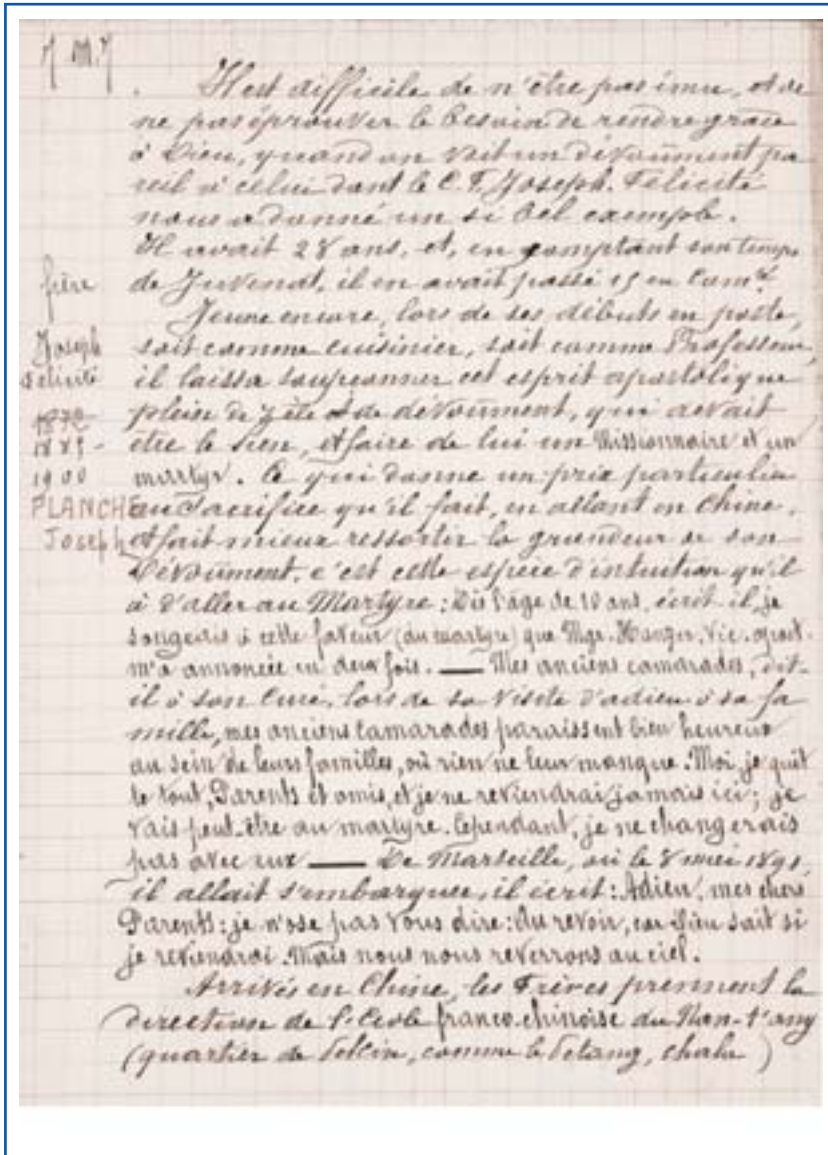


the order on June 14<sup>th</sup> that he was to leave them and withdraw to Petang, it was very emotionally difficult for him to do so.

News arrived in Petang on June 20<sup>th</sup> that the orphanage at Challa-eul had been set ablaze on the 17<sup>th</sup>. In a communication to his mother, Brother Joseph-Felicite wrote: *“Poor children! After having escaped from the Boxers at Nan-t’ang, they must now continue to try elude these thugs. Where will they go? Coming to the cities is impossible. Every door is guarded. There are no believers in the rural areas and roads are teeming with Boxers. It’s either death by the sword or death by starvation. Good Grief! How I suffer knowing the plight of my children. Am I the false shepherd that I should be separated from my sheep? Dying with them would be easy. Living without them is pure agony. If this be God’s will, so be it!”*

Brother Joseph-Felicite discontinued writing on June 21<sup>st</sup> no doubt because of his duties in Petang. Writing in his own hand, Brother Jules-Andre completed the account as follows: *“Being so anxious for love of God to shed his own blood with that of his children, Brother Joseph-Felicite had his wish granted. On July 18<sup>th</sup> at 5 o’clock in the evening, he was overseeing anti-mine operations when the enemy became aware of the efforts being made and hastened to complete theirs. Suddenly at 5 o’clock, a terrible explosion occurred. Brother Joseph-Felicity was thrown forward at a distance of 10 to 15 meters. . . Perhaps due to his proximity to the mine, he was instantly killed. . . He may have been asphyxiated. . . His body was not found until 30 minutes after the explosion. . . With him, 25 courageous workers were also found as well as 28 others who were wounded. Brother Joseph was in heaven. God called him to his reward, and that reward must be very special because he was a saint, and what is more, he was a martyr to his dedication to love and duty.”*

It could be said that the event during which Brother Joseph-Felicity lost his life was the realization of a prediction that he had



made in a letter written to the pastor at Étable on November 22, 1891: *“Soon, the executioners will make a martyr out of me. Perhaps in a few months you will welcome me in a reliquary. A holy Bishop of Chan-Tung, Mgr. Hanzer clearly told me so.”* He had earlier referred to this prediction in a letter written to his Brother Assistant on August 22, 1891.

Furthermore, he enjoyed recalling the following words of Brother Marie-Candide on his deathbed in 1895: *“Brother Joseph, five years from now you also will die.”* He would add: *“It is now 1900, five years later. This must be the year when I shall die as a martyr.”*

Upon receiving the dispatch announcing the death of Brother Joseph-Félicité, the brothers had to tell his mother the sad news. The duty fell upon the Brother Director of Allevard and to Brother Joseph-Michael who was born in a community next to Étable. The two of them arrived at their destination on Sunday, September 2nd. They first went to the parish priest and requested that he accompany them to see Madame Planche, to which he responded: *“I’m sorry to say that I cannot accompany you... However it is quite unnecessary. I saw her not long ago. She has an excellent attitude and will accept whatever you have to tell her in a spirit of faith.”*

When the two brothers arrived at her home in Étable, she questioned Brother Joseph-Michael whom she knew: *“...and how is my son, Joseph?”* He replied: *“We have come to give you some news about him.”* *“He has died?”* responded the mother. *“There is no need for you to be vague about it. I know why you have come. You can tell me.”* The director exclaimed: *“We’re sorry!”* *“His sacrifice is complete,”* replied the mother. *“What better life could there be than to give one’s life to God as a martyr. That is what my son always wanted. He even predicted that it would happen. I am now certain that he is in heaven. What more could a mother want for her son?”*



However much this woman was a reminder of St. Felicite encouraging her seven sons to endure martyrdom, she also was a mother and began to weep while still maintaining her composure as she offered the usual amenities to her two guests. Realizing that it might be best to allow her to grieve her loss in privacy, the two brothers withdrew.

That same day, a very moving incident happened at High Mass in the parish. The pastor described it as follows: *“I was in the pulpit about to deliver the homily that I had prepared. Instead, I directly told the parishioners how fortunate we were to have in our parish a martyr in the person of Brother Joseph Felicite whom we knew as Joseph Plante. After adding little more, I said: ‘At the Seminary for Foreign Missions, the first thing that is done upon learning of the martyrdom of a missionary is to go directly to the chapel and sing the Te Deum as an act of thanksgiving. We will do the same. We will replace the customary Concluding Rites with the singing of the Te Deum.’”*

The singing of the Te Deum that followed, in the midst of crying and weeping, left a powerful impression on the parish of Étable that would never be forgotten.

Msgr. Favier, Bishop of Peking said of Brother Joseph-Felicite: *“He was not only an outstanding man; he was also a martyr. At the time of his death, we ought not pray for him, we should pray to him and sing a Te Deum and offer a Mass of Thanksgiving, for as his brothers in Religion would testify, he was truly a saint.”*



## Praying with Brother Joseph-Felicite

We are blessed, Brother Joseph-Felicite, to come before you in prayer, recalling your holy life and martyrdom.

- You were born in Savoy in a deeply religious family of modest means. Your father was a carpenter, and your mother was a practical house-wife. They worked hard and raised ten children.
- You drew your pastor's attention by your attentiveness during his catechism lessons. You faithfully served daily Mass. He recognized that you had a religious vocation and spoke to your parents about your entering a Religious Order.
- Divine Providence directed you to the Juniorate at Saint-Genis-Laval where in 1885 you began your studies at the age of thirteen. It was there that you first experienced Marist Spirit under the direction of Brother Marie-Candide, an admirable teacher who was soon to leave for China to begin our first mission.
- In Nantua, you began teaching, and your director, Brother Procule, said of you: *"...Brother Joseph-Felicite was convinced that nothing was more important than giving good example to the students. He made every effort to be all things to all of his students."*
- Your departure for the mission in China on March 8, 1891 was the fulfillment of your dream as a child:



*“I see Chinese children reaching out to me even though I can’t speak their language.”*

- Two years after your arrival, with the help of other brothers, you ministered to more than 120 orphans ranging in age from 7 to 25, coming from appalling conditions. You found comfort and strength in the Heart of Jesus and succeeded in creating family spirit among them.
- After the death of Brother Marie-Candide in 1885 and that of his successor, Brother Elie- François the following year, you assumed directorship of the orphanage. Following their example, you cared for them like a father and loved them like a mother.
- You came to China with a twofold purpose: spiritual development and the salvation souls. You did all things in a spirit of faith and purity of intentions.
- There were moments of fatigue; however, you carried on. In fact, you wanted to *“...lead ten thousand Chinese children into paradise.”*
- In 1893, you would have liked to see the dream that you had when you were ten years old come true: *“To follow in the footsteps of Brother Laurent at Bessat, assisting a priest while on mission and teaching catechism to the children in order to prepare them for their First Communion.”*
- In one of your letters, you asked that a Brother come to assist you. The year that you died, your younger brother, François, entered the Juniorate at Saint-Genis-Laval. He would bear your name in Religion and follow after you in China until the expulsion of Western missionaries in 1950.

- During the Boxer Rebellion, you expressed your desolation at having to leave your orphans at Cha-la-eul. *“Good grief! How I suffer knowing the plight of my children! Am I the hireling that I should be separated from my sheep?”*
- Brother Jules Andre, the Brother Assistant who died a few days after you, was much like you. Both of you died victims of devotedness. He wrote of you: “Good Brother Joseph-Felicité was so anxious to shed his blood for love of God. His wish had come true. He became a martyr of his love and devotedness. He died on Wednesday, July 18, at five o’clock in the evening.
- Upon learning of your death, your mother exclaimed: *“What better life could one have than to give one’s life to God and to die as a martyr? My son wanted it that way, and it had been foretold. Now I am certain that he is in heaven. What more could I wish for him?”*
- On September 2, 1900, after having announced your death to the parishioners at the High Mass in Étable, the pastor had the Te Deum sung as was the tradition at the Seminary for Foreign Missions in Paris. The hymn replaced the customary Concluding Rites.

Brother Joseph-Felilcité, we now express our own gratitude to God for your life of devotedness to your young orphans at Cha-la-eul. Intercede for all missionaries today ministering in China, especially those brothers and lay persons who are involved in the “Ad Gentes” Program.

Amen

# COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS





**14**

**Brother Nestor**

**3<sup>rd</sup>  
Superior  
General  
(1838-1883)**



The following is a summary of the biography published in “*Nos Supérieurs*”.<sup>48</sup>

### **Childhood and Family**

Jean-Baptiste Granier was born in Vauvert, (Gard region of France), on April 16, 1838. At that time, Vauvert had a population of 1200 and was located near the city of Nîmes, the center of local government and famous for its Roman monuments.

Little is known about his family. At age eleven, his father died. He and his mother left for Tulette, the city where she was born, located in the southern part of Drôme, near Saint-Paul-Trois-Château. There, in the diocese of Valence, young Jean-Baptiste attended the local school that had been founded by the Christian Brothers in 1841. Brother Auguste, the principal, was soon impressed by his intelligence, docility and piety. At the age of thirteen, he suggested that the young man consider entering the Congregation of the Little Brothers of Mary. His widowed mother, a devout Christian, generously allowed her son to follow his call. He left for the brothers on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1851.

The spiritual advisor of the community at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux was Father Mazelier, a friend of Father Champagnat. It

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<sup>48</sup> *Nos Supérieurs*, Économat général, Saint-Genis-Laval 1953, pp. 143-202

was he who, in 1842, assisted in the merger of his community of the brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux to Father Champagnat's Little Brothers of Mary. Saint Paul is also significant in the fact that it was the location of the Novitiate.

### **The Novitiate at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux.**

As the Juniorate did not yet exist, Jean-Baptiste Granier was received as a postulant. Entering at such an early age was not a hindrance for the young candidate who was gifted with unusual intelligence, good will and common sense. It was not until six years later that the regulation of Canon Law requiring that one must over the age 15 before entering the Novitiate was put into effect. The young Postulant was introduced to Brother Jean-Baptiste, the Assistant in the Province of Saint-Paul. Four months after his arrival he entered the Novitiate on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1851, and received the name Brother Nestor.

### **Teacher and Cook**

At age 14, young Brother Nestor was assigned to cook at Saint-Victoire-la-Coste where three brothers ran a school. He was always happy and full of energy, and he carried out his duties so well that he found the time to assist one of the teachers. In doing so, he learned some basic skills of teaching. One day, the local Superior complained to Brother Assistant that the young brother would sing while carrying out his duties. In response, Brother Jean-Baptiste sent him a beautiful holy card and recommended that he continue singing and not repress the joyful spirit that was in him.<sup>49</sup> In 1854, he was assigned to La Roque where he was put in charge of a class of beginning students. The young teacher quickly developed an excellent rapport with his students and gained their love and respect. With him, they enjoy learning, and he enjoyed being with them. Class time was never too long.

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<sup>49</sup> *Nos Supérieurs*, Économat général, Saint-Genis-Laval, 1953, p. 51



## **La Seyne-sur-Mer**

In 1855, Brother Nestor was sent to teach in the city of La Seyne-sur-Mer, which had a population of 14,000. The school had been founded in 1852 at the request of Father Eymard, superior of the upper level school of the Marist Fathers. He would later become Saint Julian Eymard, the founder of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. The first principal of the school, Brother Urban, was a remarkable educator and a worthy disciple of Marcellin Champagnat. He succeeded in overcoming initial difficulties experienced at the school and eventually helped earn the school an excellent reputation. At age 17, Brother Nestor had the privilege of observing him and gaining from his example, knowledge and his experience. Of all the classes Brother Nestor taught, he had a preference for catechism, especially the catechism of the Blessed Virgin. He prepared it meticulously. In teaching, he knew how to relate to his students and create family spirit.

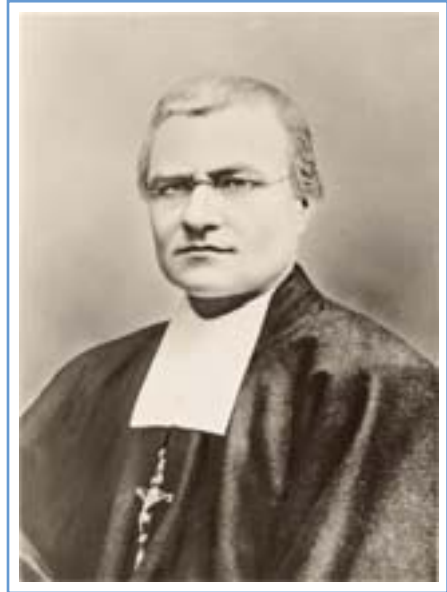
## **Director of the Scholasticate**

In 1864, Brother Eubert, one of the Assistants, handed the direction of the newly established Scholasticate at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux over to Brother Nestor. At age 26, the young brother felt at ease with the aspirants whom he sought to develop into excellent educators. He gained their affection and respect by his kind and dignified manner. He knew how to inspire a love for learning as well as the pursuit of excellence, all within the context of family spirit that he helped promote.

## **At Luc-en-Provence**

In 1867, Brother Nestor was appointed director of the boarding school at Luc-en-Provence, a little city in the district of Var having 3,300 inhabitants. It was a difficult area in which to work. In fact, one of the brothers had been falsely accused of immorality and was subsequently imprisoned. It took two court orders to undo the error. The return of the

innocent brother was an occasion for rejoicing. After living through the residual effects of this unfortunate episode, Brother Nestor focused his entire attention on the work at hand. Most of the students came from the Rhone Valley. They typified the qualities of those coming from that region; they were warm hearted, fun loving, generous, and docile. Brother Nestor initiated a new approach to learning that inspired them. He also strove to instill in them an ardent love of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and a filial devotion to Our Lady. They were fascinated by his new ways of doing things and showered him with admiration, love, and respect. Because of him, an atmosphere of peace, joy and tranquility returned to the boarding school.



Reverend Brother Theophane, Superior General, nicely summed up Brother Nestor's impact while at Luc-en-Provence.<sup>50</sup> "As a young director, he was cherished and admired by all. He personified the Common Rules by putting them into action. He had the ability of passing on his spirit to the brothers and they, in turn, would do the same with their students. When he was with the brothers, he was as one with them. In every situation, his entire way of being had a certain relaxed and non-competitive quality about it that invited participation and endeared him to all." At 31 years of age, while on the retreat of 1869, Brother Nestor pronounces the Vow of Stability. He was the only one to do so that year.

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<sup>50</sup> *Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux* Vol. 7, p. 152 et SS.



## **Brother Visitor**

In September of 1871, he was appointed as Brother Visitor. Although his new assignment differed from his previous one, his qualities remained the same. He continued to be pleasant, straightforward, and optimistic. To the communities that he visited, he brought joy and fostered family spirit. Others looked forward to his arrival. To each, he became a close and devoted friend, a master teacher. He encouraged others, especially the young brothers. He made observations and was not beyond making reproaches when necessary; however, he did so with such care and concern that they became opportunities for deepening relationships. During this time, local governments were interfering in our schools. Often enough, this would generate political or academic differences. Given Brother Nestor's responsibility as Visitor and his ability to act as intermediary, he was often asked to intervene. Thanks to his *savoir-faire* in dealing with these matters he almost always succeeded in finding a solution to the various problems.

## **Assistant**

The General Chapter of 1873 was convened on August 11<sup>th</sup> and Brother Nestor was elected Assistant for the Province of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux replacing Brother Eubert who was elected Secretary General. Brother Nestor received an enthusiastic welcome in his Province. His duties as Visiting Brother had put him in a position of knowing the brothers and being familiar with their various apostolic works. That past experience helped him to be even more effective as he carried out his new assignment. The hopes for the further development of the Little Brothers of Mary as expressed by Father Champagnat in a sermon delivered at the cathedral at Saint-Paul continued to become a reality. In the former residence of the Dominicans Fathers, candidates increased in numbers. In 1873, the expansion of the building made in 1847 was not adequate to accommodate all of the young men recruited by the Brothers and Our Lady, working behind the scenes. Brother Nestor was granted permission

by the General Council to expand the facilities, and the blessing of the first building took place in March of 1877.

## **Recruiting**

The new construction made it possible to accommodate even more candidates and the new Assistant intensified his recruiting efforts. On retreats and in his letters to the brothers, he continually stressed the importance of new vocations. He often became personally involved in their promotion, and such was the case in 1875, when he visited the boarding school in Bourg-de-Péage. While walking with Brother Adon, the principal, who was later to become the Assistant of the Province of Saint-Genis, they came upon a 13 year old boy by the name of Auguste Ménégaud, and Brother Nestor questioned about his future. The following year, on September 18<sup>th</sup>, the boy left for Saint-Paul to become Brother Michaélis, who later became Assistant, and afterwards, Vicar General. Brother Michaélis loved repeating the story of this first encounter, for it spoke highly of Brother Nestor. Brother Michaélis died in 1950 at Saint-Genis-Laval.

## **Care of the Brothers**

To someone who congratulated him on his election as Assistant, he wrote: *“Thank you for your encouragement and support. I will do everything that I can to live up to your expectations. What I want mostly is be of service to my brothers.”* Earlier, he had done his utmost to satisfy the needs of the Brothers while he was Visitor, and his efforts were not in vain. Hearts were now opened. Young Brothers would come to him seeking advice. He cared for all of them, particularly the young Brothers. He especially wished that they be happy in their vocation and that they be passionate about Christian education. He once became aware of the disappointment one of them had upon receiving his assignment as cook. To the formal letter of obedience that he addressed to the young brother, he attached a four page personal letter



assuring the young cook that he would soon be teaching in one of the better classes in one of the schools. Brother Nestor became Superior General a few months later but did not forget the promise that he had made to the young brother. On March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1880, he sent him a letter of obedience that brought him to the boarding school at Saint-Luc-en-Provence where he would teach a class of primary school children.

## **Tireless**

Brother Nestor worked tirelessly in his service to his brothers. As with others, being responsible for a Province within the context of the entire Congregation is demanding requires an enormous amount of daily correspondence. There were not enough hours in a day to accomplish everything. For him, the bell announcing evening prayer was not a reminder that it would soon be time to retire. His fragile nature would not long endure the excessive demands placed upon him. A heavy fatigue soon came upon him. It especially affected his eyes. Brother Louis-Marie, Superior General, strongly recommended that he lessen the amount of his work and that he take a complete rest. Furthermore, he sent him to Paris to consult with a specialist. After having been there for three months, Brother Nestor returned to Saint-G enis without any apparent improvement. With the help of a secretary, he reduced his amount of work and continued on. His conferences with the brothers were always interesting. His clear and gentle voice, his kindly and engaging manner never failed to captivate his audience. Because of his loving disposition, others were impelled to follow his directives. However, his condition persisted and Brother Superior General became more and more concerned for it was his hope that he would one day become his successor. This was but one indication of the high regard that he had for Brother Nestor.

## **Superior General**

The sudden death of Brother Louis-Marie on December 9, 1879 came as a shock to the entire Institute. A General Chapter was con-



vened on March 7<sup>th</sup> at Saint-Genis-Laval. Following a three-day retreat, Brother Nestor was elected as his successor and received 29 of 47 votes cast. On March 12<sup>th</sup>, the newly elected sang the praises of what he called the four pillars of the Institute: Father Champagnat, Brother François, Brother Louis-Marie and Brother Jean Baptiste. The results of the voting well received by all of the brothers, especially those at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. Brother Nestor accepted the decision of the General Chapter and undertook the difficult work that lay before him with enthusiasm and a great spirit of faith. He was greatly affected at the beginning of his administration by the death of Brother Nicet who died less than six months after his election as Assistant in the Province of Saint-Paul. Brother Nestor was deeply affected by the deaths of Brother Nicet, and that of Brother François which occurred on January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1881, at Our Lady of the Hermitage.

### **Struggles with the Government**

Added to the internal difficulties experienced by the Institute were challenges coming from the outside, especially from the wars being waged against religious educators who were directing a large number of our primary schools. At that time, the government subsidized all of our schools in France. It would not be an easy task to meet the requirements of the privatization of our schools while the process of the laicization of all of the rest of the schools was taking place. Obtaining government teaching certificates as required by law for all of the brothers would not be an easy task for any of the Superiors. Brother Nestor encourages the brothers by reminding them of the persecutions endured by Father Champagnat in his time. He remained calm and demonstrated an unshakable faith and confidence in Divine Providence and in Our Blessed Lady. With their help and with his wisdom and strength, the Institute overcame all of the obstacles placed before it. In order to meet the requirements for certification mandated by the government in 1881, changes were made in the Scholasticates throughout the Provinces. In his Circular of March 1<sup>st</sup> 1882, Brother Nestor outlines



the curriculum and syllabi that were to be used in the schools run by the Marist Brothers. On November 24<sup>th</sup> 1882, a school of higher learning was introduced at Saint-Genis-Laval. It had as its goal the preparation of the brothers from throughout the Provinces for an advanced degree of certification. It became an incentive for further studies.

## **Religion and Religious Formation**

The abundance of worldly and intellectual preoccupations that were pressuring Brother Nestor during the beginnings of his General Administration did not blind him to those concerns that were specifically religious. Like our Divine Master, he had a preference for children and spoke enthusiastically about them. Whether it was as Visiting Brother or as Brother Assistant, education was always a frequent topic in his instructions and in his interactions with the brothers. He approached this topic in his second Circular, that of March 19 1881, when he writes: “Christian Education is the greatest of all endeavors. It is a priestly and God given ministry that is holy.” In the same Circular, he reminded the Brothers of the importance of our Juniorates. They responded to him by making the promotion of vocations a priority. Soon, our Juniorates were filled to capacity with excellent students. While the number of postulants had decreased in former years, a reversal took place and they also increased in numbers. Because of the attacks on Christian Education that occurred in France at this time, Brother Nestor invested a great deal of his time and energy during the three years of his administration in maintaining and developing existing institutions while substituting laicized schools with private schools that offered religious instruction.

## **Promoting Further Studies**

From childhood, Brother Nestor loved learning. He wasted no time in extending and deepening his knowledge. At the time of his Novitiate, intellectual development was quite rudimentary in the

houses of formation and each managed as he could. As official qualifications were not required for teaching in primary schools, in the process of maturation, intellectual growth often lagged behind. There was a lack of stimulation and methodology. As Superior General, Brother Nestor was keenly aware of the need for improving the intellectual life of the teaching brothers. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, there was the need to comply with the academic standards required by the government, and secondly the success of our private schools depended upon it. In the Circular of March 1<sup>st</sup> 1882 that was previously alluded to, he wrote: *“My reasons for issuing the curriculum and its application for our schools was to promote hard work and to raise the level of academic achievement, and thereby, uphold the standards of our schools and to bring into fruition the objective of Christian Education, which includes the deepening our own experience and the promotion of our good will.”* At the time of the introduction of advanced studies at the Mother House that would lead to advanced certification, he declared: *“Study leads to knowledge and wisdom. The more that we study and improve the quality of our lives, the more effective we will become as Christian educators. The more that we contribute to the eternal salvation of our students and to the peace and harmony of our families and society at large, the more pleasing we will become to God, our Mother, Mary, and to the Church.”*

## **Family Spirit**

Brother Nestor had often reflected on the examples and teachings of the Founder on the topics of brotherly love and family spirit and he put them into practice. This material was faithfully recorded and commented upon by Brother Jean-Baptiste in ten chapters of his work, *“Avis, Leçons, Sentences”*. In the very first pages of his last Circular, Brother Nestor proudly noted: *“...the hearts of the Little Brothers of Mary beat as one. There is love, and there is affection in this, the family of the Blessed Virgin. This basic harmony makes everyone happy and gives momentum to all of our under-*



*takings. Because of this, the family spirit will continue to grow throughout the Institute, giving glory to God and bringing strength to all of us. Because of this, we put personal interests aside and look for the common good. In the end, it is part of the ‘hundredfold’ that was promised and it is a foretaste of heaven. It makes us dauntless before our adversaries.”<sup>51</sup>*

## **Devotion to the Blessed Virgin**

*“His devotion to the Blessed Virgin prompted him to turn to her. He was never without his rosary...”<sup>52</sup>* He eagerly sought to encourage the development of the spiritual life among young people, and what better way than through this devotion. He published a “Month of Mary” to be used in our schools and promoted it with the words: *“When our holy Founder placed his new Congregation under the banner of Mary, he also wished that the Little Brothers of Mary spread her devotion.”<sup>53</sup>* Saint Peter Chanel, a true Marist, had as his motto: *“To love Mary and to make her loved.”* In the same way, during his brief and challenging life, Brother Nestor had only one purpose: *“To love Jesus and make Him loved; to honor Mary and to have her honored; to love my Congregation and have it prosper.”*

## **Keeper of the Rules**

Brother Nestor was persuaded that for the brother, the Rules were the easiest and most direct way to religious perfection and eternal life. That is why he sought to observe them and expected the brothers to observe them to the letter of the law. Each year, at the time of the retreat, he insisted on the importance and the necessity of being faithful to the rules. In each of his Circulars, he would

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<sup>51</sup> *Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux* Vol. 6, p. 69

<sup>52</sup> *Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux* Vol. 7, p. 155

<sup>53</sup> *Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux* Vol. 6, p. 308

draw the attention of the brothers to an article in the Rules that may have been neglected.

He would say: *“Let there be no holding back or miserliness when it comes to giving of ourselves to God or observing the Rules for what God expects of us is contained therein. Let us, therefore be completely His and let us observe what they require of us down to the last detail, for we will be rewarded a hundredfold as we wait for the coming of Our Lord.”*

### **The Personification of Administrative Ability**

Due to his intelligence experience, Brother Nestor was a skillful administrator at the heart of the Institute and of the Provinces. As Assistant at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, he raised a considerable amount of money that was used to support the young men in formation. It had to do with the product biophosphate, a chemical creation that was refined by Brother Amable who was the infirmarian at the time. Brother Nestor organized and promoted its sale and established a Juniorate Fund. As Superior General, he continued to promote this endeavor through his Circulars. All of the Provinces benefited from the scholarships that were generated by the Juniorate Fund that he so ably established.

### **Journey to Rome**

In his Circular of December 26, 1882, Brother Nestor detailed the purpose of his journey to Rome. Accompanied by Brothers John and Euthyme, they left from Saint-Genis on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1883. His health was precarious and he was unaware of the fact that he is soon to undergo a psychological trauma that might have had lasting effects on his condition.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Chronologie*, Rome, 1976, p. 161



Before January 8<sup>th</sup>, he presented a report on the State of the Institute to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Religious and asked for an extension for our work on the Constitutions for a period of five years. However, he was badly received by the Roman authorities: “*We have evidence that is completely contrary to what you describe.*”<sup>55</sup>

With that said, they showed him a memo signed by four brothers accusing him of the following:

- Of not having published in their entirety the Constitutions given by the Holy See in 1863
- Of squandering the temporal goods of the Institute – Brother Avit maintains that the opposite was true and that Brother Nestor had taken vigorous measures to absorb enormous debts prior to his installation.<sup>56</sup>
- Of having poorly managed the Institute and of having allowing it to weaken to such an extent that 15 to 20 of the leading brothers were about to leave.<sup>57</sup>

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, Brother Nestor refuted the memo of his accusers by maintaining that:

- The unpublished articles did not appear because they were not endorsed by the Government - they were, however well known to the brothers.
- The allegation that 15 to 20 of the leading brothers were about to leave the Institute was false. What was true was that there were two or three overly ambitious brothers who for the past 20 years, had been manifestly disappointed for not having been assigned to more significant roles.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Note sur frère Nestor* par frère Marie-Sosipater, p. 144

<sup>56</sup> F. Avit, 783

<sup>57</sup> *Nos Supérieurs Économat général*, Saint-Genis-Laval 1953, p. 196

<sup>58</sup> *Registre de Projets des Constitutions* 3, n° 60

It would be quite difficult to ascertain to what extent the points were exaggerated. It cannot be precisely determined who the persons were who signed the memo. As to those who complained for twenty years however, it is known that Brother Jules, Brother Placid and Brother Marie-Jubin complained about having been unjustly punished for what they considered adherence to the teaching of the Holy See. They had complained to Brother Nestor, and before him to Brother Louis-Marie, of not publishing the Constitutions given by the Holy See, of misunderstanding some of the articles and of falsifying others.

From their point of view, Government endorsement was but a pretext.

They also maintained that what the General Council wished:

- That the Superior General be elected for life (not for 12 years: Holy See)
- That the term of Assistants be 10 years (not 4: Holy See)
- That the Institute be governed with Assistants (excluding Brother Visitor: Holy See)

The malicious memo had as its author the director in Paris, Brother Jules, who had won over a few brothers to his way of thinking. He was a contentious, overly ambitious man who would continue to send more communications to Rome until the end of his life putting Reverend Brother Theophane's patience to the test.

On January 19<sup>th</sup>, Pope Leo XIII received Brother Nestor, Brother John and Brother Euthyme in a cordial audience during which a rendering of the State of the Congregation was presented and also 10,000 francs.<sup>59</sup>

On January 22, Brother Nestor felt ill and was obliged to leave for the Mother House.<sup>60</sup> On his return, he stopped to rest for a few days at Saint-Luc-en-Provence.

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<sup>59</sup> Avit, 781-782 et Renvois p. 14

<sup>60</sup> Avit, 781-782



When he arrived at the Mother House, every possible care was given to him. Brother Réole, the infirmarian at Saint-Paul, was asked to assist. His condition somewhat improved between the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of April. The doctor even thought that in week's time, his patient might be strong enough to continue his recovery in the southern part of France. However, a bitter disappointment ensued, for on the morning of April 9<sup>th</sup>, Brother Nestor rendered his soul to God after having served in the general administration for 37 months. The funeral took place on Thursday, April 12<sup>th</sup>. Rev. Poupinel, Assistant General of the Marist Fathers, celebrated the funeral Mass.

Brother Theophane supported the brothers who had been deeply saddened by his death with the following words: "Brother Nestor was our man of the hour. This holy and talented man guided us in such a way that he made us hopeful for our future. We rejoice in his energetic soul, so steeped in faith and in confidence in God. We all loved to be near him as he guided us along the path of our mission. How un-searchable are God's ways! Just when we needed him most, God took him away from us. God is truly the God of surprises. If He chastises those whom He loves, let us conclude, my very dear brothers, that He loves us very much. The pain of our loss grows deep because we were not prepared for it, and ominous clouds gather all around us. It remains for us therefore to follow the will of God and to remind ourselves of the unforgettable words of the prophet Job: *'The Lord has given; the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!'*"

Reverend Brother Nestor's death followed that of Reverend Brother Louis-Marie so closely that it was felt all the more throughout the Institute





## **Praying with Brother Nestor**

Brother Nestor, we prayerfully recall some of the events of your life. Like us, you did not have the privilege of living with Father Champagnat. However, it was your good fortune to have had Brother Jean-Baptiste as your guide during the formative years of your religious life. You also had the good fortune of knowing several of the first brothers, especially Brother François.

- We know very little about your family and early childhood. You were an orphan at age eleven when your father died. Your mother returned to the place of her origin not far from Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. You attend the recently established school of “les Frères de Monsieur Mazelier”.
- On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1851, you become a Postulant at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. Your school’s principal is the one who referred you there. You are admitted to the Novitiate the following September without any difficulty and are given the name Brother Nestor.



- At age fourteen, you become an accomplished chef who loves his work and does it while singing. In 1854, you are given a class of beginning students. You gain their respect. Your students enjoy being in your class, and you enjoy being with them.
- At La Seyne-sur-Mer, at age seventeen, under the guidance of Brother Urbain, you refine your skills as a teacher; you succeed in winning the hearts of your students, and your classes are imbued with family spirit.
- At age twenty-six, you are assigned as director of the Scholasticate at Saint-Paul. You are at ease with the young brothers. While being respected, you know how to love and be loved. You convey a love for learning and a love for their vocation as religious educators. Family spirit pervades the atmosphere of the community.
- In 1867, you are sent to Luc-en-Provence to direct a boarding school. Circumstances are less than ideal. Thanks to your courage and leadership, the school recovers its reputation and moves ahead. Brother Theophane writes about you saying: “In every situation, his entire way of being had a certain relaxed and non-competitive quality about it that invited participation and endeared him to all.”
- In September of 1871, you become Brother Visitor of the Province of Saint-Paul. While carrying out your

duties, you maintain your straightforward attitude and your welcoming manner. You know how to encourage the young brothers. You are much sought after because of your ability to reconcile academic and political differences.

- In August of 1873, the Chapter elects you as Assistant. The brothers are happy about your election and you quickly begin the work of expanding the former residence of the Dominicans in order to make room for the many candidates for the Novitiate.
- You express your care for the brothers when you write: “I desire nothing more than to be useful to my brothers.” The fact is that you always sought to help others, especially the young. You instilled in them an ardent love for their vocation, and ignited a passion for Christian Education.
- You are a tireless worker who never shirks difficult undertakings even at the cost of your health and your eyesight. Brother Louis-Marie did everything that he could to assist you. In your conferences and in your correspondence, you know how to motivate the brothers and they are anxious to follow your directives and put them into practice.
- On March 10<sup>th</sup> 1880, the members of the General Chapter choose you as the third successor of Father Champagnat. Your election is warmly received by all of the brothers. In spite of your young age, you know



what it means to be a true Marist Brother and your experiences prior to your election prepare you well for the task at hand.

- Your primary concern during the first three years of your administration is to maintain or develop our institutions and to substitute government laicized schools with Catholic schools. New foundations abroad are often postponed because of difficulties at home.
- In your Circular of March 1<sup>st</sup> 1882, you provide a broad curriculum and syllabi to be followed in our schools. You open a Scholasticate in each Province in order to facilitate the obtaining of certification that had become mandatory. A special school is established at Saint-Genis; it leads to advanced certification.
- The impetus that you provided for better education did not distract you from what was essential. To the brothers you wrote: *“Study leads to knowledge. The more we study and improve the quality of our lives, the better Religious and Christian educators we will become.”*
- In your Circulars, following the example of Father Champagnat, you call to mind the importance of fraternal charity and family spirit. You also insist on devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Your motto is: *“To love Jesus and make Him loved; to honor Mary and have her honored; to serve the Congregation and have it prosper.”*

- A major challenge awaits you when you journey to Rome in January of 1883 to present the State of the Institute to Pope Leo XIII, a challenge that would compromise your already failing health. Your death would follow at Saint-Genis on April 9, 1883, after only three years in General Administration. Your death was deeply felt by all of the brothers

Brother Nestor, as our family approaches the bicentenary of its foundation, we request that you intercede before Mary, our First Superior that she may guide those who lead us today and bring new life to those Provinces that are at risk.

Amen

COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS



**15**

**Brother  
Theophane**

**4<sup>th</sup>  
Superior  
General  
(1824-1907)**



The following is offered as a summary of the biography published in “Nos Supérieurs”.<sup>61</sup>

### **Native Village**

The village of Saint-Priest, the birthplace of Brother Theophane, is located at five kilometers from Privas, which is the center of the county government of Ardèche. An old dwelling located below the church is the original home of Adrien Durand, ancestor of our Brother Theophane.

### ***The Family***

For many years, Adrian’s father served as mayor of Saint-Priest, as was his older brother, Hipolyte, who was also mayor for more than thirty years. They personified those qualities that one might expect from a local mayor: prudence, administrative ability, integrity and commitment. His father worked the fields that had been handed down to him by his ancestors. He was a man who was loyal and generous, straightforward and true. He was also gifted with common

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<sup>61</sup> *Nos Supérieurs* Économat général, Saint-Genis-Laval 1953, p. 203-282



sense and his virtues were well known throughout the region. His wife, Marie Gouy, was a conscientious housewife who took excellent care of her children, assisted at daily Mass and visited the poor and the sick of her community. In the household, each day concluded with family prayer. Adrien was born on September 10, 1824, and was the third of eight children: six boys and two girls. He was baptized the following day by M. l'abbé Duchamp, the local pastor.

### **Primary School**

Adrien attended school in his village where M. Bourg, a gifted man and teacher, instructed some one hundred children. There, as a student, he stood out because of his amenability, hard work and attentiveness. *"He was a wonderful child,"* asserts one who knew him, *"open, joyful, given to occasional little pranks, and always ready to help his little friends with their activities and studies."* When he was about ten years of age, he was transferred to Rochessauve, a village not far from Saint-Priest, so that he could study the rudiments of Latin under the tutelage of the local pastor, M. Arnoux.

### **At the Seminary**

During the month of October of 1836, young Adrien entered the Petit Séminaire de Privas. His grades were excellent. He was enrolled into the "Confrérie des Saints Anges" and into the "Congrégation de la Sainte Vierge". During the holidays of 1839, he had the misfortune of losing his father. On October 24, 1843, he entered the "Grand Séminaire" at Viviers. He continued to demonstrate a great deal of scholastic aptitude and was profoundly religious. As in previous years, he spent his holidays with his family. His mother was especially happy to have Adrien near her as he was the child whom the Lord had called to be of service in His Church.



## **Pilgrimage to La Louvesc**

Nevertheless, when the time came to make a final commitment to the priesthood, Adrian experienced deep reservations. He prayed and sought advice without coming to a definite conclusion. While at home during the holidays, his mother suggested that they make a pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Francis Regis. Adrian accepted willingly, and the two set out on foot along the 40 kilometers separating Saint-Priest from La Louvesc. Thirty nine years earlier, almost to the day, much like Adrian's mother, Marie Chirat, had led her son, Marcellin to La Louvesc in order to find in "the apostle of Vivarais, the strength that he would need to overcome the difficulties that he encountered during his studies at Verrières. Adrian's mother was fortunate enough to witness the re-direction of her son towards the new undertaking of Father Champagnat by Father Robin of the Society of Jesus.

## **At the Hermitage**

His family considered his decision to be misguided. He resisted the pressure and approached Brother Louis-Bernadin, director of Bégude, and sought information concerning admittance to the Novitiate at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage. Before leaving, he appeared before the Commission of Public Instruction in Privas in order to obtain the certificate for school management that was required by law. In the process, he declined a generous offer by the Inspector who subsequently granted him his certification. He arrived at the Novitiate on the evening of the feast of the Birth of Our Lady, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1845.

## **At the Novitiate**

Only five years elapsed since the death of Father Champagnat when Adrian arrived at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage, and the Founder's disciples were still very much alive. Among them was Brother Bonaventure, the Master of Novices, and one of Marcellin's closest followers. It

was said of him that he made of the Novitiate a real “Gate to Heaven”. The young people around him admired his religious attitude, his gentleness, humility, and spirit of self-denial. On November 16<sup>th</sup>, he took the Holy Habit and received the name, Brother Theophane.



### **First Assignment**

Soon after, he left the Novitiate in order to teach in the primary school at Valbenoîte. He went there on foot with another brother, with his few

belongings contained in a small black bag. The following day, Brother Director introduced him to his class, and left him in charge. The pressing needs coming from everywhere and the shortage of brothers who were adequately prepared compelled the Superiors to shorten the time of their initial formation which would lead to dire consequences.

### **The Teacher**

Some time later, the Brother Director at Valbenoît wrote the following to the Superior General: *“You must be anxious to know how Brother Theophane is doing. I am happy to say that eventually, he will succeed. It is true that at first, he had some difficulty with discipline, however given the strength of his character and his manner of acting, I hope that everything will soon improve.”*



As soon as the school year ended, Brother Theophane asked to be admitted to the Temporary Vow of Obedience, as was the custom. He was admitted to this vow on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1846, and then returned to his work at Valbenoîte.

## **The Cook**

The following year, Adrien is in charge of the kitchen at Saint-Germain-Laval, where he had taught for a year. In assuming this new responsibility, he still had much to learn. With great simplicity, he directed his joyful disposition and “savoir faire” to the temporal needs of the community, keeping all things in order. In time, he succeeded in becoming an excellent chef.

On September 11, 1849, at the end of the retreat, he professed Perpetual Vows. He was twenty-five years of age.

## **The Director**

Brother François appointed him as director of Saint-Genis-Laval and, after the Retreat of 1850, entrusted him with the responsibility of our work at Valbenoîte. The task was made even more difficult for the young director because there were two groups of students: the primary school made up of three hundred day students, and the boarding school, made up of fewer students because of its location in a recently developing area. The first demand Brother Theophane placed upon himself was to do everything possible to gain the trust and respect of the brothers and the students alike.

They were impressed by his honesty, his firm yet caring manner, his gentleness, his pleasant and engaging disposition, and his ability to reach out to others by means of his personal commitment and enthusiasm.

The four classes in day school numbered 55, 65, 90 and 120 students respectively, far too many students per class. Soon afterwards, the local government approached the Superior General with the request that the larger classes be reduced, thereby creating two new additional classes.

At that time, the boarding school was made up of some forty students. Soon afterwards, the Institute was to add new buildings thereby opening up a bright future for this undertaking.

Brother Theophane assumed responsibility for everything. He insisted that students be well prepared for their First Communion, and was involved in the process personally. He was adamant that prayers be well recited in all of the classes. He started a “Congrégation de la Sainte Vierge” as a powerful means of promoting goodness. The Institute introduced it in Valbenoîte in thanksgiving for the acquisition of the “Abbaye”. It became a boarding school on May 22, 1856.

He also sought to promote and encourage sporting events. He was a resolute hiker and enjoyed taking long hikes during holidays; he was always in the lead. Yet, he was also responsible for accounting and finances. He had the responsibility of overseeing the working staff and providing for their religious instruction each week. All of these activities were the many reasons why Brother Theophane used his time wisely and attentively.

## **With the Brothers**

Spending quality time with the brothers was always a priority with Brother Theophane. Each morning, after prayer, he devoted himself to the improvement of the studies undertaken by the young brothers. During Saturday interviews, he sought to share useful insights and advice with each one. This was always done with such



kindness and gentleness, candor and simplicity that, after the interview, each person left with the feeling of being uplifted. Although his seminary training remained with him after he entered the Institute, his outlook and ways of doing things gradually changed.

A brother noted: *“Our director is just like us. During the winter months, he wears white sabots without laces, just like the ones worn by poor people in the country.”*

*“He disliked having too many places to go”,* observed one of his Assistants. *“He often received invitations for himself or for the brothers; but rarely accepted them. The brothers studying under his guidance in his community were happy with his way of doing things.”*

He was always gracious and welcoming to the brothers coming from Saint-Étienne, for one reason or another. Brother François, who held him in high regard, invited him to profess the Vow of Stability.

## **Assistant**

On July 2, 1860, Brother François convened a General Chapter to which all Professed Brothers were invited. They numbered 36. This Chapter was officially opened on July 16<sup>th</sup> at Saint-Genis-Laval. Brother François made known that his ill health prevented him from effectively governing the Institute and Brother Louis-Marie was elected to assume those responsibilities. Three new Assistants were also elected; they included Brothers Theophane, Philogone and Chrysogone. Brother Theophane assumed the direction of “la Province du Nord et de l’Ouest” as Brother Pascal had done before him.

He hastened to arrive at Beaucamps where his nomination was received enthusiastically. At the time, Brother Eubert was the Visitor for the Province and Brother Theophane had worked with him both at

Saint-Germain-Laval and at Valbenoîte. Ever since the foundation of Saint-Paul-en-Ardois, by Father Champagnat in 1838, schools were being rapidly established everywhere. This was made possible in large measure because of the generosity of “Mme la comtesse de la Grandville.” A Novitiate was later founded in Beaucamps in 1846. Upon her death in 1865, she left the Congregation a large Provincial House including a day school and a boarding school housing 160 students.

In 1860, the Province numbered 52 houses, and 286 brothers; this after only twenty-five years in existence. During the annual retreat, Brother Theophane interviewed each of the brothers in order to come to know them better, to encourage them, and to develop the threefold objectives of love of God, the salvation of souls, and the promotion the future of the Institute. His conferences centered on his favorite topic, the Common Rules. He was not a particularly gifted speaker. His delivery was slow and deliberate, but always well thought out. The brothers were thrilled in what they saw in him, someone likable, sympathetic and well respected. His only disadvantage, at age 36, was his youthful appearance.

### **Firmness and Kindness**

One day, at Beaucamps, two of the brothers requested his permission to go visit some of the brothers living nearby. He granted their request on condition that they return at a given time. Having arrived late, they offered him some reasons for their tardiness. Brother Assistant felt that he could not justify their excuses; he admonished them and gave them a public penance.

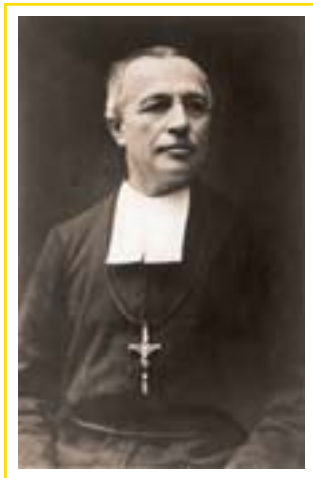
One of them did not take the rebuke very well and the following day, he returned to bitterly complain before Brother Assistant, maintaining that the penalty that had been given the evening before was too harsh. After having calmly listened to his complaint, Brother Theo-



phane said: *“My Brother, I only wanted to address your lateness. I did not intend to hurt your feelings. Please forgive me for what I really had no intention of doing”*, and in doing so, knelt down before him. *“That happened forty years ago”*, relates the brother who was tardy, *“and my eyes still fill with tears whenever I recall the kindness and humility of this revered Brother Assistant.”*

## Correspondence

Upon arriving at the Mother House, our untiring pilgrim quickly put his walking stick aside, and took up his writing pen in order to reach out as counselor and friend. His correspondence occupied much of his time. In order to satisfy the needs of the brothers, he would reply to each of them quickly, briefly and accurately. Each morning, as soon as the mail had been delivered, he would kneel at his prie-dieu and offer a short prayer. He would then proceed to write a brief note in the margin next to each significant thought, as a reminder of what he would respond. He took his responsibility very seriously.



## Recruitment

From the beginning of his mandate as Assistant, Brother Theophane was concerned about having a sufficient number of brothers to staff the schools. Having found few novices in the North, he sought the help of colleagues in other Provinces. Brother Pascal, the new Assistant of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, had regretfully left Beaucamps. During the holidays of 1861, as a help, he arrived with a group of young brothers who were full of good will and who spoke with the distinctive accent



typical of those coming from the region of Provence thereby increasing the total number of brothers available. Brother Theophane also directed his attention to the directors and brothers of the better schools to encourage them to promote vocations.

## **Formation**

Brother Theophane was also frequently in touch with the Master of Novices, for he played such a critical role in the development of the Provinces. In addition, he paid special attention to the intellectual and pedagogical formation of the young brothers. In those days, the building next to the Novitiate, that we now call the Scholasticate, was referred to as “*l'école spéciale*”.

Continuing what had already begun during the time of our holy Founder, he initiated a series of competitive catechetical exams that would be taken. The topics to be studied were made known at the time of the annual Retreat, and one would have the entire year to prepare for the exams. A committee, made up of leading brothers throughout the Province, was established in order to evaluate the results of the exams and award prizes to the most deserving. This occurred at the time of the closing of the retreat and was presided over by Brother Assistant. Father Champagnat's nephew, Brother Tharsis was the winner at the time of the first competition. He left for the missions in Oceania soon thereafter.

## **New Foundations**

Thanks to the religious tranquility that prevailed over France from 1850 until 1870, the Congregations dedicated to the primary education of youth, enjoyed a period of prosperity. Many of the local governments wished them to manage their schools. During his tenure as Assistant, Brother Theophane received over one hundred such demands; he could accommodate only a few of them.



On February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1867, five brothers, three of whom were English, set sail from Toulon to establish the first foundation of the Institute in Cape Town, South Africa. Four years later, under the direction of Brother Ludovic, four brothers left for Sydney, Australia. The spread of the Province of Beaucamps to English speaking countries prompted Brother Theophane to learn to English, which he mastered quite well.

## **The War of 1870 and the Commune**

Brother Assistant was in the Northern Province at the beginning of the hostilities. Soon, Brother François requested that he be by his side. Because of where the battle was raging, Brother Theophane had to take an alternate route in order to reach Saint-Genis-Laval from Beaucamps. Right from the very beginning of the fighting around Paris, our boarding school was occupied by the sick and the wounded. Brother Norbert, the director, and all of the brothers, demonstrated outstanding courage and dedication in reaching out to all, until May of 1871 when the battle was at its height. In spite of the dangers and difficulties, Brother Assistant took advantage of the three weeks peace agreement that ended on January 28<sup>th</sup> to reach Paris. He arrived among the brothers with two large hams that he had hidden under his mantel. This incident caused the brothers, the sick and the wounded to shout for joy.

The civil war that broke out in the capital highlighted the tyrannical power that the Commune brought with it. On the morning of May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1871, Brother Director was made aware by a reliable source that a warrant had been issued for his arrest as well as those of the brothers. They left immediately and went into hiding. Brother Kilianus was recognized at the North Station and was confined to prison at Mazas. As attested in a letter written by his Superior, he was miraculously freed: “Brother Kilianus was taken prisoner by members of the Commune but was able to escape when a shell ripped through the walls providing him with the opportunity to flee from the prison at Mazas. While there, he had

made a fervent retreat during the seventeen days of his captivity. The Blessed Virgin made it possible for him to find a safe house until the area of Villette was re-taken by a contingent from Versailles. The other brothers were able to flee from Paris on May 8<sup>th</sup>. Deo gratias!”

## **The 6<sup>th</sup> General Chapter**

The death of Brother Jean-Baptiste brought about the 6<sup>th</sup> General Chapter that took place in two sessions. The first session opened on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1873 during which time Brother Theophane continued as First Assistant. A new Province, called the “Province des Îles”, was created when the British Isles were separated from the Province of Beaucamps. Brother Theophane was Assistant of the North and the West. In 1875, he had the misfortune of losing his mother. Out of a sense of deference, he rarely spoke of his parents. However, given an opportunity, he would willingly acknowledge the debt of his gratitude that he owed to them and the lessons that he had learned, especially the good example that he received from his mother. The following year, at the end the second session of the General Chapter, he relinquished the direction of the Provinces of the North and of the West in order to take up similar responsibilities at the Province of the Hermitage. The Province at that time numbered 100 Houses with 300 classes and 14,550 students and 600 brothers, as well as novices and postulants.

## **Superior General**

The 8<sup>th</sup> General Chapter opened at Saint-Genis-Laval on April 22, 1883. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, Brother Theophane was elected Superior General by 30 of the 45 votes cast. He had arrived at the Generalate after having undergone a long period of preparation. At age 58, he was in excellent health, and this would continue throughout his new



mandate of service to the Institute. It would last for the next twenty-four years.

At the General Chapter of 1893, although he had received a life-long mandate and only ten years had elapsed, he sought to resign because he considered this to be beyond his ability. His resignation was not accepted by the Chapter. Ten years later, in 1903, the Chapter was held at Saint-Genis in the midst of preparations for the expulsion of the brothers from France. He requested a re-election, and it was approved. He then indicated that according to the newly approved Constitutions by Rome, the Superior General was to be elected for a term of twelve years. The current situation was far too critical for a major change in leadership to occur at the same time. He was, therefore, re-elected on April 22, 1903.

### **Difficulties in Government**

The entire term of Brother Theophane would occur in the midst of difficulties. In fact, between the years 1880 to 1903, the French legal system was more and more directed towards the destruction of Christian education. In 1883, steps taken towards laicization produced devastating results. Each year, the Institute was to withdraw from a number of schools sponsored by the government and create an equal number of private schools. What followed was a summary of statistics taken from one of his letters based on statistics that he had gathered in 1887.

“We have at this time 143 Institutions that have been privatized. That is an average of about twenty schools per year. Before the laicization policy, we had 18,163 students in these schools. At the opening day for our private schools, we drew 10,931 students. As of today, that number increased to 14,157. On the other hand, the competing laicized schools drew only 8,823 students.”

## **A Few Statistics**

Under the direction of Brother Theophane, the Institute expanded considerably. The upheaval of 1903 could easily have turned into a disaster; however, it would eventually prove to provide new opportunities.

During 1903, 118 Perpetually Professed brothers left the Institute. An even greater number of young brothers also left and our Juniorates experienced similar depletions with the result that there were fewer novices throughout the French Provinces for years to come. However, in spite of this terrible crisis, the Institute that numbered 3,018 brothers and novices at the death of Reverend Brother Nestor; would reach 4,260 brothers and novices at the death of Brother Theophane in 1907. This represented an increase in membership of almost 40%.

As for the total number of institutions, there are no significant differences between the beginning and the end of Brother Theophane's term as Superior General. The major difference was that the schools with fewer students, and those generally located in rural areas often had no more than three brothers. These were either dissolved or replaced by larger schools that had survived in all of the turmoil. Furthermore, schools abroad tended to be larger, and were often staffed by 8 or 10 brothers and, at times, as many as 15 or 20 thereby limiting the number of new establishments created during the mandate of Brother Theophane. In spite of all of the difficulties that he encountered during his administration, the Institute continued to expand considerably.

## **Ignatian Exercises and the Second Novitiate**

It was Brother Theophane who introduced the Thirty Day Exercises and the Second Novitiate to the Institute. The Spiritual Exercises were held as early as 1884 in the boarding school at La Côte-Saint-André. They drew together more than one hundred brothers preparing for Perpetual Profession. In 1897, The Second Novitiate began in the seclusion of Chaurand, a property located near the Mother House. It drew brothers from throughout the Institute and was later relocated to Grugliasco, Italy.



## **The Cause of Venerable Father Champagnat**

In his Circular of February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1886, Brother Theophane wrote the following: “Ever since I was elected, I have pondered and prayed over the notion of introducing the Cause of Beatification of the Founder. The Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons readily approved the undertaking, and the Society of Mary also supported the venture.

On January 12, 1896, with the approval of the Commission for the Introduction of Causes for Beatification, Brother Theophane and Brother Berillus, Assistant General, officially presented the required information on Father Champagnat to the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

On August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1896, his Holiness, Pope Leo XIII signed the Decree that set the process in motion, the process which would at the same time confer the title Venerable upon Father Champagnat. Brother Theophane instructed that the various testimonies that had been written about our Venerable Founder be gathered and published.

## **Brother Theophane’s Circulars**

Unlike Brothers François and Louis-Marie who wrote their Circulars using a rather didactic approach, Brother Theophane opted to follow in the footsteps of Brother Nestor, who stressed the role of the brothers as religious educators. Perhaps he did so, in response to the violent assaults being waged against teaching Christian Education in our schools. He wrote about his travels, and experiences as a way of encouraging everyone, especially the brothers in various parts of the world. His travels to Rome, Algeria, North America and Oceania were special occasions for providing delightful accounts. After writing extensively about his travels and personal experiences, including his Golden Jubilee celebrated at Saint-Genis in 1895, he also provided ample space for news coming from

abroad; letters coming from China, New Caledonia, Colombia, Spain, South Africa and Denmark, relating the joys and the pains, the successes and disappointments, the longings and hopes of the large family that he cared deeply for as would a father.

During the twenty- four years of his mandate as Superior General, his writings, over three thousand pages, provided, as it were, a history of the Institute written in so many installments. Imperceptibly, the view of the world that centered almost exclusively on France was gradually expanded through his Circulars and would reach out to the four corners of the world. The young brothers loved reading about the adventures and dangers that he wrote about. The reading of the exploits and heroic deaths of the early missionaries due to yellow fever, and the beatings that they suffered during the Boxer Rebellion, only intensified their thirst for apostolic involvement.

## **The Educator**

Brother Theophane often addressed the topic of Christian Education. He stressed the importance of sound education, the role of religion, how to motivate students, how to avoid discipline problems in the school and in the classroom, the importance of the faith and good example of the teacher, and the respect of the teacher for his profession, etc...

It was during his administration that the well-known F.T.D. Collection was put together. It received its name from the initials of Frère Théophane Durand. In a way, Father Champagnat had begun the collection when, with the help of some of the brothers, he wrote "Principe de Lecture" a book for beginning readers. Later, Brother Louis-Marie compiled a French Grammar and a series of writing exercises. A collection of hymns and other books also appeared. However, it was with Brother Theophane that the undertaking really flourished. Books on



biblical history, the French language, the history of France, geography, mathematics, history, natural and general sciences, drawing, and many other topics, appeared in quick succession.

Several of the works appearing in the Collection F.T.D. were published in several editions and reaching hundreds of thousands of printings. Furthermore, they were the reasons for which similar works were produced in non- French speaking Provinces.

Brother Theophane wished that the Institute be up- to- date in the field of publication and sent several brothers to visit the academic section of the Exposition of Paris in 1900. Our Institute was well represented in the area of scholarly works, and several received official recognitions and gold medals.

## **Worldwide expansion of the Institute**

Under the General Administration of Brother Theophane, the Institute experienced a period of remarkable expansion. It is true that earlier, there was some degree of development in such places as Belgium, England and Oceania, however, other than that, expansion occurred almost exclusively in French speaking territories.

- In 1885, six brothers left for Canada. Brother Theophane went there on visitation twice, once in 1887 and a second time in 1898. The following year, the brothers established themselves in the United States.
- Our first school in Gérone, Spain was established in 1886, and would experience rapid growth throughout the country.
- On September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1887, the blessing of San Leone Magno took place, the first of our buildings in Rome and named after Pope Leo XIII.



- In 1888, the first foundation in Copenhagen.
- In 1889, the arrival of the brothers in Popayan, Colombia.
- In 1891, the departure of the brothers for China and Turkey.
- In 1897, the first foundation in Brazil where the Congregation would experience expansion and development.
- In 1899, the brothers arrived in Mexico. Cuba and Argentina would follow in 1903. The Institute would also open schools in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, etc...

### **The year 1903**

If one were to inquire about the upheaval that shook the Institute in 1903, the answers would hardly be found by reading Brother Theophane's Circulars. He anticipated these events but offers few specifics. Rather, as a means of dealing with these new challenges, he encouraged the brothers to be audacious and to examine their consciences.

And yet, the following is only a partial list of events listed in "*Chronologie*"<sup>62</sup>:

- Transfer of the Mother House from Saint-Genis-Laval to Grugliasco and then to Turin
- Transfer of the Novitiate from Saint-Genis-Laval to San Maurizio, Piedmont.
- Transfer of the Novitiate from the Hermitage to San Mauro, Piedmont.
- Transfer of the Novitiate from Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux to Mondovi, Italy.

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<sup>62</sup> *Chronologie*, Rome 1976, p. 182.



- Transfer of the Novitiate from Aubenas to Pontos, Spain.
- Transfer of the Novitiate from Beaucamps to Pommeroeul, Belgium.
- Transfer of the Novitiate from Varennes to Amchit, Syria.
- Transfer of the Novitiate from Lacabane to Oñate, Spain.
- All of our schools in France were laicised.
- 534 brothers left from France for various countries beyond Europe
- 39 brothers were sent to Turkey from Europe or from Turkey to Asia.

76 new institutions were founded.

It was a time of adversity without precedence in our history.

At the time, the foundations in France counted for three quarters of those of the Institute; this included the Provincial Houses on which most far-off undertakings depended.

It was a time of adversity without precedence in our history and yet throughout the Congregation in 1903, two hundred and seventy nine postulants took the religious habit; 107 brothers made Religious Profession; and 85 brothers died.

A property was available in Grugliasco for 60,000 francs. It included an old silk mill that was nearly in ruins following a fire in 1896. A part of the building however, had avoided the fire and could house a dozen people. As for the rest, they could be renovated in order to provide livable accommodations. After having hesitated for some time, Brother Theophane decided to purchase the property. It was fortunate; because the transaction occurred in March,

with legal papers being signed by the prefect of Lyons on the third, shortly before the April 1st decree ordering the expulsion of the brothers from France.

During the winter months, the Scholastics and the brothers taking courses worked faithfully in twenty-four hour shifts bottling Arquebuse. Before the legal rights to distribute this prized liqueur was dissolved, the Institute put it on sale thereby providing much needed funds to cover the costs incurred by the brothers for travel, lodging and establishing new foundations abroad.

### **Golden Jubilee and Death**

The year 1905 began on a festive note. It would be the year during which Brother Theophane would celebrate his 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of religious life.

September 8<sup>th</sup> was celebrated with great solemnity in Grugliasco and it was also the day on which Brother Theophane celebrated his Diamond Jubilee. His Holiness, Pope Pius X sent to him and to several brothers who were celebrating their golden jubilee a special benediction. The event was truly a fraternal celebration.

His fine physical health and vigorous spirit seemed endless. On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1907, he set out for Spain for the visitation of the houses. Brother Bérillus, Assistant General, accompanied him. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, they reached Vintimille and on the 11<sup>th</sup>, they arrived at San Andres, the Provincial House at the time, which was in one of the neighborhoods of Barcelona. Upon arriving, Brother Theophane began the visitation of the various houses. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, upon arriving at Mataró, he became bedridden with lung congestion, a condition that would lead to his loss of life on the evening of April 18<sup>th</sup>. Those at the Mother House were astounded upon hearing the news. The funeral took place at



Mataró, and Brother Theophane was buried in the town cemetery. Later, as an expression of their gratitude to him for all that he had given them, former students erected a monument at the site of his burial. In 2010, the centenary of the arrival of the brothers in Les Avellanes, the remains of Brother Theophane were transferred to the community cemetery that had recently been renovated and enlarged.

## **His Virtues**

Our intention is not to go into great detail about all of Reverend Brother Theophane's virtues. Suffice to say, that after having so wisely led the Institute in three consecutive Chapters, some outstanding qualities became apparent: his prudence, his common sense, his decisiveness, his tenacity, his fatherly concern for the brothers, and his qualities of a true leader.<sup>63</sup>

## **Self-confidence and Goodness**

Brother Theophane was a man with an imposing figure who was always calm and dignified. He could easily have inspired fear in others but his kind-heartedness always inspired others to be full of trust and self-confidence. "*When we went to see him*", relates a brother, "*he would always greeted us with lots of kindness and he would put his troubles aside.*" His goodness was even more evident when extended to those who were sick for whom he was always very caring.

## **His Determination**

His natural warmth towards the brothers never slipped into softness. There are many examples of his firm determination. On one

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<sup>63</sup>*Nos Supérieurs* Économat général, Saint-Genis-Laval 1953, p. 273

occasion, after minute examination, he gave his approval to the plans for the construction of a wing at one of the boarding schools. Upon visiting the site, when he observed that some construction had taken place beyond what had been approved in the original plans, he ordered that it be taken down.

### **Spirit of Piety**

During prayer, his spirit of reflection, concentration and attentiveness was truly remarkable. He constantly lived in the presence of God and prayed continuously. A brother who accompanied him to Australia noted: *“While on the deck of the ship, I often observed him making a sign of the cross over his heart as he gazed out into the horizon.”*

### **Humility and Simplicity**

“Good grief!” he once uttered when they came to pick him up at the station with a large delegation of students, *“What do they take me for? I’m only a human being.”*

During his entire life, he never boasted of having studied Greek or Latin. A young brother once accompanied him to a holy place in Rome and provided a rather inaccurate translation of a Latin inscription. The good Superior listened to his presentation with such interest that it was only later that the guide came to know that there was much about Brother Theophane that he didn’t know.

### **Spirit of Mortification**

Brother Theophane lived his life in self-mortification. *“One day, in the month of August,”* writes a brother, *“he traveled with some of*



*us by train. The heat was unbearable. When we arrived at Douai, he insisted that we take some refreshments. In spite of our encouragement, he refused to take absolutely anything for himself.”*

## **Spirit of Faith**

His words and his actions were always filled with a spirit of faith. His letters and Circulars were imbued with a spiritual outlook. It was not that he failed to deal with practical matters, but he always raised everything to a spiritual dimension.

When he received word of the official recognition of the Institute in Spain, he responded: *“God pays us a tribute by choosing us as his instruments to make his children loved. How we should be thankful! Let us express our gratitude by putting the qualities of our religious life into action. Let us live each day according to the demands of our title: ‘Little Brothers of Mary’, that is, humility, simplicity and modesty.”*

He was unshakeable. He was never moved by the praises of the powerful, nor was he intimidated by perils and persecutions. When a brother expressed his fear over the repressive measures taken by the French government in 1903, he responded with this: *“The future will be like the past. As for the present, man’s schemes do not alter God’s designs. Our Congregation is in the hands of Our Blessed Virgin whose help has never failed us, and she knows very well how to direct our endeavors in spite of the events that we are facing.”*

One had the impression that when speaking with Brother Theophane, one was speaking with a saint. This was the perception of many of the brothers and one shared by many others. Monsignor Dadolle once told Cardinal Couillé, the archbishop of Lyons, *“You have a saint in your diocese in the person of Brother Theophane.”*



## **Praying with Brother Theophane**

With you, Brother Theophane, our prayer leads us to recall the highlights of your life in the service of the Institute so that we might give thanks to God.

- You were born in Ardèche, a region in southern France that has provided many vocations to our religious family. Your parents were successful in the field of agriculture. They were also successful in passing on the faith to a beautiful family of eight. Both your father and your older brother were longtime mayors of the commune where you grew up.
- After having had an excellent primary education, you entered the “Petit Séminaire de Privas” where you continued your formation and then enter the “Grand Séminaire de Viviers”. At the closing stages of your studies for the priesthood, you redirect your goals and sought to enter the religious life. After having made a pilgrimage to Louvesc, you decided to become a Little Brother of Mary.
- You enter Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1845. Your shortened Novitiate is made under the



direction of Brother Bonaventure who opened your heart to the spirit of Father Champagnat and the first brothers.

- You were soon assigned a class in the primary school at Valbenoîte (Saint Étienne). After a few weeks of apprenticeship, you demonstrated that you were an excellent teacher. You later become a cook at Saint-Germain-Laval.
- Brother François soon put you in charge of this school before sending you to direct an even more significant establishment, that at Valbenoîte. In the way you conduct yourself, you won the affection of the brothers and students, and the school quickly progressed under your supervision.
- In 1860, you were elected Assistant, responsible for the Province of Beaucamps. Thanks to the generosity of “la contesse de Grandville” Beaucamps at that time numbered more than 280 brothers and 52 schools. Your openness and unyielding kindness are the hallmarks of your successful administration.
- You were always concerned about the formation of the brothers and about the fostering of vocations. That is why you encouraged the sound instruction of Scholastics and you invited the directors to send good students to the Juniorates.
- On April 25, 1823, you become the 4<sup>th</sup> successor to Marcellin Champagnat. During the 24 years of your General Administration, you experienced many trials,



specifically, the laicization of schools in France and the expulsion orders of 1903.

- 1897 marked the opening of the Second Novitiate at Saint-Genis-Laval. As early as 1884, you introduced the Spiritual Exercises, of Saint Ignatius so that the brothers might be adequately prepared for their Perpetual Profession. On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1886, you launched the opening of the cause of Beatification of the Founder.
- Thanks to your encouragement and support, the collection of our most significant works was produced: Collection F.T.D. (Frère Théophane Durand). You also launched the new foundations in Canada, China, Spain, Colombia and elsewhere.
- With courage and determination you responded to the challenges of the expulsion of the brothers from France. You left Grugliasco to undertake the visitation of the foundations abroad, including China. In 1905, you have the joy of celebrating your Diamond Jubilee of religious life.

Thank you, Brother Theophane for your life of total self-giving to the Institute. May your prayer accompany all of the brothers who are called to lead the Institute. May Mary, our First Superior, guide them and protect them.

Amen.

COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS



**16**

**Brother  
Stratonique**

**5<sup>th</sup>  
Superior  
General  
(1843-1926)**



The following is offered as a summary of the biography of Brother Stratonique found in “*Nos Supérieurs*”<sup>64</sup>, published in 1953 from Saint-Genis-Laval by l’ Économat général.

### **Formative Years**

Antoine Uselard, who would later become the 5<sup>th</sup> successor of Father Champagnat, was born on March 18, 1843 in Vion, a small community along the Rhône River in the district of Ardèche. Nothing has been preserved of his family origins. He attended a Marist school directed by Brother Isaïas, who was regarded as a saint by the students. Antoine was a religious and intelligent student, gifted with a pleasant personality, and he occasionally enjoyed playing practical jokes. He entered the novitiate at Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage at age 14 and was nearly dismissed because of his excessive playfulness. However, he promised to make amends, expressing his regret for his poor behavior with such candor and sincerity that the Master of Novices gave him a clean slate. Upon the Taking the Habit he was named Stratonique, who was an early Christian soldier and martyr.

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<sup>64</sup> *Nos Supérieurs* Économat général, Saint-Genis-Laval 1953. pp. 285-335

## Early Development

Diminutive in stature, the young Brother was sent to Thodore as a cook where he remained for two years. Afterward, he spent two years at Lorette teaching the very young, followed by two years at Saint-Romain-en-Jarez. Because he looked so young and because he was of less than average height, he was not enthusiastically received by his first director who had misgivings about the two of them being seen together on days when there were outings. This would lead to an episode that he later enjoyed relating.<sup>65</sup>

## Valbenoîte

In 1864, Brother Stratonique was assigned to Valbenoîte. His director was Brother Cyron. While there had bolstered the course of studies given to the boarding school students, and designed an engineering course for those going to l'École des Mines at Saint-Étienne. During the holidays, Brother Cyron sent Brother Stratonique and several other young brothers to take university courses in the city of Lyons. It was while teaching upper students at Valbenoîte that Brother Stratonique reached his full stature. For some twenty years, he demonstrated a remarkable ability to stir up interest and passion for learning. He had a spark within him and knew how to ignite a burning love of knowl-



<sup>65</sup> Cf. *Nos Supérieurs* Économat général, Saint-Genis-Laval 1953. pp. 287-288



edge. His classes in mathematics were characterized by their clarity and by the enthusiastic response of his students. For several years, he was also responsible for the discipline of the student body, a difficult task that he performed admirably. Students loved and respected him. Upon the death of Brother Cyrion in July of 1882, it was Brother Stratonique who replaced him. One of his first undertakings as director of Vallbenoîte was to begin an Association of Former Students (*Amicale des Anciens Élèves*). It was to last for over a hundred years, an undertaking of which he was most proud.

### **Assistant**

Brother Stratonique was elected by his Province as a delegate to the General Chapter of 1883. The most important task of the Chapter was to find a successor to Brother Nestor who died prematurely while in administration and who was sorely missed. During the administration of Brother Theophane, Brother Stratonique was elected Assistant for the Province of the Hermitage, a task that he undertook at a relatively young age and performed with distinction for twenty-four years.

As Assistant, it was he who was responsible for the beginnings of the Institute in Canada, a project of which he was particularly proud. He looked upon that country as a land of opportunity and as a possible refuge for the brothers in France should the need arise. This, indeed, would later happen. The first foundation was established in Iberville in 1885 at the request of Msgr. Moreau, Bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe, who was Beatified by Pope John-Paul II on May 10, 1987. Two years later, Brother Stratonique persuaded Reverend Brother Theophane to accompany him on one of his visits to this flourishing vineyard. He returned to the Hermitage with such a glowing report of the developments in Canada that many of the brothers were eager to be sent there. In fact, prior to the year 1903, 150 did go, followed later by an additional 200.

With this kind of support new foundations blossomed everywhere, as did new vocations. A novitiate was established in Iberville as early as 1887. Juniorates soon followed, one in Iberville in 1892 and another in Lévis in 1899. A Scholasticate was established at Saint-Hyacinthe in 1898. In 1904, Brother Pierre-Gonzalès (Riboulet) launched the *“Bulletin des Études”*. A parallel expansion in the United States was begun as early as 1886.

### **General Administration (1907-1920)**

The General Chapter elected Brother Stratonique as Superior General on October 14, 1907. It was the first time that the Chapter was held at Grugliasco. He referred to our holy Founder in his first Circular. He would continue using him as his point of reference for all of his important decisions. As the newly elected Superior General, he entrusted everything to Divine Providence and quickly demonstrated true Marist spirit that was reflected in his optimism and in his simplicity.

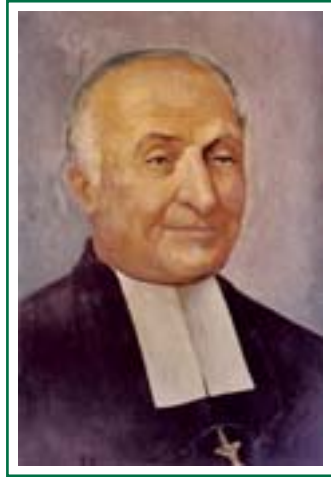
Among his many gifts was his astonishing memory. He would greet second novices arriving at Grugliasco by name after having met them only once during the course of his visitations.

### **The Ideal of Marist Spirit**

Brother Stratonique lived at the Hermitage at a time when Marist spirit pervaded the entire atmosphere. He made his novitiate there not long after the death of our holy Founder. Many of the brothers remembered him and often spoke of him. Brother Stratonique was, therefore, a young contemporary of the early brothers. He had heard the talks given by Brother François and Brother Jean-Baptiste. He was, in a way, the last of the early brothers. Many of his circulars and conferences are filled with his recollections. He had the ability of being at



ease with the most distinguished dignitaries, of conversing about science and mathematics, while at the same time still being able to relate to the most unassuming of the brothers. After having been involved in formal receptions, he was often seen seeking out the cook or the gardener in order to have an informal conversation with him, talking about such mundane things as squash and cabbages, chickens and rabbits. He valued brothers who were engaged in manual labor and menial work just as highly as he did brothers having college positions or receiving degrees of higher learning.



## The Optimist

He was optimistic about everything. It was as though he was set aside by Divine Providence so that he might assist the Institute during one of its most challenging and discouraging times. The expulsion of the brothers from France following the laws of 1903 was coming to an end. Subsequent ruins were everywhere. Abroad, hastily established undertakings were facing all kinds of difficulties. What is more, the war of 1914-1918 temporarily took away more than a thousand brothers. The situation reminded one of the prophet Jeremiah weeping over the ruins.

However, that was not the case. Placing his confidence in Divine Providence, Brother Stratonique personally encouraged those who were near, and corresponded with those who were far away. He would say: “*Pessimists see the world as spinning out of control; optimists create new ways for the universe to unfold as it should.*”



## **The International Juniorate**

Foremost among Brother Stratonique's many endeavors was the creation of the International Juniorate (l'Œuvre Saint François-Xavier). In October of 1909, students from Juniorates throughout Europe began arriving at Grugliasco. Beginnings would be difficult. Students from various countries throughout Europe speaking different languages were to come together for the purpose of religious formation and for understanding one another. The first group of students consisted in some forty Juniors. Subsequently, the number would rise to about eighty. There was a Novitiate and a Scholasticate in Italy as well. Thanks to the International Juniorate, the Institute was able to send brothers to various parts of the world where new vocations were not always forthcoming.

## **The Bulletin of the Institute**

The General Chapter of 1907 expressed the need for this publication. The first issue appeared in January of 1909. Brother Stratonique himself introduced it, explaining its purpose and goal. Among other things, he stated that it would serve both as an official history of the successes and disappointments of the Institute while at the same time communicating those deep and subtle feelings that make up family spirit, the driving force behind all of our undertakings. The Bulletin has been a true legacy and those communities that have preserved all of the issues can find therein elements of the history of the Institute from 1909 until the Second Vatican Council.

## **Enduring Learning Exposition**

While visiting the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers in Paris, Brother Stratonique was struck by the tangible way the evolution of various methods and devices of learning and expression were represented.



He wondered if we might not, in a more modest setting, gather books, student notebooks, diagrams, sketches, photographs, artwork, and other learning materials and create a kind of museum.

On the top floor of the new building of the Second Novitiate, he arranged showcases in which various items coming from the different Provinces were displayed. Within a few years, a very interesting collection had been gathered. Early acquisitions arrived in rapid succession and there exists a picturesque description of the collection in number 22 of the Bulletin of the Institute. Brother Theophane enjoyed showing the “Enduring Exposition” to various distinguished guests and encouraged visiting brothers to take advantage of what had been gathered.

Unfortunately, much of the collection that had been so diligently gathered was almost completely destroyed during the bombings of World War II.

## **The Special Scholasticate**

In the Circular of January 2, 1914, the General Council drew the attention of the Institute to the need of establishing a Special Scholasticate at the Mother House. Its purpose would be to “...*promote the preparation of teachers who were to teach in our Juniorates, Novitiates and Scholasticates. It would also promote a uniformity of pedagogical methods used in our schools and colleges throughout the Marist world.*” It would bring to a new level the one begun by Brother Nestor at Saint-Genis-Laval in 1882. Because of the eruption of World War I in 1914, Brother Stratonique was never able to carry out the continuation of this project that had been sought for so long.

## **Love of the Institute**

The love and admiration that Brother Stratonique had for our holy Founder were extended to the entire Institute. He was proud of it and loved it as if it were his own family.

As Superior General, he was well aware of the fact that some of its members were troubled and that there were difficulties. Nevertheless, that did not deter him from having a positive outlook. He was quick to show interest in various projects and to congratulate those involved.

He enjoyed supporting new undertakings such as schools, colleges, books and even Arquebuse. He once said to the brothers at Carmagnola who were doing work that was menial and unrecognized: *“You are involved in an apostolic ministry, for the work that you are doing is critical to the success of the International Juniorate.”*

He enjoyed showing visitors around the learning museum where student notebooks and literary classics in various languages were displayed side by side. He also enjoyed giving an account of his travels. Having gone around the world and having spent several winters in the southern hemisphere, he once noted in jest that it was his experience that each year had far more than one springtime.

## **The Golden Book**

Brother Stratonique deeply admired the commitment of the brothers and publicly sought ways to acknowledge their efforts. He considered having a book in which not only the outstanding achievements of the brothers would be recorded but also those accomplishments which drew little attention: the cooks, the tailors, the monitors, the cobblers, the infirmarians, the kindergarten teachers. He mentioned such a book in his Circular of June 6, 1908, and again in that of May 18, 1911. He even thought of an appropriate title: *“The Commitment of the brothers of the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary during the First One Hundred Years.”* Unfortunately, The Golden Book never materialized.

Some might, however, consider Brother Basilio’s Circular of September 8, 1984, as the fulfillment of Brother Stratonique’s dream of having a more personal account of the lives of the brothers.



## The Centenary of the Institute

More successful, however, was the solemn celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the Founding of the Institute. Brother Stratonique wished that it be characterized by family spirit and pride for what came before us. He initiated a yearly novena for the success of this celebration in his Circular of March 19, 1908. The occasion was often mentioned. Unfortunately however, war broke out over Europe on the day of the anniversary, and many of the ceremonies had to be cancelled. Nevertheless, a solemn celebration of the centenary took place in Grugliasco, on January 2, 1917.

The day began with the singing of the *Salve Regina*, composed for the occasion by Brother Henri-Émile. That evening, His Eminence Cardinal Richelmy, Archbishop of Turin, celebrated the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

After an emotional singing of the *Te Deum*, Brother Stratonique recited a consecration ending with the words: “...*as we strive to promote the welfare of the Institute, it will always be for the greater glory of God, the honor of Mary, and for the salvation of souls.*” The future of the Institute was in God’s hands and He would never fail.

## Diamond Jubilee

February 2, 1918 was the sixtieth anniversary of the Taking of the Habit by Brother Stratonique. The cruel and devastating war during which so many of our brothers died was hardly the setting for a joyful celebration.

Yet, the occasion could not be overlooked. The brothers of the Province of the Hermitage where Brother Stratonique had taken the Habit had already begun planning for the event the day after

the annual retreat of September 9, 1917. The ceremony that was held the following February in Grugliasco is described in the *Bulletin of the Institute*<sup>66</sup> of April 1918. The celebration was an eloquent testimony of Marist family spirit at a time when the agony and devastation of war was everywhere.

### **Apostle of New Vocations**

In his letters, conferences and personal interviews, Brother Stratonique often approached the topic of the need for new vocations. Writing to a Brother in Canada he noted: *“I am happy to learn that you have eighty-five new vocations. I thank God for your success. I am certain that you will soon increase that number to one hundred.”*

He would seize every possible occasion to talk about vocations. He stressed not only number of new vocations, but also the quality they were to have. His General Administration in 1907 followed the tragic events of 1903 when the number of Juniors had fallen to 600. By 1924, in spite of the war of 1914-1918, numbers increased to 1,174.

### **The Preservation of Vocations**

He not only encouraged new vocations, but he also cared deeply about the ones that God had already sent. When he was first appointed Assistant for the Province of the Hermitage, one of the first things he did was to take one of the better teachers of the boarding school at Valbenoîte and re-assign him to the Novitiate. Regretting the decision, the director of the boarding school complained: *“What were you thinking? He was one of our best teachers and he was highly regarded by the parents.”*

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<sup>66</sup> *Bulletin de l'Institut*, avril 1918, Vol. 7, p. 396



The Assistant replied: *“What was I thinking? I was thinking about our children, because novices are exactly that. They are children in our religious family and should be given priority over children belonging to others.”*

If the Institute enjoyed a period of recovery during difficult times, it was due in large measure to Brother Stratonique who maintained a positive outlook towards vocations throughout his administration.

### **Religious Attitude**

The elements of Reverend Brother Stratonique’s religious attitude included: the spirit of faith, the spiritual life, trust in Divine Providence, and the frequent Exercise of the Presence of God.

Expressions of these were plentiful in his Circulars, his letters, in his conversations and in the manner that he conducted himself.

A Brother bidding him farewell before leaving for France through Modane by rail recalled his advice: *“You will be going through a very long tunnel. You will have just enough time to recite the rosary. Try it. It would be time well spent.”*

Once, while visiting a magnificent school in South America, a representative asked him for his impressions. *“Sir, responded Reverend Brother Stratonique, had I first visited the chapel, it would have served to summarize my impressions of the entire visit.”* The point was well made, for regrettably, the school had no chapel.

Following the example that Father Champagnat had set before him, during the War of 1914, he turned to Our Lady and requested that the Salve Regina be recited at the end of evening prayer.

## New Foundations

During his administration, the Institute was extended to four new countries: Greece in 1907, Peru in 1908, Chile in 1911 and Germany in 1913.

In 1911, three new foundations were established in the missions: Ceylon (Sri-Lanka), Madagascar and in the Congo.

Brother Stratonique was always broad-minded in his dealings with people. When nearly the entire Institute was concentrated in France, he objected strongly to terms frequently used, such as: stranger, outsider, or foreigner to describe people living beyond the boundaries of France. *“There are no strangers among us,”* he would say, *“in our Institute all are at home and are brothers. Like the Church itself, we reach out and embrace everyone.”*

Brother Stratonique always derived a great deal of pleasure from reading letters sent to him from the missions.

## The Circulars

Men of action are usually not interested in long theoretical proposals to solve immediate problems. Such was the case with Brother Stratonique. He preferred an approach that was simple, direct, and often repeated. He frequently made use of the exam-



Betafo Madagascar. Walk to the crater of Tritriva 1925



ples set by our Founder and the first brothers. If the theme of the retreat of 1917 was to encourage the brothers to have a spiritual outlook in spite of everything, he did so by drawing examples from the lives of Father Champagnat and the first Brothers: François, Louis-Marie, Jean-Baptiste, Luis, Laurent, Léon and many others.

The basis for his way of life was to follow the example left by the Founder and his early followers. What was also remarkable was the care that he took in gathering various accounts of favors attributed through the intercession of our Venerable Founder. It was his hope that some day he would be Beatified.

### **Testimony during the Process of Beatification**

At age 55, Brother Stratonique was listed number 13 of the 60 people who were called to witness to the Servant of God, Marcellin-Joseph-Benoît Champagnat during the process of the Summarius of acts in his favor.

When called upon during as a preliminary witness to give the basis for his testimony during the deposition, he replied: *“I have known 97 brothers who have lived with the Venerable, and I have learned from them and from accounts that I have read, all that I could say about the virtues of Father Champagnat. I also have a number of signed documents that have helped me prepared for my presentation.”*

### **His Conferences**

Brother Stratonique had all of the gifts of a true orator, and his conferences left an indelible impression on those who were fortunate enough to have attended them.



His changing body language, his shifting eyes, his countless gestures, whether slow and deliberate or sudden and abrupt, all contributed to what he was saying. He was glib of speech, typical of those coming from southern France. He had a wide range of intonations at his command, and he would use all of them.

People enjoyed listening to him, and were transfixed, except when glancing at the clock that always seemed to be moving too quickly. He knew an incredible amount of facts and used anecdotes get his point across. People would cling to every word that he would say.

Because of his success as a speaker, he touched the lives of many juniors, novices and brothers.

## **The General Chapter of 1920**

A General Chapter was convened at Grugliasco on May 16, 1920. It was the second time the site had been chosen, and 61 delegates attended. At the first session, which was presided over by Brother Stratonique, he announced that he declined re-election because of his age. After a single round of voting which was almost unanimous, Brother Diogène was elected as his successor.

The new Superior General enthusiastically delegated Brother Stratonique to make the canonical visitations of the Provinces and to preside over several of the retreats. During the next holiday, he traveled to Great Britain and Ireland, returning to Grugliasco through Belgium. In December, he left for Brazil and continued on to Argentina, Chile and Peru. He was joyfully welcomed everywhere and for his part, he was happy to acquaint himself more personally with the brothers and their undertakings.



*Italy, Grugliasco 12<sup>th</sup> General Chapter 1920*

During his visits, he would report his impressions to Brother Diogène. He knew how to give an enthusiastic account when things were going well, and he knew how to be optimistic when things were not going so well. He deeply admired the dedication of all of the brothers.

For example, such and such a Brother had spent forty-five years in devoted service, twenty-two of them in Brazil. No one could have done more. This other Brother may have weighed only 42 kilos on the scale, but given his commitment, intelligence and religious spirit, he was worth his weight in gold. When it came to manual work, this other Brother was the personification of Father Champagnat.

During his travels, he described the beauty and marvels of nature: the banana trees, gigantic bamboo trees, tropical fruit trees, etc...

Upon returning to the Mother House, Brother Stratonique devoted himself to such things as writing numerous letters, gardening, giving conferences at the Second Novitiate and in Houses of Formation which at the time were numerous around Grugliasco: Bairo, Gassino, San Mauro, San Maurizio.

## **Vice-Postulator of the Cause of Brother François**

Brother Stratonique was grateful that Brother Diogène appointed him Vice-Postulator of the Cause of Beatification of Brother François.

He did everything in his power to promote the Cause, requesting prayers through the intercession of Brother François, calling to mind his role in the Institute, his virtues and the example that he had set. One of the first things that he did was to go on a pilgrimage to the Maissonette. He described at length the condition of the house where he was born, recalling how the remains of Father Champagnat were hidden in this house from 1903 to 1920.

In 1923, Brother Stratonique went before the Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons requesting that the relevant procedure of the diocesan tribunal be put into place, a major step in advancing the Cause for which he was responsible.

## **His Death**

Brother Stratonique always enjoyed excellent health and had never been seriously ill. At age 83, he never wore a sweater in wintertime and was always faithful to the demands of the common life. He was always faithful in following the community schedule. Although he generally always stood erect, he began to lean forward a little, and began to walk more slowly.

In 1925, Brother Diogène requested that he preside at the ceremonies of the centenary of the foundation of Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage. He gladly did so, for eighty years prior to this, Brother François had received him there when he entered. He always spoke enthusiastically about this hallowed ground, in a special way, Father Champagnat's reliquary.



Upon returning from Grugliasco, stomach ailments became more frequent and more painful and signaled a life threatening illness. He willingly accepted his condition and agreed to move into the infirmary where accommodations were more suitable for someone in ill health.

He began to accept the condition of being a patient. At times, he appeared almost healthy. He had always wanted to be like the Father Champagnat and enjoyed it when people would read to him from his life.

On Saturday, March 6, 1926, he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and quietly expired while receiving the Sacrament of the Sick.

And so it was that one of the most outstanding members of our religious family, one who had dedicated his entire life and talents to it, passed away in the peace of the Lord. He once said: *"I do not want to be a Superior who dwells on the Sorrowful Mysteries of life."* He succeeded, for he was one who knew how to renew a sense of purpose and energy in his brothers and knew how to direct them to brighter tomorrows when conditions were indeed somber. It would seem that God had chosen him to lead the brothers through cataclysmic times when optimism, dynamism, a sense of humor, confidence in Divine Providence and the protection of Our Blessed Mother were needed most.



## **Praying with Brother Stratonique**

Brother Stratonique, reflecting on your life gives us reason to thank God through the Virgin, Mary for the wonderful gift you continue to be to our religious family.

- You were born on March 18, 1843, in Vion, a small rural community of Ardèche. We know nothing about your family origins. As a bright and playful child, you attended a school conducted by the Marist Brothers.
- The principal of the school, Brother Isaïe, took notice of your intelligent and joyful disposition and invited you to attend the Novitiate at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage. At the time, you were 14 years of age. Your light heartedness did not hinder the brief formation that you received at the time.
- After serving as cook for two years, you were assigned to teach elementary school for four years. In spite of the fact that your first director did not look favorably upon you because of your less than average height, you went on to become an excellent teacher.



- In 1864, at age twenty-four, you were assigned to the boarding school at Valbenoîte in Saint-Étienne. The exceptional director, Brother Cyrion, centered his attention on the development of young brothers, especially in the area of mathematics. For some twenty years, you worked effectively with young engineering students entering l'École des Mines
- In 1882, upon the death of Brother Cyrion whom you deeply cared about during your entire life, you replaced him as director and introduced the Association of Former Students that would play an important role in the school.
- You were elected by the General Chapter of 1883 to serve as Assistant in the Province of the Hermitage. You were at the prime of life and served in this capacity for twenty-four years. In 1885, you were responsible for bringing our Institute into Canada, a country that always remained dear to your heart.
- On October 14, 1907 at Grugliasco, you were elected the fifth successor to Father Champagnat. In your first Circular, you focused on the Founder, who was the model of your life. The brothers discovered and appreciated your Marist spirit, your simplicity and your optimism based on confidence in God.
- You drew your Marist spirit from the Hermitage where you listened to Brother François and Brother

Jean-Baptiste as well as to many other brothers who had known Marcellin Champagnat. Your spirit of optimism sustained many of the brothers during difficult times.

- Among the outstanding achievements of your administration was the foundation of the International Juniorate (l'Œuvre Saint-François-Xavier) that made it possible to send missionary brothers throughout the world. You also initiated the Bulletin of the Institute that served as a record of our history. As well, you started the Learning Exposition (Exposition Scholaire) that was destroyed during the bombings of World War II.
- You loved the Institute as if it was your own family, and you took pride in it. While aware of its failings, you focused your attention on its positive aspects and its achievements. At Carmagnola, you told the brothers who were working at the production of Arcabuse: "This is an apostolic endeavor for it supports our missions."
- In 1917, you did everything possible to celebrate the Centenary of the Founding of the Institute. In your Circular of March 19, 1908, you requested that a novena for the blessing of that event be started. A summary of the history of the Institute is contained in your Circular of January 2, 1917.



On February 2, 1918, you had the pleasure of celebrating your diamond jubilee.

- Seeking and caring for new vocations was a recurrent theme in your conferences and correspondence. You wished that new vocations not only be abundant but that they also be authentic. You entrusted the care of new vocations to brothers who were most capable of furthering their growth and development.
- Your spiritual life, characterized by its simplicity, had as its foundation: your spirit of faith, your spiritual outlook, your trust in Divine Providence and your frequent exercise of the Presence of God. Like Father Champagnat whom you liked to imitate, you had recourse to Mary as your Ordinary Resource. During World War I, you had the Salve Regina recited at the end of evening prayer in order to obtain protection for our brothers who were in military service.
- In your Circulars, you constantly make use of examples from the life of the Founder and from the early brothers. You were chosen as a choice witness in the process of Beatification for Father Champagnat. You declared that you knew 97 brothers who had lived with him.



- Your gifts as a public speaker electrified those who attended your conferences. Brother Diogène entrusted to you the visitation of Provinces where you were always enthusiastically received.

Brother Stratonique, we join you in thanking the Lord for the gift of your vocation and that of Father Champagnat along with all of the brothers in heaven.

May we follow your example that our hearts may overflow with love and optimism for the future of our Institute.

Amen.

# COMPANIONS

MARVELLOUS



**17**

**Brother  
Diogene**

**6<sup>th</sup>  
Superior  
General  
(1860-1942)**



The following is offered as a summary of the biography found in “*Nos Supérieurs*”<sup>67</sup>.

## Childhood

Henri Becuwe, later to become Brother Diogène, was born in Herzele, department of the North, on Saturday, February 18, 1860. He was baptized the following day. His parents, agricultural workers of modest means, were very religious and provided two sons to the Institute: Henri, the oldest, and Alphonse, who would later become Brother Évergile. Both of them attended the school directed by the Marist Brothers in Wormoudt.

According to his brother, Henri loved to study was well behaved and was one of the best students in the school. However, there was nothing that would set him apart during times of recreation. He spoke Flemish as did his classmates while they were at play. As his brother would have it, besides being intelligent and hardworking, Henri also had good business sense. He earned several “*privileges*” which was a term used to redeem punishments received by the students. As for himself, he hardly ever used them because he was always well be-

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<sup>67</sup> *Nos Supérieurs*, Économat général, Saint-Genis-Laval 1953. pp. 339-404

haved. He once, approached a confrere who he knew was in need of a “privilege” and said to him: *“I know that you are late with a composition. Let’s make a deal. I’ll write it for you for two cents. Both of us will gain by it.”* The deal was quickly agreed upon. In those days, two cents was enough to buy a very nice dessert that would complete a frugal lunch consisting of a couple of pieces of buttered bread.

## **The Novitiate**

More than once, Brother Diogène said that he attributed his vocation to the Blessed Virgin because his grandmother remembered him in the complete rosary that she recited every day. Brother Crysole, the principal of the school, directed young Henri to the Novitiate at Beaucamps; he was only 13 years of age. At that time, one would have to be 15 years of age before receiving the habit, so he remained there for two years. For a long time, he acted as lamp lighter. Picking up oil lamps every morning, cleaning them, filling them with fuel and returning them to the Provincial House every night was not an easy task. After receiving the habit and receiving the name Diogène, he related more than once how his classmates would compare him to the Greek philosopher Dionysius who, went about the streets of Athens as a lamp-lighter.

## **Early Development**

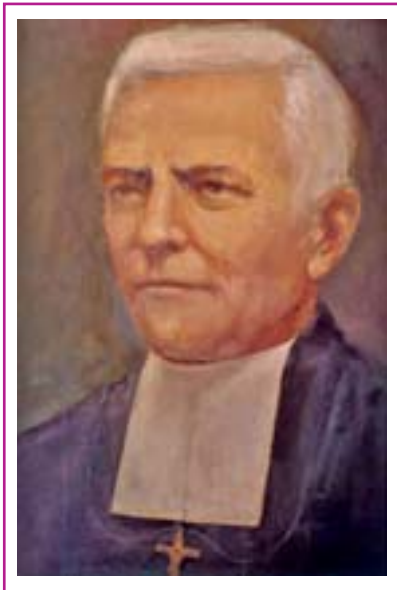
Because he had been in the Novitiate longer than usual, within a few days after having received the habit, young Brother Diogène was assigned to Lens as cook. When his assignment as cook came to an end, the Brother Director requested that he remain at Lens as a teacher, and so it was that he began his teaching career. Being responsible for a class of 120 beginning students soon helped him overcome his previous juvenile behavior. Having such a large class of students was not unusual in those days.



Using what little free time he had, he prepared himself for his certification and diploma. He would not remain with beginning students for very long. The next fifteen years of his career would find him teaching in large boarding schools: Beaucamps (1877), Paris-Plaisance (1880) and Haubourdin (1885). He obtained his basic diploma in Lille in 1879. Four years later, he received his advanced diploma with honor in Paris. This achievement did not diminish his eagerness to learn more. He went on to master a variety of subject matters: literature, science, mathematics, modern languages and Latin.

### **The Scholasticate at Beaucamps**

At age 32, in the prime of his academic career, Brother Diogène was assigned to the Scholasticate in Beaucamps as director. With the help of talented and enthusiastic teachers, each year, many young students succeeded in receiving their basic diploma. As a leader, Brother Diogène stood apart with his knowledge, his patience, and when necessary, his position. He taught as much by personal example as he did through instruction. He had the ability to instill in his students the desire to be excellent teachers and religious.



During recreation, he was the center of attention. He knew how to stir-up lively conversations with the teachers. He always had something interesting to say; he was always even-tempered, congenial and cheerful. He never lost sight of the young brothers during outings and

he organized activities for them in keeping with the various seasons of the year. He deeply cared for them and knew how to express it.

For seven years, Brother Diogène was the heart and soul of the Scholasticate at Beaucamps.

## **The Provincial**

It was not until 1892 that Brother Diogène made Perpetual Profession. He delayed in doing so, because in those days that vow was rather uncommon and doing so would increase one's chances of becoming director in one of the larger communities. In effect, that is exactly what happened. Immediately after having taken the vow, he was asked to be the director of the Scholasticate. In 1898, he joined the first group of brothers taking part in the Second Novitiate. It had recently been put in place by the General Council as a means of preparing brothers for future leadership positions. After having completed the six months experience, he returned to Beaucamps with the title "Brother Visitor", a term which, in the new Constitutions would be translated "Brother Provincial".

At the time, the Province of Beaucamps was one of the most significant in the Institute. He received a hero's welcome upon his return. Communities celebrated his homecoming, and students cheered when he visited their classrooms. When he visited civil and religious authorities, they recognized him as a man with exceptional ability. He was not only a brilliant conversationalist, but he was also a leader who was skillful, diplomatic, and the personification of *savoir-faire*.

## **The Year 1903**

It has been described in our Marist history as "*the terrible year*". Brother Diogène had to deal with an un-precedent situation. The Province of Beaucamps was made up of some sixty institutions,



among which were large boarding schools. On government orders, all of these establishments were to be dissolved, and most of them within a period of three months.

Looking back, one can only imagine how difficult it must have been for the Brother Provincial to deal with the resulting chaos. No one knew what might be the best course of action to take. Brother Diogène signed letters authorizing secularization for those brothers who were trying to save some of the schools. They were to abandon the religious habit in favor of secular clothing. He initiated a number of changes to deflect inspectors whose motives were questionable. In an effort to save the Provincial House from being taken over by the government, a large number of the older brothers were moved into the residence in an effort to claim exemption on the basis of having a large number of the sick and the infirmed to be cared for.

Furthermore, a safe haven had to be found for those young students living in the Juniorate, the Novitiate and the Scholasticate. Fortunately, Belgium was nearby and willing to help.

As one might expect, the French legal system came into play and sought to convict brothers who merely pretended to follow the demands of secularization, or those other brothers who were involved in restoring communities that had previously been dissolved. The course of events was enough to discourage anyone. However, Brother Diogène rose to the occasion and quickly proved himself to be a capable advisor, a skillful negotiator and a first class “lawyer”. If in a court of law he were to lose some of the cases, he won the majority of them, and in the end, justice was served.

Thanks to the intervention of Divine Providence and the untiring efforts of Brother Diogène, what could have been a total disaster was limited, to a large extent.



## **Assistant General**

Brother Diogène was elected as a delegate to the Chapter of 1903 by a margin of 249 votes of the 256 ballots that were cast, reflecting the esteem of the brothers in his regard. Upon the death of Brother Climaque who had been Assistant, Brother Diogène was chosen by the Chapter to replace him. As the new Brother Assistant, he went on visitations that brought him, on occasion, as far away as Brazil. Everywhere that he went he was admired for his sensitivity, his composure, his goodness and his savoir faire. Whispers of: "*There is the next Superior General*", could be heard in conversations. However, before that, years of major challenges awaited him. He would be isolated in Beaucamps during the war years of 1914-1918, for it was situated right near the front lines.

## **Impasse at Beaucamps**

When war broke out, Brother Diogène was visiting the Provincial House in Pommerœul, Belgium. The situation there was difficult. Brothers were being inducted into the military on both sides of the conflict. Brother Diogène succeeded in having juniors and novices of German extraction cross over into Holland. Belgium was soon almost completely over-run by Germany, and northern France would be next. Notwithstanding, Brother Diogène succeeded in reaching Beaucamps where he lived with some 30 older brothers.

On October 10, 1914, a Prussian soldier came to the door requesting accommodations for wounded soldiers. Brother Diogène immediately offered him two large rooms that were improvised with everything that was necessary for the care of the wounded. Straw mats were put together to accommodate the casualties. Brother Diogène quickly earned the respect of the military leaders by his quick and effective co-operation.



He urged the people living in the neighborhood to remain indoors and to remain calm during the two or three days of troop movements. Troop activity soon shifted towards the south and relative peace was restored. The mayor of Beaucamps had fled along with his family. Observing how the local citizens turned to Brother Diogène when they needed help, the German occupiers wanted him to become acting mayor. However, as he strongly objected, and given the qualities of moral authority that he had, they referred to him as, “The Prior”. And so it was, that for the duration of the war, he was acting mayor not only of Beaucamps, but of neighboring communities as well.

Military occupation followed days of combat, and the front remained relatively stable in that area for the next four years. The residence at Beaucamps served as a barrack while the terrifying sound of bullets and mortar shells whistled overhead until 1918.

## Life in Beaucamps

Brother “Prior” was never idle. As soon as they were threatened by any form of requisition from the military, rich and poor, agricultural workers and laborers alike, came and sought help from Brother Diogène. Brother Eubert, one of the older brothers in Beaucamps wrote: *“I tried my best to divert some of the untimely visits which were becoming more and more frequent; however, it became very difficult for me to do so. I can’t count the number of times I saw Brother Diogène going to the German headquarters to see the commandant.”*

That same Brother kept a record of the daily activities of Brother Diogène. In the collection “*Nos Supérieurs*”<sup>68</sup>, some of the war stories of Brother Diogène have been recorded by those who knew him best. Also recorded, is the tragic event of Brother Assistant risking his life to come to the rescue of local residents, an event that would earn him the well-deserved “Légion d’Honneur”.

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. *Nos Supérieurs* Économat général, Saint-Genis-Laval 1953, pp. 356-363

## **Election to the General Administration**

At the General Chapter of 1920 which was held at Grugliasco, Italy, Brother Diogène was elected as the 6<sup>th</sup> successor of Father Champagnat. The local community at the Mother House joined the delegates of the Chapter in celebrating his election. At sixty years of age, the new Superior General enjoyed good health, and the entire Institute considered him as a leader sent to them by God.

His insightful leadership in directing the revisions of our Rules and Constitutions in order for them to be in keeping with the new Code of Canon Law was greatly appreciated by the delegates to the Chapter. Also appreciated was his ability to bring the work of the Chapter to a successful conclusion.

New and former members of the General Council admired his ability to link orderly methodology to wisdom and insight. They were to be the hallmarks of his General Administration and would impact every sector of the Institute.

## **Overview of the First Period of the General Administration (1920-1932)**

In the first period of its administration, the Institute experienced none of the challenges that it would have during the second. The terrible war had just ended. It seemed that peace would last forever and that another war could not even be imagined. They had labeled the war of 1914-1918 as “the last of all wars”. The League of Nations would solve all potential problems; it was possible to hope all things.

As a matter of fact, with the exception of Mexico, where our undertakings were under attack as early as 1924, and in Turkey, where some of our schools were destroyed, it was a time of relative peace and calm. Significant developments were being made in the world in general and in the Institute in particular.



*Venta de Baños, Spain - Visite of Brother Diogène - 1930*

In 1920, the Institute was made up of 22 Provinces, 4,774 temporary or perpetually professed brothers and 1,773 juniors, novices and postulants in formation. At the end of this first period in 1932, it was made up of 24 Provinces, 6,033 brothers and 2,868 in various stages of formation. Admittedly all of the progress that was enjoyed could not be attributed to one man in the person of the Superior General; however, Brother Diogène was certainly responsible for much of the progress because of the qualities that he demonstrated: his quiet and organized methodology, his insightful directives, both written and oral, and his life of prayer.

### **Management of the General Council**

Before all else, Brother Diogène took full responsibility for knowing exactly what was being presented to his Council. Each session

was well planned and thought out. Every deliberation was carried out with prudence. He was trusted and well respected by other Roman Congregations.

During his General Administration, he wrote thousands of letters and 46 circulars, each averaging 80 to 100 pages. The brothers at the Second Novitiate enjoyed his conferences as did those making retreats. He welcomed everyone, Brother Assistants and Juniors from Saint-Francis-Xavier alike. In him, personal involvement, religious attitude, hospitality, goodness, tranquility and confidence in God all came together in perfect harmony. The Institute benefited by his many gifts, and he was sought by many others.

### **A day in the Life of the Superior General**

From pages 367 to 371 of his biography, the author gave an account of how Brother Diogène spent a typical day, with rising around 4:00 a.m. to evening prayer. For our purposes here, we will simply summarize what he wrote using one of his lines: *“Everything in him reflected a certain calm and reflective approach to life that left nothing to chance or negligence.”*

### **Joyful “Mysteries”**

One of the joyful moments that Brother Diogène enjoyed at the beginning of his administration was when Rome proclaimed the virtues of Father Champagnat as being heroic. Brother Diogène left Grugliasco accompanied by Brother Stratonique in order to attend the official proclamation that was held at the Vatican on July 11, 1920. After the reading of the proclamation, Pope Benedict XV delivered a homily and spoke highly of the Founder, using as a basis the scriptural passage: *“The good tree bears good fruit.”*



The following day, during the course of a private audience, Brother Diogène was delighted to hear the Holy Father's comment: *"I love your Congregation, and I admire it very much!"*

A short time later, a less formal ceremony took place at the Hermitage involving the precious remains of our holy Founder. Following the decree of expulsion of 1903, the Hermitage was in danger of being taken over by the government. The remains of Father Champgnat were secretly transferred to the maisonnette, the birthplace of Brother François. In 1920, there was an easing of tensions in France, and the situation turned in our favor. On December 1, 1920, Brother Diogène, accompanied by Brother Lin, went to the maisonnette to retrieve the remains of Father Champagnat. They brought them back to the chapel at the Hermitage where they remained awaiting his Beatification.

In 1922, the French Government let it be known that it was about to soften its approach to the harsh measures that it had taken place in 1903. It looked more favorably upon some Congregations, especially those contributing to the interests of the French government abroad. Brother Diogène undertook measures that greatly enhanced our stature in France by going through the legal process. Our Congregation would be looked upon more favorably if it bore the title: "The Marist Brothers of the Missions." He created a profile with these stipulations which remained un-touched in government files for years. The response to the government's request was filed on October 31, 1922. It was not until March 27, 1929 that it was approved by The Chamber of Deputies. The outcome would have permitted the opening of six houses of formation whose total number of personnel was not to exceed 900. Allowance would also have been made for the opening of six additional houses to provide for the needs of foreign missionaries, the elderly brothers or the infirmed. The entire undertaking remained a dead issue because it was never presented to the Senate for final approval.

Similarly, Brother Diogène had to re-purchase Saint-Genis-Laval. In 1924, after a long period of inactivity, the real estate market suddenly became more active. We learned that the government Internal Revenue service was putting the property up for auction and that the Hospice Society of Lyons was interested in placing a bid for its purchase as they were expanding their facilities. On August 20, 1926, we made a bid to re-purchase the property for the sum of 2,500.000 francs. We had to re-purchase from the government what was ours in the first place.

### **Sorrowful “Mysteries”**

At the beginning of his mandate, Brother Diogène suffered the loss of several brothers who were his close associates: Brother Pierre-Joseph, Econome General, Brother Candidus, Procurator General, and on March 7, 1926, Brother Stratonique, former Superior General. He announced the death of the later to Institute by giving a beautiful eulogy, saying among other things: “...*he was a tireless worker, an eternal optimist, a fervent and worthy religious, a zealous and enterprising Superior.*”

In 1924, we were told to close our schools in Turkey within days. New legislation had been passed forbidding denominational schools, thus ending thirty years of dedicated service.

In Mexico, a rather violent persecution took place from 1926 to 1940. If the brothers succeeded in maintaining certain teaching positions, it was because they were willing to take certain risks and divert the attention of officials. They had to disguise themselves, break up into small groups, move often, hide all religious symbols and avoid the police. In 1940, houses of formation were changed to new locations no less than twelve times. In his circulars, Brother Diogène frequently included up-dates from the region.



## Re-election to the Generalate

In spite of the fact that he would have preferred that the responsibility of leading the Institute be passed on to younger and stronger hands, in Grugliasco, on May 24, 1932, on the feast of Our Lady of



*Italy Grugliasco 13<sup>th</sup> General Chapter 1932*

Help and on the anniversary of his first election, Brother Diogène was re-elected as Superior General by a convincing majority. He was 72 years of age at the time and all of the members of his Council were also re-elected, reflecting the satisfaction of the membership with the leadership and the growth of the Institute.

The number of students had increased from 103,000 to 135,000. At the closing of the Chapter, the delegates left with the impression that God blessed the Institute and that it was in capable hands.



## **Diamond Jubilee**

May 20, 1935 was chosen as the date for the celebration of Brother Diogène's sixtieth anniversary in the religious life. It was an occasion for the local community to show him their affection and for the entire Institute to recognize him as well. Grugliasco was chosen as the location for the festive occasion. In order to emphasize family spirit and the intimate nature of the celebration the only guests invited were Brothers Michaélis and Flamien, both of whom were also celebrating their sixtieth anniversary. They were Assistants General who had been associated with Brother Diogène for over twenty- seven years, sharing both the "joyful" and "sorrowful" mysteries of his life.

## **Légion d'Honneur**

Brother Diogène's actions during the war won for him the admiration of the inhabitants of Beaucamps and those of the local communities as well. Everyone expected that he would receive an official recognition by the French Government. As the anticipated recognition never materialized, the local citizens submitted an official request. It was not until 1933 that an acknowledgement of some kind was made of the request. Local newspapers published lists that had appeared in the publication "l'Officiel" in which the name of R.F. Diogène appeared as a recipient of "la Légion d'Honneur." At the time, he was directing a retreat at the Hermitage and declined the invitation of going to Beaucamps to receive the medal that would have been given to him by the local citizens. It was finally sent to him at the end of August, 1934. Upon receiving it, he reflected for a moment, and then placed it in the back of one of the drawers in his desk.

## **The District of Germany**

This administrative unit was started when Brother Diogène was Brother Assistant, and it developed rapidly at the end of the war of 1914-



1918. Within a ten year period, several flourishing secondary schools were opened along the Rhine. However, in February of 1937, a severe persecution of the Church broke out in Germany. The school administrators were advised that nine of our schools would have to close within two months. Efforts were made to move to neighboring countries such as Poland, Holland and Austria; however, the District finally had to withdraw to Switzerland and Uruguay. Young people who were in formation went to Italy. All District undertakings in Germany came to a halt. The only house remaining was the Provincial House in Furth.

## Spain

For three years, the situation of the brothers in Spain would be a nightmare for the Superior General because he was powerless to come to the aid of the brothers who were being persecuted. From the beginning, brothers were killed, entire communities were put into prisons, and others took flight. As was proposed by the communist leaders during the first chaotic days, Brother Diogène tried to negotiate with them for the release of some of the brothers as well as the novices and postulants in Avellanas. The communists had promised to allow the community to escape if they were to receive 200,000 francs.

The quick resulting transaction made it possible for one hundred and eighteen of our members to cross over the Pyrenees and enter into areas of Spain that were under the control of General Franco. A second attempt at negotiating the release of some of the Brothers was not as successful. More than one hundred brothers were put into prison, and of those, forty-four were killed.

When the three year conflict of 1936-1939 finally ended, one hundred and seventy two of our brothers were victims of the Marxist takeover. Added to this number were the more than forty brothers who were killed in combat; the loss of material goods would be incalculable.

## **The Coming War**

The final and no less challenging difficulty faced by Brother Diogène was the war which was approaching. The month of March of 1939 would mark the beginning of the return to France by some of the brothers. The brothers were to avoid remaining east of the Alps for fear of being separated from the rest of the Institute. The General Council therefore made the decision to return to Saint-Genis-Laval. When Brother Diogène made the announcement, the brothers were caught by surprise. The novices from San Maurizio arrived on March 25<sup>th</sup>. With the return of so many of the brothers, Saint-Genis soon became the center of dynamic activity that it once was. The thirty-six year period of mourning that lasting from the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows in 1903, to the feast of the Annunciation in 1939 seemed to have ended.

As a post-script, we were able to recover all of our Provincial Houses in France.

## **The War**

The catastrophic event that so many feared broke out in September of 1939. Within a period of a few days, some 600 brothers were mobilized, sent to various training camps and exposed to all kinds of difficulties.

Yet, the worst was yet to come; Belgium was invaded in May of 1940, and the brothers of Arlon took flight to Saint-Genis. Following the collapse of the front lines by the French, a general rout took place. In the middle of the night of June 17<sup>th</sup>, those living at Saint-Genis were sent to the boarding school at Pélussin, located at the foot of Mont Pilat. The general chaos that occurred during these evacuations cannot be described. On June 29<sup>th</sup>, after the signing of the armistice, the Superiors were allowed to return to Saint-Genis. At the time, Brother Diogène was 80 years of age. He courageously began working again, relying on Divine Providence.



## **The Man**

Brother Diogène was impressive. More than average in height, with a distinctively charming manner, he captured people's attention even at first glance. His beautiful white hair added an air of dignity to his general appearance. His facial expressions reflected a harmonious blend of kindness and strength, energy and calm. Those who met him were quickly won over by his gentleness and affability.

His manner of speaking was unusually clear, simple and direct. His keen intelligence and accurate recall helped make his lectures both interesting and thought provoking. His delivery was neither rigid nor overly technical, and it was not beyond him to occasionally introduce an amusing anecdote that would make people smile.

His manner of greeting was caring and simple, with only a hint of nobility. He never lacked kindness, and his first words would immediately put others at ease. When speaking, he gave one the impression that nothing was more important in the world than the present moment. He was very polite and beyond reproach in everything that he did.

## **His Circulars**

For twenty-two years, Brother Diogène regularly wrote circulars to the brothers. Without fail, he would write them at Christmas and on the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians. In his circulars, he would always include instructions and documents coming from Rome. At times, he would include entire encyclicals. In the first ten to twenty pages, he would share pertinent information dealing with specific issues. Having prayed and reflected at great length before writing, his reflections were always well expressed and appropriate. As Superior, he knew the needs of the Institute and knew how to provide the needed guidelines.

## **His Religious Attitude**

In this area, as in all others, Brother Diogène was reserved and discrete. There was nothing peculiar about his religious attitude; it was rock-solid, and profound. He had been brought up in a very religious family, and from it, he drew his lively faith, and it carried over into all of the religious practices of the Institute. He fervently performed his religious exercises quietly. The only practice that he would add to the regular community prayers was a few visits to the Blessed Sacrament at the end of the day.

## **His Wisdom**

Sound judgment was certainly one of the key aspects of Brother Diogène's personality. His accurate assessment of people and events was often astounding. He used his time wisely and did not waste his time on wild imaginings and useless projects. He lived in the real world. He preferred to work quietly and effectively dealing with matters at hand. If he did not receive the public's attention, it did not disturb him. He did not favor drawing public attention to issues that would soon be forgotten. His words were always kind and gentle, never rude or bitter. He knew how to lead and give orders, but always did so graciously, and often by way of invitation. He encouraged others to do things that they may have been reluctant to do, but because of him, they did it gladly.

## **His Final Illness and Holy Death**

During the course of 1941, Brother Diogène's health began to deteriorate. He began to suffer severe coughing and breathing difficulties during the night. The doctors diagnosed the condition as relating to age rather than to any specific medical problem. They



recommended complete rest and appropriate care. The appropriate care was provided; however, it was difficult for him to take a complete rest, for as soon as he began to feel better again, he would continue working.

With typical prudence and foresight to the end, on October 29<sup>th</sup>, he asked to receive the Sacrament of the Sick. It was administered to him in his room in the presence of those who had worked with him and some of the brothers from the community. He thanked those present and said that the only thing that he wanted was to be faithful to the will of God. He added that he wanted to offer his sufferings to God for the Church and for his religious family.

One of his final consolations was to meet all of the brothers of the local community for a final farewell. This occurred on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942. He died peacefully on the evening of February 23<sup>rd</sup>. His funeral was presided over by Cardinal Gerlier, Archbishop of Lyons in the presence of a large gathering of friends of the Institute: priests, religious and lay.

If there were one epitaph that would be appropriate over the grave of Brother Diogène, it would have to be the inscription on the medal of the *“Légion d’Honneur”* with a slight modification. Rather than *“fifty-one years”*, it would read: *“sixty-seven years of commitment and self-sacrifice.”*



## **Praying with Brother Diogène**

Brother Diogène, a review of your life has been for us an opportunity to thank God for His goodness to you, and to thank you for your generous self-giving in the service of your brothers.

- On February 8, 1860, you were born in a family of agricultural workers of humble means in Flanders, north of France. Your family was very religious. With Alphonse, your younger brother, you attended the school run by the Marist Brothers in Woumoudt.
- According to your brother, you were an intelligent and hard-working student. When you were 13 years of age, the director of the school guided you to the Novitiate in Beaucamps where you remained for two years. You often attributed your vocation to The Blessed Virgin in response to the prayers of your grand-mother who recited the rosary every day.
- You were sent to Lens to work in the kitchen before being assigned to teach a class of 120 beginning students. You succeeded so well that you found time to study for your basic diploma which you obtained in Lille in 1879.



- For fifteen years, you taught in our large boarding schools in Beaucamps, Paris and Haubourdin. In 1883, you received your advanced diploma with honors, and thanks to your persistence and hard work, you went on and master other disciplines as well.
- At age 32, the Superiors assign you as Master of Scholastics in Beaucamps. For seven years, you were responsible for the formation of young brothers confided to your care. You did so through your teaching, but especially through your example. You were remembered because of your knowledge, your even temper, your patience and your affability. You knew how to let young people know that you cared for them.
- In 1898, after your Second Novitiate, you were named Provincial of Beaucamps. You were admired by all of the brothers and your visits to various communities were always an occasion for joy as were your visits to the classrooms. You demonstrated tact and diplomatic skill in your encounters with religious and civil authorities.
- You courageously confronted the challenges 1903 which were labeled “the terrible year.” You had to save the schools, find shelter for those in houses of formation, and defend the brothers before the courts who were falsely accused in issues of secularization. You won most of the cases, due in large measure, to your insightful advice.
- The brothers of your Province elected you to the General Chapter of 1903 by the convincing margin of 249 votes out



of 256 ballots cast. That same year, you were named as Brother Assistant. During the course of your visitations, the brothers admired your gentleness, your calm, your politeness, your savoir-faire, and your goodness.

- Confined in Beaucamps during the war of 1914-1918, you demonstrated your composure and dedicated service to the civilian population of the area. You did so to such an extent that the German authorities addressed you as “Prior” when you refused the title of local mayor. Subsequently, you would receive the “Légion d’honneur” in recognition of your heroic acts.
- On May 24, 1920, you became the 6<sup>th</sup> Superior General of the Institute. During your mandate, you demonstrated insight, calm, and sound methodology for which the brothers were grateful. By the time your term ended 1932, the Institute had enjoyed a time of rapid development.
- The official proclamation of the heroic virtues of Father Champgnat made you exceedingly happy. On December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1920, you were the one who brought back his remains from the maisonette, the house where Brother François was born, to Notre Dame de l’Hermitage. In 1924, you succeeded in re-purchasing Saint-Genis which lay in ruins since the government takeover in 1903.
- You were never without challenges: first the persecutions in Mexico



and in Turkey, then, following your re-election, the terrible civil war in Spain that lasted from 1936 to 1939 during which one hundred and seventy two of our brothers were killed; in 1937, our brothers in Germany were expelled from their country. You also witnessed the beginning of the Second World War without knowing its final outcome.

- Brother Diogène, of all of your qualities, the ones that we most admire are: your discrete charm, the way you blended into a harmonious whole your strength, your calm, your energy and your availability. Those who met you were impressed by you. You knew how to put people at ease.
- Brother Diogène, there was nothing in your religious attitude that others found strange or peculiar. It was rock-solid and profound. You loved good liturgy. In your encounters with people and events, you always demonstrated good judgment. You did not wish to draw public attention to yourself or to our Institute. You preferred to do your work quietly and unknown.

Lord, we thank you for the life of our Brother, Diogène. He dedicated himself to you by entering our religious family. May he continue to intercede for us, especially our brothers who lead us. May Mary, our Good Mother and First Superior, help and sustain us.

Amen.







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This book is a sequel to «OUR FIRST BROTHERS, marvelous companions of Marcellin».

It presents the biographies of some Brothers who knew Father Champagnat in his lifetime, with others whose exemplary lives remain inspirational today.

We hope that it will be of special interest to the young brothers in formation as they discover the work of God and men in the course of the birth and growth of the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary. May it also be of use to lay people who are interested in our history.

If it is true that the tree lives by its roots, the knowledge of the lives of the Brothers who have contributed to the consolidation and development of our religious family will be a light on our way as we approach the bicentenary of its foundation.

With the Virgin Mary, our first Superior and Ordinary Resource, we sing the Magnificat of our gratitude to the Lord.

Brother Alain Delorme

