

BROTHER JEAN-BAPTISTE

The accounts of the Brothers' lives presented in this book are, for the most part, an abridgment of "Biographies de quelques Frères", published by Brother Jean-Baptiste in 1868. He, then, is the principal author.

Brother Louis-Marie, Superior General, in the Circular written shortly after the death of this Brother, in 1872, declared: «*The venerable Father Champagnat has lived on, these thirty-two years, in an Assistant who continued his work and brought it to completion... Is he not for us like a second Founder?*» (Circulaires, Vol. IV, p. 250)

In these lines can be perceived the admiration and gratitude of the Superior, for one he had known for more than forty years and with whom he had shared a life and ministry in the service of the Brothers, since 12 October 1839, the day of their election as Assistants to Brother François, to the great joy of Father Champagnat.

May the reading of these pages arouse our own admiration and gratitude towards Brother Jean-Baptiste.

Brother Alain Delorme

Cover photos

Above: Hamlet of Maisonnettes where Gabriel Rivat, Brother François, 1st successor of Father Champagnat, was born. His house is second from right. The institute purchased it in November 1984. Photo: Br. Jean-Paul Mounard.

Below: The La Valla house where the Founder gathered his first Brothers and companions. He came to live with them and share their meals in November 1819. Photo: Br. Jean-Pierre Destombes.

OUR FIRST BROTHERS – Marvellous companions of Marcellin

Brother Alain Delorme



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[PREFACE]

This book by Brother Alain Delorme takes a fresh look at the Institute's early years and brings us closer to the young men who formed the foundation of the Institute that we know today. The sanctity of Father Champagnat quickly becomes evident as does his positive and profound influence on the lives of our first brothers. The book is well named for the young men whose lives it captures became over time truly marvelous companions to our Founder.

More than 20 different portraits are presented by the author and together they give witness to the holiness of these "rough country lads" and the Marist Family itself. Each tale reminds us that sanctity has a way of attracting others and moving them further along in their pilgrimage home toward God.

■ [Our first Brothers] ■

Brother Alain also gives us a contemporary and refreshing understanding of the lives of these saints by emphasizing their human maturity as well as their spiritual legacy. Brother John Baptiste Furet, the Founder's biographer, tells us that "they had their heads firmly on their shoulders." He cites Marcellin as the source of their passion for the Lord and our Good Mother and also credits him for helping to develop their apostolic zeal.

Serving as a fine complement to the Life of the Founder, this book should find its way into the hands of those in formation and be made available to a wide audience of professed brothers and Marist laywomen and men. The author's style of writing lends itself well to thoughtful and meditative reading, thus making the book an excellent resource for a retreat. Each chapter ends with a prayer.

We cannot help but be inspired by these tales about the lives of the young men who gathered

■ [Marvellous companions of Marcellin] ■

around the Founder. Their courage, spirit of sacrifice, and genuine goodness comes through time and again. In coming to know each of them better, we also will be encouraged in our life of faith. For over time, the Lord shaped them into his disciples and made them proclaimers of his Word. We would do well to reclaim the very qualities that we will come to admire in each of them.

I encourage you to read this book and to recommend it to others. For within its pages you will discover the Founder's simple formula for becoming a Little Brother of Mary. That formula is as contemporary today as it was almost two hundred years ago.



*Brother Sean Sammon,
Superior General*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to say a special thanks to Brother Seán Sammon, Superior General, who has given permission for the publication of this book in the period of the 21st General Chapter.



Thanks are equally due to the translators:

Brother Desmond Crowe for the English version,
Brother Tony Aragón for the Spanish version,
Brother Claudio Girardi for the Portuguese version.

To Brother Josep Roura for reading over the texts,
and Brother Giovanni Maria Bigotto, Postulator General,
for supervising the work of printing the book.

Now that the bicentenary of the foundation of our religious family is approaching, I hope that these pages will help Brothers and lay Marists to discover or rediscover some of the first Brothers, who contributed in a decisive manner to the birth and development of this work of Mary, born from the heart of her faithful servant, Saint Marcellin Champagnat, our “good father”.

May Our Lady of the Hermitage continue to accompany us in the following of Jesus, in the carrying out of our daily work.

Brother Alain Delorme

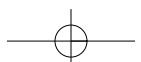
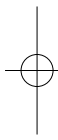
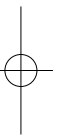
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ABBREVIATIONS

- AFA Archives des Frères Maristes. Rome.
- ALS *Avis, Leçons, Sentences*. Ed. 1927.
- Amphiloque *Biography of Brother Jean-Baptiste*, unpublished. Archives Rome.
- AVIT *Annales de l'Institut*. 3 volumes. Rome, 1993.
- BQF *Biographies de quelques Frères*. Ed. Em. Vitte, Lyons 1924.
- C (CSG) *Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux*.
- Const. *Constitutions and Statutes*, Rome 1986.
- L *Lettres du Père Champagnat*. Vol. I, Brother Paul Sester, Rome 1985.
- LBS *Le Bon Supérieur*. Ed. 1951.
- NN *Notices nécrologiques*. Volume I (1890-1900) Lyons, Imp. X. Jevain.
- NS *Nos Supérieurs*. Ed. Économat Général, Saint-Genis-Laval, 1954.
- OM *Origines Maristes*. 4 volumes, J. Coste S.M. and G. Lessard S.M., Rome 1961.
- R *Répertoire*, Vol. II of the *Lettres*, Brothers Paul Sester and Raymond Borne, Rome 1987.
- S Sylvestre. *Frère Sylvestre raconte Marcellin Champagnat*, Rome 1992.
- V *Life of Marcellin Champagnat*. Bicentennial Edition, Rome, 1989.

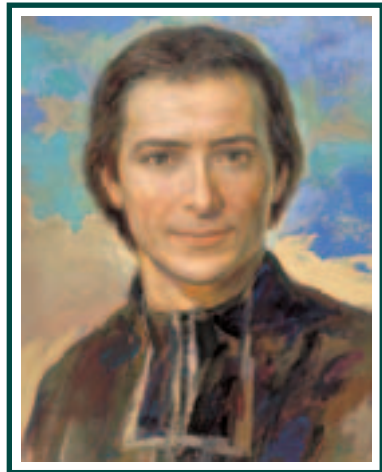


MEETING OUR FIRST BROTHERS COMPANIONS OF MARCELLIN

Introduction

“You cannot be surprised enough...”

These are the words of Brother Théodose, extracts from the evidence he gave during the open diocesan inquiry held at Lyons from October 1888 to December 1890 in regard to the beatification of Marcellin Champagnat. He stated: *“The first brothers received by the Servant of God had at their entry scarcely anything but good will and the courage to succeed. Their religious instruction was incomplete; only with difficulty did they learn to read and write. The manners of polite society were practically unknown to them. Their country ways were in keeping with the rugged mountains where they had been born. **You cannot be surprised enough** at their rapid transformation, due to the Servant of God. It took only a few years for them to show, by their conduct, that they had become good religious, and by the good management of their schools, capable administrators”* (Vol. I, p. 95).



We in our turn have to be surprised, and to marvel, when we revisit the biographies of the first brothers who might be seen as co-founders of the Institute. In fact, what Brother Louis-Marie wrote of Brother Jean-Baptiste, judging him to be **“like a second Founder”** (Circ. IV, p. 250), can be said also, in a way, about the first companions of Marcellin. It is thanks to them that he was able to undertake his educational work on behalf of country children. They were **“marvelous companions”** as Brother Seán Sammon, Superior General, wrote: *“Since the first days of our Institute, we have had marvelous companions with whom to make the journey of Marist life. Beginning with our early brothers, François, Jean-Baptiste, Louis-Marie, Sylvestre, Laurent, Hippolyte, and so many others ... These were men whose only desire was to do God’s will; men for whom prayer and the Eucharist, Mary and life together were central. Each of us needs to be those men today: marvellous companions for a new generation of brothers; men for whom the ministry of making Jesus known and loved among poor children and young people is all consuming”* (Circ. 25 March 2005, Vol. XXXI, n°2, p. 81).

Our work is based fundamentally on the work of Brother Jean-Baptiste, *Biographies de quelques Frères*, published in 1868, and also, certainly, on *Vie du Père Champagnat* (ed. 1989) and on *Avis, Leçons Sentences*. In 1868, there were 2,000 professed brothers in the Institute (there were 280 at the death of the Founder). This kind of rapid development gave the author of the biographies some concern: he is saddened that so many brothers failed to persevere (Préface, p. XVI-XVII, ed. 1924). He had also expressed to Brother Louis-Marie, Superior General, his concern at seeing *“the spreading of bourgeois life styles in the communities”* (Circ. IV, pp. 280-283).

Quoting a saying of Saint Jerome that *“Each Institute, each profession, has its pioneers, men whose example is the model upon which the others must base their formation”*, Brother Jean-Baptiste remarks: *“We have to take as models our venerated Founder and his first brothers whose edifying life and virtues conform perfectly with a Little Brother of Mary”* (Préface, XII).

Brother Jean-Baptiste poses the question, *“What was the mission of our first brothers?”* and he offers a response in two parts:

- 1° To provide models of the perfection of our holy state, and in a way personify in them the virtue and the spirit of a Little Brother of Mary.
- 2° To make reparation for the scandal given by religious who abandon their vocation, and show the futility of the pretexts they offer for excusing themselves from the sacred commitment they had made to God. The author spends three pages developing this second part of his response.

Passing over what could be harsh and seem excessive in the expression of the second response, which underlines a situation in our past history, we pause at the first which has a purpose that is forever relevant: to try to become what we are.

In writing the biographies of certain brothers, Brother Jean-Baptiste wishes to spur on those who follow, half a century after the beginning of the Institute, to learn from these brothers. So it is that he relates the lives of some of the first

disciples of the Founder, but also those of some others who came from the meridional regions of France, after the amalgamations with the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Saint Paul-Trois-Chateaux (1842) and those of Viviers (1844).

In most cases the biographical elements of each one are given in brief, the author having in mind to emphasize such and such an aspect of the spiritual life of the brother: “Brother Jean-Pierre, or the good conscience” – “Brother Stanislas, or the treasure” – “Brother Bonaventure, or the substitution” etc. This last example shows the artificial nature of these titles. In fact, in the preface the author said “Brother Bonaventure, the fidelity to grace, the good character and the spirit of charity towards all his brothers” (p. XIII). So it is that the reader has much difficulty in making sense of the new title that appears inside the work: “Brother Bonaventure, or the substitution.” Elsewhere several of the biographies give only the name of the brother without a title. In that of Brother Louis, a title appeared only after twenty pages. No doubt these little imperfections reveal the fatigue of the author who in that same year 1868 published *Avis, Leçons, Sentences*, continued editing some other works notably *Le Bon Supérieur* (1869) and a book of meditations on the Incarnation (Circ. Vol. IV, p.249) the proofs of which he was still correcting on the day he died. Speaking of his *Cours de Méditations* (Incarnation, Passion, Eucharistie) Brother Jean-Baptiste often said to Brother Louis-Marie: “*I want the brothers to know Our Lord*” (Id. P. 258).

In a Spanish edition of the Biographies, Brother Aníbal Cañón has given a title to each brother. Above all he has undertaken an immense research into the sources of the nu-



La Valla, today

merous quotations made by Brother Jean-Baptiste. I fully share the admiration of this brother in regard to Brother Jean-Baptiste's far reaching grasp of religious sources, especially of the Fathers of the Church (Crónicas Maristas I, pp. 7-10). We have to remember that he entered the Institute at fifteen years of age, and that he attended to his own formation throughout his whole life while assuming the tasks of teacher, director, and Assistant. Brother Jean-Baptiste himself enlightens us about this. He wrote to a young brother: *"I have to tell you that I loved study to the point that the venerated Father Champagnat told me that I was a **fury**. But my passion for study is limited to religious subjects, and always with a useful purpose for the future"* (Amphiloque, p. 272). In the Circular already quoted, Brother Louis-Marie told of a

conversation with Brother Jean-Baptiste: *"Their Télémaque," he said to me one day, "they call it a masterpiece. I wish I could believe it; but it is impossible for me to read it. Don't talk to me of fiction when I have the Gospels and the Fathers of the Church"* (p. 248).

In writing the lives of brothers who incarnated the spirit of the origins in the physical and spiritual environment of the Founder, the author had in mind to describe the "ideal" Little Brother of Mary. He was thinking first of all of the brothers of the second half of the XIXth century, his contemporaries, who lived in the middle of the industrial revolution, accelerated by reason of the development of communications, thanks above all to the railways. Without a doubt he also had in mind those like us, who would be called to take our place in the Institute. The biographies vary greatly in length: Brother Louis' has 30 pages, Brother Dorothee's only six.

In this present volume I have retained only the names of certain brothers, especially those who knew the Founder personally. In most of the historical details of each one I have kept all the episodes in which the Founder appears, leaving out exhortative material, to make the reading easier. Brother Jean-Baptiste's life is drawn from his correspondence which reveals the richness of his personality. The biographies of Brother François and Brother Louis-Marie have been reduced to a few chronological outlines since they have been the subjects of more complete works. I have made a summary of the biography of Brother Pascal, Assistant General who died in 1867. Brother Marie-Candide's will please our brothers who have responded to the mission *"Ad Gentes"* today.



Some places of the origins

I hope that these brief presentations will be of assistance in the rediscovery of the faces of the first disciples of Marcellin Champagnat, and through them, that of the Founder himself. May they be able to open up in us a degree of spiritual freedom and urge us on in the footsteps of Jesus, following the example of Mary, the perfect disciple and our First Superior!

There is a suggestion for a prayer after each biography. Emphasising as it does, some major features of the brother's personality and his commitment to the Institute, it may help us to see his place in Marist history.

Happy travelling to a meeting with our first brothers.

Brother Alain Delorme

BROTHER LOUIS

Jean Baptiste Audras
(1801-1847)

Brother Louis (Jean-Baptiste Audras) was born on 20 June 1801 (1st of Messidor, Year 10 of the Republic), in the hamlet of Péorey, commune of Lavalla. He commenced his novitiate on 2 January 1817.

He opened the school in Marlies with Brother Antoine in November, 1818. He was the Master of Novices from 1821 to 1831, with some interruptions (Bourg-Argental, foundation of Charlieu in 1824, direction of Saint Paul-en-Jarret in 1827). On 8 September 1828, he privately made his perpetual profession of vows. In 1831, he returned to Charlieu. From 1836 until his death, he was at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage with responsibility for the bookshop and administrative matters. He was a member of the corporation constituted by Father Champagnat before the notary public of Saint Chamond on 22 March 1839 and an electoral officer at the General Chapter held in the same year.



He was a member of the Council which decided to undertake the amalgamation of the Christian Brothers of Saint Paul-Trois-Châteaux with our Congregation on 20 October 1841. The union took place in 1842.

Brother Jean-Baptiste speaks of Brother Louis and of his vocation in the *Life of Father Champagnat (Vie)*, published in 1856. He speaks about him again, at more length, in the *Biographies de quelques Frères*, in 1868. This presentation refers to both these sources.

After reading "*Pensez-y bien*" ("*Consider well*"), he decided to become a De La Salle brother. Without informing his parents, he presented himself to the Brother Director of the school at Saint-Chamond on Sunday, 27 October 1816, after mass at the Saint-Pierre Church. The brother told him that he was still too young to enter the Lyons novitiate and that he would have to wait another year.

On Monday, 28 October, Marcellin was called to the bedside of the young Jean-Baptiste Montagne in the "Les Palais" hamlet. Without delay, he convinced Jean-Marie Granjon to follow him in his project of founding the brothers. On Saturday, 2 November, Jean-Baptiste Audras came to Father Champagnat to confess and to speak to him of his plan to enter the religious life. The vicar, having noticed that young Audras was listening very carefully, reflected a moment, and it seemed to him that an inner voice said to him, "*I have prepared this child and brought him to you for you to make of him the foundation stone of the Society you must found*". He asked the young man to come and live with Granjon and, to convince him, he offered to give him lessons and help

him to enter religion. (*Biographies de Quelques Frères*, 1924 edition, p. 3 and *Vie*, 1989 edition, p. 63)

A short time after, Fr Champagnat told his new disciple of his plans and asked him if he wished to join the new Institute. The young postulant answered him,

“Since I have had the good fortune of being under your direction, all I have asked of God is the obedience and the grace to renounce my own will. Therefore, you may do with me what you will, as long as I am a religious.”

On Thursday 2 January, 1817, the two novices entered the Bonner house with its little garden and attached land, bought for the sum of sixteen hundred francs which Marcellin had borrowed. Their time was spent in prayer, manual labour and study. Their occupation was making nails, and their earnings from this work were enough to feed them. They spent winter alone, in peace and fervour...In spring, Antoine Couturier, from the hamlet Le Coin, joined them.

In that same spring of 1817, Jean-Baptiste Audras' parents wished their son to return to the family home. His elder brother, Jean-Claude, came to inform Jean-Baptiste of the decision of their parents. We know the rest of this story through the picturesque account of Brother Jean-Baptiste (see *Vie*, pp. 66-67).

Around the 30th of the month of May, the Founder gave a religious habit to Jean-Mary Granjon and Jean-Baptiste Audras (black trousers and black frockcoat). They also took religious names. Granjon kept his Christian name and

Jean-Baptiste chose the name Louis, in honour of Saint Louis de Gonzague (Saint Aloysius Gonzaga).

Brother Jean-Baptiste writes, “Brother Louis always distinguished himself by his good spirit, his obedience and his fervour. His intelligence and his discretion, appreciated and known to all, gave him a great influence and a real authority over his fellow brothers. Fr Champagnat, who trained them all with care, foreseeing the good which Brother Louis would do for the Institute, gave him private lessons and never missed any opportunity to develop the faculties of his soul. Brother Louis responded admirably to these attentions. It was he who first requested permission...to go and teach catechism and, later, school in the hamlets of Lavalla.

“The venerated Father was edified by the feelings displayed and thanked God accordingly.” Brother Jean-Baptiste then recounts how Marcellin, who had taken Brother Louis with him on a visit to a sick person, took advantage of the occasion to train his disciple in avoiding even the smallest faults. He added that Brother Louis absorbed these lessons wonderfully well and cites as support for this comment the following two thoughts transcribed from his notebooks of spiritual thoughts (See *BQF*, p.8).

“Father Champagnat held Brother Louis in high esteem and regarded him as one of the pioneers of his Institute” (Idem p.9). To justify this statement, Brother Jean-Baptiste recounts the following episode, which he says took place at the end of 1818.

“After two years of novitiate, to halt the human inconstancy and fix the vocation of the first brothers, he proposed

that they make a promise of fidelity to God. By this promise, the brothers would commit themselves to work for their sanctification, to teach children, particularly the poor, obey their superior, guard their chastity and share all property in their community... Brother Louis, who had an extremely scrupulous conscience... was frightened at the obligations which this entailed entering into. He refused to sign despite the advice of Father Champagnat and the friendly encouragement of the other brothers. Brother Jean-Marie was surprised, even shocked, and said to Father Champagnat,

“What do you think of Brother Louis? What will become of him? I fear that he will go astray and that we will lose him. – I know Brother Louis, answered Father, he is a man who is sure and firm in his vocation. If he has not signed, it is because of an excessive delicacy of conscience. He will sign later and, in the meantime, he practises no less than that which is contained in our formula of commitment.” Then, he added and even twice repeated, *“Brother Louis is a fine young man. He still has his baptismal innocence. His is a strong soul that has never compromised with its duty. I vouch for him and for his perseverance in the religious life.”* High praise indeed, comments the biographer. *“He still has his baptismal innocence!”* He would preserve this precious treasure his whole life and, thirty years later, Father Cholleton said of him, *“What a beautiful soul! It has never known evil!”* (BQF, p. 10)

At the end of 1818 or during 1819, Brother Louis opened the Marlies school with Brother Antoine Couturier. We know, from the *Biographies*, the conversations of the curate Alliot and his vicar on the subject of the two brothers. However, the success of the brothers was rapid and total. The secret of this

success is to be discovered in what Brother Jean-Baptiste writes. "Brother Louis, who was full of the spirit of his holy state and who understood the excellence of the mission which he had been given, did not teach in the manner of a schoolmaster, but as a religious, an apostle" (*BQF*, p. 11). "Brother Louis had a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin. He placed her as the Superior of the house and wished to be regarded as only her steward. His zeal for teaching others to love this most holy Mother and for inspiring devotion to her in children was tireless. Every week, he gave a lesson on this subject, to which he came back on all occasions" (*Idem*).

Father Champagnat declared, "Brother Louis truly has the spirit of his state. The religious spirit invigorates and characterises everything he does. His virtue is truly the virtue of a Little Brother of Mary" (*BQF*, pp. 13-14). We know the difficulties encountered by the Founder to obtain more healthy premises from the curate for the brothers and their pupils. He had to withdraw the brothers in 1822 and the school was to remain closed for ten years. Brother Laurent had previously come to replace his brother as Director in November 1820. At that time, Brother Louis had a conversation with the curate, who was opposed to this change, a conversation which Brother Jean-Baptiste reports and which shows both the spiritual maturity of Brother Louis and his esteem for Father Champagnat. To the curate who said that the Founder, "whom (I) have known for a long time, is a man without experience, ability or intelligence", Brother Louis replied, "This is not what people think of Fr Champagnat in Lavalla. Everyone there considers him to be a wise and learned man, and we brothers, who live with him and see him from a close distance, look on him as a saint" (*Idem* p. 16).

Brother Louis went to Lavalla to be the Master of Novices as a replacement for Brother Jean-Marie who had just been appointed Director of the school in Bourg-Argental. On giving him this responsibility, Father Champagnat said to him, "Brother, we have few postulants, they need to be well trained in order for us to deserve that God send us others in numbers (...) They need to be well trained in piety and in the virtues appropriate to their state such as obedience, the love of Jesus and charity towards their neighbour" (Idem p.17). The instructions of the good brother centered mainly upon these three virtues. However, he rightly said to his disciples, "Virtue is not a matter of the imagination, of theory, but something of practice and feeling. Virtue resides in the heart and in action." "Brother Louis was not content with just giving such opinions. It was his desire that each individual take them as rules of conduct...Never has there been such fervour in the novitiate...The charity, the unity, the peace and the harmony were so perfect that it could have been said that the postulants had but one heart, one soul" (Idem p. 18).

Brother Louis loved his work and the life of the novitiate...Meditation on the life of Jesus Christ, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament and frequent communion were his delights. One day, he asked Father Champagnat if he could recommend a book about the love of God. "Here's an excellent one, Father Champagnat replied, taking from his bookcase the *Treatise on the Love of God by Saint Francis de Sales*. Take it, he added, read and reflect well on this work. It will teach you to love God." Some time after, Brother Louis expressed his enthusiasm to the good Father and his desire to make the book known to and read by all Christians. The Founder declared to him that God had given simple believers three books

which preached His love better than could the saintly bishop of Geneva. "You see, Brother Louis, the first three preachers of the love of God are the Blessed Virgin, the Crucifix and the church bell. Yet, are not these three before our eyes to recall the mysteries of the Incarnation, of the Redemption and of the Eucharist, the three great marks of the love of God?" Brother Jean-Baptiste describes in more detail the conversation of the Father with his spiritual son and concludes with the following statement. "This teaching of the venerated Father was extremely useful to Brother Louis" (Idem p. 21). By natural inclination, he was drawn to the love of Jesus. For that reason, he read assiduously the *Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* by Father De Ligny and *The Sufferings of Jesus Christ* by Father Thomas.

Brother Louis accordingly wished to study Latin to become a priest in order to love Jesus better. Father Champagnat, to whom he confided this ambition, told him that it was a temptation of the devil. "My dear friend, it is not necessary to be a priest to love Jesus Christ and to win souls for him..."

Father Champagnat, who knew the brother's perfect docility and seeing him still preoccupied with this thought, called him to his room and said to him, "Brother Louis, I am convinced that you are in your vocation and that the will of God is that you stay in it. Consequently, I forbid you from thinking of studying Latin."

Brother Louis received this prohibition with submission and from that day on was never more afflicted by such a temptation...To exclude all possibility of second thoughts, he asked to make his profession of vows, a request which was

granted (Idem p. 22). Until the end of his life, he was a model for his brothers by his humility, his mortification, his regularity, his attachment to the Institute and, above all, his fervour and great love for God.

Brother Jean-Baptiste then began what resembles a new biography of Brother Louis based around his attraction to the love of God.

It must be recalled that the *Biographies* appeared twelve years after the *Life of Father Champagnat*. The Institute had experienced extraordinary growth, but there was a danger for the new generations of losing the fervour of the first disciples of Marcellin. Therefore, Brother Jean-Baptiste would paint various portraits of brothers, highlighting one of the aspects of their spiritual makeup. He gives them each as an example and a pathway for arriving at godliness. He begins with Brother Louis and also mentions Brother François, who was always distinguished by a marked attraction for the hidden life, for the spirit of prayer and union with the mysteries of Our Lord. He briefly presents Brother Laurent and Brother Antoine.

This had already been clearly indicated (see Preface, p. XIII). “In the biographies which we present, rather than seeking to enter into the fine details of the behaviour of our brothers or to follow them every step of their journeys, we have limited ourselves to representing some of the distinctive features of their lives, those which could be examples for us to imitate... In addition, we have striven to reveal each brother’s own true face, highlighting his main virtue and relating it to the rest of his story... Thus, the special feature of Brother Louis is the meas-

ureless love of God, that of Brother Jean-Pierre, the righteous, scrupulous conscience ...that of Brother Bonaventure, fidelity to grace, goodness of nature and the spirit of charity towards his brothers. Brother Jean-Baptiste would not call to mind these features for his last brother and would entitle his biography 'Brother Bonaventure or the substitution'" (*BQF*, p.80). It may be imagined that the objective of the biographer was to draw a series of portraits of brothers trained by the Founder in order to provide the following generations with the ideal image of the Little Brother of Mary.



Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage

Returning to Brother Louis, we read the following in the words of Brother Jean-Baptiste. "When he confided in his parents concerning the matter of his vocation, his mother asked him why he wanted to leave her. 'To love God with all my heart' he answered her keenly. Later, when that fine mother came to see him in his community, she never failed to ask him the question, "Do you love God well?" Brother Louis declared several times that that question was like a darting flame which restoked the fire of his love for God."

Father Champagnat, who monitored vigilantly the progress of brothers along the path of virtue, was overjoyed with the feelings of Brother Louis...One day he asked him a series of questions. "Brother Louis, do you love Jesus with all your

heart? Do you love Jesus with your mind? Do you love Jesus with all your strength? Brother Louis, if Jesus asked you, 'Do you love me?', as he asked Peter, how would you answer? Could you truly say, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you?'"

Brother Louis was moved and touched to the point of tears by that series of questions. Father Champagnat himself remained just as impassioned. "O Father!" he cried at the last question, "I dare not assure Jesus that I love Him, but it seems to me that I wish to love Him with all my heart, and that it is to you whom I turn to learn to love Him more and more." The good Father then gave Brother Louis four means for acquiring the love of Jesus, "Calvary, said Saint Francis de Sales, is the place of lovers..." All these opinions made such an impression on Brother Louis that he would never forget them. It was a turning point in his life (Idem p. 31).

From then on, his whole life became an exercise in love and some time before he died, he said to a brother from whom he had nothing to hide, "O brother! How sweet love is! How strong love is! If only you knew, the waves of love that break against me! ...Love is all I need, and henceforth I only wish to study, contemplate and love Jesus, my Saviour, my love and my beatitude." It is in these feelings that he lived and in which Brother Louis died on 3 August, 1847 following a long illness during which he did not miss a single of his communions (Idem p. 32).

His grave is located close to the large cross in the cemetery of Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage. Brother Laurent is buried beside him as is Brother Stanislas.

Praying with Brother Louis

Brother Louis, today we would like to associate our prayer with yours.



- In the springtime of your life, you became the foundation stone of our Institute. You revealed to the curate of Lavalla your desire to become a religious.
- He knew how to win your trust and helped you to conform your life to that of Jesus. He was the admiring witness of your delicacy of conscience, your generosity, your obedience under trial.
- You were the first to ask to go and teach catechism in the hamlets. You were the apostle of the children of Marthes, teaching them reading, writing and arithmetic, and at the same time the love of Jesus and Mary.
- Father Champagnat charged you with the formation of the novices, thus showing the esteem he felt for you. Did he not say of you :
« *Brother Louis truly has the spirit of his state; the religious spirit animates and characterizes everything he does.* »

- Brother Jean-Baptiste, who knew you intimately, reports that you wanted to become a brother *«to love God with all your heart»*, just as you told your mother.
- The Founder, like your mother, asked you one day: *“Brother Louis, do you love Jesus with all your heart ?”* And you answered him with simplicity: *“O Father, I do not dare to assure Jesus that I love him, but it seems to me that I want to love him with all my heart”*.
- From the Founder, you learned the three first preachers of the love of God : the Blessed Virgin, the crucifix and the steeple.
- Your life was but an exercise of love. To a brother, from whom you had nothing to hide, you said: *«Love is enough for me and I want to study, contemplate and love only Jesus my Saviour, my love, and my beatitude.»*

May our lives, in the image of yours, be filled with the joy of heart of Saint Marcellin and attract young men into our religious family.

We entrust this prayer to Mary, our ORDINARY RESOURCE, for her to present to the Lord.

Amen.

BROTHER LAURENT

Jean Claude Audras
(1793-1851)

Jean-Claude Audras was born on 4 May 1793 in the hamlet of Péorey, commune of Lavalla, to Jean-Marie, labourer, and to his wife, Jeanne-Marie Poyetton.

Eight years older than his brother Jean-Baptiste, who had begun his novitiate on 2 January 1817, Jean-Claude became a novice himself on 24 December of the same year under the conditions which Brother Jean-Baptiste recorded (See *Vie*, 1989 edition, pp. 66-67). He was clothed in the habit (black trousers and black frockcoat) on 15 August 1818. He was the third brother of the Institute. The fourth would be Antoine Couturier, who entered it on 1 January 1818. Barthélemy Badard entered on 2 May and Gabriel Rivat on 6 May.



“For a long time, good Brother Laurent had asked to be allowed to teach catechism in Bessac,” wrote Brother Jean-Baptiste (*Vie*, p. 82). He recorded a dialogue between the Founder and his disciple on this subject. “One Thursday, as was his routine, he came to pick up his provisions in Lavalla and returned to Bessac with Fr Champagnat, who was going that way to confess a sick person. That day, there were two or three feet of snow and the roads were completely covered in black ice. In his bag, Brother Laurent carried a large loaf of bread, cheese and potatoes to feed him for the week. Strong though he was, he perspired as he carried his heavy load, as the roads were very bad, Fr Champagnat seeing him in such a state, said to him,

- *“Brother, that’s very hard work you are doing.*
- *Excuse me, Father, it is not hard but, rather, very pleasant.*
- *I don’t see what is so pleasant in climbing up and down these mountains every week and walking in the snow and ice with a heavy load across your shoulders at the risk of falling over some precipice.*
- *It is the full certainty that God counts each of our steps and will reward with an immense weight of glory the pain and the fatigue which we bear for His love.*
- *So, you are truly happy to teach catechism and school in this rough country and to carry your bread like a poor man?*
- *So happy, Father, that I would not exchange my job for all the goods of this world.*
- *Certainly, you value this job highly, but do you deserve it?*
- *Oh, no! I am sure that I do not deserve the privilege of going to teach catechism in Bessac and that it has only been granted me through the kindness of God.*
- *Everything which you say is very true. Nevertheless, you must admit that today you are having a very hard time of it.*

- *No, Father, this is one of the most beautiful days of my life.*” Saying these words, his face was laughing and radiant, and sweet tears of happiness flowed from his eyes. Fr Champagnat, touched and consoled to see so much virtue, had difficulty in holding back his own tears” (*Vie*, pp. 83-84).

In the *“Biographies de Quelques Frères”* (1868), Jean-Baptiste writes “The main qualities of Brother Laurent Audras were his zeal for the religious instruction and sanctification of little children. In him, this spirit of zeal was a true passion or, rather, a noble virtue which did not leave him a moment’s rest. Explaining the catechism and teaching prayers to children was his whole life’s work. Thursday was his day of penance as he was deprived of teaching catechism that day. He admitted that, for him, it was the longest day of all the week. Shortly before dying, although overwhelmed by infirmities, he again requested to travel the countryside and even go to overseas missions to instruct the ignorant and teach *so many poor children*, (his expression) to know, to love and to serve Jesus who died to save them” (*BQF* p. 24).

The Founder’s biographer has preserved for us a delightful “fioretto” story which is revealing about the relations that existed in the first community. *“Once, when, after contemplation, Father publicly asked Brother Laurent how he had spent his time, the good brother answered with great simplicity, ‘You do well to ask, Father. It is God who has inspired you to question me as a punishment, for I have done nothing good today having lost my subject of meditation. However, to use my time, I imagined Saint John Francis Régis spending whole nights prostrated before the doors of churches to adore Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I thought of that great saint who was all the time in that posture.*

Now there's someone, I said to myself, who didn't forget his subject of meditation - he used to think about it all night whereas I can't manage to concentrate for even a few moments'. 'That's good, Brother Laurent, said Father, that is what you should do every time you lose your subject'" (Vie, p. 320).

Brother Laurent replaced his brother, Jean-Baptiste (Brother Louis), at the school in Marthes in 1820. Brother Avit, in the Annals for the Marthes school notes that "the zeal of Brother Laurent for catechizing the children continued there as elsewhere. Every Sunday, he went bell in hand to call together the children of the scattered hamlets, and he derived all his pleasure from instructing them in religion. Despite this, under his direction and as a consequence of an excessive gentleness, discipline slackened and the number of children in the school decreased considerably" (See *Répertoire des Lettres*, Rome 1987, p. 316).

In November 1822, Father Champagnat sent him as Director to the school of Tarentaise, founded by the curate, Fr Préher. On Thursdays and Sundays, he continued to go to Bessac to give instruction in the catechism. In 1823, he was in Vanosc. From 1826 to 1838, he was in Mornant as Director. In 1839, we find him in Chavanay. "There, he did the cooking and taught the junior class in which, say some of the village elders, he often fell asleep. That is easy to believe as he was a very plump, ruddy-faced man and the class must have been hard for him." (Brother Avit, *Annales de Chavanay*) The curate, Fr Gauché, asked that the brother be replaced, and it was Brother François who answered him in the name of the Founder.

In 1840, Brother Laurent took over the direction of the school of Saint Julien-Molhesabate. On 27 January 1842, he

wrote to Brother François to give him his news. *“Since Christmas, our mountains have been covered in snow and my poor little ones haven’t been able to come to school. Only the older children have come. Our good brothers who are with me here are well. There is only this old duffer who seemed to be on the way out recently, but unfortunately (sic) I’m feeling better. Dear Brother Hippolyte told me that he would send some clothes for our poor folk... ”* (Idem p. 320).

At the end of the same year, on 26 December, 1842, he wrote to Brother François. *“Dear Brother Superior, you allowed me to believe that you might permit me to go and catechize the children in the Diocese of Angoulême. Oh, please let me leave as soon as possible! All I need is a catechism book and a hand-bell. I feel as if I can hear those poor children saying to me, “Ah, if only we knew this great God who created us, who gave his life for us, we would serve him better than do our unfortunate parents who have abandoned him and live like beasts ... it seems to me that our good Mother is asking this sacrifice of me. This will all be for Her. Ah, if I could bring these children to love and serve that great Queen, that would bring them to Jesus!”* (Idem).

Brother Laurent retired to Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage after the retreat of 1848. It was there that he died on 8 February 1851. In the *Vie du Père Champagnat*, Brother Jean-Baptiste recounts the following episode. *“Do not worry, said excellent Brother Laurent to the Brother Superior who was leaving for Paris in order to push the request for authorisation, do not worry, when I’m up above with Father Champagnat, the two of us will get this matter straightened out.”* He adds that *“the piety and virtue of the good brother were so great that it gave us call to believe that this idea had been suggested to him by the holy in-*

spiration of God in order to alert us to the tangible protection which we should receive from our pious Founder in these circumstances.” (Vie, 1989 edition, p. 266) We know that the legal authorisation of the Institute was granted on 20 June 1851.

In his Circular of 3 July 1851 which announced the death of Brother Laurent, Brother François wrote: “My very dear brothers, you see that our elders are leaving us, those whom Fr Champagnat trained and who, more particularly, received his spirit, the original spirit of the Society. In less than a month, we have lost two of the longest-serving brothers of the Community (Brother Laurent and Brother Antoine Couturier, deceased on 7 March in Ampuis). Let us ask God that the spirit of these good brothers should live on and be perpetuated amongst us, their simple and sincere piety, their zeal for the teaching of the catechism, their love of poverty and simplicity, for the Rule and the ways of the Institute, their devotion to all its interests, their respect, their submission and their attachment to those whose task it is to lead it. It is certain that these virtues shone with particular brilliance in the good Brothers Laurent and Antoine, whose deaths I announce. How many times since his infirmities confined him to the Mother House did dear Brother Laurent come looking for me to ask to go catechizing from village to village, begging for his supper? Almost not a week went by that he did not come to me and say, “Oh, then tell the brothers to teach the catechism to the little children and to have them recite their prayers and prepare themselves well for their First Communion.” This thought pursued him. In particular, when retreats drew near, he could not stop himself from talking about it every day, either to me or one of the Brother Assistants, and always with flowing tears which forced him to stop after his first few words.

In the House, he took an interest in everything and paid attention to the smallest of details. Despite his constant aches and pains, he could not stop for a moment without doing something, nor would he miss the common prayer and spiritual practice. Nothing irked him more than not getting up and doing his meditation with the Community or not having his meals in the refectory with the others. Only obedience or the headaches whose violence he dreaded were able to hold him back. The enemy of his body and full of contempt for his own person, he always found himself too well-fed, too well-dressed and too well-treated. He liked to call himself the most humiliating names and never signed a letter without making some qualifications which testified to the small regard in which he held himself. His spirit of poverty was perfect, his simplicity admirable, and with this he had a gentle and easy piety which pleased everyone. We loved to hear him during the evening recreation delight all the young brothers, gathered around him, with some of the old hymns, so simple and so beautiful, recalling the old times and the old language, which he sang in a soft yet trembling and breaking voice. Dear Brother Laurent reminded us of good Brother Damien, good Brother Dorothee and all the elders who were there at the birth of the Society and who, all of them, were marked by a special simplicity, humility, spirit of mortification and poverty, devotion to the Institute and zeal for the teaching of Religion. He died full of calm and resignation, calling on God continually and never ceasing to move his lips in prayer until he stopped breathing.

These are the true Brothers of Mary, and it is absolutely necessary that we cause them to live on in the Society by imitating their virtues and preserving their spirit.

Praying with Brother Laurent

Today, Brother Laurent, we would like to pray with you.



- We know how you came to the Lavalla novitiate that Christmas Eve of 1817 at the invitation of the young parish priest, the invitation which so surprised you and to which you responded whole heartedly.
- The apostolate that you so ardently desired, to be the catechist in Bessat, revealed the kind of active charity that brought you happiness. "I would not give up this work of mine for all the riches of this world." Those were your words (Life, page 83).
- The intense desire to make Jesus and Mary known and loved, burned within you right up the end of your life. On the day after Christmas 1842, you kept asking Brother Francois for permission to catechize the children in the town of Angoulême. "The only things I need are a catechism and a little bell," were the words which, in your unassuming way, you wrote to Brother François.

- Brother Avit tells us that your kindhearted nature made it difficult for you to discipline the schoolchildren. Nevertheless you taught over many years in whatever places you were sent by obedience.
- In giving news of your death, Brother François takes pleasure in recalling that you were a true disciple of Marcellin. He speaks of your piety, straightforward and sincere, your zeal for teaching catechism, your love of poverty, your simplicity, your spirit of obedience.
- The Founder succeeded in convincing you to become part of his young community. He formed you into a true Little Brother of Mary. On your part, you loved him as a father.
- In the testimony you wrote about Father Champagnat, you revealed the knack of describing the key aspects of his personality in its human and religious dimensions. We are grateful for your testimony, as well as for what you handed down to us regarding the words that Marcellin often repeated when he spoke of Mary: "Without her, we would not have been able to accomplish anything."
- We admire so much the way you spontaneously answered Brother François when he asked you to

offer your sufferings for the success of his efforts to obtain legal recognition for the Institute. "Be at peace," you said. "When I am in the next world with Father Champagnat, you will see how the two of us take care of the situation."

Brother Laurent, following your example, may we be Brothers filled with love for Jesus and Mary, ardently desiring to make them known and loved by the young people of our day. Share with us too your love of our Founder and his work. Amen.



BROTHER ANTOINE

Antoine Couturier
(1800-1851)

We have only a few documents related to Antoine Couturier, the fourth brother to enter the Institute. He was born on 18 June 1800 at Lavalla in the hamlet of *Le Coin* not far from that of *Laval*, opposite *Maisonnettes*. His father, Damien, was a farmer; his mother was Marguerite Bois.



Le Coin, birthplace of Brother Antoine

We do not know how he was drawn to join the three first brothers (Jean-Marie, Louis, Laurent). We know only that he entered the novitiate on 1 January 1818, a week after Jean-Claude Audras (Brother Laurent).

In January 1819 he accompanied Brother Louis (Jean-Baptiste Audras) in the foundation of the school at Marhles. Despite the misgivings of the curate (*Life*, pp. 85-86, ed. 1989),

the parish priest's nephew, our two young brothers, aged just 17 and 19 were highly successful, a success that opened made possible the opening of the schools at Saint-Sauveur-en-Rue (1820) and Bourg-Argental (1822). On 11 October 1826 Brother Antoine made his lifelong commitment in the Institute by private vows; he was to renew these publicly on 10 October 1836.

Brother Avit, in a document quoted by Father Jean Coste (OM, III, Doc. 859, pp. 822-823), writes: *"Having caused so much sorrow for the venerated Father Champagnat, Father Courveille came here (to Saint-Antoine, in Isère) in 1826. He bought a part of the abbey at a cost of 60,000 francs. There he tried to found a congregation of farming brothers. Brothers Dominique and Antoine, who had followed him, soon left him and returned to the Hermitage..."* Father Coste notes: *"No other document links the name of Brother Antoine with this episode, but it is possible that this temporary departure of one of the first brothers of Father Champagnat, especially one from Lavalla, was passed over in silence. However, it is hard to understand how the matter could have been attributed to him if it had no foundation..."* Neither Brother Jean-Baptiste nor Brother François mention it.

In communicating to the brothers the death of Brother Antoine and that of Brother Laurent who had died some days earlier, Brother François wrote: *"My very dear brothers, you see that our elders are leaving us, those whom Fr Champagnat trained and who, more particularly, received his spirit, the original spirit of the Society. Let us ask God that the spirit of these good brothers may live on and be perpetuated amongst us, their simple and sincere piety, their zeal for the*

teaching of the catechism, their love of poverty and simplicity, for the Rule and the ways of the Institute, their devotion to all its interests, their respect, their submission and their attachment to those whose task it is to lead it... Good Brother Antoine was also one of the faithful disciples of our pious Founder. He served actively until his last moments and died at our Ampuis establishment, which he had directed for many years" (Circ. Vol. II, pp. 71-73).



In the "Biographies de Quelques Frères", Brother Jean-Baptiste states: *"Brother Antoine, always modest, always simple, went to God by the path of humility. 'I am nothing, I can do nothing,' he said, 'but I put all my confidence in God; by his grace he can, from my nothingness, make a good religious; I put myself in his hands, and place all my trust in his divine goodness'"* (BQF, p.24)

Earlier, in the Life of the Founder (p.423, ed. 1989) Brother Jean-Baptiste had shown the rough and austere side of the life of Brother Antoine, who refused to be tended by a woman during his illness at Bourg-Argental.

Brother Avit, in the Annals of the Millery school, noted: *"Brother Antoine did very well at Millery, becoming loved by*

all. The people there talked of him in glowing terms long after he had left. He is the perfect example of the excellent brothers formed by the venerable Founder. Simple, self denying, boundlessly devoted, this brother did not leave the world unfulfilled. Like all the old brothers he had little in the way of secular knowledge, but he gave himself fully to religious teaching and was a great lover of poverty” (Répertoire des Lettres, pp 45-46).

The *Lettres de Marcellin Champagnat* (Brother Paul Sester, Rome, 1985) also bring Brother Antoine to mind. Of the 339 letters published, 70 are addressed to brothers. This number may seem to be rather small, but we have to remember that the Founder often visited the schools and so was able to reply to the brothers in person. Of these 70 letters to the brothers, 15 were written from Paris to Brother François, almost all dating from the second stay there, January to July 1838, when Marcellin was trying to obtain from the government the legal authorisation of his Institute. It was after this that Brother Antoine received 9 letters sent not only to him but to his co-workers as well. Although they are not personal, they reveal a little of the personality of the Founder and of his correspondent. That is why we quote them as something additional to the biography of Brother Antoine.

On 15 August 1830, Marcellin referring to the troubles caused by the July revolution, wrote to Brother Antoine and his confreres in the community of Millery, Rhône: *“Don’t be afraid, we have Mary as our defence”* (Doc. 16, p. 57).

On 10 September of the same year, he insists: *“Fear nothing my friends, we have God on our side”* (Doc. 17, p. 58).

On 4 February 1831: The Founder encourages Brother Antoine and his deputy, Brother Gonzague: *“My good friends, do not spare yourselves in working for the success of your school... Just look at the interest the Saviour of the world has in the instruction of children. He tells his disciples to let the little children come to his divine person... Get Mary interested in your favour; tell her that after you have done everything that you can, it will be her fault if things do not go well. Recommend your students to her fervently. Make a little novena with your children, in her honour: the little prayer ‘Memorare’... I am longing to go and see you and embrace both of you”* (Doc. 20, pp. 63, 64).

On 10 November 1833, Marcellin finished his brief note in this way: *“A Dieu, my dear friend, -pray for me. I have plenty of troubles. Still, all goes well”* (Doc 32, p. 87). The troubles he mentions are, among others, those caused by the Guizot Law of 28 June 1833 which required the elementary pedagogical certificate to teach in our schools.

In January 1834, the Founder thanked Brother Antoine who had sent him New Year’s greetings. He added a P.S.: *“We have received a good number of novices”* (Doc. 33, p. 98).

The letter of 4 November of the same year is a brief word to grant some permissions and advise of the arrival of various things, in particular, *“a brand new shirt for Brother Moyse”* (Doc. 48, pp. 127, 128).

On 9 January 1835, Marcellin replied to Brother Antoine’s New Year’s wishes and gave him news of the mother house.

As in the year before, he wrote, *"We have received a good number of novices. We have given the holy habit to twenty on the feast of the Epiphany..."* He finishes with these words: *"I leave you in the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary where I have placed you"* (Doc 53, pp. 133, 134).

On 21 December 1836, the Founder told Brother Antoine that he was sending him two extra brothers, one for the classroom and one for the kitchen. He told him that he hopes to send him *"for your Christmas present, a printed copy of the Holy Rule"* (Doc 74, pp. 179, 180).

On 24 March 1838, from Paris, Father Champagnat sent a long letter to Brother Antoine. He speaks of *"troublesome journeys"* and asks for prayers for the success of his efforts. He says that he is happy at the Seminary of the Foreign Missions (120 Rue du Bac), and that *"in Paris there is an excellent nucleus of good Christians."* He adds, *"I will not tell you, dear friend, how cold I have been this winter... Several people have died of the cold."* He asks, in a P.S., to share his letter with the brothers at Mornant and Saint Symphorien, and with the parish priest (Doc. 183, Opp 373, 374).

This is all that we have been able to glean, here and there, to preserve the memory of the life of one of the first companions of Marcellin Champagnat whom he joined in heaven after an earthly life of the same duration.



Praying with Brother Antoine

Brother Antoine, we get to know you better by praying with you, who were one of the first disciples of our holy Founder.

- When on 1 January 1818 you left the hamlet where you were born to enter the novitiate at Lavalla, it was Mary who received you into her house, a gift for her servant Father Champagnat and his small community.
- You were the companion of Brother Louis in the foundation of the school at Marhles; through your youthful good spirits and your generosity you became excellent catechists and teachers, loved by the children and highly esteemed by their parents.
- Brother François wrote that you were *“one of the most faithful disciples of our pious Founder, and that you remained active until your last moments”* (Circ. Vol. II, pp. 71-73)
- Brother Jean-Baptiste recalls your modesty and simplicity, your humility and confidence in God; he recalls one of your words:

“By his grace, God can make out of my nothingness a good religious. I put all my trust in his divine goodness” (BQF, p.24).

- Brother Avit draws attention to your spirit of poverty, renunciation and zeal as a catechist. He also notes that you became loved by all, and sees in you *“a perfect example of the excellent brothers formed by the venerable Founder”* (Annales de Millery).

God our Father, we thank you for the life of our Brother Antoine entirely spent at the service of the young. May his example inspire us and attract vocations today, for if the world has changed a great deal, the young are always in need of devoted educators full of love. We ask this through Jesus, your Son and Our Lord.

Amen.

[BROTHER FRANÇOIS]

Gabriel Rivat
1808-1881

First successor of Father Champagnat



Bedroom of the parents of Brother François

In the body of the book “Meeting our first Brothers, companions of Marcellin” some account of the life of Brother François was essential: was he not the sixth brother received by Father Champagnat on 6 May 1808, in time becoming his successor at the head of the Institute in 1839?

However, it was difficult to offer, in just a few pages, an overview of his holy and industrious life and his considerable influence on the development of the Institute. That is why we refer the reader to the work of Brother Gabriel Michel, who died recently. In almost 400 pages, beginning with the life journey of Brother François, the author relates sixty years of Marist history. The text is well documented, its style easy to read. Published in 1996, it is the best work until now for getting to know Brother François.

Before recording some chronological landmarks to put the life of our brother in context, we quote the introduction to a review of texts written by him. This comes from the book entitled “With Jesus and Mary” (Spiritual Counsels drawn from the correspondence of Brother François), written by Brother Louis-Laurent, Pierre Zind, a pioneer among the brothers undertaking research into our Marist origins. The book was published in 1959 by the Centre Champagnat at Our Lady of the Hermitage. In a few gripping pages Brother Louis-Laurent presents the life journey of Brother François in the manner of a picture with four scenes. Here is his unabbreviated text.

I

A spring morning in La Valla Wednesday 6 May 1818

The curate of the parish of Lavalla climbed to the hamlet of Maisonnettes. It was not precisely his ministry that attracted him to the place, still less to enjoy a walk among the flowering bushes. But a sprig of lily of the valley was in flower on the other side of the ravine, and its perfume delighted the heart of the blessed Champagnat. He went into the house of the Rivat family and asked for Gabriel, the youngest of the boys.

The child's boyish eyes were a little nervous, but shone with the brightness of his marial soul. His mother, Françoise Boiron, was one of those masterly women whom the countryside produces. (Until the time of her marriage she had been accustomed to wear a hair shirt beneath the sash of her young woman's country costume - she asked to be buried with it in 1844.) She had consecrated François in August 1813 at Notre-Dame de Valfleury and clothed him in blue.

Following the usual practice, the blessed Champagnat made the sign of the cross on the boy's forehead. The child blushed a little: he knew the reason for the visit of the one who had admitted him to first communion though unusually young. The parents gladly gave their consent: on the following day, Gabriel would go to the town and place himself under the direction of the founder of the Marist Brothers.

On the following day, early in the morning, the mother and child, dressed in their Sunday best, crossed the Ban, climbed the right bank and wended their way to la Valla. In a side chapel in the church a picture of Our Lady of the Rosary hung above the altar. A modest painter of Saint-Chamond, Ravery, had recently completed it at the request of a woman who wished to thank Our Lady for the return of her two older sons, safe and sound, from conscription in the imperial army. That woman was none other than this one, Gabriel's mother. In front of her *ex-voto*, Françoise renewed her son's consecration to Our Lady of Valfleury.

Today, however, the son is conscious of the gift his mother was making. *"Given by my mother to Mary, at the foot of the altar of the chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary in the church of La Valla, I*



made my departure from the world on Wednesday, 6 May 1818," he was to write at the top of his personal journal. He had just turned ten. From now on he was no longer the child of Françoise, but the child of Mary. And that is why, a few minutes later as she confided him to the hands of Father Champagnat, she simply said, "Take this child, do with him whatever you want: he belongs to the Blessed Virgin. I gave

him to her, and consecrated him to her many times."

The woman left La Valla on her own, crossed the Ban, climbed the left bank and returned to Maisonnettes, her sacrifice complete.

II

An autumn night at Our Lady of the Hermitage Saturday, 12 October 1839

On this autumn night, at Our Lady of the Hermitage, the third since the beginning of the retreat, a light could be seen shining for a long time: Brother François was awake.

He saw once again the little Gabriel accompanying his mother on that clear spring morning in 1818: he recalled taking the habit at the age of eleven on 8 September 1819, remembered the little cook aged 13 whom the Brother Director

of the school at Marlhes had to carry on his shoulders, and thought of the tiny brother who used to stand on a big stone in class to make it appear that he was taller when he was teaching the children of Vanosc and of Boulieu to read and write: yes, he is still that same self. In his heart he relives the joy of his perpetual profession in the fullness of the generosity of his 18 years on October 11th 1826, here at Our Lady of the Hermitage. And then he looks back over the constant contact and direct collaboration with the blessed Founder in the solitude of the Gauds...

It had been a heavy day: 92 brothers in perpetual vows had elected him as successor to the holy Founder. The ceremony had been presided over by venerable Father Colin, superior general of the Society of Mary who tallied the votes: Brother François had received 87; he was only 31 years old.

In his room the new superior hears once again the good wishes of the Marist Fathers, of the brothers, novices and postulants; he feels once again the deep joy of the Founder's gaze upon him. But his pen, halted for a little time, returns to the paper.

"What am I to do, I who recognise clearly that I have neither the bodily strength and health, still less strength of the spirit and virtue? The will of God has been made clear; I bow to it with the happy confidence that he who with one hand imposes this burden upon me will with the other know how to relieve me of the weight of it. At all times I will have to balance my firmness with kindness, my severity by forgiveness. I will have to encourage, strengthen, warn, reprove and correct...These are such heavy duties, so difficult...!"

The lamp goes out, the night takes possession of its domain, and in the calm among the closed violets, the chestnut trees alone continue to whisper to the Gier.

III

A summer morning at Saint-Genis-Laval

Sunday, 19th August 1860

Great joy at Saint-Genis-Laval: twenty six postulants have put on the livery of Mary. In the middle of all his cares, Brother François is jubilant, a grandfather surrounded by his grandchildren. He is even happier than he was at the last general chapter, just a month earlier, when he was permitted to resign from the overwhelming responsibilities of general administration and pass them on to his first assistant, Brother Louis-Marie.

His health had never been the best, and the burdens of the office of superior general had increased his headaches twofold. He had given himself totally to the task: in 1842 he successfully brought about the union with the brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, and in 1844 with the brothers of Viviers. Seven years later, on 20 June 1851, the French government, in authorising the Institute, fulfilled to the letter the prophecy made by blessed Champagnat. This authorization was the first of its kind since 1789, recognising by official decree the religious character of the Institute. The erstwhile little peasant of La Valla had been received in audience by the President of the Republic, the future Napoleon III, and several times by the Pope in Rome. And for three years now on the crest of Saint-Genis-Laval, a new general house extended two immense white wings, exposing them to the extremes of the midsummer heat, its granite surface glittering.

In 1840, when the holy Founder died, The Institute had 48 establishments and 280 members. In 1860, when venerable Brother François submitted his resignation, there were 379 establishments and about 2000 brothers.

Brother François went back up to his room. Across from him was the majestic chain of the Alps; at his feet, at the bottom of the valley, flowed the Rhone, tumultuous and powerful; to his left, the ancient shrine of Lyons stood out on its promontory; nearer, the strident tournament of cicadas and crickets; in the corner, the trunks packed for the Hermitage, and on his desk, his notebooks:

“I had twenty years of preparation for the role of superior general; twenty years carrying it out: will I have twenty years to make reparation for it?”

IV

A winter day at the reliquary of Father Champagnat Saturday, 22nd January 1881

He was to have these last twenty years, not so much to make reparation as to give one last example of life hidden in God with the Nazareth family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Like Moses on the mountain, he prays for the salvation of souls, and mortifies himself like St John the Baptist in the desert.

His greatest pleasure: to care for and comfort the sick and infirm. As one who himself suffers, he understands. For their needs he personally sets up a little garden of medicinal plants, and each morning he goes around the dormitories to make sure that no one is worn out.

However, he knows that the only true illness is sin. Besides, his whole life has been a ceaseless struggle against “the enemy”. His letters are full of advice about overcoming temptations; he has a quite special gift for encouraging those who are violently tempted, and to inspire in others a love of purity. And now, like a second Curé of Ars, this enemy torments him. *“Out with you, you devil, I have nothing to do with you.”*

Following the example of his model, blessed Champagnat, he has experienced his share of setbacks; he has met opposition along the way and knows suffering. *“It is sometimes good to have people who contradict you. We must carry our cross with Jesus, that is, to suffer for the whole world and not make anyone else suffer.”*

He always loved children. He reminds the brothers continually that they must make holiness the object of all their efforts; that they may be saints so that their students may be saints, and happy ones too.

He feels at ease among the juniors who gather around him. His soul, always fresh and new as on a certain morning in May 1818, finds itself naturally in harmony with their joy: *“Do not allow yourselves to fall into sadness and boredom; leave this sad lot to those who serve the devil; but you, who serve God, who are children of the Blessed Virgin, make it your business to be always happy, light hearted and lively.”*

However, today, to the great astonishment of the community, Brother François was missing at the visit to the Blessed Sacrament that always preceded the midday meal. Enquiries were made, and he was found on his knees, his head resting against his bed, overcome by apoplexy.

■ [Marvellous companions of Marcellin] ■

“For a true Christian, for a good religious, death is the beginning of life. Sudden death is not something to be feared if we are always prepared for it; but a good death is a masterpiece; to succeed, it is necessary to attempt to do so over and over again; life is not given to us for any other reason than to prepare for a good death” (February 1843).

He came into the world on a Saturday, and he left it on a Saturday.

As the freezing night obscures the pure summits and imposes silence on the murmur of the Gier the knoll sounds in sadness: it is six o'clock in the evening.

Brother Louis-Laurent (Pierre Zind)



CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- 12 March 1808: birth in the hamlet of Maisonnette, commune of La Valla. He was the youngest child of a family of seven.
- 19 April 1818: first Communion in the church of La Valla.
- 6 May 1818: the young Gabriel, brought by his mother, Françoise, joins Champagnat, curate of the parish since August 1816. He was the 6th member of the young Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary founded on 2 January 1817.
- 3 August 1818: Gabriel was confirmed in the church of St Pierre in Saint-Chamond.
- 8 September 1819: on the feast of the Birthday of Mary, Gabriel made his promises as a Little Brother of Mary, taking the name of François in memory of his mother whom he loved dearly.
- January 1821: At the age of twelve and a half, Brother François began his apostolate at Marlies.
- All Saints 1823: he was sent to Vanosc (Ardèche).
- Spring-summer 1824: he took part in the construction of the Hermitage before returning to Vanosc.

■ [Marvellous companions of Marcellin] ■

- All Saints 1825: at the age of 17 he was appointed Director of the school at Boulieu-les-Annonay, replacing Brother Jean-Pierre Martinol, the first brother who died in the Institute, 29 March 1825.
- 11 October 1826: Brother François took his perpetual vows at the age of 18. He was thereafter to remain at the Hermitage for 32 years, first of all in charge of studies at the novitiate. Through his enthusiastic application to work, he acquired a solid knowledge in various disciplines. He became a good infirmarian who from the outset looked after a garden. Father Champagnat appointed him as his secretary and placed the direction of the house in his care during his absence for several months in Paris in 1836 and 1838, seeking to gain the legal authorisation of the Institute.
- 12 October 1839: Brother François, aged 31, was elected Director General of the Brothers; he was aided by two Assistants.
- 6 June 1840: the death of our Founder, Marcellin Champagnat, at the age of 51. He left an Institute of 280 brothers, 180 of whom were giving religious instruction to 7,000 students, in 48 schools.

■ [Our first Brothers] ■

- 8 September 1840: Brother François wrote his first letter to the brothers inviting them to the annual retreat at the Hermitage.
- 31 March 1842: the union of the Little Brothers of Mary with the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux in the province of Drôme.
- 15 April 1844: the union with the brothers of Viviers (Ardèche).
- 20 June 1851: the legal recognition of the Institute was obtained at Paris following approaches by Brother François and Brother Louis-Marie. At this time there were more than 800 brothers, 565 of them teaching.
- 1856: publication of the biography of Father Champagnat written by Brother Jean-Baptiste based on the evidence of the brothers. Announcing the fulfilment of this project to the brothers, Brother François wrote: *“We can say that Father Champagnat lives among us once again.”* His own desire was to *“become a living copy of the Founder.”*
- August 1858: Brother François left Our Lady of the Hermitage for the new general house built near Lyons at Saint-Genis-Laval.

In this same year he went to Rome seeking for the Institute the approval of the Holy See.

- July 1860: Brother François, worn out, was replaced by Brother Louis-Marie at the head of the Institute. He returned to the Hermitage where he lived until his death. In 1860 there were more than 2,000 brothers, 1,445 of them active, in 379 houses, some of which were in Belgium, England and Scotland.
- September 1871: The Hermitage saw new life, becoming the centre of a Marist province. Once again the house was filled with a great many young people in formation. Brother François, Director of the community, was also the infirmarian, very attentive to the sick brothers. The young ones called him affectionately, "the grandfather".
- 28 May 1876: Brother François had a stroke that paralysed his right side. He was to recover well from this and continued to live his vocation with great fervour.
- 22 January 1881: the death of Brother François. The people of the area spontaneously said, "*The saint is dead.*"- the mysterious radiance of a life wholly given to God

■ [Our first Brothers] ■

and to others. His body was buried in the community cemetery alongside Father Champagnat.

- 25 April 1909: The Institute introduced the cause of the Servant of God, Brother François.
- 20 June 1910 – 24 April 1924: the process initiated by the Ordinary of Lyons.
- 20 March 1924: exhumation and, in the chapel, reburial of the precious remains of the Servant of God.
- 14 November 1934: The Decree introducing the cause of beatification of venerable Brother François.
- 4 July 1968: the Sacred Congregation of Rites published the decree of the heroicity of the virtues practised by Brother François.

Ever since this date we have been waiting for his beatification by which the Church officially would recognise the holiness of Brother François. To bring this process to a conclusion we have to pray to Brother François that, through his intercession, the Lord will give a sign, a miracle, which in the eyes of the Church will authenticate the holy life of our Brother. It is for us, therefore, to pray to him with confidence.



Prayer for the intercession of Brother François

Tomb of Brother François (chapel of the Hermitage)

*Venerable Brother François,
from the days of your childhood
the Lord drew you to himself,
asking you to serve him by a holy life.
Obtain for us the knowledge of how, like you,
to go "to Jesus through Mary",
in simplicity and filial abandonment.
May your prayer, united with that of Mary,
obtain for us also the grace of
And the grace to praise the Lord
who always answers prayer
in ways visible or invisible.*

Amen.

We may also say an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory
be to the Father ...

Venerable Brother François, pray for us.

Please inform the Brother Director of Notre-Dame
de l'Hermitage of any favour obtained through the
intercession of Brother François. He will pass it on to the
general house, Rome.

Prayer with Brother François



Lord Jesus, we come to thank you.

- For François, Gabriel's holy mother. His love for her led him to take her name at his religious profession.
- For devotion to Mary, inherited from his mother, the guiding star of his vocation and of his childhood.

Lord, we thank you.

- For the paternal with which that Marcellin surrounded the young novice with during his formation.
- For Brother François' love of Father Champagnat and his new community.

Lord, we thank you.

- For his generous definitive engagement by perpetual profession at the age of eighteen.
- For the depth of his spiritual life cultivated over the years.

Lord, we thank you.

- For his expertise as a catechist and schoolmaster clearly visible despite his youth.
- For his generosity in accepting the will of God, explicitly through the election on October 12 1839.

Lord, we thank you.

- For his total devotion as Superior General of the Institute for a period of twenty years.
- For his care for all the brothers, especially the sick.

Lord, we thank you.

- For his years of retirement at the Hermitage, “the great reliquary of Father Champagnat”, as “grandfather” among the young.
- For his ardent desire to be “the living copy of the Founder.”

Lord, we thank you.

- For the radiance of his holy life, in community and in public.
- For the decision of the Institute to introduce the cause of beatification of Brother François.

Lord, we thank you.

- For the recognition of his heroic virtues by the Church on July 4, 1968.
- For all the faithful who have confidence in the intercession of Brother François.

Lord, we thank you.

Lord Jesus, increase our confidence in the intercession of your servant and our brother, so that the Church may soon recognise his sanctity and declare him “blessed.” Amen.

[BROTHER JEAN-PIERRE]

Jean-Pierre Martinol
(1793-1825)

First Brother deceased in the Institute, declared a “saint” by Marcellin Champagnat

The life of this Brother is interesting from several aspects. It shows:

- The isolation of country people at the beginning of the XIXth century.
- The force of example in awakening the vocation of a religious-teacher.
- Father Champagnat’s qualities as a formator.
- The great success of Brother Jean-Pierre as a religious-teacher.

This is what we will discover in the few pages of this Brother’s biography, written by Brother Jean-Baptiste (Cf. BQF, p.33-39).

Jean-Pierre Martinol was born on the 26 July 1793 in Burdiges (Loire) to Joseph, a farmer from the hamlet of Montméat, and Marie Robin. Brother Jean-Baptiste, his biographer, tells us that Jean-Pierre felt drawn to the religious life from

an early age but did not have the opportunity to fulfil his desire as he had received no schooling and “had never seen a brother or any other member of a religious community”.

“One day, when he had gone to Saint-Sauveur-en Rue on some family matter, he came across the brothers who were leading their children to holy mass. When he saw this long line of children walking so modestly, he marvelled and spoke aloud,

“Oh, how beautiful it is to lead children in procession in this way and to teach them to love and pray to God! How happy I would be if God were to bless me with such a wonderful occupation.”

After the mass, without another thought, he followed the brothers to their house and asked to speak to the Brother Director.

“Brother, he said, forgive me for daring to ask that you take me into your house to serve you and help teach the children. I know nothing, but I am willing. If you teach me, I will learn. In any case, I am sure that I can serve you as a domestic if there is nothing else I can do.”

And so he came to Saint Sauveur, and the brothers were so satisfied with his conduct that they took him to Lavalla and placed him in the hands of Father Champagnat. The venerated Father, charmed by his candour, his humility and his good spirit, was taken with such affection for the young man that he wanted to personally instruct him in the first principles of religious life and in the areas of knowledge necessary for a teaching brother. Several times a day, the young postulant

would go to the room of the venerated Father to recite his lessons and confide his doubts in the Founder.

One day, after having recited his lesson, he asked,

“Father, can we pray to God without speaking? – Yes, but why do you ask me this question? – Because, every morning, I see you and the brothers remain prostrated for a long time, deep in contemplation, without saying a word. I understand that you are praying, but I don’t know how to do this, which grieves me. – And what do you do during this time? – I recite my rosary and tell God, “I give you my heart and I love you and pray to you like the saintly Father and the brothers who know how to pray so well”. – You can very well continue with this prayer, but I will also teach you how to pray like the brothers.”

So, Marcellin set out the Ignatian method which the brothers practiced, explaining to Jean-Pierre how to harness the forces of the soul: memory, intelligence and will. To the young man’s question, *“How can one take actions without speaking?”* Marcellin responded by giving the example of the mother who looks at or who thinks of her child with love, without telling the child. *“Yourself, said the Father, do you not love the good Lord when you see a crucifix?”*

When the postulant answered affirmatively, Marcellin explained that in this way he could pray to God, every morning, without speaking as did the brothers during the time of meditation. Brother Jean-Baptiste concludes the story by telling us that, *“in the space of a few days, the pious novice was able to meditate and pray wonderfully well, and the good father never needed to repeat this lesson for him.”*

Another day, the Father noticed that the young man seemed worried and asked him the cause of his troubles. *“I fear that I do not have a good conscience and I would very much like to know what state it is in.”* Then, the Founder indicated to his disciple the marks of a good conscience, one which is both righteous and sensitive, and reassured him that he recognized those signs in him. *“Brother Jean Baptiste added that the Brother was overjoyed on hearing this answer and continued to come for his lessons every day with the venerated Father so that in no time he was ready to teach.”*

He was therefore chosen to go and found the school in Boulieu, near Annonay in the Diocese of Viviers, not far from his native region. At the moment of his departure for that parish, he threw himself at the feet of the venerated Father to receive his benediction and asked him,

“Please Father, grant me the blessing of remembering me every day during holy mass and of asking God that he take me from this world soon. – And why do you wish to die? – Because I fear that I will offend God and lose my good conscience through some serious fault. – Trust in Jesus and Mary and do not be afraid. I promise you that I will pray for you, and I hope that you will never have the misfortune of committing a mortal sin. Ask the Blessed Virgin for this blessing and I tell you that she will obtain it for you.”

Brother Jean-Pierre arrived at Boulieu towards the Feast of All Saints in 1823. He opened his school on 2 November and it was soon full of children. The piety of the kindly brother and his gentle and friendly character won him everyone's esteem. However, he was not to spend long in that

parish: God answered his prayer and called him to heaven. During the 1824 retreat, he had a presentiment of his death and the day of his departure when taking his leave of Father Champagnat he was not able to hold back his tears and cried out,

“Father, I’m crying because something tells me in the depths of my heart that you are blessing me for the last time and that I will never again have the joy of seeing you on this earth.”

Indeed, he died little more than a month later from typhoid fever, on 29 March 1825 (See *Chronologie*, p. 41). In his delirium, three names were continually on his lips: the loving name of Jesus, the holy name of Mary and the blessed name of the venerated Father.

When the news arrived of the death of this excellent brother, the Father Champagnat shed tears and exclaimee,

“Our loving God has chosen well, the first amongst us whom he has taken is a saint. This is truly what we have needed to show us the way. Oh, that all the brothers should die in this same state of mind and with the same feelings as this good brother. He has all the marks of one predestined, of a true child of Mary!” (*Biographies de quelques Frères*, pp. 33-39).

- In his *Vie du Père Champagnat*, Brother Jean-Baptiste writes that “The school at Boulieu had so many students that Brother Jean-Pierre, who was its Director, was overcome by the workload and died a victim to his zeal and devotion... He was so loved by the children that when one of them also passed away on the same day, the parents insisted that the child be buried in the

same grave as his kindly schoolmaster” (*Vie*, 1989 edition, pp. 112-113).

- In *Avis, Leçons, Sentences*, this same Brother Jean-Baptiste tells us that, “Brother Jean-Pierre Martinol, Director of Boulieu, paid a visit to Lavalla in 1824. The next day, as he was leaving in the very early morning, the venerated Father said to him,

“As the Brother cook is not yet awake, take this brioche which is the blessed bread I was given on Sunday as celebrant of the high mass. It can as your breakfast on your return trip.”

“No, Father, replied the brother, I will take it to my brothers and we will eat it together with great pleasure because it comes from you and from our Mother House of Lavalla where everyone is so kind and pleasant and do us such good. I am delighted to bring such happiness to my brothers. I am sure that it will be a real thrill for them, and that we will talk of only you and of our brothers of Lavalla throughout the dinner.”

Delighted by such sentiments, the venerated Father exclaimed,

“My dear Brother, you make me weep with joy when you speak like this. These are truly the feelings of family spirit which must fill all the Brothers of Mary. Let us maintain these feelings and this spirit and we will experience fully the gladness of the religious life” (S.L.A., 1868 ed., p. 384; A.L.S., 1927 ed., p. 321).

N.B.

- In the *Annales de l'Institut* (Volume I, 1993 ed., Rome, p. 31), Brother Avit writes of the arrival of Jean-Pierre Martinol in Lavalla in 1818. This is an error. In fact, the school in Saint Sauveur-en-Rue was opened in November 1820 by Brother Jean-François Roumezy at the request of the Mayor, Mr Colomb de Gaste (*Chronologie*, p. 34). However, we know that Jean-Pierre Martinol discovered the religious life through the brothers of that school, as stated by Brother Jean-Baptiste. Therefore, he probably arrived in Lavalla sometime in the years 1821 or 1822.
- The Death Certificate in the public records of Boulieu, dated 28 April 1825, indicates that Jean-Pierre Martinol, "Brother of Christian Doctrine," died on 29 March, at six in the evening, in the Brothers' house at Boulieu. It is interesting to note that the names Little Brother of Mary, Brother of Mary, or Marist Brother do not appear. In the first schools founded, the people associated us with the Brothers of Christian Doctrine, better known under the name « Brothers of the Christian Schools ».

■ [Marvellous companions of Marcellin] ■

- Le Répertoire is the second volume of the letters of Fr. Champagnat. Pages 206-207 provide interesting information about Pierre Antoine Dumas (1781-1856) the priest at Boulieu, particularly about the efforts he made to obtain from Father Champagnat, two Brothers to take care of the boys' school.
- Note that in March 1825, the construction of the Hermitage was nearing completion.



Praying with Brother Jean-Pierre

Brother Jean-Pierre, we are pleased to be in your company for this moment of prayer.

- The life you led amazes us, as we reflect on the mysterious ways of Providence. Your life evokes our desire to thank God for the paths along which our own lives have moved.
- You were inflamed with the wish to dedicate yourself to the Lord through the education of children. You found your vocation through the good example of our Brothers working at Saint-Sauveur-en-Rue.
- You had the good fortune, the grace to be formed at Lavalla by Marcellin Champagnat who remained close to you as a guide all through your brief life.
- He marveled at your thirst to learn the ways of prayer, at your sensitive conscience, at your thoughtful and friendly character.
- Because of your good will which you always placed at his disposition, the Founder helped

you to become in a few months a fervent religious and a capable teacher. He chose you to start the school in Boulieu.

- In 1824, while he was visiting the community in LaValla, you caused him to weep for joy. As he offered you a simple piece of pastry for your return trip, he heard you speak words which manifested to him your family spirit.
- What Brother Jean Baptiste wrote about you still touches us: “Brother Jean-Pierre was so greatly loved by his young students that the parents of one child who died on the same day as he, insisted that the child be interred in the same grave as his kindly teacher” (Life, page 113).
- When he heard of your death, the Founder began to weep. He said, “God has chosen well. The first one of us whom He has taken to himself is a saint. That is just what we need to show us the way.”
- Brother Jean-Pierre, we give thanks to God, and we offer our thanks to you. You led a religious life that was fervent and wholehearted, drawing its strength from your love of Jesus, of Mary, of Father Champagnat, of children.

May your example inspire us today in our own apostolates with young people. Amen.

[BROTHER STANISLAS]

Claude Fayol
(1800-1853)



Claude Fayol was born in 1800 in Saint-Médard (Loire). He arrived at Lavalla in February, 1822 and died at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage on 2 November 1853.

In the *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, Brother Jean-Baptiste writes the following. "It was at the beginning of 1822. The Institute was not well-known and had few recruits. Father Champagnat suffered on account of this lack of subjects and prayed fervently to the Blessed Virgin to obtain some postulants. On 12 February, having gone to say the Holy Mass at the Chapel of Notre-Dame des Sept-Douleurs (Our Lady of Sorrows), during the thanksgiving, which was very long, he repeated this prayer many times:

"Remember, O divine Mother, that it is you who have founded this little community, and that it would benefit you to bless it and make it prosper. If you abandon us, we shall per-

"Remember, O divine Mother, that it is you who have founded this little community, and that it would benefit you to bless it and make it prosper. If you abandon us, we shall per-

ish; we shall go out like a lamp without oil. But, if this work perishes, it will not be our work which perishes, but yours. It shall not occur thus, O most holy Mother. We have put our trust in you, and it shall never be said that we counted on you in vain” (p. 47).

On his return, Father Champagnat found Claude Fayol at the house of the brothers, a young man of twenty-two who came to ask admission to the Institute. He gave Father Champagnat a letter from his curate which contained the following text.

“The bearer of this letter is a good and pious young man who wishes to withdraw from the world. He has little schooling but is intelligent and will be able to learn. To give you the essence of my thinking on this recruit, I believe that he is apt to perform any task and I am convinced that he will be a real treasure for your house.”

The exemplary conduct and the edifying and hard-working life of Claude Fayol over the thirty-three years during which he lived in the Institute confirmed all points of this glorious testimonial and the praises of his curate.

We can judge the virtue and merit of this brother by the opinion formed of him by the venerated Founder. One day when he was visiting a school, the Brother Director asked him for news of the Mother House. Father Champagnat responded,

“Death has struck us a heavy blow as it has taken one of our best recruits. – Would that be Brother Stanislas? replied the Brother director? – O my godness! cried the Father, What would

become of us if death were to carry off that excellent brother, who is one of the strongest pillars of the Institute? We still have too much need of him for God to call him away. That brother is a real treasure for the house and I am sure that the Blessed Virgin will keep him in own midst for a long time” (p. 48).

In the Circular of 24 February 1854, a few months after the death of Brother Stanislas, Brother François, Superior General, wrote the following. “Linked from the outset with all the struggles and all the works of our good Father, at all times, the faithful imitator of his virtues and filled by his spirit, he was the Founder’s living copy until the end...He liked to say, *‘God and the Blessed Virgin have always helped us. Have trust, they will not abandon us’*” (Cir. Vol. II, p. 179).

Further on, he added, “Moreover, no one could resist the type of natural eloquence which his love for the Institute and his desire for good gave him. Although unschooled, barely able to read, he always found in the feelings of his heart, in the energy of his will and in the good judgement of his mind, everything which was the most pleasant to say, the most touching to present, when he needed to interest someone in the needs of the Congregation... So many brothers, so many postulants were able to overcome the first difficulties of the novitiate and persevere in their vocation thanks to the passion and guidance of his advice and exhortations” (Idem p. 183).

In the preface to his abridged version of the life of Father Champagnat, written in Saint Genis-Laval in 1886-1887 on the occasion of the introduction of the cause of the Founder’s beatification, Brother Sylvestre cites his sources. Amongst

them were *“my frequent contacts with dear Brother Stanislas, whose assistant I was for nearly one year. This good Brother... was the constant right arm and consolation of the venerated Father up to his death. I know from him that in moments of private conversation our Founder confided in him about several secret matters concerning his family and about other, very special matters relating to the Congregation of which only he was aware”* (*Frère Sylvestre raconte Marcellin Champagnat*, Rome 1992, p. 74).

For his part, Brother Jean-Baptiste wrote, *“Every evening, he went to the room of the venerated Father and, after his death, to that of his successor to report on his day and take orders for the next”* (*BQF*, p. 59).

Brother Jean-Baptiste records several conversations of the Founder with Brother Stanislas (see *Vie*, 1989 edition, pp. 233, 237, 353), in particular, this one which took place several days before the Founder's death. *“My good Brother, I've caused you a lot of trouble which I very much regret. But, what consoles me is that God will repay you a hundredfold for that which you have done for me...So, try and make yourself as useful to the brothers as you can. I ask especially that you encourage the novices and see the new arrivals often in order to accustom them to things”* (Idem p. 248).

“Brother Stanislas had all the qualities of a beautiful soul, a chosen soul: good judgment, sure tact, a generous, tender and sensitive heart, an open, sociable, friendly and constant nature, a strong yet docile will, a righteous and scrupulous conscience, a rare know-how, a special talent for dealing with men. All these fundamental qualities were highlighted and

embellished by a solid piety and by all the virtues which make a good religious.

Brother Stanislas was a treasure for his Superiors and for all the brothers because the services which he rendered them. After his novitiate, the venerated Father, believing that he wished to teach, assigned him a position. However, he was pleasantly surprised when the brother came to ask for the blessing of staying close to the Founder in order to serve him and look after the practical, day-to-day running of the house. He granted this request even more willingly as there was then no one onto whom he was able to shift responsibility for worldly matters. The good brother would take up this work with incomparable zeal and devotion. He was capable in all areas. He did everything with taste and succeeded in everything he did: cooking, cleaning and organising rooms, looking after the laundry and linen, buying and storing the provisions, making the bread, working in the garden, seeing to the sick, acting as the servant of all the brothers, that was his occupation, that was the life of Brother Stanislas. And as the day was not long enough for this weighty task, he also gave over part of his night to his work. His charity was such that he would anticipate all needs: someone arrived after a journey and he was there with refreshments for the traveller, to offer him a change of clothes if needed and get him anything else he required...No brother suffered, none experienced any kind of need without the industrious charity of the good brother guessing the problem and coming to his aid.

However, while he made himself the servant of all his brothers, he was even more so that of the venerated Founder. Who could tell all the services of every sort which he performed dur-

ing the twenty years which he spent by his side? It was he and almost he alone who served the Founder during his serious illness in 1825. He spent nearly six weeks by the patient's bedside without sleeping in his own bed, and it was to this constant care, lavished with limitless devotion and a rare intelligence, that the venerated Father would owe his life and his return to good health. In the last illness of the pious Founder, Brother Stanislas applied the same attention, performed the same services and with the same devotion, and it is certainly his care which we must thank for prolonging the life of the venerated Father, without which he would have died much earlier.

This life of struggle, labour and continual sacrifices saw the good brother contract a nervous disease which caused him to suffer horribly. However, this was never to alter the joy and peace of his soul or that blessed cheer, that affability and accommodating nature which distinguished him. He was never heard to complain of his ills. He never requested relief or had others do part of his work. His ambition was to die on the job, to sacrifice himself for the good of his brothers, in the service of the Institute. Accordingly, he was the servant of all and the treasure of all, right until the end.

Brother Stanislas was a treasure for the Institute through the resources which he procured for it. This excellent brother was sent by Providence just at the moment when the Institute was starting its development and even at the very moment of its greatest need. The community had no novitiate house at all and was without resources. This state of affairs inflamed the zeal of the good brother. He requested and obtained permission to collect funds and set himself to work. His modesty, his simplicity, his humility, his politeness, his

know-how and that fine tact which directed all his actions, all his words, soon gained him everyone's esteem and confidence. People liked to see him and to give to him. As a result, he obtained great assistance and considerable alms for the Institute. It was he who, during the illness of Father Champagnat in 1825, went to visit the curate of Saint-Pierre of Saint-Chamond, explained the state in which the house found itself and convinced the curate by his prayers and tears to take over its debts. Indeed, the venerable curate paid off eight thousand francs of debt and made himself liable for the remainder. It was Brother Stanislas who later collected all the sums necessary to build the chapel of the Hermitage and to fit it with all the ornaments and furnishings required to hold worship. It was he who convinced a good Christian of Lavalla named Biron to give all his wealth, amounting to more than forty thousand francs, to the Institute and to retire to live with the brothers. It was he who was able to gain the sympathy for the Institute of the most important families of the town of Saint-Chamond, who contributed so generously to the works of our pious Founder and who have always come to our aid in times of need." (*BQF*, pp. 48 to 51)

Brother Jean-Baptiste continued in his praises of Brother Stanislas by recalling the words of Brother François in his Circular of 24 February 1854. "No one could resist the natural eloquence which his virtue and his love for the Institute gave him." Later, he highlighted how Brother Stanislas was a treasure for the Institute through the vocations which he procured or strengthened. "So many brothers, so many postulants owe their handling of the initial troubles of the novitiate to his advice and his passionate encouragement! Who can say how many of them he preserved in their vocation?...He normally spent his

recreations with the postulants and the young brothers, and he always knew how to find himself in the company of those who were wavering and had need of his help. His zeal provided him with a thousand occupations to distract those who were bored, to strengthen the weak... Sometimes, he would assign to the sacristy or some other pleasant job the person who was discouraged by or tired of study. Sometimes, he would take as his shopping companion a postulant to whom he wanted to give some diversion and also some good advice.”

Brother Jean-Baptiste concluded the description of this aspect of the personality of Brother Stanislas by the following words, full of admiration. “It has to be acknowledged that there was in that excellent brother such an attachment to the members of the Institute, such zeal for the sanctification of all, such self-sacrifice, such an energy in his words, in his will, such a mark of virtue and saintliness in his conduct that it was almost impossible to resist him” (*BQF*, p. 54).

In the pages which follow he goes on to say why and how Brother Stanislas had been a treasure for the Institute. He invokes

1. his love of and his attachment to his vocation,
2. his piety,
3. his mortification,
4. his love for Jesus and Mary and
5. his constancy, giving several examples taken from the life of the brother and citing his words. (*Idem*, pp. 55 to 58)

To finish, Brother Jean-Baptiste again cites the words of Brother François. “Linked from the outset with all the strug-

gles and all the works of our good Father, at all times, the faithful imitator of his virtues and filled by his spirit, he was the Founder's living and faithful copy until the end. He died at the same age of the same illness, in the same circumstances, and while giving to all the brothers the same examples of patience, resignation and fervour" (Idem, p. 59).

N.B.

Brother Jean-Baptiste gives 12 February 1822 as the date of Brother Stanislas' arrival at Lavalla. Brother Sylvestre indicates 18 February in the work cited (p.112). In the Register of Perpetual Vows, 2 February is given as the date of his entry to the novitiate.

It is good to recall the letter of Father Champagnat to Mr. Antoine Thiollière, steel manufacturer at Saint-Chamond, dated 18 January 1837.

According to Brother Avit, « Mr. Antoine Thiollière, a great benefactor of the Institute (cf. References, p. 482-484), invited Father Champagnat to send him the good Brother Stanislas so he could have a talk with him. »

The Founder sent him the Brother with the following short letter:

« Sir,

We are sending the bearer to you, as you kindly and charitably invited us to do, with the following declaration : « We associate ourselves, if you are willing, with you and your family, in a special and particular way, in sharing in the blessing which God gives us and the good works we do for him now and in the future. Excuse me for taking this liberty and please believe that I am, with respect, your most humble and obedient servant... »

Your most humble and most obedient servant,

Champagnat » (Letters, Doc. 85, p. 183).

One can see in this short letter the Founder's wish to associate his Brothers with the family of this generous benefactor, in order to place their good works in common. It is a very interesting page for our time, when lay people are looking for a closer collaboration with the Brothers.

Praying with Brother Stanislas

Brother Stanislas, it is a joy for us to come and pray with you, by recalling some traits of your personality and your spiritual life.

- One morning in February 1822, you knocked on the door of the novitiate at Lavalla. It was the first response of Our Lady of Pity to the fervent prayers of the young Founder to obtain vocations.
- In the letter of the parish priest of Saint Médard which you presented to Marcellin we read these prophetic words : « *I am convinced that this young man will be a real treasure for your house.* »
- Father Champagnat said of you, as if in echo : «*This brother is a real treasure for the*



house. » And Brother Jean-Baptiste on his part declared that you were «right to the end the servant of all, the treasure of all. »

- In the Circular in which he announced your death to the brothers, Brother François painted a wonderful portrait of you. In particular, he wrote: *« No one could resist the type of natural eloquence which your love of the Institute and your desire for good gave you. »*
- Brother Jean-Baptiste wrote that *« you had the qualities of an elite soul : good judgment, sure tact, a generous heart, tender and sensitive, an open character, sociable, happy, affable and constant, a will at the same time strong and docile, an upright and delicate conscience, a rare savoir-faire, a special talent for handling people. »*
- It was you who were the visible guardian angel of Marcellin during his serious illness, in January 1826. You remained nearly six weeks at his bedside, caring for him with skill and devotion, before returning him to his little brothers who were beginning to become discouraged.
- Brother Sylvestre, who lived with you for nearly a year, affirms that you were the right arm

and consolation of Father Champagnat, and that he kept you up to date with the affairs of his family and of the Congregation.

- The Founder was very quick to appreciate the riches of your heart. He named you the “minister of encouragement” for the postulants and novices. Your zeal made you think up a thousand tasks to distract those who were discouraged and to strengthen the weak.
- Brother François who recognised in you «*a living copy of the Founder*» has also passed on to us the words you had frequently on your lips: «*The good Lord and the Blessed Virgin have always helped us; have confidence, they will not abandon us.*»
- Brother Stanislas, we are sure that, in the company of Mary, Marcellin and our Brothers in heaven, you too are offering prayers to Jesus. Ask for us, who are still on the way enthusiasm and joy in our Marist vocation.

Thank you, Lord, for having given us Brother Stanislas as a companion on the way.

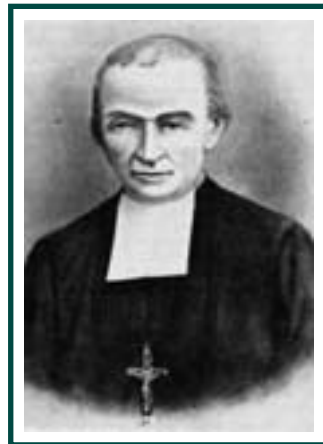
Amen.

[BROTHER JEAN-BAPTISTE]

Jean Baptiste Furet
(1807-1872)

**Assistant General
and Institute Historian**

It seems opportune to present the life of Brother Jean-Baptiste. In fact, it is thanks to his various works relating to our origins that we are able, after nearly two centuries, to recover some of the deeds and traits of the first companions of the Founder. We owe an immense debt of gratitude to this Brother, and it is by way of repayment, however modest, that I propose to help you become better acquainted with him.



In the Circular he addressed to the Brothers after the death of Brother Jean-Baptiste, and in which he presented his life and works, Brother Louis-Marie, Superior General, wrote: « Is he not for us like a second Founder? » (Circ. Vol. IV, p.250).

And further on he added: « Brother Jean-Baptiste has had a very special mission in the Institute, that of constituting and completing it » (Id. p.279).

In finishing, he asked all the Brothers who had known the deceased, especially those of the Midi, « for they were the ones who knew the Brother Assistant at the height of his powers », to put together “a good study” and to send it to him or to the Brother Assistant of the Province, at the time of the next retreat, in view of composing a more complete biography.

« So, my very dear Brothers, letters, conferences, public counsel, individual counsel, good thoughts, good maxims, witticisms, anything you hear about the dear Brother Assistant, note it down, note it down carefully, even if it seems to you of no consequence. One day someone will draw good from it, to the benefit of all » (p. 273-274).

We do not know how well the Brothers responded to this appeal, nor what became of the documents sent. One cannot doubt, given the exceptional radiance of the personality of Brother Jean-Baptiste and the esteem he enjoyed, that many Brothers gave their testimony. It was probably on these testimonies that Brother Amphiloque drew to write a biography on the occasion of the centenary of the Institute (1917), doubtless at the request of Brother Stratonique, then Superior General. This text, composed mainly from the letters sent to or received by the Brother Assistant, has never been published. We were able to consult it and quote some extracts from those letters as illustrated in the pages which follow.

An outline of his life

- He was born on 24 September 1807 in the hamlet of Pieyre, commune of Saint-Pal-en-Chalençon in Haute-Loire, in the Diocese of Puy. His parents were farmers.

He was the third of six children. He was a good student at the little village school which was taught by a saintly woman. He was lively and mischievous and had a fascination with bird nests (Circ. Vol. IV, p. 272). His rather delicate health (asthma) prevented him from going out to work in the fields. His mother taught him to do lace-work at home, a cottage industry which provided extra income to the families of the district. With part of the earnings, he bought pious images including one of the Way of the Cross which he displayed in his room.

- On 27 March 1822, he arrived in Lavalla. He was fourteen and a half. It was an answer of Our Lady of Le Puy to the prayers of Father Champagnat, who had requested vocations from Mary. The Queen of Heaven gave her servant a princely gift in the person of this adolescent who was to become a loyal disciple and give the Institute, in addition to his apostolic work, the treasure of his books which transmit our story and our spirituality. She had already responded magnificently in February with the arrival of Claude Fayol, Brother Stanislas, who would become the Founder's confidant and support.
- On 25 October 1822, he received the religious habit in the company of Brother Stanislas, who had arrived at Lavalla a few days before him, and Brother Joseph (G. Poncet). Very soon after, he was sent to Bourg-Argental. The Brother Director (Jean-Marie Granjon) having left to join a Trappist monastery, our young brother found himself one of only two brothers there. Seriously ill, he received the visit of Father Champagnat, accompanied by Brother Stanislas, in February 1823 (the *Memorare* in

the snow”). In 1824, he was at Saint-Sauveur-en-Rue. In 1826, he opened the Neuville-sur-Saône school: he was not yet nineteen. He stayed there for ten years with an absence of one year in 1830 and founded a boarding facility.

- On 8 September 1828, he made his profession of perpetual vows. In 1836, he was in Charlieu where he replaced Brother Louis. At the time, he wrote to the Founder, *“Thanks to the protection of our good Mother, I am very happy with my class and the other brothers are going equally well. We have a hundred and fifty pupils in all, of whom thirty are mine. The task is not beyond our powers. All three of us are well and we are very united.”* In his unpublished biographical essay written in 1917 at the request of Brother Stratonique, Superior General, Brother Amphiloque indicated that Jean-Baptiste also spent time in Feurs, Millery, and Saint-Symphorien d’Ozon, before Neuville (Manuscript, p. 64; Rome archives).
- In 1839, he founded the school of Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise in a town of nearly 4,000 inhabitants in the north of France, 700 kilometres from Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage. He stayed there only a short time as he was appointed Assistant to Brother François at the General Chapter of 12 October of the same year, along with Brother Louis-Marie. He was thirty-two years old.
- In 1842, he assumed responsibility for the Province of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, following the amalgamation of the Brothers of Fr Mazelier with our own. There, he imposed the Rule and the ways of the Hermitage, “with

gentle obstinacy and fatherly kindness.” He was well seconded by the excellent Brother Jean-Marie (Jean-Claude Bonnet), born in Saint-Sauveur-en-Rue on 14 September 1807, who had entered the Hermitage on 2 September 1826 (see LPC, 2 *Répertoire*, pp. 292-299). This brother remained at Saint Paul whilst Brother Jean-Baptiste ordinarily resided at Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage. In the same year, we find him director and cook of the school of Bouillargues in the Gard region for several months. Here, he restored his poor health whilst allowing Fr Carle, the curate, not to lose face in relation to the Prefect and the Bishop whom he had already invited to the inauguration of his school (See *Nos Supérieurs*, p. 28 and *Annales du F. Avit*, Volume 2, p. 64-65). The Province of Saint Paul under the direction of Brother Jean-Baptiste was to experience remarkable development. In 1842, it counted 40 brothers, 6 postulants or novices and 13 establishments. In 1860, when Brother Chrysogone replaced Brother Jean-Baptiste, there were 80 establishments and nearly 400 brothers.

- In 1844, he was also in charge of overseeing the amalgamation of the Brothers of Viviers with our Institute. He was to succeed, in La Bégude as in Saint Paul, in inculcating the spirit of the Hermitage in the brothers so well, that the Province of Aubenas would experience development which was comparable in speed and quality with that of the Province of Saint Paul.

“Dear Brother Térance, in this centenary year of 1917, one of the rare and perhaps even the only survivor of the first hours of the merger and the creation of the Province of

St Paul-Trois-Châteaux and who was only thirteen years old when dear Brother Jean-Baptiste arrived there, said: "that incomparable brother was, literally, for the Institute and specifically for the two Provinces of the Midi, what Saint Paul had been in the Apostolic College in establishing the reign of the Gospel among the Gentiles"» (Amphiloque, p. 20).

- On 2 September 1855, Brother Jean-Baptiste made the vow of stability.
- On 6 August 1858, the General Administration left Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage for Saint-Genis-Laval. In the work cited (see p. 55), Brother Amphiloque indicated that, in 1866, "Third Year" session was organized under the responsibility of Brother Jean-Baptiste. There was no immediate continuation, and it was not until 1897 that the session was repeated. This first experiment of a second novitiate of six months' duration is also indicated in the *Chronologie Mariste* of 1917 (p.30). The war of 1870 brought Brother Jean-Baptiste back to the Hermitage for several months, but it was in Saint-Genis that he died on 5 February 1872. By that time, the work of Father Champagnat, which Brother Jean-Baptiste had known in its beginnings, counted around 2,200 brothers in some 400 establishments.

His personality

It must be said from the outset that Brother Jean-Baptiste had a rich personality.

Brother Louis-Marie, in his Circular of 8 April 1872, entitled "Brother Jean-Baptiste or the fervent vocation" (Circ.

Vol. IV, p. 239), wrote, *"In Brother Jean-Baptiste, it is reason, intelligence and common sense which stand out. Even piety, which seems to be more particularly a matter of the heart, he wished to be above all solid, wise and based on the principles of faith."*

His intelligence

His intelligence was lively, as indicated by his accomplished works, although he had only attended the little school in his village and had entered the novitiate at fifteen years of age. However, he had a passion for study, as he wrote to a young brother, *"I admit that I loved study to the point that the venerated Father Champagnat used to tell me that it was a "fury". However, I only passionately loved the study of the Religion and always with the goal of being of use to others. "* (Amphiloque, p. 272) Brother Louis-Marie, in the Circular already cited, reports one of Brother Jean-Baptiste's conversations, *"This 'Télémaque', he told me, they are calling a masterpiece. That may well be true, but I can't read it. Don't talk to me about fables when I have the Gospels and the Church fathers"* (p. 248). Brother Aníbal Cañón, in his presentation of the Life of the Founder, translated into Spanish, had reason to be astonished at the vast religious culture of Brother Jean-Baptiste (*Crónicas Maristas I*, p. 7-10).

A happy nature

"And who, what's more, was more cheerful, more fulfilled, more loveable, more captivating than he?" (Brother Louis-Marie, Circ. p. 244). Brother Amphiloque recorded the words of witnesses, *"Brother Jean-Baptiste was always cheerful in*

the gentlest and friendliest way. The attraction of his person and the happiness one felt approaching him; the great ease with which one could speak to him, the facility with which one opened one's heart to him, were they not the effect of that translucent joy in him which made him so amiable, of that so welcoming, so benevolent goodness directed towards everyone which made one feel at ease being near him!" (p. 112-113). And the same brother reports these words of Brother Jean-Baptiste which provide enormous food for thought, *"The good natured man is the only one who makes others love virtue* (Idem p. 200 bis).

A kindly and strong heart

"No one would leave him without feeling lifted up, consoled, encouraged, strengthened, joyful" (Idem p. 93). His goodness and firmness took the form of a will to encourage which he expressed to everyone. He was in the habit of saying, *"You have got the devil to discourage you. As for me, my job is to always encourage you"* (Idem, p. 259). We find this will in his book *"The Good Superior"* which *"is the admirable summary of instructions given to his brothers in his lectures, private conversations and letters ..."* (Idem, p. 243).

A tireless worker

"Even on the day of his death, he was still correcting the proofs of his Meditations on the Incarnation" (Circ. Vol. IV, p. 249). *"His research! What can we say of all the care and effort which he invested in this task, of his application and attentiveness in coordinating these works! He spent a full thirty years in collecting, here and there, from the best authors, the saintly thoughts, admirable phrases and solid maxims which*

he has left us today. He spent twenty years writing and bringing them together either in already or yet to be published works. And this work, he continued without stopping, without being distracted from first, his classes and later, his heavy responsibilities as Assistant: eighteen uninterrupted years of teaching in the schools of Neuville-sur-Saône, Bourg-Argental, Millery, Feurs, Saint-Symphorien d'Ozon, Hermitage and Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise , thirty-two years as Provincial Assistant, either in the Midi or the Centre” (Idem, p. 262/263).

We know, from Brother Avit (*Annales*), that *“Brother Jean-Baptiste, as active and courageous as he was, was a great lover of sleep”* (See *Amphiloque*, p. 75).

Brother Jean-Baptiste put his rich personality totally at the service of Marcellin and his work.

From the time of his arrival at Lavalla, he was won over by Father Champagnat (*Vie*, 1989 edition, p. 100/103). He was trained by Father Champagnat and would always be totally at the Father’s disposal. It can be said that he was one of the latter’s favourite sons and never disappointed him. After the Founder’s death, Brother Jean-Baptiste was to play a capital role in the development and consolidation of the Institute in his work as Assistant and through the books which he wrote. After the publication of the *“Life”* (1856), Brother François, the Superior General, wrote *“that it recalled marvellously the Founder amongst his brothers”* (Circular of 6 January, 1857).

And Brother Louis-Marie wrote, *“It is to this reflective spirit, this solid spiritual nourishment, that the venerated Father Champagnat owes his continued presence thirty-two years after*

his death, these qualities in an Assistant who continued and perfected his work (...) Is he not like a second Founder for us?" (Circ. Vol. IV, p. 250).

And further on, he adds, *"Brother Jean-Baptiste had a very special mission at the Institute, that of establishing and completing it" (Idem p. 279).*

Physical and mental sufferings

Brother Jean-Baptiste never had robust health. He found himself compelled to follow a very strict diet. *"In the morning, a little hot chocolate without bread or anything. During the day, some herb broths, again without bread, and, at around half past four in the afternoon, a poor excuse for dinner for which, whatever he was served, he ate barely half and, in his last years, the quarter of the ordinary meal of any other brother."* (Idem, p. 281) Brother Louis-Marie goes on to cite at length a letter of the Brother Assistant, written at the Hermitage on 2 January 1871, in which we read, *"I won't hide from you that I often, I can say daily, reproach myself concerning this critical point (the spread of domestic comfort within the communities). My infirmities have forced me to adopt a diet which, as sad and hard as it is for me, is not edifying for the others...If I had followed the true desire which I have often felt, I should have resigned my position and retired to the infirmary twenty-five years ago. Until I die, I will regret not having done so..."* (Idem, p. 280-283). *"Often, very often, wrote Brother Louis-Marie, Brother François and I had to struggle against this same idea which the brother would express aloud to us, and there was a necessity for him to submit to and for us to compel him to follow the only diet which allowed him to live and to do work which was indispensable to*

the Institute, work which he and he alone could do” (Idem, p. 280). Yes, my very dear brothers, I thought it well to reveal to you the mysterious sufferings of Brother Assistant, without which he would not have become known. We can say that this is the finest and most praiseworthy aspect of his life” (Idem p. 283).

In the service of the Institute

The rapid development of the Institute beginning in the years 1850-1860 did not occur without there being serious problems in the training of brothers. After a year or sometimes less of novitiate, the young professed brother was sent to a school to continue his training under the supervision of a Brother Director while also doing the cooking for the community. We can well understand the importance of the supervision of young brothers and also of Directors. Brother Jean-Baptiste wrote hundreds of letters to these privileged recipients, often in answer to their own letters as these brothers had to write regularly – every second month – to their Assistant. This was an immense and crushing task which he carried out very faithfully. In a little-known document entitled “Principles of Brother Jean-Baptiste”, we read as 30th and final principle, *“When you have written eight or ten letters in a day, you must stop because after that you will do nothing but repeat yourself –you won’t be able to get anything right. You need then to take a break from this activity and go and restock you provisions through study or meditation.”*

In this vast correspondence, Brother Jean-Baptiste always showed himself to be understanding and kind but, at the same time, firm and demanding when the situation required.

One of his thoughts expressed how he viewed this delicate position. He wrote, *“The guidance of souls is a matter of prudence, moderation, wise arrangements, delicate precautions, benevolent attentions and honest procedures”* (Cited by Brother Amphiloque, p. 89).

His letter-writing style is often colourful and picturesque. Here is an extract from a letter to a young man living at Saint-Paul. *“If the saints were not all geniuses, they were all men of great common sense, men with their heads squarely on their shoulders, calm, men of character and strong will... As my New Year’s wish for you my dear friend, I wish you a head squarely placed on your shoulders, one made of stone - but of granite, not Saint Restitut stone.”* Brother Amphiloque explains for us, *“The stone of Saint Restitut, from the quarries of St Paul-Trois-Châteaux, is white, very soft and crumbles easily”* (Idem, p. 60).

The same Brother Amphiloque transcribed the letter of Brother Fuscien, encouraged by the Brother Assistant despite his deformity (he was a hunchback), who did good work in the Province of St Paul from 1856 to 1912. He also recopied the letter of Brother Térance who witnessed the amalgamation of 1842. *“For lack of men, Fr Mazelier found himself unable to correctly establish a training novitiate. But, oh how difficult was Brother Jean-Baptiste’s task of training us...For the record, I will give myself as a sample of the state of things at the time. I went to St Paul-Trois-Châteaux in 1842, the same year as the union. I was thirteen and a half. The community, very much reduced in numbers, was mixed. There were six of us, novices, young brothers or postulants, under the care of a teacher whose job was to have us recite the catechism lesson, the weekly*

Gospel reading and to teach us spelling and arithmetic, while Brother Jean-Marie, the Director, responsible for transforming all the children of Fr Mazelier into Marists, did all he could to organise things well. From time to time he saw us individually, supervising and instructing his religious community.

Four months after my investiture, that is, after eleven months of preparation, I was posted and put in charge of cooking and then a junior class, followed by a first grade class, the preparation for which enabled me to obtain my "brevet" teaching diploma. This was the reason for my appointment to the weighty responsibilities of Director at eighteen years of age and with my eleven months of training!

It was thus that I fell into the hands of our dear Brother Jean-Baptiste and started the series of correspondence which lasted up to the end of his life... Under the conditions in which we found ourselves in the Midi at that time, oh what patience, attention and prudence were required of dear Brother Jean-Baptiste in his "letters" in order to shape, instruct and encourage recruits who had had so little training up to that point! And, yet, he was admirable in that taxing and difficult task! Such know-how, such tact in dealing with people, not mincing his words but without hurting people's feelings; knowing how to conceal where the need arose, to revive even the most sagging morale!... He completely won our hearts, having us under his spell and delighted to be so" (Idem, p. 81-83).

Other witnesses confirm, "He had a marvellous gift for consoling, encouraging, lifting up, strengthening... One never left his room, wrote Brother Anatole, without taking away renewed courage, contentment and desire to do better" (Idem, p. 88).

A citation from Brother Amphiloque expresses his admiration before the work of Brother Jean-Baptiste. "It was through his letters, so numerous, so varied, often so original,

so colourful, always so sensible, so tender, so affectionate, so frank, so fatherly and, sometimes, when the need arose, so strong, so threatening, so fearsome, that he trained and instructed the brothers, that he bound them to their vocation, that he inoculated them with the spirit of the Institute and, finally, made men and saints of them” (Idem, p. 89).

A few pages earlier, he names brothers trained by Brother Jean-Baptiste: “Urbain, Ribier, Nicéas, Élisée, Nivard, Nestor, Félicité, etc.” (Idem, p. 77).

He also declares, “*Dear Brother Jean-Baptiste was alert with fatherly concern for his young brothers. He made it his duty to defend them even against their Directors when justice and reason required” (Idem, p. 210).*

This comment lets us imagine that some Directors did not correctly perform their duty as formators of the young brothers. In this case, Brother Jean-Baptiste knew how to firmly bring them back into line. Here is how he responded to a Director who requested that Brother Jean-Baptiste remove his two young brothers. *“Remove them! Remove them! That’s easy to say. But if each time someone causes a fuss you move him on, by the end of the year he’ll have caused turmoil in twenty establishments. So, five or six of such rowdy elements are enough to disturb the whole Province and keep in it perpetual motion. So, we need to take things easy. You need to be patient. I need to be patient. Let’s join forces to knock the rough edges off these fellows. It would be better to do that rather than replace them. You are no longer a young man. You must understand that today we need to work with our recruits and not send them on a tour of the country. Therefore, do what you can from your side as a good Director and I’ll do what I can in the circumstances. If we end up having to make a*

change, at least we will have had the satisfaction of having done our duty” (Idem, p. 252).

He wrote to another Director who also had two young brothers in his community, *“For twenty-three hours a day play the role of their mother and for one hour their father” (Idem, p. 257).*

In 1854, on finishing his novitiate, the young Brother Nestor, the third Superior General, was posted to Saint-Victor-la-Coste in the Gard region to work as the cook. His Director complained bitterly to the Brother Assistant that the little brother sang as he worked. Brother Jean-Baptiste sent the offender one of his most beautiful images, encouraging him to sing even more so that his heart would never be filled by sadness (*Nos Supérieurs*, p. 51).

The problem of training Brother Directors was a major worry for Brother Jean-Baptiste, as it was for Father Champagnat. Remember the dream of the Founder, recounted in the introduction to the book *“The Good Superior”*, and the interpretation given to it by Brother Jean-Baptiste, at the request of the Founder (*Le Bon Supérieur*, 1869, pp. V to IX).

A comment from Brother Amphiloque may help us to better understand the situation at the time. *“Before the 1903 Constitutions, one could postpone indefinitely perpetual profession and remain, without fixed limits, at the vow of obedience which bound one to the vocation until profession, or until the Superiors decided in relation to this vocation. Most brothers pronounced their vows after five years under the vow of obedience only. Others, either through conscientiousness or for other laudable or less laudable reasons, postponed indefinitely the perpetual profession to the great detriment of public edification and the spiritual benefit of the individual (Idem p. 276).*

To finish, I would like to cite two picturesque expressions of Brother Jean-Baptiste.

He didn't want either for himself or others "*mumbled, hasty, special express prayers.*" (Idem, p. 142) "*You swindle Him (God), each time you say them (your prayers) badly*" (Idem, p. 132).

The living memory of the Founder

In addition to his role of Assistant for the Provinces of the Midi for sixteen years and of Saint Genis for twelve, his work as a formator of brothers, especially of the young and Directors, Brother Jean-Baptiste was the living memory of the work of the Founder through the texts which he wrote. As he reminds us himself, at the end of the preface to "*Biographies*", Father Champagnat asked him to be the chronicler of the Institute. "*I give you the responsibility for taking note of everything which can edify the brothers or later serve them as a rule*" (p. XX).

Brother Louis-Marie, in the Circular already cited, listed the works of the deceased: The Life of Father Champagnat (1856), The Directory of Solid Piety, The Principles of Perfection (1865), The Good Superior (1869), The Subjects of Meditation (concerning the Incarnation, the Eucharist and the Passion), The Biographies (1868), Opinions, Conferences and Sayings (1868), the three capitular books to which made such a major contribution: The Common Rules (1852), The Constitutions (1853) and The Teacher's Guide (1854). At least twelve volumes when all of them will be published, as Brother Louis-Marie stated (Circ. Vol. IV, p. 256).

Speaking of his Subjects of Meditation, Brother Jean-Baptiste often said to Brother Louis-Marie, "*I want the brothers to know Our Lord*" (Idem, p. 258).

Along with his works which were able to be published, Brother Jean-Baptiste was preparing others which remained unfinished. We have from him a "Treatise on Education", that the General House in Rome published in 1997 under the title "Apostolate of a Marist Brother". A series of meditations concerning the great truths and the ultimate ends, a second series of examinations of conscience concerning the main duties of a good religious, a short treatise concerning devotion to the Blessed Virgin which was used in the preparation of the work "Mary explained to young people", a treatise on civility and numerous lectures and notes on different religious subjects. These combined manuscripts form a pile of notebooks for which the detailed summary of chapters alone covers 34 large-format pages (*Nos Supérieurs*, p.41-42).

Brother Avit admired the work capacity of Brother Jean-Baptiste of whom he states, "*as ill as he was in his last years, he could still spend twelve hours a day at his desk*" (Idem, p. 43).

Concluding his Circular announcing the death of Brother Jean-Baptiste, Brother Louis-Marie requested that all the brothers who had known the deceased, especially those of the Midi "*since only they had known the Brother Assistant at the height of his powers*", write "*a good work*" and give it to him or the Brother Assistant of the Province at the time of the next retreat, with a view to writing a more complete biography. "*So, my very dear brothers, letters, lectures, public opinions, private opinions, good thoughts, good maxims, witty remarks, everything which you have of the dear Brother Assistant, note it down, note it down with care, even though it might seem minimal to you. One day, it will all be put to good use for everyone's benefit*" (p. 273-274).

We do not know to what extent the brothers responded to this appeal nor what became of the documents sent. We can imagine, given the enormous impact of the personality of Brother Jean-Baptiste and the esteem in which he was held, that many brothers submitted their testimonials. It is probably on these accounts that Brother Amphiloque drew to write a biography on the occasion of the centenary of the Institute (1917), no doubt at the request of Brother Stratonique, Superior General. We have used this unpublished text extensively as a source to illustrate these few pages of presentation on the life of the Brother Assistant.

- Finally, we inform the reader that Brother Paul Sester published a work on “Jean-Baptiste Furet, biographer of M. Champagnat”, in the first two “*Cahiers Maristes*” (1990-1991).
- The book « Our Superiors », edited in 1954 by the department of the Econome General at Saint-Genis-Laval, opens with a presentation of the life and works of Brother Jean-Baptiste (pp.11-69).



Praying with Brother Jean-Baptiste

We are coming to make a prayer of praise and thanksgiving in your company, Brother Jean-Baptiste, remembering the many gifts you received from God, gifts which you generously placed at the service of all the Brothers of the Institute.

- You had a keen intelligence and you had a passion for study. Father Champagnat said of this passion that *«it was an “obsession”.*» But you declared: *«I have a passionate love only for the study of religion, and always with the aim of being useful to others.»*
- With regard to your character, Brother Louis-Marie wrote : *« Who was more cheerful, more merry, more attractive, more captivating than he?»* You made use of this happy character to win over the brothers who *«felt at ease with you.»* According to witnesses, in your visits and your correspondence, you had the gift of consoling, encouraging, lifting people up and invigorating them.

- Your goodness and your firmness are seen in the compassion which made you write to a director who had two young brothers in his community : *«Be for twenty-three hours a day their mother and for one hour their father.»* And to another brother: *«You have enough of the devil to discourage you; as for me, my mission is to keep on encouraging you.»*
- You were an indefatigable worker in carrying out the task confided by the Founder : *« I make you responsible for taking note of anything that can edify the Brothers or may serve them as a rule later on.»* The very day of your death, you were correcting the proofs of the book “Méditations sur l’Incarnation”. Still your health was not strong and you were, in the words of Brother Avit, *«a great lover of sleep.»*

Thank you, Lord, for the splendid gift you granted to the Institute in giving us Brother Jean- Baptiste.

- We would also like to recall your total devotion to the service of Marcellin and of his work. You laboured fifteen years to publish a “Life of Father Champagnat,” at the request of Brother François. The latter was able to write, in 1856, that this book *«made the Founder live again among his brothers.»* It is also through you that we know the life of our first brothers and the instructions that Marcellin gave them during the holidays.

- What we know about you helps us understand why Brother Louis-Marie, Superior general, in the circular announcing your death to the brothers, could say: « *The venerated Father Champagnat lived again, for thirty-two years, in an Assistant who continued and perfected his work... Is he not for us like a second Founder ?* »

Could one find a more beautiful eulogy of your work, especially from a brother who knew you for more than forty years!

Brother Jean-Baptiste, intercede for each of us. May the quality of our lives be influenced by yours. May we gather new vocations into the family of Mary.

Amen

[BROTHER DOROTHÉE]

Jean Villelonge
(1810-1837)

Jean Villelonge, the son of Jacques and of Catherine Celarier, was born in Saint-Genest-Malifaux (Loire) in 1810.

He declared that he was admitted to the Lavalla house on 26 December 1823. He received the religious habit on 3 April 1825. On 12 October 1826, he "privately but voluntarily and



Stone anvil of the First Brothers

freely pronounced the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for the term of five years." On 6 October 1833, he privately pronounced the three perpetual vows, which he renewed publicly on 10 October 1836.

He died at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage on 2 September 1837.

Brother Avit tells the following anecdote. "The Hermitage had a cow from which it got milk for the sick. Brother Dorothée looked after the animal. He was a brother with little schooling but who was very pious, very obedient and of great simplicity of nature. One day, Fr Préher, the parish priest of Tarentaise, came to see the pious Founder, his friend. After dinner, they went for a walk in the garden. Noticing Brother Dorothée, who was tending his cow in the pasture at the bottom of the garden, Fr Préher greeted him, saying "Good day, brother of the cow!" The good brother, who mistook the curate for a Marist priest, naively replied, "Good day, my Father!" So, said Father Champagnat, laughing, this means that you are the cow's father!" A little too late, Fr Préher resolved to no longer take advantage of the simplicity of others" (Avit, *Annales de l'Institut*, p. 179/180, Vol. I, Rome 1993).

Brother Jean-Baptiste (*Biographies de Quelques Frères*, p. 40-46) reports some dialogues which reveal the soul of this brother. He writes how "his humility and the low opinion which he had of himself led him to insist on being given the care of the farm animals and the stable. His request was granted and he spent nearly all his life in this humble job."

One day, a priest who knew of his virtue found him busy looking after the cows and asked him:

- *What are you doing, Brother?*
- *The will of God, Father.*
- *What do you earn from your work as a herder?*
- *Paradise.*
- *A herder who earns entry to paradise! Do you really believe that?*
- *Very firmly, as Jesus Christ said “Whoever does the will of my Father shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*
- *But, are you really sure that you do the will of the eternal Father?*
- *Yes, because I do the will of my Superior.*
- *Splendid. But, tell me, are you happy in your job as a herder?*
- *Happier than if I were king.*
- *You don’t want another job?*
- *No, Father.*
- *Then what do you want?*
- *I only wish to remain obedient and to love God with all my heart.*
- *From where do we draw the love of God?*
- *From the heart of Jesus.*
- *What is the door to the heart of Jesus?*
- *Faith, confidence, purity and love.*
- *Do you know that there you speak with as much wisdom as a doctor of the Church?*
- *Father, I do not know what a doctor of the Church is, but I do know that my learning is barely that of a child who has learnt a little catechism.*
- *How much time each day do you spend in the heart of Jesus?*
- *As much as I can and always less than I would like.*

Indeed, the usual subject for meditation of the good brother was the sufferings of Jesus and his infinite love for the human family.

One day after dinner, Brother Dorothée was questioned about the mealtime reading, and when Father Champagnat showed his surprise that he had remembered nothing, the good brother timidly responded:

- *Forgive me, Father, but the verse from the Imitation of Jesus Christ which was just read made me forget the rest.*
- *What struck you from the Imitation?*
- *I was struck by the fact that the whole life of Jesus was suffering and martyrdom and these words have made such an impression that I cannot explain.*

Like the great Apostle, Brother Dorothée knew only Jesus, Jesus crucified...

Almost every day, he followed the Stations of the Cross and, as he did not use a book, Father Champagnat said to him one day:

- *How do you follow the Stations of the Cross? I am afraid that you do not have the right approach and are wasting your time.*
- *Father, replied the brother, when I am before each picture, I contemplate Jesus in the mystery which I behold. I tell him that I love him with all my heart and I offer the eternal Father the passion and the blood of Jesus Christ for the expiation of my sins, the conversion of sinners and relief of the souls in purgatory. Then, I let my heart tell Jesus everything which I feel.*

The venerated Father, touched and edified by this response, told him:

– *Your method is good. Continue to do it in this way.*

During the chapter of faults, he was once accused by a young brother of being distracted during mass, of amusing himself by looking at an image which he had in his book.

– *I saw that he was so distracted he never turned the page, stated the young brother.*

In the light of the accusation which had been brought, the venerated Father had Brother Dorothée go to his room and get the image which he immediately handed over. This image, which represented Jesus on the cross, was completely worn and faded by the kisses of the good brother. His method for hearing holy mass was to meditate on the passion of Jesus Christ and ceaselessly make mental acts of contrition, confidence and love.

Brother Dorothée, who was well prepared for heaven and, in addition, had led a life of much hardship and suffering with no care for his health, caught a bad cold which quickly deteriorated into consumption. This would take him to his grave. The venerated Father liked to visit the brother often and would talk with him for a long time. One day, finding him in conversation with some other brothers who were all sick to some degree, he asked him:

- *What were you all taking about just now?*
- *Father, replied Brother Dorothée, we were pondering an important question.*
- *What is that question?*

- *We were wondering what would worry us most at the hour of death...*
- *And what about you, brother? said the Father to Brother Dorothée.*
- *I admit, Father, he replied, that I fear death and that what pains me most is to have never loved Jesus, my saviour, enough. And, I assure you that this pain and this regret torment me greatly. Also, I ask God every day, through the intercession of Mary, to let me stay one more year on earth to learn to love Jesus and to prepare myself for death.*
- *A year! replied the Father. But don't you know that your consumption is in its third stage? Consumptives who have reached this point may die without warning... But be reassured, Brother, if God does not give you a year to love Him on earth, he will grant you an eternity to love Him in heaven.*

Brother Dorothée died three days after this conversation with the venerated Father. He was conscious until his last sigh and passed away in a holy exercise of love, contemplating the crucifix and pronouncing the holy names of Jesus and Mary.

Two days after the death of Brother Dorothée, the Founder called all the brothers to the annual retreat. In the Circular of 4 September 1837, he expressed his high regard for this brother, a true model of saintliness. Here is the text.

*“My very dear Brothers,
The Lord has just called our dear Brother Dorothée. For a long time, an affliction of the chest tried his patience while in-*

creasing his merits until a most violent haemoptysis confined him to bed. He looked on the dissolution of his body with tranquillity and expressed an ardent desire to go and celebrate the Assumption of the Holy Virgin with the angels and saints of heaven. From the time of that solemn feast, the coughing of blood ceased entirely. Our good brother took advantage of this respite from the illness to better prepare his last hour. What gentleness, what calm and such joy he displayed during this interval but, above all, on the last day of his life!

It was a Saturday, the 2nd of September. Already in the morning, he received the last sacraments. Never had he appeared so joyful, filled with God, his soul waiting only for him to say his last prayers of the Church before taking flight. Towards three o'clock in the afternoon, I gave him the last blessing and during the recommendation of his soul to God, he calmly fell asleep in the Lord. All those who witnessed this were envious of him and each sought for himself the honour of remaining by his side.

Today, the 4th of September, we have buried him with all the ceremonies set down for a professed brother, and we have advised you to do for him that which is indicated in the Rule at Chap. 11, Art. 3, Points 2 and 3. It will no doubt be with joy that for the first time you perform this duty for a brother who was so dear to us and whom we can count amongst the intercessors with our common Mother.

It is thus, my very dear brothers, that we reap what we sow. Such is life, such is death, such is eternity. God has called us to be saints. I call on you therefore to go ever forward in his love, to teach yourselves to live in peace, that each of you

■ [Marvellous companions of Marcellin] ■



Hamlet of Luzernaud, at La Valla

apply yourself to do that which you must, in order that everything which is in you, spirit, soul and body, be preserved without stain for the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ (Thes. 4 and 5).

Whilst awaiting the pleasure of your arrival, I embrace you affectionately in the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Champagnat.

Praying with Brother Dorotheé



Brother Dorotheé, we come to be schooled by you and to pray with you.

- In all humility, you asked to be given the care of the animals and the stables.
Share with us your spirit of simplicity.
- Like a shepard, you followed the will of God in your life, firmly convinced that in that way you were attaining paradise.
Give us your generosity in the work that is entrusted to us.
- Your greatest desire was to be faithful in obedience and to love God with all your heart.
May we be led by your example.
- The heart of Jesus was the source of your love of God, and there you spent as much time as you could, though that was always less than you wished.
May your fervour animate us and be contagious.
- The usual subject of your meditation was the sufferings of Jesus and his infinite love for humankind.
Make us more conscious of this love.

- Practically every day you made the Stations of the Cross, your heart sharing with Jesus all your feelings.
Let us learn from you openness and spontaneity in personal prayer.
- Your way of hearing the holy Mass was to meditate on the passion of the Saviour while contemplating and kissing the image of Jesus on the cross.
Help us to maintain a heart full of love while taking part in the Eucharist.
- You declared to Father Champagnat that what would cause you the most pain at the moment of your death would be “not to have loved Jesus my Saviour enough.”
That, following your example, Jesus may become the great love of our life.
- On 4 September 1837, in the Circular to the Brothers inviting them to the annual retreat, the Founder told them of his wonder when calling to mind your death: “What gentleness! What serenity! ... especially on the last day of his life.” And he added: “God has called us to be saints.”

*Thank you, Brother Dorothee for your simple life and your heart burning with love of Jesus.
Help us to walk in your footsteps.*

[BROTHER HIPPOLYTE]

Jean Rémillieux
(1799-1868)

Jean Rémillieux was born on the 12 October 1799 in Chuyer (Loire). He was admitted to Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage on the 20 September 1826. He was a tailor by trade and continued in this occupation within the community for more than forty years. He died in Saint-Genis-Laval on 26 March 1868.

The title of Chapter 16 of *"Avis, Leçons, Sentences"* is "Brother Hippolyte with his lamp". Here, we transcribe a few lines in order to better know this brother, presented by Brother Jean-Baptiste.

"Brother Hippolyte was a young man of twenty-six when he entered religion. He was trained as a men's tailor and was even a good worker who could have done well for himself at that time. However, the desire to ensure his soul's salvation drove him to give himself to God. In the midst of the struggle in which he found himself embroiled between this world and grace, Brother Hip-



polyte hesitated. The religious life had its attractions for him, but so did worldly life. In this state of hesitation, he went to see the venerable Father Champagnat and consulted him concerning his vocation. However, in order to avoid taking any risks, he asked to try out the community for a few days only. The venerable Father welcomed him kindly but did not allow him to enter on a trial basis, nor without first paying novitiate expenses, as he feared that the young man might recoil at the first tests, which are the hardest test on one's nature, particularly when the person has not entirely broken off from the world. In the end, grace triumphed over the resistance of nature. Our pious young man permanently renounced the world and all that he had hoped for from it.

He went to the Hermitage with the board money for his novitiate which he handed over to Father Champagnat, assuring him that henceforth he wished only to work at becoming a good brother. Charmed by this good attitude, the venerable Father welcomed him with pleasure as he was in great need of a tailor. The same evening, speaking of him to one of the senior brothers, he said,

"Thank God that today he has sent someone for our tailor shop. I am counting on his perseverance as he came with a good sign of his vocation. –Father, what is that good sign? – It is the three hundred francs which he gave me. This young man, he added, was doing well in the world. He was making a good living. So, he would not have thrown away his whole future like this or sacrificed all his savings if he were not detached from the goods of this world and resolved to persevere in his vocation."

The venerable Father was not at all mistaken. Brother Hippolyte never missed the secular world, became truly attached to his holy state of life and was soon able to be entrusted with the direction of the tailor shop, a post he would occupy with so much intelligence until his death and in which others noted his complete devotion and unfailing patience and gentleness.

Brother Hippolyte lived in the community for forty-one years and during that time all who knew him assure us that he was outstanding for four qualities:

1. His constancy in his vocation and his love for his holy state...Brother Hippolyte was often in contact with those who left the Congregation because he was normally responsible for obtaining secular clothes for them. *"In my job, he said, there is nothing except that act which troubles me. I am always pained when I see those poor young men, without experience, set off back to the world..."*
2. His gentleness. It was known to all the brothers that Brother Hippolyte did not know what it was to get angry and had never been seen to lose his temper... *"What can I do for you Brother? Please wait a moment. Please be patient, you will all be served."*
3. His great benevolence and his habitual willingness to help everyone. He had made himself the servant of all his brothers. He never thought of himself. From morning till night, he looked after others...
4. His love of work and his devotion to his apostolate... It is impossible to describe with what persevering zeal he made, cared for, repaired and organised all the brothers' wardrobe for more than forty years...

However, these four characteristics of Brother Hippolyte were not the only virtues which shone in him. This excellent Brother was also very pious. However, he had a piety which was in no way affected. It was in keeping with his character: peaceful, calm, constant and sustained...

The venerable Father, who very much liked thrift, did however reprimand Brother Hippolyte sometimes because he had the habit of carrying a little lamp to light his way as he ran his nocturnal errands around the building. The Father scolded him, sometimes publicly, for not always putting the lamp out soon enough or using it when there was no real need. Brother Hippolyte humbly accepted these reprimands without a word. However, they hardly changed his behaviour as he believed that with the lamp he could walk more quickly and lose less time. Above all, he did not wish to risk bumping into furniture or striking a beam with his head. Even while chastising Brother Hippolyte with a thought to thrift, the venerable Father said that he liked to see the Brother with his lamp in hand because for him this was an image of the wise man who is always illuminated by the spirit of reflection and guided by prudence.

"Like Brother Hippolyte, he added, the virtuous man, the good religious, the wise Director, never goes anywhere without his lamp. The spirit of reflection lights up all his actions. Prudence guides and directs all his undertakings, everything which he does."

Brother Jean-Baptiste continues over six pages to talk of prudence and its importance in the spiritual life. He cites the Book of Proverbs (9, 10) in which this virtue is called the "science of saints."

We return to Brother Hippolyte, in the company of Brother Jérôme, at the bedside of the good Father as the latter lay dying. "Only Brother Hippolyte and Brother Jérôme remained by his side... Around half past two in the morning, he said to the two brothers who sat close to him, *'Brothers, your lamp is going out.'* – *'Excuse me, Father,'* answered one of them, *'the lamp is burning well.'* – *'Yet, I can no longer see it. Bring it closer then.'* One of the brothers brought the lamp, but the good Father could not see it. *'Ah!'* he then said in a faltering voice, *'I understand that it is my sight which has gone. My hour has come, God be blessed!'* Then, he murmured some more prayers. A short time later, his mortal agony began" (Vie, 1989 edition, p.254).

In one of the displays close to the room of Father Champagnat in Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage, a green, earthenware pitcher is kept on which can be read the words, painted in black, "Brother Hippolyte, 1826."

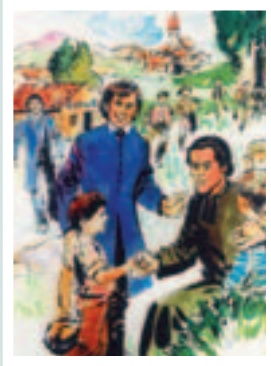
The "*Guide pour la visite de la chambre du Vénérable Père Champagnat et du Vénéré Frère François,*" published in 1932 by L. Pleynet Printers in Saint-Chamond, gives a few explanations concerning the pitcher (p.5).

"There is a history to this pitcher. Brother Hippolyte, a tailor, was lodged on the top floor of the house. What is more, he was lame. At the time, the community used the river as a community washbasin. Because of the distance and his infirmity, the good brother was often late for morning prayer. Father Champagnat sometimes scolded him. One day, the brother humbly replied,

'Father, I hurry as much as I can, but I'm a long way from the river and my leg doesn't let me go as fast as I would like to.' – 'That's all right,' the good Father simply answered.

Two or three days later, Father Champagnat, was in Saint-Chamond and bought a pitcher, which we have kept. When he handed it to Brother Hippolyte, he said to him,

'Brother, given your special situation, I am going to make an exception for you. I am giving you this pitcher and I permit you to wash yourself next to your bed. But, don't be late any more.' – 'Oh! Father, how kind you are!' replied the Brother, filled with joy. 'I thank you and I promise you that I will always be on time.' He kept his word."



Prayer with Brother Hippolyte

Brother Hippolyte, we come to pray in your company, calling to mind some events in your life that reveal your personality.

- You had made a place for yourself in the world as a men's tailor when, at the age of 26, you decided to knock on the door of Our Lady of the Hermitage to become a religious.
- To test your vocation, Father Champagnat declined to accept you on a trial basis and asked you to pay the expenses of the novitiate from the beginning, September 20, 1826.
- Your generosity and your good disposition charmed the good Father who shared his joy with "one of the principal brothers" asking him to thank the Lord for your arrival.
- You spent forty one years in the community as a tailor, carrying out a work that became heavier and heavier as the years passed because of the growing number of brothers.
- Everyone knew that you were a man who never got angry, as Brother Jean Baptiste affirms in recording your words, "*I am at your service,*

*Brother; please wait a moment;
please be patient, you will all be served."*

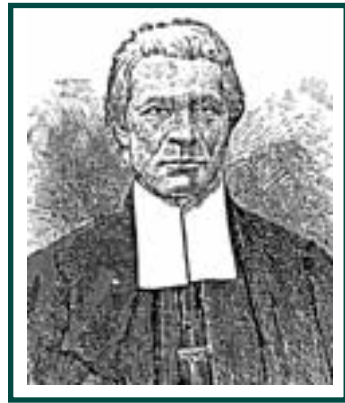
- The brothers have also noted your great kindness and your habitual disposition to be of service to everyone. From morning till night you were always giving yourself to others.
- Your piety showed no affectation. It was like your character, simple, quiet, tranquil, reliable and helpful.
- The Founder loved to see you with your little lamp in hand to see the way through the house in the night time, even if sometimes he scolded you for overusing it. For him you were the very image of the wise and prudent man.
- With Brother Jérôme, you were at his side when he entered into his final agony; we have this on the word of Brother Jean-Baptiste (Life, p. 254, ed.1989).
- The green earthenware pitcher, with the words, "Brother Hippolyte" painted in black always touches us. It reminds us of your infirmity (you were lame) and at the same time brings to mind the kindness of Father Champagnat who bought it for you so that you could wash yourself next to your bed and thus be on time for morning prayers.

Brother Hippolyte, we join you in thanking God for your vocation and for that of all our brothers who, like you, spent their lives in the service of others in manual work.

[BROTHER JEAN-MARIE]

Jean Claude Bonnet
(1807-1886)

“There is, amongst our dear departed, one of the main disciples of the venerated Founder, one of those who best reproduced his spirit and virtues. This is the excellent Brother Jean-Marie who concluded with a saintly death the so edifying, perfect life which he led during his sixty-two years in the Community” (Circ. Vol. VII, p. 334).



It was with these words that Brother Théophile, Superior General, announced the death of this brother, which occurred in Gonfaron (Var) on 23 November 1886. It should be remembered that he was critical to the success of the amalgamation of the brothers of Fr Mazelier with those of the Hermitage in 1842. Volume 2 of the Letters, presents his biography in a few pages (p. 292-299). A short biography published in Valence in 1887 by Brother Noël provides us with a photograph of the brother.

Brother Jean-Marie, born Jean-Claude Bonnet on 14 September 1807 in Saint-Sauveur-en-Rue (Loire), became an orphan at five years of age. He entered Notre-Dame de

l'Hermitage on 2 September, 1826 and received the religious habit on 2 December of the same year. He taught in Charlieu and was Director in Boulieu (Ardèche). In 1832, he was a teacher at the Hermitage scholasticate. He was House Director of the Hermitage in 1836 and Administrator of Institute Assets. At the General Chapter of October 1839, he obtained 45 out of 92 votes. He replaced the absent Brother Jean-Baptiste to serve the brothers at dinner (*Avit, Annales de l'Hermitage*). He was a member of the Founder's inner circle. Director at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux from 1842 to 1849, he was the major actor, with the help of Brother Jean-Baptiste, Assistant, in the successful merger of the Christian Brothers of Father François Mazelier with those of Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage.

In 1852, he opened the school in Gonfaron in the Var region, where he would stay until his death. In a difficult political situation, he ensured that the work flourished despite problems of all kinds. In 1886, the Brother Visitor noted that "Brother Jean-Marie was gaining in goodness what he is losing in health." During the same period, the Bishop of Fréjus, to convince a priest to accept the position of curate of Gonfaron, gave as his last argument, "You will have a holy brother in your parish in the person of Brother Jean-Marie. Take his advice and I promise that you'll succeed." His death was marked by special honors as we learn from a letter to Brother Assistent written, by Brother Réole, the nurse of the provincial house, sent especially to Gonfaron to care for the brother during his last days.

It is good to commence our *journey in the footsteps of the disciples of Marcellin* by evoking the memory of him who took up the name of Jean-Marie Granjon, the first disciple of all, whom the Founder had had to let go. In him, states his bi-

ographer, "were found all the virtues which Father Champagnat wished to find in his disciples."

Born on 14 September, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, he would write one day to his Superiors, "*A feast of the Cross was the day of my birth. The Cross will need to accompany me until the grave.*" His father, Jean-Baptiste was a cartwright and had a small land holding which he farmed in his spare time. His mother, Marie Ruart, was a clean and orderly woman and a good Christian. She died of pneumonia, followed soon after by her husband. They left three orphans, two girls and Jean-Claude who was aged four or five.

A relative from Riotord, the neighbouring commune in Haute-Loire, took him in. Jean-Claude was schooled at Saint Sauveur-en-Rue by Benoît Arnaud, the brother-in-law of Marcellin Champagnat. One of his classmates said, "*You never saw him without a book in his hands. In the playground, at home, in the fields, on Thursday, he was always reading.*"

After twelve years spent at Saint Sauveur, he returned to his guardian's home in Riotord and opened a school there for boys and girls. At night, he used to go to a neighbouring hamlet where he would spend the evening teaching catechism or explaining an instructional booklet. "*There were so many of us and we were so restless, wrote one of the pupils, but Claude never lost his temper ... Not only he was keen, but he was full of ideas for things to interest us and get us to work. All around the classroom were coloured images and crosses suspended on a rope, which he gave as rewards. The crosses and the other objects of encouragement were all made by him during his free time.*"

The day class was fee-paying and the young teacher attempted to earn so honestly the modest fees which he was paid that he would go to give lessons in pupils' homes in the morning or evening for those who could not come to the school.

The school in Saint Sauveur had been founded nearly six years earlier and Jean-Claude was able to see and visit the brothers. He was won over by their family spirit. He would later say to a group of brothers, "You really had to see all the family happiness they had, to find yourself wanting to follow them, because there was really nothing attractive about their house." He said farewell to his guardian, his pupils and his two sisters. His eldest sister had received the inheritance left by her wealthy, adoptive parents. The younger sister, in turn, took over the management of the inheritance in concert with her older sister. So, Jean-Claude left his village on 2 September, 1826 to go to Hermitage de Notre-Dame which the brothers of Saint Sauveur called "our house" and where lived Marcellin Champagnat, whom the brothers named "the Father".

True to his maxim "*we should not be making only dead saints*", Father Champagnat received with pleasure the new postulant about whom he had heard so much good, but put him to the test of manual labour and public penance, like all postulants. However, as early as 2 December, he gave him his holy habit (blue) with the name of Jean-Marie, the name of the first brother whom the Founder had been forced to dismiss that year.

After the 1827 retreat, Brother Jean-Marie, then aged twenty and already very well-educated for the period, was appointed to teach in Charlieu. Two years later, he was in

charge of the school in Boulieu (Ardèche). In 1836, Father Champagnat appointed him Director of the Hermitage and Econome General of the Institute. He undertook the supervision of workers, the inspection of classes and teaching catechism. One of the brothers wrote of this period, *"He had a lot to do, but despite his jobs and his well-recognised talents, he was always admirably gentle, simple and modest...He was so persuasive and moving in his catechism and teachings that you felt irresistibly convinced and drawn towards good."* Another Brother declared, *"At the end of the year 1840, three of us presented ourselves as postulants at the Hermitage...Brother Jean-Marie, the Econome, so modest in his bearing, so gentle in his appearance and with such a kindly smile, made such a strong an impression on us that, 46 years later, it is still as vivid in my mind as it was that day."*

Brother Jean-Marie was one of the confidants of Father Champagnat during the latter's last illness, always by his side to provide care, daring even to speak of some of the pious feelings which filled him, but, above all, listening to the words of encouragement and love which fell from the lips of the venerated Father in order to relay them to the brothers. He was one of the witnesses to the Founder's Spiritual Testament.

During the amalgamation of the brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux with the Congregation of the Little Brothers of Mary, Brother Jean-Marie was appointed Director of the new provincial house. The task was weighty and difficult. There were administrative tasks to undertake, new ruler to implement, reforms to carry out. Brother Jean-Marie showed himself to be up to the demands of his new position. Here is the portrait drawn of him by one of the brothers of Saint-

Paul, *“Brother Jean-Marie has sure and profound judgment, a broad and lofty mind, a constant and rather firm character, but is a little shy whilst at the same time jovial, very gentle and very kind. His conscience is most delicate. His piety and his faith are very solid and practical. His mortification and his humility are prodigious.”* He was able to collaborate very well with Brother Paul, the former Director of the house who had become his deputy.

There was much to do on the apostolic works premises of the house, in particular the chapel. Some institutions were disorganised, others had insufficient personnel and some recruits had little training in their professional duties while others lacked religious education. These shortcomings, in brothers who were otherwise good, were due to the lack of time which the little Society had been able to consecrate to the training of its recruits. However, given the good spirit which filled these brothers, Brother Jean-Marie, with the help of God, time and patience, succeeded in making the Province of Saint-Paul the worthy sister of its elder siblings in the Institute.

He was involved in all the work - catechism, instructions, meditations, teaching, and manual activities. *“This man who, to look at, you would think was not particularly active, said one brother, had done the work of four men by the end of the day. Often he led the meditation, reading the subject aloud and then giving it to us on Thursday to analyse in a composition which he would have us read and correct in class. He was also very meticulous on Thursdays in having us learn and recite the brief prayer manual which we had at that time. In addition, he often gave us dictations and, above all, he liked teaching us mathematics.”*

Like Father Champagnat, he was consumed by zeal for the glory of the house of God and beautiful ceremonies. Thus, once the chapel was sufficiently repaired, he had solemnly celebrated the month of St Joseph and the month of Mary. His wise piety enabled him to understand the special needs of his community. This is why he joined with his main brothers in composing a prayer to the Blessed Virgin in order to obtain

1. many pious recruits for the Congregation
2. zeal for the glory of God and the Christian education of children
3. the worldly assistance required by the house and
4. the sanctification of all members of the Institute.

He combined prayer with work. At the time of his arrival in Saint Paul, half the property belonged to a landowner in the town, and the garden and yard of the community were unfenced. One of Brother Jean-Marie's first actions was to remedy this situation through hard labour in which, following his example, everyone participated very willingly.

His biographer notes that, *"his shyness and modesty prevented him from giving orders in the imperative form, lending his direction an appearance of weakness which only a great moral ascendancy could balance."* When the Superiors ended his service in the Tricastin district to call him back to the Hermitage, he left after having gained the respect of all and achieving immense good in the Midi.

Here are a few extracts from the letters – there are 90 of them – from Brother Jean-Marie to the Superiors. They give us an idea of the difficulties encountered during his stay in St Paul.

"I will need someone to visit the houses. It is difficult for me to be away for very long. When I go, I have to walk day and night. I almost got sick after my last visit."

"I am very conscious of the difficulties which you experience on account of your finances. They are very great. Nevertheless, they are but a pale shadow of my own problems. If things go on like this, my mind will struggle to cope with such trials. If only we had a chaplain and a good Master of Novices!"

His Master of Novices was not doing well because, said Brother Jean-Marie, he didn't know how to make himself liked and a *"Master of Novices who does not have the hearts of his students, cannot train them."* *"Our chaplain is tired. At first, I let him do the catechism. Now, that's out of the question: catechism, meditation, correspondence, journeys, seeing the brothers and novices, etc., and the burdensome task of looking after our worldly affairs, which is so difficult with our very limited resources, all comes back onto me. There are so many annoyances, it's useless to talk about them all. I am truly sorry to always write you unpleasant letters. I don't know what to think."*

In another passage, he joked, *"We've recently had some fairly presentable novices of a certain age. In general, they have not made off with the wealth of Egypt like the Israelites. The world cannot be so easily robbed of its riches."* Having returned to the Hermitage, for a time he directed the novitiate. He was then appointed Director in Joyeuse, in the Ardèche. He did not stay there long as he was sent to the Var region to make arrangements with some communes which had requested our brothers. In September 1852, with two brothers, he opened the school in Gonfaron.

It was the Mayor and the curate, encouraged by the Prefect, who had sought to obtain the brothers, the municipal council not wanting them. It was necessary to arrange with the prefectural authority for the brothers' payment, which had been automatically included in the municipal budget. The Mayor was in conflict with his council over everything to do with the brothers.

The school enjoyed quick success with more than 200 pupils, justifying a third and soon a fourth class to accommodate them. The municipal council still being opposed to teaching by the brothers, Brother Jean-Marie had to rely on the benevolence of some well-off persons and the parents of pupils in order to obtain the funds required for the construction of premises. In 1870, the new municipal council revoked the brothers' appointments and expelled them from their school.

After their expulsion, the brothers were assigned another destination by order of the Superiors, except Brother Jean-Marie who became the superintendent of the boarding school of Luc, in Provence. He was able to reopen a free school in Gonfaron itself in December 1871. When school re-opened at Easter, 1875, it became a communal establishment. So, there were now two communal schools – the brothers' with more than 100 pupils and the other with forty children. This situation, with a largely irreligious population and in an anti-clerical political atmosphere, could not go on forever. Indeed, three years later, *“under the pretext of making savings, the municipal council, at its meeting of 24 February 1878, voted for the closure of the congregational school and claimed this measure to be one of moral and financial relief.”* (Avit, An-

nales de Gonfaron, p. 13) The decision, confirmed by the Prefect, was only communicated to Brother Jean-Marie on 1 November, the beginning of the term for the communal school.

Nevertheless, on 1 December, the new free school opened its doors. Brother Jean-Marie remained Director but hardly taught anymore. The brothers lived in poverty. *“There was nothing very fixed about payment. It was made up of 900 francs given in donations to Brother Jean-Marie or begged for by him and about 400 francs in pupils’ fees.”* (Idem)

However, for several months, the good brother had been suffering from a catarrh from which he had almost died at the outset. As he did not look after himself, the illness worsened from day to day. Several time the Superiors made suggestions concerning his health, but, as they left decisions in these matters up to him, nothing could convince him to leave Gonfaron. It was there that he would die on Tuesday, 23 November 1886.

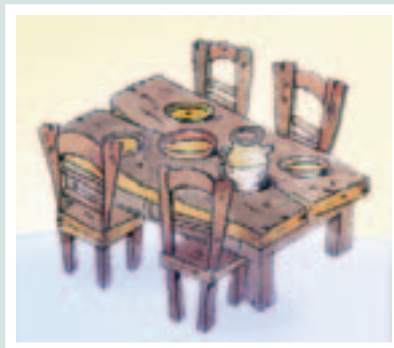
In his report of 26 November to the Brother Assistant, Brother Réole writes, *“When the news came of his death, the local people said, “The saint is dead, let’s go and see him”, and from then on there was a real procession...until 9 o’clock in the evening of the first day, and until ten o’clock the second day. They came in, they mourned over him, they prayed, they wept, and everyone, men and women, conservatives and republicans, paid homage to the beloved deceased. Who knows how many hundreds of rosary beads they put to his hands and lips. I stayed a good part of the time by his side and I saw almost everything. Not having rosary beads, many people who never set foot in a church came and asked me to have him kiss*

their rings which they gave me and which I returned to them after having placed them on the hands and mouth of our saint, as the crowd called him... His funeral was a real triumphal march rather than a funeral march... The whole district was there... More than three hundred men followed the procession in an orderly manner... He was carried in an open casket. If I had not strongly opposed it, they would have cut his whole cassock into pieces... So, to satisfy the fierce desires of many people, I thought of taking his coat and giving out 8-centimetre pieces. There were hardly any left and still many people came asking for them... One of the officiating priests, an ex-student, grabbed his skullcap (this was Father Broquier, then chaplain to the sisters of Cuers). His bands had been cut. His cassock had already received several scissor cuts deftly made during the procession and was in shreds below the knees. The lid of the coffin couldn't be closed, blocked by the heads and arms still carving up the cassock of our dear departed. It was madness! I would go as far as to say that there were almost accidents. Choirboys and some other young children, being close to the coffin, were lucky to escape the pressure of the crowd which forced its way forward for one last glimpse of the saint."

Later, the inhabitants marked their affection for Brother Jean-Marie by paying 150 francs to have a mausoleum erected over his grave (AFA 215.32, p.22). Today, the cemetery having been transferred, nothing is left to recall the memory of Brother Jean-Marie.

Prayer with Brother Jean-Marie

The fidelity of Brother Jean-Marie to Marist life invites us to pray in his company, he who was one of the first companions of the Founder.



- You had a difficult childhood, losing both your mother and father at the age of five. Pray for children and young people who suffer the same family situations.
- You were devoted to study, becoming a school master at Riotord, your tutor's village. One of your students says that "you never once lost your temper". Grant that teachers may, like you, always have patience.
- It was the family spirit of the young community of Saint-Sauveur-en-Rue that brought you to the Hermitage. May all of our communities continue to give the same witness.
- Marcellin received you with joy and clothed you in the holy habit. You chose the name of Jean-Marie in memory of the first brother who left us. Pray for our perseverance in fidelity.

- You were one of the confidants of the Founder, and you passed on to the brothers the words that you received from his lips during his final illness. Share with us your love of Father Champagnat.
- You won the hearts of the brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux by your understanding, your good character and the example of your life. Help us to do the same wherever we live or work.
- At your death in 1886, after 34 years apostolic work among the young of Ganfaron, people said, "The saint has died." Brother Theophane has written that you were "an authentic disciple of the venerated Founder."
- Lord, we thank you for calling Brother Jean-Marie to follow you in the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary. May your call to the young of today be heard.

Amen.

[BROTHER JÉRÔME]

Pierre Grappeloup
(1803-1850)

Pierre Grappeloup was born in Charlieu in 1803 to Antoine and to Marie Crusille. He was admitted to the novitiate at the Hermitage on 28 April 1829 without knowing how to either read or write. He always worked as a manual labourer. Father Colin chose him to become the gardener at Belley. He died from injuries sustained in an accident on 3 February 1850.

In “*Vie*” (1989 edition, p.478), Brother Jean-Baptiste recounts how this postulant, disenchanted with his vocation, went to the Founder to tell him of his desire to leave the community. Despite his efforts, Father Champagnat did not succeed in convincing him to go back on his decision. “All he managed to obtain was that the postulant agreed to wait another few days to return to his family in the company a brother who was to travel to the same district. Having won this brief delay, Father Champagnat summoned a pious and intelligent brother who was in charge of the kitchen and said to him,



"I am going to send you a postulant whom I hold in high regard and who has all the qualities to make a good brother. He has been discouraged by some things that a brother novice said to him, but I'm sure he will soon feel as he did before, if he sees only good examples. I'm going to tell him to go to the kitchen where you will keep him busy and do what is necessary to win him over and convince him to persevere in his vocation."

The postulant was assigned to the kitchen but, despite the good example, good advice and encouragement of the brother to whom he had been entrusted, his temptations and troubles increased to the point of making him sick. Several times he went to the Father to obtain permission to leave, but the latter knew so well how to insinuate himself into the postulant's mind that he always decided to postpone his departure. In the meantime, the devil, who makes use of everything to trick souls, set him another trap. Having been present at a sermon given by the Father to the brothers concerning the advantages and duties of the religious life, the postulant, instead of being keen to continue in the blessed state the many praises of which he had just heard, was, to the contrary, utterly discouraged.

"I don't know anything, he said, and I've got no memory. How do you expect me to remember so many things? And, what's more, I have inclinations which are so opposed to the religious virtues that obviously I'm not made for such a holy vocation."

He concluded that he had to leave straight away without waiting for the next day. With that idea in mind, after the evening prayer, he went up to the Father's room to say his farewell but, finding Father Champagnat in the middle of say-

ing his rosary, the postulant felt so overawed that he didn't dare disturb him.

The next morning, as he was once again preparing his departure, the brother cook said to him decidedly,

- *“Instead of readying yourself to return to the world, go this instant and ask to receive the religious habit. You know that there is an investiture in one week and you must be among those who take part.*
- *What are you saying to me?* retorted the postulant. *That I need the religious habit, I, who have no desire at all to be a brother and have none of the qualities necessary for that vocation?*
- *If you hadn't wanted to become a brother, you wouldn't have come here. As for the qualities which you lack, you can acquire them. Put all those ideas aside and go and request the habit straight away. I tell you that you won't regret your decision.*”

On hearing these words, the postulant felt all his temptations disappear and, after a moment of reflection, he went to request the habit. The Father, though somewhat surprised by this request, answered him, *“It is a fine idea, but it is good to think deeply before putting on the habit which should not be taken unless you are well decided to wear it until death.”* As the postulant confirmed his intention, Father added, *“Go find the brother tailor and tell him to make a beautiful cassock.”*

From that moment on, thoughts of the world no longer came to trouble the postulant's peace of soul. However, to give him time to be sure of his good resolutions, the investiture was delayed for several weeks. Finally, he took the

habit on 15 August 1829, made his profession of vows some time after this and, under the name of Brother Jérôme, was a model of all the religious virtues during the 22 years which he spent at the Institute (*Vie*, p. 479).

He was, in the words of Father Champagnat, a man who rose to the occasion whenever there was a need. He was responsible, in turn, for the kitchen, the bakery, the garden and the upkeep of the cellar. He performed all these duties to perfection and those around him always remarked on his skill, cleanliness, thrift, love of work and devotion to the Institute.

“This excellent brother, Father Champagnat also said of him, is no intellectual, but his character and his virtues make him worth his weight in gold. He is one of those rare and precious men whom we cannot replace easily when God takes them.”

Father Champagnat liked to tell how during the night, he had many times come unexpectedly upon the Brother who would be making the round of the building to see that the doors and windows were shut and that there was no danger of fire. When Father heard him walking lightly and without a sound through the corridors and rooms, even though he knew that it was the brother, he would call out,

“Who goes there? – It’s me, Father. – Me, Me, who is this me? – Brother Jérôme, Father. – Oh! So it’s you, Brother Jérôme. But, you didn’t need to put yourself out like this. So, what are you doing alone at this time of night? – I was afraid that someone had forgotten to close a window and that the wind might break the panes. I was afraid that a fire might start somewhere... and I came to have a quick look around. –

Very good, Brother Jérôme, but everything's fine. Go back to bed". Nothing made Father happier than this concern and devotion. "Now there is one, he said to himself, who loves the Institute! Not like certain brothers who only think of themselves and do the least they can" (Idem, p.480).

Over the last years of his life, the good brother was employed leading the horse cart and doing outside errands. In this job, his virtue never deserted him. He was so humble, so honest and so charitable when he found the opportunity of being of service to others that he gained the esteem of all the public and was seen as a saint. Leading the horse, he would piously recite his rosary or do his other exercises of piety. The lay people were so used to seeing him pray and they had such respect for his virtue that they would be careful not to disturb him.

This excellent brother perished as a victim of his devotion. When his horse reared in the middle of the town of Saint-Chamond, he rushed to calm the animal became the street further on was filled with children who were leaving the orphanage. However, he stumbled and the cart rolled over him, crushing his leg. God, no doubt wishing to reward his heroic charity, had the horse stop a few steps from the door of the orphanage from which the children were leaving in such a way that none of them was endangered. Brother Jérôme was lifted off the ground by the witnesses to his tragic accident and transported to the hospital. He lived on for another eight days and provided an example of all the virtues. His patience and his resignation were so great that those who looked after or visited him were filled with admiration. *"Never, said the sisters of the hospital, have we seen so much virtue in a patient."*

A last detail tells us a great deal about righteousness, simplicity and purity soul. When he was transported to the hospital, a priest was called for and seeing the seriousness of his condition, said to him,

“Brother, I must not conceal from you that your life is in danger. Therefore, if you need to confess, I am at your disposal. Think a little, I will return in a few minutes.” Half an hour later when the priest had returned, the brother said *“Father, it is not long since I last confessed and I had the joy of taking Holy Communion this morning. I have examined my conscience and, thanks to God, I have found nothing which troubles me.”*

Such was the virtue, such was the purity of soul of the good brother that, finding himself suddenly faced with death, he found nothing to make him fear the awesome passage from time to eternity. He had long been in the habit of confessing himself every week as if we were to die immediately after (Idem, p. 481).



Prayer with Brother Jérôme

Brother Jérôme, we come to pray with you as we recall a number of events in your life.

- At the age of twenty six, you entered the novitiate of Our Lady of the Hermitage on 28 April 1829, able neither to read nor write.
- After a short time you were discouraged, and wished to withdraw, despite the efforts of Father Champagnat; he had placed you in the care of the cook, a pious and intelligent brother, telling him: “Keep him busy, and do whatever is necessary to win him over and convince him of his vocation” (Life, p. 487).
- Your intention to leave remained so strong that one day, after night prayer, you went to Father Champagnat’s room to bid him goodbye; but you found him saying his rosary, and you were so impressed that you did not dare disturb him (Vie, p.479).
- You thought that you lacked the qualities necessary to become a Little Brother of Mary. Nevertheless, you took the advice of the brother cook who urged you to go and ask for the religious habit.

- At first Marcellin was astonished by this turn of events, but eventually, in the face of such insistence, he finished by saying: *“Go and find the Brother tailor and tell him to make a fine cassock for you.”*
- On August 15, 1829 you began your novitiate under the name of Brother Jérôme, and for twenty-two years you were an exemplary religious.
- The Founder said of you: *This excellent brother does not know a thing, but by reason of his character and his virtues he is worth his weight in gold.”*
- He loved to tell how he had on many occasions surprised you at night doing the rounds of the building to be sure that everything was locked up and safe from fire. *“Here is one,”* he said, *“who loves the Institute”* (Life, p. 480).
- You drove the horse and cart and did the errands to Saint-Chamond. Full of humility and charity, your demeanour won for you the high regard of everyone, and they looked upon you as a saint.
- You died in an accident, a victim of your devotion. Your patience, your resignation in suffering and your peacefulness in the face of death drew the admiration of the sisters of the hospital who witnessed it (Life, p.481).

Thank you, Brother Jérôme, for your simple worthy life, completely devoted to God through humble daily tasks in the service of others. You will always be an example for us.

[BROTHER BONAVENTURE]

Antoine Pascal
(1804-1865)

In the constellation of Marcellin’s first disciples, Brother Bonaventure shines as a star of the first order.

The quick biographical overview which follows highlights the human and spiritual qualities of this young man of twenty-six who knocked at the door of Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage in June 1830. From the first weeks, the Founder was conscious of the exceptional gift which he had just received and which compensated for the recent departure of several very talented youths. A parallel is noteworthy between this arrival and that of Brother Stanislas in February 1822 in La Valla under the circumstances already described. The Good Mother sent a new “treasure” to her young Institute.

In 1868, Brother Jean-Baptiste wrote the biography of Brother Bonaventure, basing his work largely on the letter written by Brother Louis-Marie, Superior General, on 17 Janu-



ary 1866, a few months after the brother's death (Circ. Vol. III, p. 277 to 296). He used the title "Brother Bonaventure or the substitution", whereas in the preface to the same work he had written "Brother Bonaventure, fidelity to grace, goodness of nature and the spirit of charity towards all his brothers" (*Biographies de quelques Frères*, Preface p. XIII).

Although the impact of Brother Bonaventure may be difficult to assess, it seems reasonable to assert that he was one of the brothers who most contributed, as an educator, to the consolidation and development of the Congregation over the two decades 1832 to 1852.

Antoine Pascal was born on 12 February 1804 in Pélussin (Loire) to Jean-Baptiste and to Marie Champallier. We know nothing of his youth or anything concerning his family.

In 1830, Antoine was a servant in Ampuis. At that time, several very talented and very promising young brothers had abandoned their vocation and left Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage. One of them was from Ampuis. Antoine Pascal presented himself to Father Champagnat as the other's replacement (*Biographies de quelques Frères*, p. 83 to 102).

"The Founder understood straight away that God had sent him a good recruit to compensate for the losses that the house had just suffered. On putting the new postulant in the hands of Brother Louis, who was the director of the novitiate, he said to him:

– *Here is one who will console you for the losses which you have just had.*

- *But, Father, he is alone and we have lost five.*
- *Brother, you still calculating by human standards. It is not so much the quantity but the quality which needs to be estimated. A kilogram of gold is worth more than a hundred kilograms of lead...It would be better for us to have fewer recruits, as long as they are very good.*

On 27 June 1830, Antoine Pascal was admitted to the novitiate. From the beginning, those around him noted his good spirit, his submission and his love of work.

A few days after, the July Revolution forced King Charles X to flee into exile. The Hermitage was searched by a magistrate of the new king accompanied by a brigade of gendarmes, frightening all the Brothers. Seizing on this occasion to test young Pascal, Father Champagnat said to him:

- *You have chosen a very bad time to become a religious. Who knows if one of these days the gendarmes won't come back and lead us all off to prison. In my opinion, you would have been better off staying at home.*
- *Father, replied the young postulant, since I have been here, I have not stopped thanking God for having withdrawn me from the world. The events which have just taken place, far from frightening me, only serve to confirm me in my vocation. Even this morning, I felt such an urgent need to come and ask you for the religious habit in order to be able to suffer as a religious if we are to be harassed.*
- *You are right, my dear friend, to fear nothing and to attach yourself more and more to your vocation...Prepare yourself to receive the habit and pray to the Blessed Virgin to obtain for you the grace to wear it with dignity until death.*

The investiture took place on 9 October following the annual retreat. Antoine Pascal took part and received the name of Brother Bonaventure.

Father Champagnat, who followed the brother's progress closely and never missed an opportunity to test or train his virtue, found him so mature and so solid in his vocation that he resolved to use him deftly to cure a brother of a very dangerous temptation.

Brother Cassien, the director of the Sorbiers institution, who had dedicated himself to the Institute with great generosity, was struck by a terrible temptation following his profession. He regretted having become a religious...because, above all, he found that the brothers who were placed under his direction were not virtuous enough. Father Champagnat gave him a fine answer by sending him Brother Bonaventure to replace the Brother who was the cause of his complaints.

A few months after, when he had the opportunity to see Brother Cassien, Father Champagnat asked:

- *Are you happy with Brother Bonaventure? Do you find him pious enough, virtuous enough?*
- *Father, Brother Bonaventure embarrasses me by his goodness. He is a model for us all ...Your letter made me think about matters, but the virtue of this brother has completely cured me of my temptation.*

Brother Cassien, delighted by such strong virtue, understood that the brother was not suitably employed and could do much more than teach a junior class. Therefore, at the retreat of 1831, he said frankly to Father Champagnat:

- *Brother Bonaventure has asked to make his vows. He can be admitted to the profession without examination and then you could make a good Director of him.*
- *I planned to make him a Master of Novices, replied the Father.*
- *I think that he would be very suitable for such work, replied Brother Cassien. You can be sure that he will train your postulants and your young brothers well.*

Brother Bonaventure made his vows on 12 October and shortly after was appointed Director of the Novitiate, a noble position which he filled with zeal beyond all praise for nearly twenty years.

One day, Father Champagnat, finding him busy helping a worker who was making plaster statues of the Blessed Virgin, said to him:

- *Brother Bonaventure, is it not true that as is the mould, so is the statue? Well, remember that you are the mould of the brothers, the mould of the entire Congregation, because the brothers will be as you make them and you will make them as you are.*

This comparison greatly struck him. It was like a light, like a sun which made him see all the excellence of his position... For several days, his thoughts constantly returned to the comparison of the mould. The duties which it reminded him of, frightened him so much that he went to beg Father Champagnat to remove him from an apostolate which he considered beyond his virtue:

- *Brother, replied the Father, it is very true that the dearest interests of the Congregation are in your hands and that the*

fate and the future of the young people for whom you have been given responsibility depend on the care which you take of them and the example which you give them... But, because your position is excellent and lofty and it demands a perfection which you do not yet have, should you be discouraged? No, just try to recall this proverb often - "nobility and position oblige." Thus, because you are the Master of Novices, you have one more reason to work tirelessly towards your perfection, to make yourself holy, since you must form saints. If you do this, God will do the rest. Trust in Him!

During the customary visit that the venerated Father made to the novitiate, he addressed a few words of edification to the novices. He said to them:

- *You are like that tree about which the Prophet speaks, which, when planted near running streams and in excellent soil, bears abundant fruits... Your master of novices is, for you, like the brother gardener tending his plants...*

The term "spiritual gardener" remained engraved in the memory of Brother Bonaventure and supplemented the instructions of the mould.

Father Augry, a Jesuit, led the retreat for the brothers in 1832. Brother Bonaventure went to see him for confession. Having heard his confession, the Father asked:

- *What position do you hold in the Congregation?*
- *I am the Master of Novices.*
- *You have a very important role...Here is an opinion which may be very useful to you ...To train good religious, partic-*

ular attention must be paid to their spirit, their heart, their conscience and their character. This is because the good spirit, the good heart, the good conscience and the good character are the four essential qualities to make a holy religious...

For a long time, Brother Bonaventure made his examination of conscience concerning the four qualities recommended by Father Augry and it can be said that he excelled in most of the virtues which they include, that is, attachment to one's vocation, filial spirit, devotion to one's Institute, piety, fervour and the spirit of charity towards one's neighbour.

He admitted that he had never been tempted against his vocation.

"I had the misfortune to have stayed a long time in the world and to have wasted the best days of my youth there. But since God has blessed me by allowing me to leave the world, I have not missed it for a single instant."

Each year, on 27 June, the day of his entry into religion, he began a novena of thanksgiving to express his gratitude to God for the great favour which He had granted to Brother Bonaventure in calling him to the religious life.

Father Champagnat had a high opinion of the quality of obedience of Brother Bonaventure. A priest came to his room having crossed the path of a brother who continued to work whilst the postulants had stopped work to go to community prayer. He said to Father Champagnat:

- *Who is that brother who does not take notice of the bell and remains alone while the others go where the Rule calls them?*
- *Don't be shocked by the action of this brother, replied the venerated Father. He left his own will at the door when he entered into religion. It is not therefore to be feared that he is not following the Rule or is displaying disobedience. This is one of our best brothers. He is a model of obedience and religious simplicity.*

The esteem and attachment to vocation, the filial spirit and perfect obedience naturally produced devotion and family spirit. The devotion of Brother Bonaventure to his Institute was limitless. He said to his novices,

“Do not hesitate to ask me for what you need and to come to me with your worries and troubles. The sweetest of consolations for me is to encourage you, to be of service to you and to help you bear your small crosses. If ever I learn that you have suffered, that you have wanted for something without telling me, that would grieve me deeply.”

After his long period in charge of the novitiate, Brother Bonaventure was given the direction of manual labour at Saint-Genis-Laval. He was to stay there for twelve years. He was up at half past three in the morning to milk the cows and feed all the farm animals in order to be free to consecrate himself to his spiritual exercises and his outside work.

There was a time when Brother Bonaventure used to give a short teaching to his novices after the meditation which took place in the sacristy. Father Champagnat would go there

to make his preparations for holy mass. He was so struck and delighted by the solidity of the brother's instruction and the way in which he spoke of God that he could not help but testify of his astonishment and satisfaction to the members of his council.

"Brother Bonaventure is admirable, he said to us one day. Listening to him, one feels that his heart is aflame with the love of God. It is impossible for me to continue my preparation when he speaks. Unwittingly, I catch myself listening to him. I don't know where he finds the beautiful things which he says to his novices, but I think that those young people are very happy to have such teachings. This brother is a saint and he speaks like a saint. Listening to him, one is convinced that he says only what he feels and does. In this case, it can be truly said that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks."

At the end of his life, Brother Bonaventure's piety and fervour were so intense that he had difficulty in containing his feelings. A year before his death, he said,

"I enjoy journeys because, alone on the roads, I can pray to God aloud and give full reign to the feelings of my soul. I am sometimes so carried away by joy and love that I stop to look at the sky to my heart's content or to sing the Te Deum, the Magnificat, or the Laudate, to invite all the animals to bless and praise God who is so good, so loving."

Brother Bonaventure had the happiest of characters. Nature had given him a serious appearance, tempered by modesty and a gentle cheerfulness. His affability, his delicate

manners and the holy joy which shone in his face made him loved by everyone.

- *Brother Bonaventure*, someone said to him one day, *give me the secret for always being cheerful and content like you.*
- *You have my secret because, like me, you are a religious and a servant of God.*

He was not seen to lose his temper or treat anyone harshly, act brusquely or appear bad tempered – never! His good heart and his sure judgment gave him common sense, perfect tact and admirable disposition in giving his opinions, making reproaches without hurting feelings, dealing with weakness and making punishments proportional to the degree of virtue of those whom he corrected.

After his death, when the brothers with whom he had spent his life were asked what they had noticed about him, the same kinds of answers came from everywhere.

“Brother Bonaventure was altogether good, completely charitable. He was good to everyone. He did nothing but good for everyone. He never had any problems with any other brother. He never gave anyone reason to complain about him.”

Such is the testimony which the entire community gave, testimony which is all the more glorious because it is the expression of the most exact truth.

Brother Bonaventure had a strong personality and enjoyed perfect health until the age of sixty. He suffered from no illness other than the one from which he died.

Someone said to him one day, *“Brother Bonaventure, you should pray to the Blessed Virgin to give you back your health? – I pray to her every day, he replied, to obtain the blessing of doing the complete will of God as that is the only thing which I desire.”*

Another day, the same brother said to him, *“Don’t you regret that you will die before the chapel is completed? – No, because heaven is even more beautiful than the chapel. It is the house of God and the home of all the saints. – What then do you regret? – Nothing, except perhaps to have not made enough sacrifices for God.”*

He died on 20 October, 1865 saying, *“Jesus, Mary, I love you.”*

Brother Louis-Marie wrote, “in addition to very sure judgment, superb common sense and perfect tact, Brother Bonaventure constantly practiced the most solid virtues - humility, charity, mortification...He won the esteem and love of all his fellow brothers who knew him. “There’s one who doesn’t often lose his temper”, said a rich landowner from the Saint-Genis area who had had dealings with the brother in relation to several sales, “If he is not a saint, I don’t know who will be” (Cited Circ., p. 290).



Praying with Brother Bonaventure

We would like to pray with you, Brother Bonaventure, and to stand in awe at the way in which the Lord works, thanking him for the gift that you were to our religious family.

- You came to l'Hermitage de Notre Dame when Marcellin was going through a difficult period. Several promising, young Brothers had left the Institute. Mary was directing your steps towards the novitiate and there Brother Louis received you on 27 June 1830. You were twenty six years of age.
- The turmoil which followed the July Revolution allowed Father Champagnat to learn how solid your vocation was. You remarked to him, *"The events which come our way, far from frightening me, only serve to strengthen my vocation. This very morning, I felt a lively desire to see you and to ask that I may receive the religious habit. In that way, if troubles come our way, I will suffer the difficulties as a religious."*
- Brother Cassien, who never found sufficiently virtuous the Brothers whom the Founder

sent to help, testified before the Founder that you were a good example for everyone.

- Very soon Marcellin appointed you to the difficult post of master of novices. He simply said to you, *“The Brothers will be such as you make them, and you will make them such as you are.”* Even if the assignment appeared to be a heavy one for you, you put your confidence in God and you did not permit yourself to be discouraged. You worked unreservedly to become holy yourself and to help others to become holy.
- According to Brother Jean Baptiste, you had a pleasant character, a serious demeanour tempered by your modesty, and an appealing sense of joy. Your pleasant disposition, your sensitivity, the holy joy which you radiated: these factors meant that you were liked by everyone.
- Father Champagnat held you in such great regard that he stated to the members of his council, *«Brother Bonaventure is an admirable man... He is a saintly Brother whose words match his saintliness.»*
The Founder valued the way in which you spoke to the novices, the way you gave them advice, or corrected them without leaving a wound, or the way you handled their weaknesses, and especially your devotedness to all.

- After twenty in charge of the novitiate, you spent a dozen years directing the manual work at Saint- Genis-Laval. You would get up very early to milk the cows and feed the animals; in that way you would be on time for the community prayers. All the Brothers there appreciated your eminent kindness.
- Some time before your death on October 20, 1865, one of the Brothers suggested that you ask the Blessed Virgin to make you a saint. You answered, *“I ask her every day to obtain for me the grace of doing God’s will in everything; that is the only thing that I desire.”*
- In the message announcing your death, Brother Louis Marie wrote, “To a very astute judgment, admirable common sense and perfect tact, Brother Bonaventure added the consistent exercise of very fundamental virtues: humility, charity, mortification... He knew how to win over others and how to gain the love of all his confreres and everyone who knew him.”

Lord, once again we bless and thank you for having given us Brother Bonaventure.

Amen.

[BROTHER SYLVESTRE]

Jean Félix Tamet
(1819-1887)



Jean-Félix Tamet was born on 12 January 1819 in Valbenoîte in the district of Saint-Étienne (Loire), the son of Antoine and of Catherine Didier.

He entered the novitiate of Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage, sent by Fr Rouchon, the curate of Valbenoîte, on 12 March 1831 and received the habit there on 15 August of that year. He himself recounts how Father Champagnat guided him, especially at the start of his novitiate (*Brother Sylvestre raconte Marcellin Champagnat*, Rome, 1992, p. 241).

He described "his incomparable patience, his most tender fatherliness combined with a constant firmness which finished by triumphing over my character - immature, unruly and seemingly little suited to the religious life."

"The venerated Father, to try to put a hold on my unruliness, had me try a number of different jobs: in the kitchen, at the forge, in the bakery, in the lamp room, etc., but everywhere I made new careless mistakes... So, for example, having been employed in the lamp room, it happened that the venerated Father came to see how I was getting on in this

job. While trying to show off, I dropped a jar of oil at his feet, the contents even splashing on his cassock. I certainly deserved a penance as this happened because of my carelessness. Well, all he said was to pay attention to what I was doing and, despite what had happened, he let me keep that job”.

Brother Sylvestre then tells the story of the punishment which the Father gave him for having tonsured another brother. “Go and take off this holy habit. I’ll see when you deserve to put it on again”. And, he added, “The change in my behaviour which resulted from this terrible punishment... won me forever the affection of the venerated Father. Not only, did he no longer think of expelling me, but, a few days later, he was kind enough to send me to a posting even though I was only fourteen and a half”.

Brother Sylvestre made his first vows for three months on 8 September 1832. He renewed them for six months on 11 May 1833. In 1836, he made his profession for three years and on 13 September 1843, his perpetual profession. He was 24 years old.

1833: He was the cook at Ampuis for two months.

1835: He taught in Marllhes, then in Vienne and La Côte-Saint-André under the direction of Brother Louis-Marie. Father Champagnat sent him a letter (Doc. 158, 25 November, 1837). He passed the examination for the *brevet* teaching diploma in Grenoble in 1839.

1840: Tempted to abandon his vocation, he wrote to Father Champagnat, who answered him through Brother Louis-Marie, asking that he come to see him at the Hermitage. He arrived

there on Friday, 5 June 1840. Father Champagnat's life was nearing its end and he received the brother but was unable to speak. Brother Sylvestre had to return without delay to La Côte-Saint-André. On his departure, Brother Louis-Marie told him, "The Father Superior, on his death bed, asked me to tell you that he believes that you are perfect in your vocation" (Brother Sylvestre, p. 214-215). Later on, Brother François was to confirm these words of Father Champagnat and Brother Sylvestre would remain faithful to his vocation.

1843: Brother Louis-Marie asked him to come to the Hermitage to teach the brothers who were preparing for the Primary School Teacher's Diploma at Grange-Payre, where the boarding school had just been closed. Brother Louis-Laurent (Pierre Zind), in the *Bulletin de l'Institut* of October 1959, gives a lively account of an event which the chronicler reported in these terms, "The Grange-Payre boarding school was closed and in its place was created a so-called teaching diploma class. Both young brothers and old were instructed by Brother Sylvestre. All of them came to spend their Sundays at the Hermitage. To stimulate them, Brother Sylvestre had placed a nice, gilded frame in the parlour in which, every Saturday, he displayed his students' compositions. The old brothers, who always came last, were annoyed by this. They came up with a plan and the board was broken into pieces with the pieces thrown out during the night of Saturday to Sunday. The teacher informed Brother Louis-Marie first thing in the morning. When the time came for communion, the Brother Assistant forbade those who had destroyed the board from coming to the altar. All the brothers from Grange-Payre stayed in their places. This affair stirred up a lot of commotion throughout the house. An investigation was carried out but without success. Brother

Sylvestre moved heaven and earth to find the culprits. He stopped eating and drinking and couldn't sleep. The old brothers were nevertheless worried. Brother Jean-Baptiste arrived three days later. He said that the old brothers were the troublemakers of the Institute. These brothers, not guessing his opinion, felt that they had won. They were returned to their teaching duties. There were many rumours about the matter. Questioned about what had happened, Brother Dominique answered, "Little pest, fat slob, the wise guy was making fun of the old brothers. We showed him! He got what he deserved!" Brother Dominique had not understood that Brother Jean-Baptiste did not approve of the old brothers' action but, rather, had returned them to their duties because he thought that they were too old to study seriously".

In 1885-86, Brother Sylvestre was at Saint-Genis-Laval as Director of the "Special" section. He was replaced the following year and probably went into retirement at the infirmary. Speaking of the golden jubilee tradition, Brother Avit tells us that no one had celebrated it before 1881. However, "that year, the former brothers of the Mother House celebrated the anniversary of Brother Sylvestre with a very small extra serving at dinner. That was all. The then Director, Brother Marie-Jubin, apologised for this extra, saying that Brother Sylvestre had promised not to repeat the experience." A few pages before, the chronicler, in his colourful style, gave the brother the following testimonial. "Brother Sylvestre, who unwittingly created havoc for the pious Founder in 1832...and laboured hard in Ampuis, later became a distinguished smoker. He smelled of tobacco from ten metres off and enveloped his fellow brothers in a dreadful perfume at their meetings. He was a keen teacher throughout his life, but his method could have been

more practical, more at the level of his pupils. Above all, he like teaching catechism and was allowed to instruct in it until the end (*Lettres, Répertoire*, Rome 1987, p. 478).

Brother Sylvestre died in Saint-Genis-Laval on 16 December 1887, aged 68, 56 of his years having been spent in community.

In 1886, on the occasion of the introduction of the cause of beatification of the Founder, Brother Théophane, the Superior General, asked all the brothers who had personal memories of Father Champagnat to forward them to him and to give their assessment of the "Life" written by Brother Jean-Baptiste in 1856.

Brother Sylvestre highly praised the writing of Brother Jean-Baptiste and, for his part, wrote an abridged life for which he gave his sources. These were primarily his own memories as he had lived nine years in obedience to the venerated Father. Then, there were conversations with Philippe Arnaud, the Founder's nephew, cabinetmaker at the Hermitage for several years and his confidant in respect of many important matters. Next, Brother Sylvestre mentions Brother Stanislas, whose assistant he was for nearly a year and who was the constant right arm and consolation of the venerated Father until his death. "I know from him that in moments of private conversation our Founder confided in him about several secret matters concerning his family and about other, very special matters relating to the Congregation of which only he was aware." Brother Jean-Baptiste was also one of his sources as was Brother François who, retired at the Hermitage, "talked to us about Father Champagnat all the time". Brother Sylvestre also cited Brother Louis-Marie "with whom I did my novitiate. In addi-

tion, he was my director at La Côte-Saint-André for several years." Finally, he mentions "the accounts which I heard directly from the mouths of brothers who lived for a long time with Father Champagnat, more than forty of whom are still alive today" (*Brother Sylvestre raconte...*, p. 74-75).

Here are some of the personality traits of Father Champagnat which Brother Sylvestre describes in the work referred to. They will no doubt both reveal the author's sensitivity and complement the image which we have of some personal aspects of the Founder.

Joy: "The imposing appearance of the venerated Father, which immediately inspired respect and even a certain fear, did not prevent him from being cheerful... And, during the recreation periods, he always had some witty remarks to amuse us. More than that, he taught us and had us play some very pleasant, harmless games. He even didn't mind joining in" (p. 17).

Meditation, Prayer: "I remember that in the room where this took place there were no pews, no chairs and no prayer desks. We would all gather around the Reverend Father who, by his piety, his fervour, his serious and contemplative bearing and, sometimes, by his passionate speech, excited the devotion of the most indifferent, kept alert those whom the temptation of sleep would have caught out and warmed those whom the cold would have numbed as, in winter, during this holy exercise, there was no other fire than that of a flickering light or a half-extinguished oil lamp...When he prayed, he had a tone which was so respectful, so energetic, a pronunciation so accentuated, that we felt completely penetrated. He went quickly rather than slowly and only paused when he

needed to help us clearly understand the meaning of the thought expressed by the nature of the prayer. In short, he did not read the prayer but, rather, recited it with fire and intelligence" (p. 19-20).

The Saturday fast: "Father Champagnat never dispensed the community from the Saturday fast" (p. 23 and p. 268).

Generosity: "During my novitiate there were two elderly brothers. Into the table drawers in which their silverware was kept, Father Champagnat had put, for both lunch and dinner I think, 1/5 of a litre of pure wine, despite the poverty of the house. He also gave a litre of wine to the baker when he made our bread" (p. 24).

Love of the Church: "When he spoke of the Church, he always called it "the Holy Church our Mother" (p. 26).

Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament: "I had the good fortune to serve him at mass at different times, and I must say that, though unruly and very immature, I was gripped and almost stupefied by his gravitas in the performance of the rites, his attention to the finest details of the service and, even more, by the penetrating tone with which he recited the prayers of the sacred liturgy" (p. 28).

Liturgical Chant: "He was so insistent that the chants be performed well that, in addition to the class which was held every day, he required that those who had to intone or chant the gradual or some motets practise individually so as not to put off the choir. As for the rites, he wanted them to be performed as closely to perfection as possible. To this end, he es-

tablished a special meeting on Sundays at which everyone, young and old, learnt to perform the rites with taste, ease and edification. After the service, he didn't fail to correct those who had made mistakes and to give some words of praise to those who, to use his expression, had pulled it off" (p. 28-29).

Harmonium: "Concerning this instrument, dear Brother François, who shared so closely the spirit of the venerated Father, would say, "Unison or a sweet, simple harmony without showiness is what is most appropriate for a community. The organist should aim to support the choir without trying to dominate it. In my opinion, he added, the harmonium ordinarily must be a chanter, a chanter having only one voice" (p. 56).

Sermons: "What did he preach about most often? About trust in God and His great mercy or about Jesus Christ welcoming the prodigal son with open arms and, above all, about trust in Mary, assuring us that constant devotion to that good Mother is a sure sign of predestination, even in respect of the greatest sinners" (p. 44).

The Father's Kindness: Brother Sylvestre describes several examples of Father Champagnat's kindness towards him, in particular, when he pardoned him of twelve hundred lines given by the Master of Novices. "Knowing the kindness and justice of the venerated Father, I summoned my courage and went to find him in his room. "What's wrong?" he asked, seeing me enter. Straight away, I told him in the greatest detail about the subject of my misery. Then, without answering me, he took a sheet of paper out of his drawer, dripped sealing wax on it, applied his seal, wrote a single line, signed the paper and handed it to me, telling me to be more silent in the

future. What did that one line say? Here is the exact text: "Payment for twelve hundred lines" (p. 64).

Catechism: "Above all, he like hearing it taught by those who did so with suitable questioning, very clear, very accurate and very solid. The preacher brothers, as he called those who taught without questioning, usually didn't win his approval, however capable they otherwise were. The tone, whilst animated, had to be moderate, the terms simple and the comparisons true and natural" (p. 65).

Visit to La Côte-Saint-André: "After the vacation of 1839, at the beginning of the school year, I could not have been more surprised to see him arrive at our institution in La Côte-Saint-André with another priest. And what had he come to do there? To lead another retreat, despite his extreme weakness, for the students of our boarding school, who numbered around ninety. He was so exhausted and so ill that he was pitiful to look at...One day, when he was in the brothers' common room, he started to vomit violently. Then, he said the following troubling words, "I managed to digest the prunes, but now the two or three I ate for dinner I've had to throw up. Oh, I see." And he said no more.

However, despite his gaunt face, the pupils never tired of looking at him and admiring him, for there was something in him that strongly attracted them... Usually, the pupils whispered amongst themselves "Father is a saint" (p. 197-198).

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin: "I remember that in confession, hugging me in his arms, he often repeated, "Let us love Mary, my dear friend, let us love her well, let us love her

warmly” and other expressions of this kind. However, these were not just words, but sparks shooting from his heart which burnt with love for her” (p. 281).

The postulant received as a brother on his death bed: A postulant who very much wanted to receive the holy habit but was unable to because of his infirmities, fell dangerously ill...The good Father, who recognised the great desire that the postulant had to become a brother, did not want him to take that regret to the grave. Therefore, after having given him the Last Sacraments, he brought a brother’s coat, blessed it, spread it himself over the bed of the dying postulant and said, “My dear friend, I receive you, from this instant, as a member of the Congregation, and as a mark of your admission, receive this coat in the place of the holy habit which so ardently desire.” I will leave you to imagine the contentment of this postulant and how he thanked the good Father for having granted him this remarkable privilege (p. 283-284).

The Memorare in the snow: Brother Sylvestre states that the incident was first described to him by Brother Stanislas and later by other brothers, “I heard said by a brother, even though Brother Stanislas never spoke to me about it (perhaps because Fr Champagnat had forbidden him to) that in that house were a man, a woman and a child and that, in the morning, after they left, the house disappeared without them noticing...All these varied circumstances, omitted in the narrative of Brother Stanislas, lead me to believe that St Joseph, the Blessed Virgin and the Infant Jesus themselves had taken them in” (p. 285).

These lines reveal the naïve side of the piety of Brother Sylvestre. Brother Jean-Baptiste gave a totally different account of the event (*Vie*, p. 353). We can be surprised that Brother Sylvestre retained his own version of the incident, thirty years after that of Brother Jean-Baptiste.

Brother Champagnat and Brother Louis-Marie: Brother Sylvestre describes some of the trials to which the Founder subjected the postulant, who arrived the same year as he at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage, and highlights the role of Brother Stanislas. "The venerated Father had secretly given Brother Stanislas the order to form Brother Louis-Marie well, to take great care of him, to strengthen his morale by encouraging him with a view to all the good which he would be able to do later within the Congregation and to make him aware of all the esteem he had for him, which Brother Stanislas did admirably well. Finally, after two months, the venerated Father, having assessed his virtue, his merit and his docility, gave him the holy habit and immediately sent him to teach the first grade class at the La Côte-Saint-André boarding school, which Father Douillet had founded and then transferred to Father Champagnat" (p. 300).

N.B. The work "*Brother Sylvestre raconte Marcellin Champagnat*" published in Rome in 1992, records, in 310 pages, the personal memories of the Brother, those he collected from others, stories of his relations with the Founder and his thoughts on the Founder's work.

Praying with Brother Sylvestre

Brother Sylvestre, we have come to pray a moment with you, to share your company and your knowledge of Marcellin Champagnat.



- It was he who welcomed you at Our Lady of the Hermitage, when you came at the age of twelve years. You were sent by his friend, Fr. Rouchon, parish priest of Valbenoîte.
- Marcellin had difficulty in putting some sense into your scatterbrained head. But beyond your pranks, he knew how to recognize your goodwill and your desire to follow Jesus in the family of Mary.
- You yourself recognised it : « *The Venerable Father, in order to try to give respite to my dissipation, made me go through various employments :the kitchen, the forge, the bakery, the lamp room ...* » He had especially confided you to Brother Stanislas for almost a year.
- Much later, you will emphasise «*the incomparable patience of Father Champagnat, his fatherly attitude, the most kind but constant firmness which eventually triumphed over my fickle and*

dissipated character which seemed little suited to religious life. »

- You experienced the temptation to leave while you were at La Côte-Saint-André, under the direction of Brother Louis-Marie, after your success at the elementary Brevet.
- On Friday 5 June 1840, the eve of his death, the Founder received you, on your written request. In his extreme weakness he could only look at you, without being able to speak to you. But on your departure, he made you say that he fully believed in your vocation.
- With the grace of God and your docility, you persevered, and Brother Avit wrote that *«you were a zealous teacher all your life and that you especially loved teaching catechism.»*
- By means of the anecdotes that you have recounted for us, we discover some of the less well known traits of the personality of the Founder: his joy, his manner of praying, his kindly foresight for the brothers, his love of the Church, his love of the liturgy and his tender love of Mary.

Thank you, Brother Sylvestre, for your perseverance and for your filial love of Father Champagnat.

May we follow your example in loving to stay in his company so as to know him better and love him more.

Amen.

[BROTHER LOUIS-MARIE]

Pierre Alexis Labrosse
(1810-1879)

2nd Superior General



Brother Louis-Marie has a very important place in the history of the Institute. In the body of this book, we present only a brief overview of his life and work, with some chronological landmarks, as in the case of Brother François.

Pierre-Alexis Labrosse was born on 22 May 1810, in the hamlet that bears his family name, part of the commune of Ranchal in the northwest part of the department of Rhône. He was the fourth child of a farming family of thirteen. We have few details of his childhood; according to an aged servant the child had a charming character, and was obedient and pious.

He was a good student; he entered the minor seminary of Verrières in 1824, and in 1827 went on to l'Argentière for two years of Mathematics and Philosophy; in 1829 he entered the major seminary of Saint Irenaeus at Lyons, where Father Gardette was the superior, as at the time of Marcellin Cham-

pagnat. After two years of theology, during the 1831 holidays, he told his parents that he would not return to the seminary, without revealing the reasons for his decision.

He got in touch with Father Champagnat, who replied to him in this fashion on 29 August 1831:

M. Labrosse,

The first, and I may say, the only condition necessary to enter our house, along with good health, is good will and a sincere desire to please God. Come with this disposition and you will be received with open arms. You will do well in our house. Mary our Good Mother will watch over you, and having had her as your first Superior, you will have her as Queen in heaven.

The clothing that you had in the seminary, and your linen, can be used in our house, and will make up your wardrobe. For your novitiate, 400 francs if you can.

I leave you in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

I have the honour to be your devoted servant.

Champagnat, sup.d.ff.M.

Pierre-Alexis arrived at Our Lady of the Hermitage on 16 October 1831; he was never to return to his birth place. He made his novitiate under the direction of Brother Bonaventure, and on 7 October 1832 made his vows for three years.

Father Champagnat lost no time in sending the newly professed, now Brother Louis-Marie, to the boarding school at la Côte-Saint-André to teach the first class. Here he showed himself to be an excellent teacher and an adroit diplomat in

dealing with Father Douillet and Marthe, his housekeeper, who tended to interfere with the running of the school. He was appointed director in 1833, and remained such until 1839. In 1838 the Academy of Grenoble bestowed upon the school at la Côte “an honourable mention” in recognition of the excellence of its teaching.

Brother Louis-Marie made his perpetual vows on 12 October 1834, at first privately. He renewed them publicly in 1836 during the October retreat in the new chapel at Our Lady of the Hemitage blessed by Mgr Pompellier.

Assistant

On 12 October 1839 Brother Louis-Marie was elected Assistant General of Brother François, Superior General. Some months later, Father Champagnat, at the point of death, asked him to write his Spiritual Testament, under dictation. Some days later, taking him by the hand, Father Champagnat said to him:

“Now Brother, be Assistant to Brother François with all your might... Have confidence, God will be with you... And never forget that you have the Blessed Virgin who is the resource of the house; you will never lack her protection” (Life, ed. 1989, p. 248).

With Brother François and Brother Jean-Baptiste, elected second Assistant, to the great joy of Father Champagnat, the government of the Institute was to be assured, from 1839 to 1879, by three brothers whom Marist history came to name “the three in one” (Cf Avis, Leçons, Sentences, Chapter XXXIII).

Saint-Genis-Laval

To improve the administration of the Institute, in 1853 a property was bought at Saint-Genis-Laval, close to Lyons. Brother Louis-Marie had the oversight of the new construction. On 6 August 1858 the Superiors transferred to this place. The novitiate followed in September, making a widow of the Hermitage until 1868 when the first juniorate was opened. Brother Louis-Marie accompanied Brother François to Rome to obtain from the Holy Father approbation of the Institute which was received in 1863.

Superior General

In the years after the death of the Founder, the Institute developed in an extraordinary way, especially after the union with the brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux (1842) and of Viviers (1844): 1852 saw the foundation in England, and 1856 in Belgium. Brother François, worn out after twenty years as superior, retired to the Hermitage, "the great reliquary of Father Champagnat."

On 16 July 1860 the General Chapter elected Brother Louis-Marie Superior General, with five Assistants to help him. He was in good health, and he had much experience of government; even more, he was admired and loved by his brothers. Short in stature, his head a great shock of white hair, he had a kindly manner with lively eyes, and a voice sonorous when he spoke in public and gentle when in one to one conversations. Endowed with leadership, he was above all to strive to become a father to his brothers.

Development of the Institute

During his generalate of nearly twenty years the Institute continued to grow in the same way. There were many diffi-

culties, but no persecutions. In France new provinces came into being, making it possible to make further overseas foundations: Scotland (1858), Ireland (1862), South Africa (1867), Lebanon-Syria (1868), Australia (1871), New Caledonia (1873), New Zealand (1876).

In 1879, the year of his death, there were 2,500 brothers in the Institute, 560 houses, and 83,000 pupils. Significant buildings such as the chapel at Saint-Genis-Laval, a boarding school in Paris, the provincial house at Aubenas and the chapel at Our Lady of the Hermitage caused heavy financial worries for the Superior General; in 1868 the debt was 500,000 francs.

The Juniorates

The first juniorate, for sixty boys twelve to fourteen years of age, opened at Our Lady of the Hermitage in May 1868. This kind of establishment had become necessary at this time; it had become impossible to receive postulants directly into the novitiate because of the evolution of society, especially since the development of the railways. So it was that each province assumed the responsibility to nurture possible Marist vocations. In 1870 everything was interrupted by the war against Prussia. The house at Saint-Genis-Laval being occupied by French soldiers, that of the Hermitage found a new life.

The Circulars

Brother Louis-Marie was a great writer; the collection of his circulars constitutes a *Summa*. The first, 27 December 1860, outlines a programme that was quickly accomplished: *"I have given myself three objectives, he wrote: to preserve and strengthen among you the spirit of piety, to strive to main-*

tain a perfect charity and to bring about everywhere the faithful observance of the Rule.” He wrote this about the Rule: “The general spirit of the Institute, humility, simplicity and modesty, gives to its authority such a paternal character, to obedience such a filial spirit, and to all our mutual interaction so much freedom and cordiality, that the brothers find in all the houses of the Institute where the Rule is fully and well observed, the delights and joys of a family, the peace and union that are the source of happiness” (Cf. Our Superiors, p. 116).

Five Circulars have to do with prayer, two with regularity and punctuality. Those on “Hell” and “Eternity” are especially moving. The last letter he wrote to his brothers was a “Call to Holiness”. This was dated 30 November 1879, a week before his death. We can look upon it as his spiritual testament.

The Superior

Brother Louis-Marie had a gift for leadership. He had a natural authority, he was persuasive and eloquent. More, he was a man of understanding and goodness. He was able to listen and understand without doubting the good will and good faith of those he was in charge of. He visited the houses as much as possible, putting everyone at ease, encouraging the shy ones to speak up. His presence at a meeting was a feast for everyone. Once, at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, he was carried in triumph through the courtyard to enthusiastic cheers. “These brothers of Saint-Paul, he said, smiling, have always been a little inclined to exaggeration, but they are so good!”

Pedagogical Work

Brother Louis-Marie was an excellent schoolmaster. He composed a “French Grammar” with a book of suitable exer-

cises, and a writing method, with notebooks for its application. He encouraged certain capable brothers to write "Principles of Plain Chant and Music." He published a book of arithmetic put together by some good teachers. As superior of a congregation devoted to teaching, he showed himself to be a true professional, fully equal to the demands of his complex task.

His Relationships

Brother Louis-Marie was quite detached from his family. As for his parents, he wrote to them from time to time, although he never returned to his birth place. However, when his brother, the parish priest of La Fouillouse had to withdraw from the ministry because of ill health, he welcomed him to the motherhouse where he helped him during the short time before he died. Brother Louis-Marie was always affable, polite, full of urbanity and delicacy, but precise, simple and brief. His letters to benefactors, such as the Countess de la Grandville, and Baron Benoist d'Azy who did so much for us to obtain legal authorisation, and to Mgr Parisis, are distinguished models of their kind.

His Virtues

The humility of Brother Louis-Marie was seen in every aspect of his life, notably by the choice of an Institute so little known at the time of his entry into the novitiate, and by his docility to his formators. This humility helped him to be always charitable, kind, helpful and simple. He practised poverty by making all his visits on foot as much as possible, often in spite of tiredness and sometimes in pain. His clothing was no different from that of all the other brothers.

His piety was deep and fervent. He said to the brothers:

“For perseverance, for salvation, for the preservation of virtue, for a fruitful apostolate, prayer is necessary. Prayer is the great means, and often the only one. We pray to learn how to pray, to gain a taste for prayer” Cf. Our Superiors, p. 133).

The source of this piety was his ardent love of God and of people. In his Circulars he praises devotion to the Sacred Heart; he ponders lovingly the wounds of the Redeemer, remains overcome with gratitude before the Tabernacle, his fervour recalls Father Champagnat speaking with Brother Louis about divine love. He made the Stations of the Cross every day. He loved his brothers with a constant, active, practical charity. He had a special place for the sick and visited them every day. Sometimes, some of them were embarrassed, and told him so. *“Don’t say a word,”* Brother Louis-Marie replied, *“This is my first job; there is nothing more urgent”* (Our Superiors, p. 136).

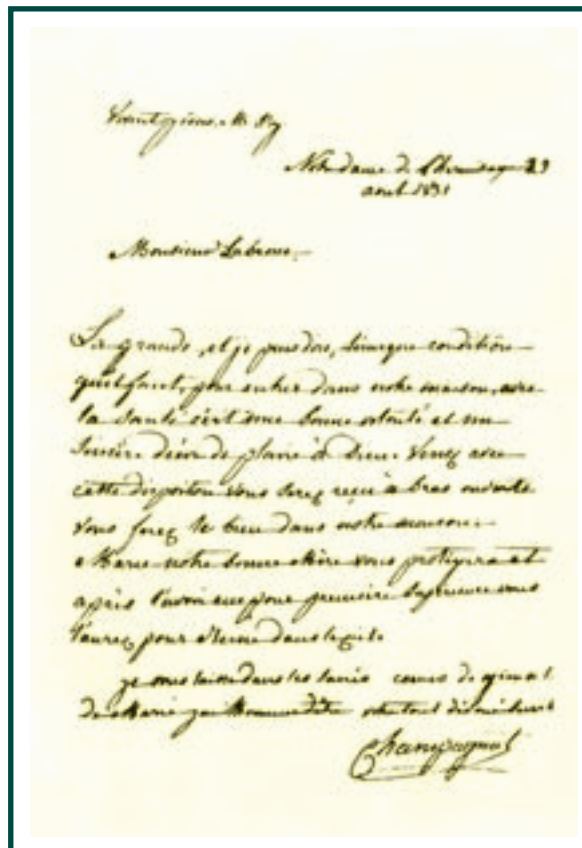
His piety and his charity nourished his zeal, an apostolic zeal that nothing could obstruct. Because he loved God, he wished to win souls. Because he loved people, he wished to save them. He showed his pastoral charity above all in the search for good vocations and in the accompaniment of his brothers.

His death

He was in his seventieth year, vigorous, always active, enterprising, hale and hearty as at the beginning of his career. His intellect remained clear and his will power as strong as ever. Nothing hinted at debility or decline. He struggled ardently against the educational policies of the government which wanted to see Catholic schools disappear. For the brothers he was their venerated superior, their vigilant and vigorous leader, their father full of kindness.

■ [Our first Brothers] ■

On the evening of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, just when he had come to look at the lighting of the decorations of the city of Lyons in honour of Mary, he was struck by an attack of apoplexy, and died the next day, 9 December 1879, just after noon. His sudden death was deeply felt by the Institute. In fact, he had known all the brothers personally, and won their hearts and their admiration by the way he governed them.



CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- 1810, 22 May: Pierre-Alexis Labrosse was born at Ranchal (Rhône) in a farming family. Few details of his childhood.
- 1824: in autumn, Pierre-Alexis attended the minor seminary at Verrières, having had lessons in Latin from Father Desroches, parish priest of Ranchal. One of his brothers went there before him.
- 1827: Pierre-Alexis left Verrières for two years of philosophy and mathematics at l'Argentière.
- 1829: Lyons, the major seminary of Saint Irenaeus, with Fathers Gardette and Cholleton. He left after two years without revealing the reasons for his decision.
- 1831: following a response from Father Champagnat (letter of 29 August), the young man entered the novitiate of Our Lady of the Hermitage. Brother Bonaventure was his master of novices.
- 1832: first vows, for three years, 7 October. Shortly after, the newly professed was sent to La Côte-Saint-André, in the beginning being charge of the first class, and then Director until 1839. This school had been founded by Father Douillet, a friend of Fr. Champagnat.
- 1834: Brother Louis-Marie privately made his perpetual profession, 12 October. He renewed these vows publicly after the retreat of 1836. The establishment at La Côte-Saint-André had 200 students, fifty of them boarders.

- 1838: There were five brothers including a bursar. the Academy of Grenoble gave the brothers' school an "honourable mention" in view of the quality of its teaching.
- 1839: 12 October, Brother Louis-Marie was elected first Assistant of Brother François who succeeded the Founder. Brother Jean-Baptiste was elected second Assistant. Champagnat was overjoyed: "How good God is, just the choice that I would have wished; they are truly the men we need to have!"
- 1840: Brother Louis-Marie drew up the Spiritual Testament, dictated by Father Champagnat.
- For some years: he directed the scholasticate, also known as "The Special School," where the young brothers studied while preparing the examination for the elementary *Brevet*, the qualification necessary for teaching.
- 1851, 20 June: the legal recognition of the Institute by the French government. Brother Louis-Marie accompanied Brother François to Paris.
- 1853: opening of the school at Saint-Genis-Laval. Brother Louis-Marie was delegated to look over the property that the parish priest, Father Magat, suggested to the Superiors who were looking to relocate the motherhouse in Lyons. The property of Le Montet, twelve hectares, was bought for 230,000 francs. The first step towards getting this amount was to sell the boarding school at la Grange Payre for 75,000 francs.
- 1856: construction work began under the super-

vision of Brother Louis-Marie.

- 1858, 6 February: he accompanied Brother François to Rome seeking the Holy Father's approbation of the Institute with its Rules and Constitutions. On 6 August, the same year, the mother house was transferred to Saint-Genis-Laval.
- 1860, 16 July Brother Louis-Marie was elected Superior General, having been nominated by Brother François. In his last Circular to the brothers, the latter wrote: *"I regard as a great grace of God the choice that providence has deigned to make in the one who is to replace me... He was formed, like me, by Father Champagnat."*
- 1863, 9 January the approbation of the Institute by His Holiness Pope Pius IX, and the Constitutions for a trial period of five years.
- 1867, 26 August: blessing of the main chapel at Saint-Genis-Laval. In the same year, the foundation of the first establishment at Cape Town, South Africa. To the five brothers he was sending there, he said: *"The Cape will be from now on the first step to Oceania."*
- 1868, 1 May: opening of the first juniorate at Our Lady of the Hermitage.
- 1869: Construction of a boarding school in Paris. Brother Louis-Marie wrote, in his February Circular: *"We have to buy and to build or miss out altogether. This step was necessary to link the North with the Centre and maintain communications with the ministries. It was a matter of urgency, and we did not hesitate despite this new expense. No one in*

the Institute will be surprised that it leaves us with a debt of 500,000 francs."

- 1870: the Franco-Prussian war. The house at Saint-Genis was occupied for five months by 2,000 French troops who were quartered there.
- 1871: four brothers founded St Patrick's school in Sydney, and a novitiate two years later.
- 1873: foundation in New Caledonia at the request of the Minister for Colonies. Four brothers set out, 5 May, to open a primary school in Nouméa.
- 1875, 2 February: the first Sydney novices wrote to Brother Louis-Marie who responded to them as follows on January 31 of the following year: *"Be fruitful and multiply, fill the whole land, the land of Australia, of New Zealand and of all the lands that make up Oceania..."* (C. V, 296-303). In July, with Brother Euthyme, he went to Rome on the occasion of the Pope's 84th birthday and the 29th year of his pontificate. They presented to His Holiness a magnificent album illustrating the location of our works in the world.
- 1876, 15 May: the brothers arrived at Wellington to open the first school in New Zealand. The same year, the opening of the novitiate at Dumfries, Scotland. The General Chapter reorganised the juniorates at Saint-Genis-Laval, Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and Beaucamps.
- 1877, 15 August: blessing of the present chapel at Our Lady of the Hermitage, following plans drawn up by Brother Théodore. It replaced the 1836

- 1878: chapel which was in danger of collapsing. inauguration of the provincial house at Aubenas (Ardèche) constructed under the direction of Brother Philogone, Assistant General. Its predecessor had been at La Bégude since 1844, the year of the union with the Brothers of Viviers. On 2 November a Circular called for the suspension in all the houses of the Institute of all constructions, all buying of furniture, and all significant repairs; *“These two capital measures have been rigorously imposed upon us by the financial state of the Congregation”* (C VI, 78-110).
- 1879: on the evening of 8 December, Brother Louis-Marie had an apoplectic attack; he died the next day a little after noon. He was in his 70th year. Some hours before his death he had said to the brothers: *“Our congregation was founded under the protection of Mary. It bears her name. We may hope that she will sustain us to the end of time. Our brothers therefore always have the beautiful mission of fostering devotion to Mary”* (Our Superiors, p. 138).

A full biography was published in 1907 by la Libraire Catholique Emmanuel Vitte, Lyons, Paris, entitled: *Vie du Frère Louis-Marie, deuxième Supérieur général de l’Institut des Petits Frères de Marie, 1810-1879*, by a brother of this Institute. Moreover, the book *“Our Superiors”*, published in 1954 by the General Econome of the Marist Brothers at Saint-Genis-Laval, presents the life and work of Brother Louis-Marie (pp. 73-140).



Saint-Genis-Laval, interior courtyard

Prayer with Brother Louis-Marie

Brother Louis-Marie, we come to thank God, remembering your life devoted to the service of the brothers and works of the Institute. We pray:

- Thank you for the family in which you grew up in a climate of work and simplicity. It left you free to respond to the call of God.
- Thanks for the formation that you received in the seminaries; it was a great preparation for the work that you were to undertake later.
- Thanks for your commitment in the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary. Father Champagnat welcomed you joyfully, and Brothers Louis and Bonaventure accompanied you as a novice.
- Thanks for your years at La Côte-Saint-André where you showed your talent as a teacher with the children, and as a diplomat with M. Douillet and his housekeeper.
- Thanks for responding to the trust of the brothers who elected you to assist Brother François, and

for the good relationship with him and Brother Jean-Baptiste in the government of the Institute.

- Thanks for the rousing energy, enthusiasm and ardour that you put at the service of the brothers and their schools.
- Thanks for the fidelity to the spirit of the Founder; by your life and by your teaching you passed this on to the brothers.
- Thanks for your forty years in the service of authority among the brothers. By your kindness and understanding you won their affection and their respect.
- Thanks for your faith in the future of the Institute, a faith that setbacks never dimmed. Under your administration it experienced regular and rapid growth.
- Thanks for knowing how to lead from the front despite the financial problems that were never absent throughout the whole time of your government.
- Thanks for your detachment from your natural family, and for your kindness to your priest brother whom you welcomed at Saint-Genis at the end of his active life.

- Thanks for your readiness to put at the service of the brothers your leadership skills: your natural authority, your energetic willingness, your clear intelligence, your eloquent and persuasive speech.
- Thanks for the confidence in Mary that you communicated to the brothers as an inheritance received from the Founder.

Lord, thank you for giving us Brother Louis-Marie, a man of both the heart and the head, a faithful disciple of Marcellin Champagnat and his second successor as Superior of our religious family.

BROTHER CASSIEN and BROTHER ARSÈNE

Louis Chomat and Césaire Fayol
(1788-1858) (1783-1863)

The names of these two brothers are linked in a single biography. In fact, Brother Jean-Baptiste only briefly mentioned Brother Arsène. What is interesting is that the two schoolmasters worked together for a long time before becoming Little Brothers of Mary in 1832. Their pathways toward the religious life bring out several aspects of the personality of Father Champagnat, in particular, his prudence in the guidance of individuals.

Louis Chomat, who would become Brother Cassien, was born on 2 September 1788 in Sorbiers, Canton of Saint-Chamond, in the Loire region. He never knew his mother and lost his father at ten years of age. It was the period of the Terror and the curate of Sorbiers had sworn an oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. The boy's guardian was a fervent Christian who hid a refractory priest in his house. The child was catechised by the priest who taught him to read and write at the same time. He also prepared him for his first communion, which he made on 25 April 1801.

Breaking free of family ties, the young man lived an unsettled life for a time before settling down thanks to the advice of a virtuous aunt, who counselled him to dedicate himself

to the Blessed Virgin and address himself to a wise confessor, Fr Dervieux, the curate of Saint-Pierre of Saint-Chamond. A Jesuit, Father Marion, received him into the Confraternity of the Scapular. Therefore, Louis was under the protection of Our Lady. Fr Dervieux gave him a life programme in seven points: 1) Remember the presence of God; 2) Combat self-love; 3) Do not go over past errors which have been forgiven (war on scruples); 4) Be a light to men ; 5) Avoid venial sin, but remain at peace with oneself in respect of daily faults of weakness; 6) Consider the ministry of catechist-schoolmaster as a great blessing; 7) Maintain courage in the difficulties of that work. Christ saved the world by his crucifixion.

For eight years, from 1812 to 1820, Louis Chomat was guided by Fr Dervieux. It was Fr Dervieux's idea that he open the school in Sorbiers in 1815. Louis thought of entering the De La Salle Order but renounced the idea for health reasons. Not attracted by the position, he refused the direction of the Saint Chamond orphanage which had been offered to him by Fr Dervieux. This work would later be passed on to the Marist Brothers.

After two years of frequent contacts with Fr Rouchon, the curate of Valbenoîte in Saint-Étienne who wished to found a congregation of brothers, Louis Chomat decided to leave his home to join him. The inhabitants of Sorbiers forced him to give up this plan.

Not being able to manage his very large class alone, he accepted Césaire Fayol's offer to share the task. The two men, "as soon as they met, respected and loved each other like brothers" declared Brother Jean-Baptiste (*BQF*, p.154). They

would never be parted from that time on. Over nearly twenty years, they shared their income and lived in the same residence. All the boys of the parish and a good number of youths from the neighbouring towns and villages attended the school.

“So, writes Brother Jean-Baptiste, while they were working in this way for the glory of God, Father Champagnat was laying the foundations of his congregation and word of his virtue was spreading all around. The pious schoolmasters of Sorbiers, wanting to meet a man whom public opinion declared a saint, paid Father Champagnat a visit in La Valla... After that, they would often return to consult the venerated Father, confess themselves to him and perform, under his direction, the exercises of the annual retreat (*BQF*, p.155).

From time to time, Louis Chomat would write to Father Champagnat to seek his opinion and advice. Brother Jean-Baptiste quotes extracts from the Father’s answers and adds the following. “The venerated Father, who never attempted to force grace, but wished only to assist its workings in souls, instructed these two young men, directed them and trained them in the highest virtue for more than ten years without ever committing them in any way to enter the Congregation, even though he was profoundly convinced that they would one day belong to it” (*BQF*, p.157).

Indeed, Louis Chomat did ask to enter the Congregation. However, one thing troubled him: the promise which he had made to teach the children of his parish all his life. Father Champagnat removed this source of worry easily by saying to him, “*As Providence has called you into the Congregation, we can continue your work.*”

“Césaire Fayol, shared all the feelings of his colleague. After a long preparation which served as their novitiate, they went to the annual retreat, at the end of which the venerated Father had them clothed in the religious habit under the names of Brother Cassien for Louis Chomat and Brother Arsène for Césaire Fayol. When school went back, two young brothers were sent to assist them and Brother Cassien, appointed Director of the little community, continued to direct the school as in the past” (*BQF*, p.158).

The next section of Brother Jean-Baptiste’s text may be surprising given what we know of the esteem in which the inhabitants of Sorbiers held Louis Chomat: did they not oppose his departure for Valbenoîte? Yet, we can read, “Only a single voice was raised in the Parish of Sorbiers to condemn the action which he took.” Let’s note in passing that Brother Jean-Baptiste forgets that Césaire Fayol took the same action. The authorities withdrew the protection and the subsidies which they had until then granted, and wanted nothing more to do with the school. The arguments reached such intensity that Father Champagnat was obliged to close the establishment and withdraw the brothers.”

We know that this removal of brothers occurred in 1837. The Mayor having strongly protested against the closure of the school, Brother Cassien answered him at length and his letter sheds light on the situation. “Your Honour the Mayor, in the letter which you did the honour of sending me on 18 November, you appear completely surprised by my intention to leave the commune of Sorbiers ...Truly, Your Honour the Mayor, your surprise astonishes me. One would imagine that you were totally unaware of the difficulties of our position in

recent times ... It appears that you have never been told of our classrooms, much too low and half as big as they should be, where masters and children continually breathe air which is unhealthy and unclean and where the health of all is each day placed at greater and greater risk. It is true that this year I no longer have anywhere to sit, and that, in order to leave some space for my pupils, I am forced to teach while leaning against a little chest of drawers. Perhaps, you will find some people who will object that we should have sent the boarders elsewhere, but where would we have found enough to live on? The children's fees combined with the 200 francs from the commune came to barely 600 francs. Could we, with that much, feed ourselves, maintain the property, make repairs and pay charges?... You speak to me of my devotion to the commune of Sorbiers. I believe, Your Honour the Mayor, you are very right to do so. Over nearly 30 years, I do not recall ever having stepped away from any sacrifice, feared any effort where it concerned making myself useful to the district. At a time when my powers have begun to diminish, in the fear that the work will not be maintained, I have joined a body of schoolmasters which can continue it after me" (*Lettres 2, Répertoire*, p.117/118). This edition of the *BQF* adds as a note, "At the request of Mr Rumilieu, the Mayor of Sorbiers, this school was once again placed in the Brothers' hands, eight years later" (p.158).

No longer able to practice the austerities which he had previously imposed on himself, Brother Cassien found the Rule too easy and the brothers too imperfect. He informed Father Champagnat of his views by letter. Father Champagnat replied with a tact which reveals his experience as a formator, giving Brother Cassien to understand the value of

religious obedience as a shortcut to perfection. He also urged Brother Cassien to seek to discover the qualities of the young brothers.

“Even amongst the young brothers who appear so imperfect to you, there is basically a rich source of goodness. I, who know them, am often struck with admiration when I see the efforts which they make to live in accordance with the spirit of their vocation” (BQF, p.160).

And the Founder added with a pinch of humour,

“What’s more, my dear Brother, if you do not find models which are perfect enough amongst us, behold the Blessed Virgin, take her as a model. Her life and the examples which she has given us are the first rule of the brothers” (BQF, p.161).

At the same time as giving him this advice, Fr Champagnat sent Brother Bonaventure to help Brother Cassien. Some time afterwards, the latter wrote to the Founder, *“Brother Bonaventure’s virtue makes me blush because it clearly shows up my faults. It really is the remedy which I needed to cure me of my stupid vanity and dispel my illusions”* (Idem).

Brother Jean-Baptiste continues, writing that Father Champagnat’s instructions had a marvellous effect on Brother Cassien. Moreover, he adds, *“this brother had a heart which tended to indulgence, kindness and compassion for the miseries of others. He was always seen acting as the servant of his brothers and showing towards all of them, in particular, the imperfect ones, an extreme indulgence”* (BQF, p.163). On leaving Sorbiers, he was appointed Director of the Grange-Payre boarding school.

“Brother Arsène followed him there and, as manual labour had always been to his liking, he was put in charge of tending the garden, looking after the animals and taking care of provisions for the kitchen. In this humble job, he was remarked on for his love of work, the perfect order which he created everywhere, his constant bearing of modesty and reverence, his good character, his friendliness to all, his charity towards his neighbour and his keenness to be of service to others and please everyone. Even the children admired his piety and his virtue. They venerated him and called him by no other name than that of ‘the holy brother’” (Idem).

After this fine tribute to Brother Arsène, Brother Jean-Baptiste speaks no more about him. From other sources, we know that Fayol Césaire was born on 10 November 1783 in Fontanès in the municipality of Saint Héand (Loire), the son of Claude and of Claudine Meiller. After Grange-Payre, he retired to the Hermitage and then Saint Genis-Laval, where he died on 19 May 1863 (See *Répertoire*, p.56).

Brother Cassien had much success with the young at Grange-Payre. Father Champagnat then chose him to direct the novitiate in Vauban, Saône-et-Loire, which he would inaugurate on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December 1839. In the “Life of the Founder,” Brother Jean-Baptiste describes the foundation of this novitiate and reports the Founder’s words to Brother Cassien.

“Remember, Brother, that we are the children of Bethlehem, the Little Brothers of Mary. Be careful to keep alive in you and strive to inspire in your novices the feelings of Jesus and Mary in the manger of Bethlehem and in the poor house of Nazareth” (Vie, p.229 – 1989 edition).

The last fifteen pages of the biography recall the virtues in which Brother Cassien excelled : 1) Avoiding little faults and even imperfections; 2) Fidelity to all observances of the Rule; 3) Punctuality; 4) His love for Jesus, with this testimony of a former pupil:

“He was at Sorbiers when I was sent there as a boarder. I was eight and a half. There were twenty of us pupils, sleeping in the house and going to class with the other pupils from the village. I can state in all sincerity that we all professed for him and for Brother Arsène, his worthy companion, the highest regard. We looked on them as saints. It wasn’t possible that the boarders, witnesses to almost all their actions, could have had any other opinion” (BQF, p.166).

His gratitude: “He admitted that the memory of the blessings of God was what touched him the most” (Idem, p.170).

And Brother Jean-Baptiste transcribes a note, found in Brother Cassien’s retreat notebook, which recalls the blessings received from the Lord: His baptism on 2 September 1788, his leaving the schismatic church to enter the Catholic Church on 15 December, 1800, his first communion on 25 April 1801, his “conversion,” thanks to the influence of his virtuous aunt, receiving the Holy Scapular, on 15 May 1814 from the hands of Father Marion, Jesuit, the arrival of his virtuous colleague, Césaire Fayol, on 15 November 1815, his confirmation at 28 years of age, at the Saint Pierre Church in Saint Chamond on 17 July, 1816 by Monsignor Dubourg, the Bishop of New Orleans in Louisiana, his investiture in the Society of the Brothers of Mary on the Feast of the Holy Rosary in 1832 under the name of Brother Cassien. *“I had asked for*

this name myself in order to have as my protector and model Saint Cassien, martyred by his pupils" (BQF, p.172), his religious profession in 1834, again on the Feast of the Holy Rosary, several very special favours from and certain incidents of a visible protection by Providence. "I can say, like Saint Bernard, that I am overwhelmed by the gifts of God. Gratitude is for me, therefore, a sacred duty, a duty which is very pleasing to perform as no prayer, no sentiment gives me as much consolation as thanksgiving" (Idem, p.173).

Charity for his brothers.

"I like the work of schoolmaster, he said, because it is a ministry of charity: one is constantly busy looking after and helping others. After the work of schoolmaster, the job that attracts me the most is that of nurse because, there also, one is totally devoted to others. "

Brother Jean-Baptiste adds that the brother had spent a good part of his life in these two occupations. In Sorbiers and in Grange-Payre, even though he was teaching, he also looked after sick children. In Vauban, he did the same. Finally, the biographer transcribes a document extracted from Brother Cassien's spiritual notes with the title "The twelve rules of charity taken from the Holy Scriptures". Two come from the Old Testament and ten from the New Testament of which eight are from the Epistles of Saint Paul and two from the letters of Saint Peter (BQF, p.173 to 178).

His spirit of mortification. Brother Jean-Baptiste states that "his detachment from the things of this earth was complete. Before making his profession, he disposed of all he

owned, keeping absolutely nothing. Through his savings of more than twenty-five years, he had amassed nearly twenty thousand francs. He gave this money to the Institute without any condition.”

“He spent the last days of his life in appalling suffering, but with an even greater resignation and patience. It was at Saint Genis-Laval on 18 February 1858 that he fell asleep in the Lord, pronouncing the holy names of Jesus and Mary.”

N.B.

In three letters of Father Champagnat to Brother François, Brother Cassien is named in the positions of Visitor to Millery (L. 169), to Valbenoîte and to Neuville (L. 172). In the letter of 24 February 1838, the Founder writes, “I very much approve the voyages which the good Brother Cassien makes. May God give him the courage and good health which he needs to do such good work” (L. 174).

Prayer with Brother Cassien and Brother Arsène

Let us pray with Brothers Cassien and Arsène whose lives are presented in the single biography by Brother Jean-Baptiste. We remember that these two brothers were older than Marcellin Champagnat: Louis Chomat (Brother Cassien) was born in 1788 and Césaire Fayol (Brother Arsène) in 1783.



- These two brothers worked together for a long time at the school in Sorbiers which looked after some boarders from the nearby communes.
- We have no knowledge of the childhood of Césaire Fayol; we know that Louis Chomat lost his mother while very young, and his father when he was ten years old.
- Young Louis came to take seriously the advice of a pious aunt, and that of Father Dervieux, pastor of Saint Pierre in Saint-Chamond who became his spiritual director from 1812 to 1820.

- It was Father Dervieux who encouraged him to open a school at Sorbiers. Louis was so successful in that that the people objected to his departure to Saint-Etienne to rejoin Father Rouchon, pastor of Valbenoite, who wished to found a congregation of brothers.
- Louis Chomat accepted the collaboration of Césaire Fayol as joint founder. Brother Jean-Baptiste writes: *“As soon as they met, they held each other in high regard, and loved each other as brothers”* (BQF, p.154). They lived in community and shared their goods for nearly twenty years.
- Louis and Césaire came to know the young curate of Lavalla who directed them for ten years. In 1832 they asked to enter the Institute. *“At the end of the annual retreat the venerable Father clothed them in the religious habit.”*
- Brother Cassien found the Rule too easy and the young brothers who helped him too imperfect. Father Champagnat wrote to him: *“Even among the young brothers who seem to you to be imperfect, there are, in the majority, a rich store of virtues. I who know them, am often full of admiration at the sight of their efforts to live in the spirit of their vocation”* (BQF, p. 161).
- The Founder adds: *“What’s more, my dear Brother, if you do not find models that are perfect enough among us, behold the Blessed Virgin, take her as a*

model. Her life and the examples that she has given us are the first rule of the brothers” (BQF, p.161).

- A little time after welcoming Brother Bonaventure, Brother Cassien wrote to the Founder: *“The virtue of Brother Bonaventure makes me blush because he makes my faults as plain as daylight. It really is the remedy I needed to cure me of my stupid vanity and dispel my illusions” (BQF, p. 161).*
- Brother Jean-Baptiste writes: *‘Brother Cassien had a heart which tended to indulgence, kindness and compassion for the miseries of others” (BQF, p.163).*
- When Brother Cassien was appointed director of the boarding school at la Grange Payre, Brother Arsène went with him to take charge of the gardening, the care of the animals and the kitchen needs. *“He was noted in this humble occupation for his love of work, the perfect order that he maintained everywhere, his good character, his readiness to be of service and to please everyone... The only name the children had for him was “the saintly brother” (Id.).*
- When he chose Brother Cassien to direct the novitiate at Vauban, set up in a beautiful house, Father Champagnat told him: *“Remember, Brother, that we are children of Bethlehem, Little Brothers of Mary. Keep a careful watch on yourself, and try to inspire in your novices the sentiments of Jesus and Mary in the stable of Bethlehem and in the poor house of Nazareth” (Life, p. 229, 1989).*

- On the day he received the habit, the feast of the Holy Rosary 1832, he wrote:
“I asked for this name (Cassien) taking as my patron and model Saint Cassien who was martyred for his students” (BQF, p. 172).
- *“I love being a school teacher,”* he said, *“because it is a ministry of charity; you are always busy serving and helping your neighbor”* (BQF, p.173).
- You had a great spirit of poverty and self denial. Before your profession, with Brother Arsène, you gave the Institute unconditionally almost five thousand francs which represented the savings of more than twenty five years.

With you, Brothers Cassien and Arsène, we thank God for lives consecrated to the education of the young, and for Saint Marcellin Champagnat who brought you into his religious family by his tact and kindness.

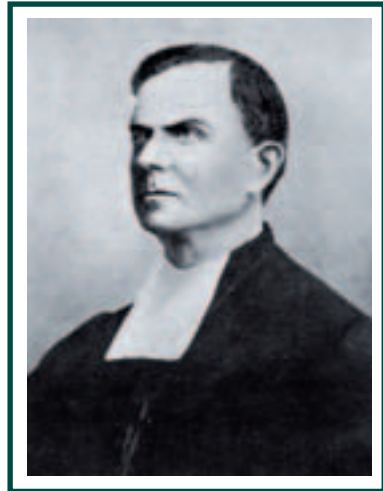
Amen.

[BROTHER AVIT]

Henri Bilon
(1819-1892)

The Institute chronicler

The following information comes mainly from the biography of Brother Avit which opens Volume I of the Biographical Notes on Brothers deceased between 1890 and 1900. One can also refer to the Volume of References published in Rome in 1987 (Cf. p.60/62), which reproduces a photo of Brother Avit. The most complete text was written by the Brother himself. It is reproduced, with complementary passages from the Annals, in the first volume of the Annales de l'Institut, Rome 1993, pages XIII to XXXVII, under the title «Silhouette de l'annaliste.»



Henri Bilon, Brother Avit by his religious name, was born in Saint-Didier-sur-Chalaronne in the Diocese of Belley on 11 October 1819. An accident at birth caused a deformation and weakness of the right arm which made him largely unfit for manual labour and incapable of making the sign of the cross with his right hand.

He lost his mother at the age of six. At the town school, he saw a succession of five teachers, four of whom were no fonts of knowledge. However, they did teach him the catechism. The Institute opened a free school in Saint-Didier in October, 1836, which Henri attended for six months. Later, he liked to tell people how in that space of time he made more progress than during ten years with the local schoolmasters.

His father, having reached the age of fifty, got the idea of learning to read and having his son Henri be his teacher. Henri gave him his daily lesson in the evening after work. Having taken lessons for a whole winter, Mr Bilon had learnt how to read, and parishioners were flabbergasted one Sunday to see him following the service with a book. The neighbours and acquaintances, filled with wonder, proclaimed his son the most learned child in the town.

Henri made his first communion in 1831 and was confirmed shortly thereafter by Monsignor Devie, the Bishop of the Diocese. On 1 October 1837, he left for the Hermitage with the brothers of Saint-Didier. They arrived half an hour before the opening of the retreat. The days seemed very long to him in a silence which was uninterrupted except for a few words spoken to him by Fr Champagnat, to whom he confessed. After the retreat, overwhelmed by the boredom, he went back to Saint-Didier.

However, he left his home a few months later to enter the novitiate on 9 March 1838. He received the religious habit on 14 May the next year under the name of Brother Avit. He volunteered for the Oceania missions and would subsequently reiterate that wish several times. He began his service at Pélussin as teacher of the junior class. In 1839, he was at Terrenoire

with a first grade class. After the retreat that year, he made his profession. Posted to Viriville, he taught a class of 65 pupils.

Studying late into the night, he prepared for the *brevet* teaching diploma over six months, which he passed in Grenoble on 9 March 1840. In May, he was in Charlieu, in charge of the first class. On 15 August of the same year, he was appointed director of Saint-Genest-Malifaux. He was almost killed along with two student monitors when the fireplace mantelpiece above their seats collapsed. He escaped with little more than a bad fright but would later say that the Good Mother had played a part in his survival.

In June 1842, Brother Avit was sent to Mornant, where he stayed only a short time. The local curate asked for him to be replaced as he found him not flexible enough, saying of him in a letter, "*Keep a close eye on this brother. He's really got the makings of something but is in need of a good trimming down to size*" (*Annales de l'Établissement de Mornant*).

In September 1843, he was at Bougé-Chambalud. He acquired such a reputation there that, in his own words, "they thought he could control the weather." In October 1846, Br Avit was called to the direction of the Mondragon establishment (Vaucluse), a difficult post, dreaded by the brothers. He was also required to visit the houses of the Provinces of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and La Bégude.

For him, this was like an apprenticeship in the position of Visitor to which he was appointed in September, 1848 for the Provinces of the Centre and the Midi. He had to create everything from scratch in this job: organising examinations for

brothers and pupils, drawing up and balancing accounts, the reports of visits, preparing the new foundations, real estate transactions, arranging conditions with the founders, etc. He remained Visitor for seven years and performed very important services. Thus, in 1850, he managed despite great difficulty, to obtain from the Rectors of Drôme and Ardèche the documents necessary to have forty brothers exempted from military service.

In 1852, he was elected a member of the General Chapter and from that period on was a party to the capitular meetings, for which he was one of the secretaries for twenty years. In December, 1855, he was sent to Digoin to direct the boarding school there and, it is believed, to give him a well-earned rest. However, many trials awaited him in that post. In May 1859, following a transfer, he went to Bourbon-Lancy to finish out the year.

In September, 1859, Br Avit was appointed Visitor solely for the Province of Saint-Genis. He was to stay there until the vacation period of 1876. On 25 August of the same year, he was appointed Assistant by the General Chapter, and saw himself assigned the Province of Bourbonnais. It was without a novitiate and there were not enough recruits for the fifty-nine houses of the Province. Brother Avit, aged 57, was in failing health and had very weakened eyesight.

Despite this, he threw himself into the work courageously, full of confidence in God. There was no provincial house. After many negotiations and formalities, Br Avit succeeded in establishing the novitiate in Arfeuilles, in a house belonging to the Bishop of Moulins. Under his direction, the Province of Bourbonnais would be enriched with seven new foundations, those of Mont-Dore, Pouilly-sur-Loire, Saint-Rémy-sur-Durolle, Graçay, Tramayes, Hérís-

son and Saint-Léopardin-d'Augy. After three and a half years, the Brother Assistant, feeling his powers spent and his sight further deteriorated, asked to be relieved of his duties, a request which was granted by the General Chapter on 12 March 1880.

He had fully earned the right to rest. However, Brother Avit was not going to waste his time. Now practically unable to read or write, he would make himself a chronicler. For two or three months of the year, he would travel around the districts through which he had journeyed in the past, going from one establishment to another, gathering the documents which, combined with what his strong memory recalled, would comprise the General Annals of the Institute and of the 600 houses, including establishments which had already been closed. With his supply of notes, he would come back and close himself off in his room where, with the help of his secretaries, he would put everything in order, giving himself over to the task of writing with assiduity, patience and strong opinions. He worked in this way for ten years.

In the writing of the Annals, Brother Avit showed himself to be a man of frankness, righteousness and justice, a true Nathanael, neither concealing nor disguising. To these qualities, he added a gentle, subtle wit and natural liveliness from which flowed quick repartee, spirited remarks and clever, sometimes caustic, expressions, all with a marked originality in his language, character and manners. The Annals which he left us are of great value for the future as a source of useful information despite his having died before being able to complete them.

Under his rough exterior, Brother Avit possessed a kind, affectionate heart, open to friendship. Furthermore, he had a gift for attracting the friendship of others.

His relations with God were marked by a lively faith and an ardent piety. Thus, we can read as a dialogue with the Blessed Virgin this excerpt from a notebook containing his retreat notes for 1864. *“With the grace of my beloved Lord and your constant aid, O gentle Mother, 1) I will go forward in the love of my Jesus and in your love by following exactly my Rule, in the company and under the aegis of the Holy Family of Nazareth; 2) I will especially strive to acquire humility, the love of prayer and of silence, purity, poverty and obedience; 3) You will be my treasurer, good Mother...”* (Retreat of 15 August 1864).

There follows the summary of thirty-five subjects of reflection for the purpose of occupying the mind when on a journey, then the list of hymns that he would sing or revise mentally while travelling. Finally, there are the titles of thirty-nine chapters of the *Imitation of Jesus Christ* chosen for his readings, after which are the following lines.

“The reading of the admirable life of Blessed Margaret Mary moved me strongly and created in me a strong attraction for the virtues of that heroic lover of the divine heart of my beloved Saviour, that is, her ardent love of this loveable heart, her prodigious humility, her perfect obedience, her insatiable love of sufferings and humiliations. Since then, at least once a day, I have invoked this sublime lover of the suffering divine heart and conjure up her image to obtain from her gentle and loving Master the force to imitate her in her heroic virtues...”

All the retreats Brother Avit made after 1864 and for which he left a record, reveal a soul smitten with the love of God and completely sacrificed to His service. Thus, in 1882, he wrote,

"I accept my grievous infirmity and all that it should please the Lord to send me. O my God, let me bend myself to Your adorable will following the example of my Lord Jesus. O my good Mother, bless my resolution and obtain for me the grace to never fail in it. Keep my mind fixed on Nazareth, or before the tabernacle, or in Bethlehem, or on Calvary."

In December 1891, Brother Avit required special care due to his weakened state and pain. To cause as little trouble as possible, he asked to be sent to the infirmary, which he entered on 16 January 1892. On 29 January, the doctor ordered him confined to his room and soon after that to his bed, which saddened him deeply.

He himself asked for Extreme Unction which he received with faith and piety. In the presence of all the Superiors, the patient renewed his vows, confessed his faults and humbly asked pardon for any harm which he might have caused. He asked to be remembered in everyone's prayers and declared that he freely made the sacrifice of his life, in accordance with the will of God, and in particular for the success of the trip and the negotiations of the Brother Superior General, then in Rome for the introduction of the cause of the venerated Founder. It was the 1st of February. He died on the 7th at two o'clock in the afternoon.

The biographer concludes, "After having been one of that group of brothers who had known our pious Founder here below, Brother Avit went, we are quietly confident, to join those who form his crown in heaven" (*Notices nécrologiques*, T. I, p. 1 to 13).



Prayer with Brother Avit

Brother Avit, calling to mind some of the stages of your life leads us to thank God for the gift of your Marist vocation and for your fidelity, handed on through the immense work that still today continues to be of great value to the Institute.

- Your childhood was not easy. You lost your mother at the age of six, and your education

was difficult because of the ignorance of most of your teachers.

- On the other hand, at the Brothers' school that you went to in 1836, you say that previous you made more progress in six months than in all the years.
- Your first contact with Our Lady of the Hermitage, 1 October 1837, was not a happy one because of the silence of the brothers' annual retreat, interrupted only by a few words from Father Champagnat who heard your confession.

- Nevertheless, you entered the novitiate on 9 March 1838 and took the habit on the following May 8. With the generosity of your nineteen years you volunteered for the Oceania mission, and you repeated that request several times.
- In 1842, when you were teaching at Mornant, the local curate said of you in a letter: *“Keep a close eye on this brother; he has in him the makings of three men, but he needs a good trimming down to size”* (Annals of Mornant, AFM, 214.56, pp. 10-1).
- In 1843 you were appointed to Bougé-Chambalud, a place in which you remained for three years and where, in your own words, they thought you could control the weather.
- In October 1846 you undertook the direction of the school at Mondragon, near Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. You restored the discipline here, and moreover undertook the visitation of the houses in the Midi.
- In September 1848 you began a period of seven years as Visitor to the schools in the provinces of Midi and Centre to animate the brothers and the students.
- In 1852 you were elected to the General Chapter that, in three sessions, gave us the Common Rule, The School Guide, and the Rules of Government.

- After seventeen years as Visitor to the province of Saint-Genis-Laval, on 25 August 1876 you were elected Assistant General with responsibility for the province of Bourbonnais.
- At the age of 57, despite failing health and weakened eye sight, you courageously took up the work of providing this new province with a novitiate and a provincial house.
- When you retired in March 1880 you were not going to waste your time; although no longer able to read or write you became a travelling chronicler.
- After travelling for two or three months to gather documents you would retire to your room where, with the help of several secretaries, you composed the Annals of the Institute.
- Over ten years of assiduous and patient efforts, you produced a work which, flavoured with your strong opinions, enables us to know the history of six hundred schools of the Institute, including a number that have been closed.
- In compiling the Annals, you show yourself to be a man of frankness, righteousness and justice, a true Nathanael, neither concealing nor disguising.
- To these qualities we must add your wit marked by subtlety and natural liveliness, from which flowed

quick repartee, spirited comments – sometimes caustic – revealing the originality of your language, character and manners.

- Under your rough exterior you hid a good heart, warm, affectionate, friendly. That is why you attracted the friendship of others.
- You were always careful to maintain the character of humility, simplicity and modesty that Father Champagnat had wanted to be the hallmarks of his first disciples.
- Fond of good fun, with a memory full of happy stories, you knew how to banish worries and spread joy among the brothers you visited, showing that virtue is not a dull thing.
- Careful to fulfil your role as chronicler well, in the Annals you do not hesitate to tell the truth about people and things.
- Your retreat notes reveal a generous heart given to God and a zeal for his glory. We have the summary of thirty five subjects of reflection to occupy your mind during travel, as well as a list of hymns that you would sing while travelling on foot.
- We find in a notebook: *“Reading the admirable life of Blessed Margaret Mary has moved me strongly and created in me a great attraction to the virtues of this heroic lover of the divine heart of my beloved Saviour...”*

- In 1882 you wrote: *“I accept my grievous infirmity and all that it should please the Lord to send me. O my God, let me bend myself to your adorable will, to the example of my Lord Jesus. O my good Mother, keep my mind fixed on Nazareth, or before the tabernacle, or at Bethlehem, or on Calvary.”*
- After the account of your death on 7 February 1892 at the infirmary at Saint-Genis, your biography, concludes with the following: *“After having been one of that group of brothers who had known our pious Founder here below, Brother Avit went, we are quietly confident, to join those who form his crown in heaven.”*

With you, Brother Avit, we thank the Lord and our Good Mother for your life as a Little Brother of Mary. Thank you, above all, for his immense work on the Annals which continue to be of great value to us today.

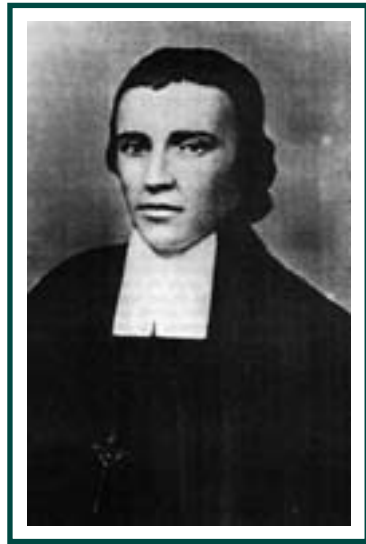
Amen.

[BROTHER PASCAL]

Jean Marie Gaudin
(1824-1867),

Assistant General

Jean-Marie Gaudin, born on 29 February 1824 in Bois-d'Oingt (Rhône), died in Saint-Genis-Laval on 19 June 1867. Admitted to the novitiate of the Hermitage on 23 July 1841, he was elected the third Assistant General by the Chapter General on 20 May 1854, with responsibility for the Nord Province (Beaucamps).



Brother Jean-Baptiste wrote a biography of this brother. It takes up 54 of the 380 pages of *“Biographies de quelques Frères”* (1924 edition). The second longest, that of Brother Urbain, is only 41 pages in length. In the preface (p. XIV) there is the sub-title *“Brother Pascal, the tender love for Jesus-Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and the zeal for the salvation of souls.”* He does not repeat this sub-title in the work itself.

Brother Jean-Baptiste brought together extracts from the letters of Brother Pascal, letters sent or received, in order to

illustrate the title given to the biography. In this way, he assembles a text which is reminiscent of a harlequin's costume. Did the author lack time? This hypothesis appears possible if we take into account the date of publication of the *Biographies* (1868) and that of the death of Brother Pascal (19 June, 1867). However, this brother was the first deceased amongst the members of the General Administration of the Institute. (See *Chronologie*, p.266, Rome, 1976.) It is therefore probable that Brother Jean-Baptiste rushed to complete this obituary without having the time to construct it well and that the abundance of material – the many letters written and received by a Brother Assistant to whom the Brother Directors had to write every two months – worked against the construction of the whole.

Brother Louis-Marie, Superior General, in his Circular of 19 July 1867, a month after the death of Brother Pascal, requested that all brothers forward any documents in their possession to assist Brother Jean-Baptiste in writing the biography of this first deceased Brother Assistant (*CSG*, Vol. III, p.380)

Before reading the summarised text of Brother Jean-Baptiste, some remarks to situate the activities of Brother Pascal in his time.

1° Over the thirteen years during which Brother Pascal was Assistant General, the Institute experienced very strong growth. For the year 1856-57, i.e., when he took up his responsibilities, the Institute numbered 321 establishments, 1,536 teaching brothers and 50,000 children, according to the figures and terms of Brother François, Superior General (*CSG*, Vol. II, p. 288/289). At the time

of his death in 1867, there were more than 2,000 brothers. It should also be noted that between 1850 and 1860 the number of foundations of schools often exceeded that of investitures (See André Lanfrey, *“Une congrégation enseignante : les Frères Maristes de 1850 à 1904”*, 1979, post-graduate thesis, Table IX.)

- 2° As a result of this very strong growth, the problem of training for the brothers became serious. Brother Pascal thanked Brother Louis-Marie, Superior General, for his Circular of 9 February 1867 concerning the training and retention of brothers. This problem would be further exacerbated beginning in the 1880's with the passing of the Jules Ferry education laws.
- 3° It was during this period that the Institute founded branches outside of France: England (1852), Belgium (1856), Scotland (1858), Ireland (1862) and South Africa (1867).
- 4° We know of the concern of the Superiors to maintain uniformity. Brother François wrote in the Circular of 29 January 1856, “As I already explained in the previous Circular, we wish to have perfect uniformity in all our houses for the prayers which are recited in community, as they appear in the *Manual of piety*” (CSG, Vol. II, p. 243). We are a long way from “inculturation,” as we have also been able to notice in the opinions expressed by Brother Pascal to the brothers of the British Isles.
- 5° A certain belief in salutary suffering is also noteworthy. Virtue, to be real must be austere. Brother Jean-Baptiste writes, “The spirit of mortification was for Brother Pascal

a question of principle. He did not believe that solid virtue could be acquired in any other way" (p. 328).

Here are some extracts from the biographer's work giving details of this brother's life, stories which should be called to mind in order to perpetuate his memory.

Jean-Marie was from a Christian family which had hidden priests during the French Revolution. The biographer was not lost for descriptive terms in his account of the young boy's personality. He writes, "Divine Providence had gifted the boy with wonderful faculties and given him an intelligent and docile spirit, a tender, generous, filial and grateful heart, a righteous, strong, energetic yet pliable will, a scrupulous conscience with a natural antipathy not only for sin but for anything which had a hint of imperfection, an open, straightforward, simple, benevolent character which accommodated itself easily to all circumstances" (p. 276). And he writes in reference to the pious mother of Jean-Marie, "The others (children), she said, complained and cried when, instead of playing, they had to say the rosary, recite litanies or listen to pious readings. By contrast, Jean-Marie was always happy and responded to prayers gladly, no matter how long they were" (p. 277).

He then reports the following incident which has a feeling of the "fioretti" stories. "At around the age of eight, his mother sent him with one of his aunts who was only a few years older than he to run an errand to the neighbouring parish to Bois-d'Oingt. She told both children to be good and to recite the rosary as they walked along the way. The two little travellers set off happily and started chatting, arriving at the village without thinking of the rosary. They were on their way back, having already travelled a good part of the way,

when Jean-Marie said to his aunt, 'We've talked enough. If you like, we can say the rosary now. You know how much my mother warned me not to forget it. All right! You begin and I'll respond. 'The little girl, who didn't feel like praying, refused and cleverly got the conversation going again. A moment later, Jean-Marie went back on the attack, insisting so strongly that the little girl appeared to give in and said to him, 'We're going to begin, but your mother's rosary is too long. I'm going to teach you one which is much shorter. Take your rosary beads. I'll say *benedicamus Domino* and you answer *Deo gratias*, and that's the whole thing'. So that was how they said the rosary, but Jean-Marie wasn't happy with it. When they arrived home, his mother didn't lose a moment before asking them whether they had said their rosary. 'Yes, we said it,' the little girl hastened to answer. Jean-Marie lowered his head and said nothing, fearing to tell a lie. His mother, suspecting something, said to him, 'Why don't you answer me?' – 'Because the rosary which we said was not the one which you taught me'. – 'What is this rosary?' – 'It is very short.' The dear child then told the story of the new rosary" (p. 277/278). We can also note in this passage that the child uses the formal "*vous*" to address his mother.

All his life, the anniversary of his first communion, made at the age of ten, was a feast day consecrated to gratitude. He carefully kept and carried with him always the little commemorative picture of that beautiful day.

At thirteen, he enrolled in a brotherhood of penitents dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. Jean-Marie regularly attended the parish church to follow the Stations of the Cross. His devotion to the Saviour's passion endeared this exercise to him

– he practiced it his whole life. Again, it was his love for Jesus crucified which earned him the privilege, in the procession which the penitents made on Holy Thursday, of carrying the large cross of the brotherhood barefoot through the squares and streets of Bois-d’Oingt.

“The main occupations of Jean-Marie until his entry into religion were work in the fields and housework. Except for the two years prior to his first communion, he attended only night classes. He never had a moment to himself and yet he was always all disposed, always good and happy. He never asked for anything, neither for clothes nor money. He was content with what he was given by his parents, who lived with very limited means...

Mr Gaudin, delighted by the good conduct of his son, tried to find him innocent diversions and keep him away from bad companions. To this end, he bought the boy a fine rifle which Jean-Marie liked very much and used for some time. However, he made a pilgrimage to Ars, and the saintly curate pointed out to him that this amusement was not without danger and put him at risk of causing harm to others. That was enough for our young hunter to let the birds fly and the hares run freely. On arriving back at his family home, he took the rifle, wrapped it in its case, placed it on top of a wardrobe and promised to never touch it again. He stuck to his resolution” (p. 279/280).

“He was already preoccupied with thoughts of a religious vocation ...However, so as not to make a mistake in a matter as serious as that of vocation, he did not wish to make any decision before having first asked the opinion of a prudent confessor. He therefore went to consult the venerable curate of Ars...The saintly priest, having listened to him, said, ‘My

child, you are not made for this world. God wants you for Him alone. Therefore, respond to this blessed calling.”

Such a clear and firm judgment dispelled all his hesitations... Even though he was their eldest child and of an age to greatly help them, his parents left him entirely free to follow the will of God and offered to provide him with the necessary means to pay his novitiate expenses... His tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin determined his choice from among several religious orders which were proposed to him (notably, the Capuchins) and attracted him into our Congregation, because it bears the blessed name of Mary” (p. 281/282).

He was admitted to the novitiate of Notre-Dame de l’Hermitage on 23 July 1841 and began this stage of his training with generosity of spirit. He received the Marist habit on 10 October of the same year and took as his motto, “I am *yours*, O my God, I am yours, all of me is yours. Your will, my only law, is deep in my heart. It will govern my conduct for all the days of my life.”

When he had finished his novitiate, he was sent to Valbenoîte to teach the junior class which numbered one hundred children. Barely eighteen, shy and without experience, he was sorely tested finding himself with so many pupils. Despite his willingness, he felt frightened by his task which he believed was beyond his powers and his abilities, and admitted this ingenuously to the Brother Director. The latter, who already valued his virtue and intelligence, answered him, “I am not of that opinion. I am sure, on the contrary, that you will control your children and teach your class very well once you have been trained. I am going to assign a brother to direct you. You will obey him completely and God will do the rest.” Brother Pascal, perfectly docile,

needed only a few lessons to be able to assert his authority over the children, discipline them and win their esteem and affection.

He stayed only one year at Valbenoîte and was posted to Saint-Pol (Pas-de-Calais). To sound out his state of mind and ensure that this separation from his parents would not be too hard on him, the Brother Assistant – probably Brother Jean-Baptiste – said to him, “Brother Pascal, do you know the story of Abraham? – A little. – What was the first sacrifice which God asked of him? – To abandon his loved ones and his country of birth. – If God wanted the same sacrifice of you, how would you answer him? – That Your will be done. – Very good. In that case, prepare yourself to leave tomorrow for the north as it is there that God calls you.” Brother Pascal made his way cheerfully to Saint-Pol. He was happy there and succeeded perfectly in his duties over two years.

He made his perpetual vows at the retreat of 1845, aged barely twenty-one. He was then posted to Beaucamps to teach the junior class at the communal school. There was a little boarding establishment attached to the school which supplied much material for his zeal. The Beaucamps house then had a Director who was unable to meet his responsibilities. The prosperity and development of the house was therefore due to the zeal and devotion of Brother Pascal.

“Even though Brother Pascal found himself second-in-charge at Beaucamps, the role which he played there, an eye-witness tells us, often saw him take the lead. The Brother Director was a sickly man of limited ability and the other brothers were very ordinary recruits, yet the classes went well, pupils were educated, the brothers were held in public esteem, the house prospered and good was done, but thanks,

let us say, to the talents, devotion, good spirit and virtue of Brother Pascal.”

The great success which Brother Pascal had achieved in Beaucamps followed him to Digoin where he was sent as the Director in 1851. We can judge this from a single event. In 1852, the venerated Father Ducharne, chaplain of our Charlieu house, visited the Digoin boarding school to organise a Sodality of Children of Mary. He was enchanted by the wise direction that Brother Pascal gave his house...On returning to Charlieu, he said to the brother who was accompanying him, “In an establishment directed by a prudent, pious and zealous Brother such as Brother Pascal, we find all the virtues of the house of Nazareth...”

A few months after, he was called on to take up the direction of the novitiate of the Hermitage and appointed Assistant General for the Province of the North at the General Chapter of 1854. He in no way expected this appointment and pleaded to be spared this responsibility. The Reverend Brother Superior answered him, “It is not up to me, my dear Brother, to relieve you of a job which the Chapter confers on you and to which God clearly calls you to procure His glory. However, I promise you that you will never want for divine help or my advice.”

And Brother Jean-Baptiste continues, “We will not follow the new Assistant General in the details of his administration. It will suffice us, for our edification, to pause a little on the virtues in which he excelled, that is, piety, the love of Jesus, and the devotion to his vocation and to his Institute” (p. 291).

To illustrate the spirit of Brother Pascal's piety, he gives us several testimonies. Here is one of them. "A brother who found himself travelling with Brother Pascal and seeing him pray so often said to him, 'But, dear Br Assistant, do you always pray in this way when travelling? – Ah, my dear friend, responded Brother Pascal, have you not read in the *Life of Father Champagnat* that, in the venerable Father's opinion, journeys were a good opportunity to pray to one's heart's content? Should we not imitate a little our venerated Founder? And, what's more, journeys offer us a thousand occasions for being distracted and even offending God if we do not hold fast in the *fortress* of prayer. As for me, I need prayer to support me and so that I do not lose what little virtue I have along the way" (p. 292).



But what were the major ingredients of his piety? His love for Jesus in the meditation of his mysteries and Holy Communion. Divine love, it can be stated, was his dominant virtue. His good and sensitive heart beat fast at the memory of Jesus and at the invocation of his holy name. Brother Pascal's ascetic studies nearly all turned around Our Lord. To know Jesus and have others know Him, to love Jesus and have others love Him, this was his great passion or, rather, his noble virtue. He

constantly came back to this subject in his instructions and in his letters... He never ceased recommending to brothers that they follow Jesus in all His mysteries, as the feasts of the year present them to us, and that they make these mysteries the usual subject of their meditation (p. 293).

Brother Jean-Baptiste draws extensively on the notes of Brother Pascal to present the exercise of divine love. After having transcribed an instruction of Brother Pascal on this subject, he adds, "We can be sure that this fine Brother practiced that which he advised others to do. The exercise of love was so familiar to him and he used it every day to progress in charity. He called it, as he admitted in a private conversation, his *ready made meditation* (p.294).

The biographer then copies a conference given by Brother Pascal about the charity which must be the dominant virtue of all religious, and continues with the comment that, "Brother Pascal did not content himself with asking every day for divine love, he often pleaded with others to ask for it on his behalf. In a great number of his letters he makes this request, 'Pray for me and ask God to give me His holy love'" (p. 296).

The reader comes upon another of Brother Pascal's heartfelt desires, "The greatest of my desires is to be one with Our Lord through Holy Communion. He had an insatiable hunger for the bread of angels. For him, communion days were real days of celebration and joy." After this statement, Brother Jean-Baptiste transcribes a text in which Brother Pascal lists the benefits obtained through frequent communion. He also notes that "Brother Pascal regretted not having lived in the times of the early church when believers could come to the

Eucharistic table every day. Several times, he requested daily communion and his love for Jesus Christ led him to believe that he would one day be granted that privilege.

Nothing grieved him more than to see certain brothers miss holy mass or forego Holy Communion under some flimsy pretext or other. "There, you wound me, you cut me to the heart, he wrote to one of them, by telling me that you casually forego your communions."

We see in his correspondence that again and again he comes back to the riches which we possess in Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, and uses all the means that his industrious zeal suggested to him to inspire in the brothers a heartfelt desire to unite themselves with Jesus Christ through frequent and fervent communion" (p. 297).

Brother Jean-Baptiste then reports the words of Saint Theresa, "If I were half dead and I were presented communion, I believe that I would come back to life to receive it." He then moves on to the following incident. "On Saturday 15 June, four days before his death, Brother Pascal had been delirious all day. At nine o'clock in the evening, his fever was very strong, but the offer to bring him viaticum restored his calm and consciousness. After the communion, having his hands joined and his eyes turned towards heaven, he was so absorbed in his feelings of love that the brothers believed he was dead. They therefore ran to notify the Reverend Brother Superior, who had accompanied the Blessed Sacrament to the chapel. He hastened back to the side of the dear patient and found him, to his great surprise, perfectly conscious, overflowing with joy and in an ecstasy of love.

One of the brothers then said to him, 'Jesus has just done you a great favour by giving himself to you. – Oh, yes, replied Brother Pascal fervently, he has blessed me for which I can be grateful. Thank Him for me and tell all the brothers to join with me in singing His praises and blessing Him.' The doctor, having arrived at this moment, said to him, "Ah then! My dear Brother, how do you feel? – Good, very good, Doctor, *I am in ecstasy!*" On pronouncing these words, his face was radiant. 'Yes, I understand and I will hold my tongue, said the doctor, I would fear to mix human words with this celestial conversation which you are having with Jesus'" (p. 298).

Two days later, Holy Communion, which was brought to him a little before midnight, once more rendered him lucid for half an hour. He used that time to bless the Lord. Then, he fell back into his ordinary delirium which worsened by the hour.

Contrary to what the reader might expect, Brother Jean-Baptiste, as already mentioned, does not conclude the obituary here.

Without a transition from the preceding passage, he continues, "Brother Pascal reached towards God through love. Study Jesus, become one with him through Holy Communion, love Him, bless Him, thank Him, think of Him, long for Him: that was his inner life. To have others know Jesus, to win hearts for Him, deliver up to Him all the zealous works which comprised Brother Pascal's apostolate: that was his inner life and these two kinds of works filled up all his days."

What are you doing, Elijah? said the Lord. *I burn with zeal for Your glory,* answered the prophet. To the same question,

Brother Pascal would have been able to give a similar answer as all his life he burned with zeal for the glory of God. The biographer then records a conversation with a brother before recounting how the young Brother Pascal had left his school in the Province of the North to go to a Trappist monastery in Belgium where, he thought, he would be able to glorify God more perfectly. The Father Abbot welcomed him kindly and said, "What is your goal and what do you wish for in entering the Trappist life? – Nothing other, replied the brother, than to procure for God as much glory as possible. – If this is so, responded the Abbot, return to where you have come from because, with the intelligence, health and devotion which you have, you can do a hundred times more good by teaching children than by giving yourself over to contemplation here" (p. 299/300).

The brother, seeking only the reign of God, received this decision with complete submission. Thoughts of the Trappist life never returned. He calmly took the road back to Beaucamps...

Always moved by the same desire to do good, he asked the Brother Assistant permission to take music lessons with the lay teacher who came to teach at the Beaucamps boarding school. "What do you want to do with these lessons, replied the Brother Assistant, you who have such a poor voice? – It is true that my voice is neither beautiful nor true, but this would not stop me from learning the principles of singing. And, with this knowledge, I could encourage singing and even teach it. This could help me to get others to sing God's praises and to procure His glory, the only purpose for which I propose this for myself. – One needs, he added, to use everything to please children and win them to God." Edified

by such sentiments, the Brother Assistant willingly gave him permission to have private music lessons, and good Brother Pascal threw himself into this study as if he planned to become a fine musician. (p. 301)

When Brother Pascal was appointed Assistant General, his zeal reached new heights... In his voluminous correspondence, there is not one of his letters which does not reveal to us some pious action of his charity in inspiring zeal in the brothers, attracting them to the study of religion and giving them a high esteem of their apostolate as catechists of children. He advises; he encourages; he prays; he orders; he uses all the means and takes all forms to ensure that the brothers fulfil the goal of their vocation and teach the children in a Christian manner. To illustrate this, Brother Jean-Baptiste cites many extracts from the letters of Brother Pascal to those under his direction (See p. 302 to 305).

After this, the biographer continues, "The recruitment of religious vocations was one of the main objects of his zeal. The following letter, which he wrote to the Brother Visitor of the Province of the North, provides us with proof. The opinions which it contains are as useful today as they were at the time. It is for that reason that I present it to you textually. This letter reads, "From our house of Saint-Genis-Laval, 25 January 1860, Feast of the conversion of Saint Paul, the great apostle of nations." Over more than two pages, it provides very practical advice for encouraging Marist vocations amongst the children of our schools.

Brother Jean-Baptiste adds, "Every day, Brother Pascal recalled in his letters the instructions which he gives to the

Brother Visitor. Reading his correspondence, we are struck and deeply edified by the constancy and many holy works of his zeal for promoting vocations and training brothers in this difficult labour." Then follow pages of extracts of letters in which Brother Pascal advises, encourages, stimulates, corrects, thanks...

The biographer next deals with another aspect of Brother Pascal's zeal, his concern for the formation of brothers. To illustrate this, he cites the letter written to the R.Br Superior after receiving the Circular of 9 February, 1867, concerning this important subject.

Brother Jean-Baptiste then recounts, citing extracts from the letters of Brother Pascal, how the latter corrected the brothers and the communities which he visited, how he laboured hard, adding (in relation to the British schools) that they provided a vast field of action for the Brother Assistant's zeal. The first edition of "*Biographies de quelques Frères*" presented a note on the Province of England in 1867. The establishments in the British Isles were as follows: 2 in London, 2 in Glasgow, 1 in Dundee (Scotland), 1 in Sligo (Ireland). The Institute then numbered in its mission to the British Isles: 38 brothers, 12 schools, 5,160 children, including 2,870 in normal classes and 2,290 poor children and young workers, admitted to Sunday school for catechism instruction. This note, which we have abridged, was deleted from the 1924 edition.

During the foundation of the Glasgow house, while it was still without a cook, Brother Pascal took on this job himself, doing the work of a lay helper until the arrival of someone to fill that position. As the house was also short one teacher, he

also took the junior class without consideration for the difficulties that he was to encounter, not knowing the language of the country.

The important point for ensuring the success of the English schools, he states, is that the individuals recruited in the country adopt perfectly and preserve carefully the spirit of the Institute. Brother Pascal did not have long to wait before having to struggle against various tendencies which threatened to ruin this spirit. He forcefully resisted the pretensions of certain brothers who relied only on their talents for doing good and believed that the Rule, such as it was, was not practicable in England. Brother Pascal reminded these brothers of the words of the Founder,

"We waste our time if we expect success from our works, our talents, our efforts and our industry - God alone can give it. As for us, all we are good for is spoiling everything. It is not genius which is needed to do the works of God but, rather, great devotion, solid virtue, much piety and full confidence in God."

In the same conversation, he stated, "Know and never forget that the Rule is for all countries. It must be respected in England as elsewhere and I would say as much for the Teacher's Guide. I feel that this matter is so serious that I consider to be in a state of sin ("I forbid communion to" said the 1868 edition) anyone who may have spoken or acted overtly against the Rule or the Guide. By speaking or acting overtly, I mean to do so in the presence or several brothers, and very deliberately. This *prohibition* does not include an inadvertent word or deed."

From fear that comfort might become one more trap for the brothers, he told them, “Brothers shall guard against all finery under the pretext of customs of the country. The immoderate use of sugar, preserves, certain mixed foods and other delicacies must not be tolerated. Similarly, fruit brandies must only be consumed out of necessity. Brothers are to remember that uniformity and the spirit of poverty must be displayed in everything and everywhere, in food as in clothing and furnishings” (p. 321).

But what motivated Brother Pascal’s zeal, the biographer wonders again: the love of God, as he who loves God loves his neighbour, the love of one’s neighbour being proven and displayed in the zeal for the other’s sanctification. He loved the brothers. “They should know this, he wrote, it will make them happy and encourage them” (p. 322).

However, while Brother Pascal loved all the brothers, we can and must attest that he had a special affection for the British brothers. His love enabled him to discover all kinds of good qualities in them, and he spoke endlessly in praise of their intelligence, their docility, their piety and the wealth of dispositions to virtue which they had inherited from their ancestors and which earned their island the name of the *Island of Saints*.

Brother Jean-Baptiste states that Brother Pascal was happy in his vocation and cites a passage from a letter that Brother Pascal wrote to his brother, “If I am a religious, I owe my happiness to the curé of Ars and my good mother. Yes, it was the prayers of these two people which made me a religious and which have made me *happy*, as, thank God, I can truly say *I am*.”

There is then a list of the causes of this happiness:

1. His vocation which he loved and valued more than all the treasures of the earth
2. Meditation on the truths of religion and the gifts of God
3. Communion.
4. Mortification, privations, trials (p.323/328)

The virtue of Brother Pascal was austere adds Brother Jean-Baptiste. As much as possible he travelled on foot. If he was compelled to take vehicles, he imposed greater privations of food on himself in order to reduce expenses and to practise poverty. It was for this reason that his travelling companions generally complained of having to endure hunger and having to pay for the benefit and honour of his company through hard privations.

For him, the spirit of mortification was a question of principle. He did not believe that solid virtue could be acquired in any other way. One day, one of his aunts advised him to look after himself and take such and such precautions, giving as reasons to convince him that his poor health required it and that the Superiors would find it very right and fitting that he do so. "Yes, Aunt, answered Brother Pascal, I could easily do everything which you advise and my Superiors would be pleased, I am sure. However, when you are in a community, you must set a good example, particularly when you are in charge. What is more, are we not on this earth to suffer? Do we not need to do penance to go to heaven? Where would we be, what virtue would we have, if we chose to live comfortably and without cares?" Instead of seeking comfort,

in fact, he sought avenues for physical mortification as much as he could. Often forced to drink tea to ease his very difficult digestion, he would drink it without sugar in a spirit of mortification and to practice poverty.

To the mortifications of daily life and work and those arranged by Providence, such as sickness, infirmities, difficulties and trials of all kinds, he added corporal mortifications, such as the wearing of a hairshirt and the use of the discipline.

After his death, two Brother Assistants who were busy in his room removing his personal affairs found two disciplines in the corner of a cupboard, one made of rope, the other of iron. The instruments appeared worn, having seen much use.

This solid, even austere, virtue, far from making the brother severe, difficult and gloomy, gave him, on the contrary, a cheerful character, a beaming face that reflected blessed joy, an honest, friendly manner that won him the esteem and affection of all who knew him or with whom he dealt.

Brother Pascal, who had given himself wholly to God and who had been fervent all his life, spent his last days in the practice of all the virtues. Far from hindering him in doing holy acts, his sufferings led him, on the contrary, to increase his activity. He died on 19 June 1867, while practicing the exercise of divine love.

■ [Marvellous companions of Marcellin] ■

It is with this rather terse statement that Brother Jean-Baptiste concludes the long biography – compared with those of other bothers – of the first deceased Assistant General.

Let us finish with a comment by Brother André Lanfrey: “Brother Jean-Baptiste could present himself as severe in certain aspects of his manner of governing and his behavior. However, he did not hide what made him, like so many Brothers of his stamp, an engaging superior: a high idea of his responsibilities and, in carrying them out, a humility which took its toll on him more than anyone else.”



Praying with Brother Pascal

We join you, Brother Pascal, in thanking God for so much:

- The happy character and the human qualities you received and that you put to best use throughout the whole of your short life.
- The human family in which you grew up in the faith of your baptism; it never placed any obstacle in the way of your response to the call to follow Jesus.
- The desire to know the will of God that drove you to seek the counsel of the Curé of Ars and to follow his advice.
- The tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin that determined your choice and drew you into our Congregation because it carries the holy name of Mary.
- The total gift of yourself from the day you received the habit, 10 October 1841, when you wrote:

“I am yours, O my God, I am yours,
all of me is yours.”

- The strength of will, despite your shyness and inexperience, to teach a hundred students at Notre-Dame de Valbenoîte, under the guidance of an experienced brother. Brother Jean-Baptiste says that you succeeded in gaining the affection of the students.
- At the age of 21 you took your final vows and were appointed to the normal school at Beaucamps, in the north of France, to take the first class. This school was to flourish thanks to your talents, virtue and devotion.
- We recall what was said of you by the chaplain at Charlieu: *“In an establishment directed by Brother Pascal are found all the virtues of the house in Nazareth.”*
- With great surprise and with considerable apprehension you accepted in 1854 the office of Assistant General for the Province of the North, although you were barely thirty years old.
- Like Father Champagnat, you took advantage of your journeys to pray, *to hold fast in the fortress of prayer*, as you told a brother who accompanied you.

- To know Jesus and make him known, to love Jesus and make him loved, this was the great passion of your life. You returned again and again to this subject in your instructions and letters.
- Brother Jean-Baptiste wrote: “Brother Pascal was not satisfied with daily asking for divine love, he asked others to petition it for him. In his letters he often made this recommendation: *“Pray for me, and ask God to grant me his holy love.”*”
- The same Brother Jean-Baptiste says: *“Brother Pascal wished that he might have lived at the time of the primitive Church when the faithful were admitted every day to the Eucharistic table. Several times he requested daily Communion and his love for Jesus Christ led him to believe that this favour would be granted to him one day.”*
- One time when you were a young brother you left the school at Beaucamps to try the Trappist life in Belgium in order to *“gain the greatest possible glory for God.”* However, you accepted the decision of the Abbot who advised you to remain in your vocation as a brother.
- Your desire to do good made you ask permission to take music lessons despite the fact that you had such a poor voice, saying:

“one needs to do everything to please the children and win them to God.”

- Your voluminous correspondence as Assistant General reveals to us your zeal in giving the Brothers a high esteem for their function as catechists.
- You were preoccupied with the recruitment of Marist vocations among the students in our schools. This is clear from your letter of 25 January 1860 to the Brother Visitor of the Province of the North.
- You had a great concern for the formation of the Brothers; Brother Jean-Baptiste quotes the letter you wrote on 9 February 1867 to the Superior General, Brother Louis-Marie, to thank him for his *“admirable Circular”* on this subject.
- During the foundation of the house in Glasgow, Scotland, when it was without a cook, you undertook this task yourself while at the same time teaching the first class despite the language difficulties.
- For you, the important factor in assuring the success of the English schools was that the young men recruited in the country adopt and carefully

preserve the spirit of the Institute.
 You reminded the brothers of the words
 of the Founder: *“It is not genius that is needed
 to carry out God’s work, but rather great devotion,
 solid virtue, deep piety and a total confidence
 in God.”*

- Brother Jean-Baptiste says that you had a special place in your heart for the British brothers and that you saw in them all kinds of good qualities. You spoke endlessly of their intelligence, docility, piety and the depth of their virtuous dispositions – the inheritance from their ancestors that led to their homeland being called “The Island of Saints.”
- You were happy in your vocation, writing to your brother: *“If I am a religious, I owe my happiness to the Curé of Ars and to my good mother. It was the prayers of these two people that brought me into religious life and brought me the happiness that, thank God, I can truly claim to have.”*
- You had a great spirit of self denial; as far as possible you travelled on foot; you regularly used the discipline.
- Your solid, even austere virtue, far from making your severe, difficult and gloomy, gave you, to the contrary, a cheerful character and a beaming face that reflected a holy joy. Your friendly manner

won for you the esteem and affection of all you had dealings with.

- Brother Jean-Baptiste completes the presentation of your life with this terse statement: *“Brother Pascal died on 19 June 1867 while practising the exercise of divine love.”*

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of Brother Pascal to our religious family. May the example of his life encourage us in our journey as we too follow Christ in the footsteps of Saint Marcellin and all our brothers in heaven.

Amen.

[BROTHER PAUL]

Louis Bouteille
(1793-1866)



Saint-Paul-3-Châteaux, south front

Brother Paul was the first Brother of Christian Instruction of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. When these Brothers were amalgamated with the Little Brothers of Mary in 1842, he took second place to Brother Jean-Marie (Jean-Claude Bonnet). Brother Jean-Baptiste wrote a biography of twenty pages (*Biographie de quelques frères*, pp. 129-149, ed. 1924). From that we draw a resume that allows us to get to know this man who played such a great part in the success of the amalgamation.

Louis Bouteille was born in Ménéé, a canton of Luc-en-Diois (Drôme), in November 1793. Brother Jean-Baptiste says nothing of his parents or childhood. Conscripted in the armies of Napoleon, he took part in the final campaigns in Italy in 1813 and 1814; several times he mentions the dangers from which he was preserved. Knowing that the armies of the emperor were being defeated, he deserted, and since he was a quartermaster sergeant, his example was followed by a good number of his comrades. Having faced many dangers and born the pangs of hunger, he succeeded in getting back to his family.

He had beautiful hand writing and enough education to find a good place in the world, wrote Brother Jean-Baptiste. However, he had no great ambitions, and for four years carried out the humble task of village school teacher while thinking about becoming a Trappist. A providential accident led him to embrace the religious life. "One day, needing to attend to some business in a village some kilometres away from his village, he was stopped by a river in flood. He stopped to prepare to ford it, when a young man mounted on a strong mule invited him to be seated on the rump behind him. The invitation was accepted with pleasure; but the mule, carting this extra load, took a few paces with some difficulty before the current swept them into deep water and the two riders were thrown. As he fell, the young man's foot was caught in the stirrup, and he was dragged ashore by the mule, while poor Bouteille was carried by the current which was quite rapid at this place... In a loud voice he recommended himself to the blessed Virgin, and vowed that if his life was saved he would become a religious. Nevertheless the current continued to carry him, and he was already more than two hundred metres below the road when, by a supreme effort... he found himself on the bank, without knowing how."

He was true to his word. He returned home, put his affairs in order, and set out for the Trappist abbey of Aiguebelle. Along the way he was saying his rosary when the thought occurred to him to seek the advice of his bishop. He therefore went to Valence where, the bishop being absent, he was received by the vicar general, Father Fièrè. At that time he was involved with an Institute of Brothers, founded for primary schools, and he had just received a royal decree from Louis XVIII that gave legal recognition to this project. He said to Louis Bouteille, *“God does not want you to go to La Trappe, although the Trappist life is an excellent one. There is something better for you, if you are prepared to believe me and allow yourself to be led by obedience.”* He then told him of his project, spoke to him about the excellence of the vocation of the teaching Brother, the catechist of small children, pointing out that this was a participation in the priestly and apostolic ministry, and concluded by telling him that the hand of God was inviting him to be the first religious of the Congregation that he was founding.

Louis Bouteille had never dreamed of such a vocation, but seeing in it the will of God for him, he agreed to the proposal. Father Fièrè lodged him in his own house. He outlined for him some rules of conduct and initiated him in the principles of the religious life, while at the same time employing him as his secretary. Shortly after, a half a dozen postulants arrived, sent by Father Gilbert, parish priest of Chabrilan. They made up the first community founded by Father Fièrè. Soon, other subjects presented themselves. As his house was too small to accommodate them, the vicar general sent his little congregation to Peyrins and entrusted it to the parish priest, Father Brun, who had been a Brother of the Christian

Schools. Louis Bouteille was appointed director of temporal affairs, and in the absence of the priest he presided over all the religious exercises, as he had done at Valence.

Several of these young postulants withdrew and Father Fièrè looked for a house more suitable for the brothers. It was in this way that he agreed to place them in the former Dominican convent at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux that some people had just bought. They arrived, fifteen in number, at the beginning of 1823, led by Louis Bouteille. Father Solier, the parish priest, was not in a position to be their formator because of the obligations of his ministry. Father Fièrè therefore appointed his cousin Father Mazelier, the curate at Romans, in his native district.

Father Mazelier gave himself entirely to the direction of the Brothers. He gave them the name, the habit, and the rules of the Brothers of Christian Instruction, founded in Brittany by Jean-Marie Laménais. On clothing day, Father Soulier asked that Louis Bouteille take the name of Brother Paul, in honour of the patron of the parish. Since the community was in dire need, Father Fièrè appointed Father Mazelier parish priest of Saint-Paul so that at the same time he could help the Brothers. He had already spent on them two thousand francs that he brought with him when he became their superior.

To encourage his first subjects, Father Fièrè promised to give them a hundred francs a year until such time as their formation was complete and they had been given a posting. Father Mazelier saw very quickly that this personal payment was ruining the spirit of the community, while at the same

time being a burden on the congregation. He thought about it, prayed to God, sought the advice of Father Vernet, vicar general and superior of the major seminary at Viviers, and he resolved to stop this ruinous practice. He let the Brothers and the postulants know this in a moving homily on detachment from the goods of this world, family spirit, and the need to live as perfect religious if they wished to have a solid foundation for their work. This homily, though expressed in a fatherly manner, caused much trouble in the community. Eight of the members left within a week, and three or four others followed a few days later. The defection was so great that only two or three remained.

Father Mazelier, grieved by the departure of so many brothers, summoned Brother Paul and said:

“What are you going to do now that your companions have almost quite deserted you? – I am going to pray to God that he may send others who may be more constant and more faithful.”

Greatly moved by the sentiments of the Brother, he thanked God and said a Mass of thanksgiving. The postulants who presented themselves following this were no more faithful, with the result that from 1823 to 1840 the community made little progress. Despite all the setbacks, Brother Paul never doubted the future of the Congregation: *“Let us pray, he said, and be patient; God will do the rest when the time comes.”*

The union of 1842 was a response to his prayer. At times when the negotiations threatened to break down, he used to say, *“God wishes this union, something tells me this from the bottom of my heart; it will go ahead despite all the obstructions*

that may arise.” Of course, there was full agreement and the union was brought about to the satisfaction of both parties.”

“Brother Paul,” said Father Mazelier, “possesses a range of virtues and good qualities that are quite rare, even in good religious... I can assure you, when I praise Brother Paul, that I have not found his like for uprightness, simplicity, docility, sincerity, integrity and fidelity in small things. These virtues go along with a particular style that colours his character and makes him extremely amiable. During the twenty years that I was director of the house and of the novitiate of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux he underwent many vexatious events, many things that were disagreeable and difficult to deal with, but during all that time I never saw him gloomy, bitter or discouraged...”

“The very sight of this Brother always does me good,” said one of the townfolk of Saint-Paul, and another said, “The sight of Brother Paul, the friendly greetings that he offers me and the cheerful word he shares with me, these are better than a sermon.”

One day Father Mazelier seemed to reprimand him for being so friendly to everyone, especially with a difficult Brother who was conflict with all of his confreres, and Brother Paul replied: *“I always thought that one of my first duties was to be agreeable to my brothers in order to maintain charity and the union of hearts.”* Charity imposed some sacrifices on him, but, as he said at another time, *“Peace never costs as much as it is worth.”*

The first time that Father Champagnat went to Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux for discussions on the union, he was accom-

panied by Father Douillet, the director of the minor seminary at La Côte-Saint-André¹. Father Champagnat, Father Douillet and Father Mazelier were taking a stroll in the garden when Brother Paul, in the presence of some other Brothers, cried out: *“Look, three saints! Thank God, how happy we are to have such men as directors and as fathers.”*

The kindness and charity that filled Brother Paul gave him the rare ability to correct his Brothers without causing hurt. Most of the time, instead of reproaching or warning the one who had failed in his duty, he was content to say,

“Let us not do that; it is better to do it like this.” “Brother,” he once said to a Brother who was full of himself, *“You have everything that is necessary to be grand; you have therefore done well to become a Little Brother of Mary, for you lack nothing but being small in your own eyes so that you may be great in heaven.”*

Brother Paul’s obedience and charity were no less admirable than his charity. *“This good religious,”* said Father Mazelier, *“is truly the little child of the Gospel; you might say that obedience comes naturally to him and he supports it with so much joy, so much love.”* When the union was accomplished and a director for the house of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux had been sent from the Hermitage, Father Mazelier said to Brother

¹ Father Champagnat arrived at Saint-Paul on 7 December 1835, with Father Douillet, travelling via Valence where they visited the vicar general. In May of the same year Father Mazelier paid a visit to the Hermitage. Father Champagnat discussed the union of the two congregations with him. As a consequence, Father Mazelier agreed to receive Father Champagnat’s Brothers. The four first brothers went to Saint-Paul on 13 June of the same year.

Paul: *“So, Brother, you have been replaced. Is it not painful for you to give up your position and to become a subject after having been a superior for so long?”* With his usual good spirits, Brother Paul replied in the manner of Saint John the Baptist regarding Our Lord: *“It is necessary for him to grow bigger, and for me to become smaller. It is a God-given grace that makes me return to the way of obedience. I assure you that it will be more agreeable and more easy to obey than to command.”*

Although the new Director had to make considerable changes to bring the house into harmony with the Rule of the Little Brothers of Mary, Brother Paul supported him in everything, without a word of complaint or criticism. His last director had this to say: *“... On my arrival at the house of Saint-Paul in 1854 I found in Brother Paul a particular liveliness, and he was a little attached to his own ideas when things did not go as he would have wished; but he was so much the master of himself at the end that he was the most patient, most charming, most humble and the most detached of the Brothers... I have never known a Brother who acted so much as a warmhearted father as did Brother Paul.”* The Brother Director adds: *“Judging by what was said of him by the lay people as well as by the Brothers, Brother Paul was always a model of piety and regularity: everywhere and always he spread the sweet fragrance of Jesus Christ.”*

Brother Paul’s piety was fervent, humble, courageous and constant. *“Prayer is my greatest consolation,”* he told one of his superiors... *“I feel even sensibly that prayer is for my soul what food is for my body.”* He rose every day at half past

three, but without making any noise so as not to disturb anyone. Having made his bed and seen to washing up he knelt down and prostrated himself deeply to adore God, asking for his blessing and offering him all his actions of the day. Then he recited the seven penitential psalms to ask pardon for his sins and the *Te Deum* to thank God for all the graces he had received. At half past four he went to light the lamps and ring the rising bell, and then went to the chapel. Every day he recited the entire Rosary; he called the beads his friend, and in free moments he had them in his hands. Someone asked him why he said so many rosaries:

“Because it is the most beautiful prayer that can be addressed to the Blessed Virgin. – So you love the Blessed Virgin? – Without a doubt, because she saved my life and without her I would not be here. It is to her kindness that I owe my life and my vocation and my perseverance to this very day. Oh, how many graces she has obtained for me!”

He used snuff for his eyes, but never in the chapel, nor before Holy Communion, out of respect for Our Lord. In every thing he was behaving in the most sure way! He had read somewhere when he started using snuff that the Church forbade him to use it there. That was enough for him to refrain all his life from using it in churches.

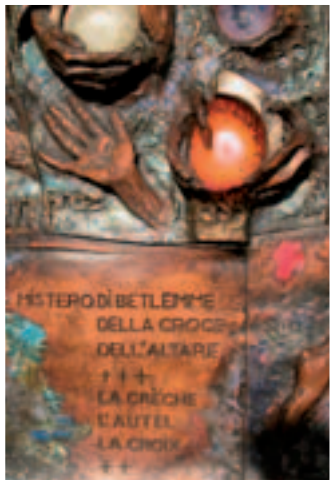
The virtue of Brother Paul was most notable by reason of his constancy, the hallmark of solid virtue. He used to say: *“With God there must be no half measures, we must go with all our heart.”* Prayer and work, and during work sanctify all one’s actions by frequent ejaculatory prayers; that was his life. Constantly kind, polite, full of charity and agreeableness

to everyone, he was never found to be at odds with anyone; he was never heard to utter a word of self pity. He loved, he served, and supported all his brothers in the most friendly way. Brother Paul was a rose without thorns; he spent his life without hurting, without displeasing anyone.

One day someone asked him:

“If another revolution broke out in ‘89, what would you do? Wouldn’t you set aside your habit and flee as so many religious did? – Me, set aside my habit, he replied, abandon my vocation! No, no; my vocation and my habit are dearer to me than life itself; I would therefore wear it, if it pleased God, with my head on the scaffold, rather than abandon habit or vocation.” On the evening before his death someone asked if he wished to live longer or to die. He replied simply, *“Whatever God wills.”*

That, wrote Brother Jean-Baptiste without exaggeration, that was Brother Paul in life and death. Entirely in submission to the will of God, full of confidence in God’s mercy, his heart radiant with love, his eyes fixed on the crucifix, he handed over his soul to God peacefully at two o’clock in the afternoon on 18 April 1886, leaving his Brothers a memory to be venerated, a fragrance of virtue and holiness that, I hope, this short notice will help to spread and preserve forever in our congregation.



Prayer with Brother Paul

Brother Paul, as we come to pray with you, we recall that you were the first member of the Brothers of Christian Instruction of the diocese of Valence, and that you knew Father Champagnat from the time of his first visits to Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux.

- Brother Jean-Baptiste, your biographer, has told us nothing of your parents or your childhood. He speaks of your enlistment in the armies of Napoleon, your participation in the Italian campaign of 1813-14, and the way you were able to be released from all that.
- For four years you were a village school teacher, while all the time having the desire to become a Trappist. Mary saved you from drowning, and sent you on your way to the bishop of Valence.
- At the request of Father Fièrè, vicar general, you agreed to become the first brother in the Institute that he had founded to administer primary schools.

- You arrived at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux in 1823, nearly thirty years of age, and you remained there until your death, never discouraged despite the departure of quite a lot of young brothers.
- You never doubted the future of the Congregation; you used to say: *“Let us pray, pray and be patient; God will do the rest when the time is ripe.”* The union of 1842 was an answer to your prayer.
- Father Mazelier had this to say about you: *“As for Brother Paul, you may be sure that I have never found his like, in righteousness, simplicity, docility, sincerity, faithfulness and fidelity in little things.”*
- A native of Saint-Paul said: *“the sight of Brother Paul, the friendly greeting that he gives me, the kind word that he has for me whenever I meet him – these are as good as a sermon for me.”* And another adds: *“The very sight of this good brother always does me good.”*
- You were able to bring everyone into harmony, and you knew how to ask for sacrifices so that charity prevailed. You used to say: *“Peace never costs as much as it is worth.”*
- When Brother Jean-Marie came to Saint-Paul to replace you as superior of the community, Father

Mazelier asked you if you regretted losing this post, and you replied: *"I assure you that it will be easier for me to obey than it was to command."*

- Your piety was fervent, humble and constant. Every day you said the rosary, and when asked why you said so many decades, you replied: *"Because it is the most beautiful prayer that can be addressed to the Blessed Virgin."*
- You used to say: *"With God there are no half measures; we offer ourselves with all our hearts."*
- Brother Jean-Baptiste, referring to your good character and charity towards all, adds: *"Brother Paul was a rose without thorns; throughout his whole life he never hurt or annoyed anyone."*

Thank you, Brother Paul, for the quality of your response to God's call despite the fact that circumstances were not always easy. May your example guide us in our daily difficulties.

Amen.

[BROTHER AMBROISE]

Mary Jean-Antoine
(1819-1896)

Brother of Christian Instruction of Viviers

In the Notices Nécrologiques (Volume 1), the biography of this brother covers twenty pages (p. 278-300). The writer begins in this way: "One of the maxims that Venerable Father Champagnat loved to repeat to his brothers to stir them to a virtuous course and to lift their spirits in the pains and difficulties of each day, was this: *"More action and less talk."* That is one of those thoughts, at the same time simple and profound, that God uses to stir the hearts of his servants, and the practice of which confirms them in doing good while



Aubenas, provincial and boarding house

leading to prudence and wisdom... We see this in Brother Ambroise who died at Aubenas, 11 May 1896, at the age of 77 years and 2 months. He had spent 58 years in religious life, was professed for 52 years, with the vow of stability for 41; he gave 49 years of uninterrupted service to the education of the young. After the name of Brother Ambroise, the notice bears the sub-title: *"Or the prudent and wise religious."*

Mary Jean-Antoine, Brother Ambroise's civil name, was born at Vanosc (Ardèche) 25 February 1819, of parents who were weavers. At the age of four he was already an orphan. Sister Saint-Pierre, superior of the Sisters of Saint-Joseph of Vanosc received him lovingly, raised him piously, and when he had made his first Communion, placed him in a very Christian family where he remained until he entered the religious life. All his life he remained grateful to her.

Canon Gery had just been appointed superior of the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Viviers by the vicar general, Father Vernet. During a visit to Vanosc someone spoke of the young Antoine as a future subject. He was happy to see him, and with no difficulty, decided to leave his life in the fields to continue it at Viviers. Antoine Marie entered the novitiate 3 April 1838. He was nineteen years old. Brother Laurent was at the time master of novices.

The situation of the Brothers of Viviers was not bright. In fact, the lack of subjects, and the pressing needs of the existing establishments were such that the Superior had only very limited time to give to the novices. This serious failure, joined to the lack of unity in the young congregation, led it into stagnation until its amalgamation with the Little Brothers of Mary.

Thus, one evening in this same year, 17 September, Antoine Marie found a religious habit on his bed: that was the complete clothing ceremony; he was told to wear it the next morning and leave for L'Argentière where he was given the direction of the second class. He left on foot on 18 September 1838 under the name of Brother Ambroise by which he was henceforth to be known.

His first stay at L'Argentière lasted until May of the following year, after which he spent a month at Thueyts in charge of the second class. From there he was appointed to Notre-Dame de Bon-Secours, where he remained until September of the same year. Although he spent only fleeting times in different houses, this was enough for his zeal and prudence to be noticed, qualities that shone in him the more, given that his initial formation had been so brief and the teaching methods left much to be desired.

At the end of the retreat of 1839 Father Gery appointed Brother Ambroise, just 19 years of age, director of the school at L'Argentière. He obeyed, though not without a lively repugnance, when Fr Gery told him that Father Vernet, the vicar general, had ordered it. He left with Brothers Arsène and Irénée, his two assistants.

The establishment at L'Argentière had been through a difficult time before being confided to Brother Ambroise. The Brothers of Viviers were the third of the congregations that one after another had been in charge of this school; and the last Director, to the great scandal of the people, had set aside his habit and contracted a marriage in the local area.

The people of l'Argentière were sympathetic to the brothers, but after so many deceptions there was a certain anxiety and they hesitated to put their trust in the new arrivals. Brother Ambroise and his brothers decided, "action not words". The young Director summarised in the following points the programme that the brothers of his little community would have to follow: 1) Not to neglect any of their exercises of piety; 2) to become attached with all their hearts to their holy vocation; 3) strict cloister, avoiding all going out that was not absolutely necessary. This line of conduct, followed during the ten years that Brother Ambroise spent at l'Argentière, was the means by which the brothers won back the esteem and the trust of the families.

Brother Ambroise also kept a watch on the quality of studies, and it was on account of this that his work was recognised by the Sous-Prefect who in 1841 awarded him a bronze medal as a gesture of appreciation.

While he was Director at l'Argentière the amalgamation of the Congregation of Religious Instruction with the Little Brothers of Mary took place. This union was brought about after the first retreat given at La Bégude, 25 September 1844, by Father Épalle, a Marist priest, assisted by Father Gery with Brother François and Brother Jean-Baptiste, Assistant, presiding. Brother Ambroise and nine other brothers of Viviers made their profession into the hands of Brother François on 2 October 1844, the final day of the retreat.

Brother Ambroise returned to l'Argentière to continue with his educational work. On 25 February 1848 he was surprised to find that his students did not return to class at the usual

time. The parents, frightened by the proclamation of the Republic, had kept their children at home. Before long he saw a deputation of the townsfolk arrive to reassure the brothers. Brother Ambroise smiled and thanked them, saying:

“What do you think the brothers have to fear? It is well known that we are strangers to politics and that our work is to help the children of the people.”

And, without showing any worries, he rang the bell for the class as usual. At first only a few of the students returned, but they were not slow in coming back so that the political events gave no more trouble to the classes at l'Argentière.

In September 1850, Brother Ambroise took over the direction of the small boarding school at Le Cheylard where he remained until 1859, when he was appointed to the novitiate at Le Bégude. At first a teacher, he was appointed master of novices until January 1866. He then became Director of the boarding school at Les Vans, in difficult circumstances. He knew how to restore prosperity here, thanks to his patience, charity, prudence and his deep confidence in God and Mary. After six years he again became novice master, first at La Bégude and then at Aubenas. He showed himself to be prudent and wise, a zealous and devoted man, full of solicitude and sensitivity. This was the unanimous testimony of all those who had the good fortune to be formed by him.

One of the happiest memories of Brother Ambroise when he spoke of twenty seven years in public schools was the numerous priestly and religious vocations from the ranks of his pupils. During that comparatively short time there were

twenty seven priests with whom he was happy to keep in touch. No less numerous were the vocations of religious brothers, for he was never one to neglect the dear Congregation that he loved with all his heart.

The chronicler presents some of the virtues practised by Brother Ambroise.

1. His spirit of faith and confidence in God *“Look with the eyes of faith,”* he would say, *“and see if God is doing you a great honour; he calls you to continue the mission of his Divine Son.”* He expressed these thoughts with the energy of a truly personal conviction. He wished that all might be equally well convinced so that they might make the teaching of catechism their principal concern.
2. His charity. He said, *“Charity and obedience are virtues that we must practise at every moment.”* *“We must set aside our spectacles and telescopes that magnify things, to see our brothers and our children through the veil of kindness and charity. Who are we to dare make ourselves equal to or better than others?”*
3. His prudence and discretion. If one had a decision to make, a difficult case to unravel, going to him one found enlightenment and good advice. He kindly welcomed those who came to him, and as if to set aside time for his opinions to mature, he would turn over his old snuff box in his hand, tap its top rhythmically with his finger, and then slowly give his advice: *“It seems to me that you could do this, or do that; sum up things in this way.”* Brother Philogone sometimes took his advice, but

Brother Ambroise, always so reserved, so modest, never pressed a decision on anyone.

4. His piety and his devotion to Our Lord. He used to pray like the Church and with the Church, going to God in all simplicity and abandonment. This is what he asked of his novices. He had a particular devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Passion; his hunger for prayer was such that, besides the Way of the Cross which he would never omit, he piously and faithfully undertook other practices that he had adopted.
5. His devotion to the Blessed Virgin. When he spoke of Mary it was with an expression of inimitable love. It was impossible to forget his catechism lessons on the Blessed Virgin, so interesting they were; hearing them you could well say of him, *"It is clear that he is talking about his mother."* There was nothing of a recitation about his prayers in honour of Mary, they were his own words; it seemed as if the flame of his heart rose towards his Mother to praise and bless her. He said his Rosary piously every day.
6. His obedience. This was not only supernatural and Christian, it was also courageous and generous, as we saw when he took the direction of Largentière and of Les Vans. At Largentière, so as not to fall behind in his work and be capable and ready to fulfil it, he had in the beginning to work late into the night and sometimes, even, after class walk four or five hours to go to Thueyts to learn the solution to problems that he had not been able to resolve. Later he said humbly: *"God was doing*

everything, and he had to because the instrument he had chosen was worthless.” He was in a position to say to his novices the words found in his notes: “Obedience is the true liberty if it is carried out for God; it is slavery if one carries it out for men.”

7. His humility and perfect spirit of the Institute. We read in his notes: *“Rejoice, if you are unknown and forgotten; if you are employed in the meanest occupations; if you give way to others; if you are never praised; if you are often humiliated.”*

When he was relieved of his functions as Director of novices, from the time of the arrival of his successor he was completely self effacing. He could be seen the next day, he who had until then been totally occupied with the young people, with a little ladder on his shoulders, dressed in an apron with a packet of strings on his belt, going to the vineyard to work all day tying the vines, a job that he engaged in until his death.

At Vans, where despite the passage of many years his memory was still held in honour, they still spoke of Brother Ambroise, so humble, so modest.

8. His attachment to his vocation and to the Institute. His religious family was, first of all, the little Congregation of the Brothers of Christian Education of Viviers, which he saved from disorder in 1844 by his prudence and wisdom; afterwards it was the Little Brothers of Mary, to which he brought his whole heart and his devotedness from the first moment of the amalgamation. On the day

of his golden jubilee, responding to the community, his heart deeply moved, he uttered this cry of love and thanks". *"Glory to God, brothers, who granted me the singular grace of calling me to the religious life, and the no less singular grace of making me persevere, despite the temptations, the verbal and written urgings addressed to me to turn my back on it. I appeal to the affection that you have shown me here to help me to pay back to Our Lord and our good Mother my debt of love and of eternal thanks."*

Brother Ambroise's health, exhausted by so many works, weakened day by day; he spent the years following his jubilee preparing for death so that he might say with fullest confidence to the Lord, when he would come, like the good servant: *"Here I am."* This was on 11 May 1896, Rogation Monday.



Prayer with Brother Ambrose

Brother Ambrose, reading about your life once again we discover a beautiful page in our Marist history, the record of the union of the Brothers of Viviers with those of Our Lady of the Hermitage. Your participation was critical to its success.

- You had a difficult childhood, being orphaned at the age of four. God looked after you, and you had a good education thanks to Sister Saint-Pierre, the superior of the Sisters of St Joseph at Vanosc.
- You were happy to enter a congregation of brothers founded at Thueyts by Mgr Vernet, vicar general of Viviers, copying the one that Marie Rivier had founded in 1814.
- Being hard pressed by his work, Mgr Vernet was not able to accompany his brothers closely; their brief formation led to rather weak perseverance.
- You entered the novitiate on April 3, 1838 and received the habit on September 17 of the same

year, and set out the next day for Largentière where you were in charge of one of the classes.

- In the following year Mgr Vernet appointed you director of the school at Largentière; doing that was not easy for you because the position was a difficult one given the situation.
- For the two brothers who helped you, you used to recall one of the sayings that Marcellin Champagnat liked to repeat to his disciples to lift their spirits in the face of the difficulties of the day: *“Action, not words.”*
- Thanks to your competence and prudence, during the ten years that you spent at Largentière the brothers won back the esteem and confidence of the families.
- The quality of your work as an educator was recognised in 1841 by a bronze medal awarded by the Sous-Préfet as a gesture of esteem.
- On October 2, 1844, at the end of a retreat presided over by Brother François and Brother Jean-Baptiste at La Bégude, you became a Marist Brother along with nine other brothers of Viviers.
- After Largentière, you were a gifted teacher at Le Cheylard and at Les Vans, bringing and maintaining prosperity to these boarding schools.

- In the course of twenty seven years spent in public schools you had the joy of stirring among your pupils numerous vocations to the priesthood and religious life.
- Recognising your human qualities and your religious spirit, the superiors entrusted to you the direction of the novitiate, at La Bégude and at Aubenas.
- Pointing out the beauty of the ministry of catechesis, you would tell your novices: *“Have eyes of faith, and see how the Lord is in fact granting you a special honor: he calls you to continue the mission of his Divine Son.”*
- You urged them to be kind: *“We have to set aside the glasses and telescopes we use to magnify things, and see our brothers and our children only through the lens of kindness and charity.”*
- You would go to God with simplicity and abandon yourself to him. You had a special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to his passion. Every day you made the Stations of the Cross.
- Your love for Mary was expressed by the daily recitation of the Rosary, and by your ardent words whenever you spoke of the Good Mother.

- If someone remarked on your success, you would humbly say: *“It is God who does everything: and just as well, because the instrument he has chosen is worthless.”*
- From the very next day after you were replaced as master of novices, you were busy with manual work, especially in the vineyard.
- On the day of your golden jubilee, you said to the brothers: *“Glory be to God who granted me the singular grace of calling me to the religious life, and the no less singular grace of making me persevere, despite the temptations, the verbal and written urgings adressed to me to turn my back on it.”*

Thank you, Brother Ambroise, for your generous life, and for the important part you played in making the Institute of the Marist Brothers take root and spread in the Province of Aubenas.

[BROTHER MARIE-CANDIDE]

Jean Dubost
(1856-1895)

Founder of the Marist Mission in China

The volume of obituaries of some brothers deceased between 1890 and 1900 contains the lives of 65 brothers and those of Cardinal Howard and Father de la Lande. The work is 674 pages long, but the length of each obituary varies enormously, from a single page to more than thirty for Brother Marie-Candide.

The interest of the obituary concerning this brother, other than describing his great personal qualities, lies in its composition based on the extracts from the many letters sent to the Brother Assistant or the Brother Superior General. It is this brother who still speaks to us today, and it is for this reason that I have seen fit to make a condensed version in order to preserve his memory.

With five fellow brothers, Brother Marie-Candide left on 8 March 1891 to found a mission in Beijing at the request of the Lazarist Fathers. He was thirty-five years old and was only to live a few years in China, a victim of typhus contracted while caring for four of his brothers infected with the same disease. However, the quality of his life and his heroic death would give birth to a marvellous Marist Province of China

which, in 1948, before the Bamboo Curtain fell, numbered 210 brothers, including 106 Chinese.

Jean Dubost was born in Grièges, in the Ain region, on 21 November 1856. His mother, Georgette Bon, was an excellent Christian, two of whose sisters were nuns with the Bourg Congregation of the Order of Saint Joseph. One of these sisters, Marie-Candide, gave her name to her niece and her nephew. She died, a victim of her zeal, in caring for the sick during an epidemic of typhoid fever in Bâgé-la-Ville (Ain). The Dubost couple had five children, three of whom died at an early age. Annette and Jean survived. Annette, Jean's godmother, entered the Sisters of Saint Joseph, like her aunts, and died young, six months after the departure of her brother for China.

Jean lost his father at the age of twelve. He was a mischievous boy, lively and hot-blooded. His mother did not know how to guide him. Finally, she decided to put him as a boarder with the brothers of Saint-Didier-sur-Chalaronne. There, the child revealed himself to be a model student, straightforward, open, docile, thoughtful, affectionate and studious. After a year, Jean confided to his sister his desire to become a religious. The biography explains, "He was attracted by the example of the perfect charity of the good brothers of Saint Didier."

Over the summer vacation, Jean made the pilgrimage to Ars to ask the saintly curé for the grace of knowing his vocation. His mother was away, being cared for by her daughter in Garnerans. The young boy left on foot at nine in the evening and walked the whole night in order to arrive for the morning mass. The requested blessing was granted, and the

generous mother gave God her only son, saying, "God has asked for both my children. What an honour he does me!"

On 6 October 1874, Jean Dubost was admitted to the novitiate of Saint-Genis-Laval. On 5 April 1875, he received the habit of the Little Brothers of Mary and received the name of Marie-Candide, a name already borne by one of his aunts and by his sister. In the novitiate, the young man showed himself to be serious, intelligent, pious and helpful. He had a straightforward cheerfulness and happy nature which kept the novitiate in good spirits.

His first field for apostolic works was the Neuville-sur-Saône boarding school, where he would stay seven years achieving great success with the young. In September 1883, he was appointed Deputy Director of the novitiate. However, a year later, he was put in charge of the juniorate. In this role, which he would carry out for seven years, he revealed his qualities as an educator, organiser and administrator. He had already expressed his desire to go on mission to evangelise the pagans. It was for this reason that the superiors conferred on him the task of founding the Chinese mission. On 8 March 1881, he left France for Beijing with five fellow brothers.

What characterised Brother Marie-Candide, writes his biographer, are the qualities and virtues of the good Little Brother of Mary, listed and elaborated on in our *Principles of Perfection*. He practised these qualities and virtues to a high degree, as evidenced in his letters. Accordingly, let us hear from our dearly departed brother himself. Through the extracts from his writings, he will show us the high degree to which he possessed the thirteen qualities of the true disciple of venerated Father Champagnat.

For the reader of the 21st century, here is the list of the thirteen qualities: 1) piety; 2) love of Jesus; 3) devotion to the Blessed Virgin; 4) zeal for the salvation of children; 5) sincerity and openness of heart to the Superior; 6) obedience; 7) regularity; 8) devotion to the Institute; 9) family spirit; 10) cheerfulness and holy joy; 11) good character; 12) gratitude; 13) constancy. (See *Les principes de la perfection chrétienne et religieuse*, pp.192 to 352, 1893, Lyons: Emmanuel Vitte, 4th edition).

1) Piety

Letter of 7 May 1891 – “Friday, 24 April, we arrived in Peking and Friday, 1 May, we officially took possession of our house in Nan t’ang. Our mission is indeed that of the Sacred Heart... Nevertheless, we will maintain the college under the name of the Immaculate Conception, given to it by the Lazarist Fathers at the time of its foundation. It is through the heart of Mary that we will arrive at the heart of Christ. Is this path not the safest? ”

20 December 1891 – He responded to the news of the death of his sister and godmother. “I have wept much and I weep still as I write you these lines... Of all the ties which bind me to this earth, the strongest has just been broken. Because of my sister, I feared the fever, in other words, feared death. Today, it is without a second thought that I say, “Whenever you like, my God!” Without doubt, I will not refuse the work. On the contrary, I want to accomplish my task, all my entire task. But when it pleases God to reunite me with my dear sister and all my loved ones, he will answer the most heartfelt of my wishes.”

8 March 1893 – “I still feel filled with confidence as I finally have the will and deep desire to have others know and love Our Lord. My intentions are righteous and I know that my Master does not demand success. Yes, I want to sacrifice myself to His glory and to the good of souls with all my force, all my life.”

3 September 1893 – “Good Father Favier, whom I have chosen as my director of conscience, has succeeded so well in inspiring me with the confidence in Our Lord that, even in critical moments, I feel reigning in me all that goodness, that gentle and consoling assurance that only the support of God provides. He knows that I wish to love Him, to serve, to have others know Him and to procure His glory. He knows that I have sacrificed everything, absolutely everything for Him. How could he not come to my aid, support my interests which are His own, not have pity on me? ...The field which obedience requires me to tender is fertile and may produce many fruits of salvation. My brothers and our children are admirably disposed, but in my heart I need, in the place of some rare and fleeting sparks, the roaring flames of divine love which devoured the likes of Xavier, Perboyre, Chanel and so many others!”

2) Love of Jesus

14 July, 1891 – “My goal in this retreat is to develop devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in me and my brothers. It seems to me that a missionary must attempt to imitate this divine model of missionaries.”

8 September, 1891 – “When I think that I can say only a single sentence in Chinese to these children and that nine-tenths of them do not understand what I tell them in French,

how can I explain the results already obtained? It is to God that they must be attributed. They are the fruit of the many and fervent prayers addressed to the Sacred Heart by our friends, our brothers in France, and, above all, the juniorate students of Saint-Genis. Oh, thank you, thank you to all who pray for us, who obtain for us from Jesus and Mary, the abundant blessings of which we are in need... ”

25 November 1892 – “How beautiful is our task of directing the Cha-la-Eul orphanage! Teaching the knowledge and love of Our Lord to five hundred children, could one find a more enviable mission?...Don't say that too much to our young brothers or you will find yourself in trouble with them all wanting to board a ship and come to China.”

11 October 1891 – “All my successes must be attributed to the heart of Jesus, the devotion to which I strive to spread... It is He who does everything here, in unison with the Blessed Virgin.”

9 June 1892 – “My children know too little French for me to be able to teach in that language. As for the Chinese language, I am far from being able to use it effectively. This situation is the great trial to which God subjects me here. Yes, seeing the good to be done and being unable to do it, this is an agony for me.”

3) Devotion to the Blessed Virgin

3 August 1891 – “We are preparing ourselves for the retreat by praying very particularly to the Sacred Heart of Mary. It is through the immaculate heart of the Mother that we will enter into the fiery heart of her divine Son.”

4 October 1891 – “During this month consecrated to the rosary, in addition to the exercises which we perform in church, we have a little family meeting every evening for our close friends. Here, we talk in French about the many kindnesses of Mary, study the catechism in images and finish with a recitation of a decade of rosary and sing a hymn to Our Lady of the Rosary.”

10 December 1892 – “Fireworks at the close of our beautiful Feast of the Immaculate Conception...Oh, yes, Mary must have been satisfied with what we did to honour the glorious privilege of her Immaculate Conception. As for me, I have never been happier, more delightfully moved. Something happened to me which I cannot explain when, my brothers, our boarding children and I prostrated before the statue of Mary, I considered that we were almost alone in this capital with its one million inhabitants, the only ones to pray to Mary, to sing her praises. I believed that I heard that good Mother say to me, “I am very happy. I bless you and your works.”

11 November 1893 – “During the Retreat, we talked of the Blessed Virgin, analysing the chapter of the Rule and of the life of the venerated Founder which deal with this matter. Every Sunday in October, I was so happy to speak of Mary in the meditation that I did so aloud ... Oh, what a wonderful day for me, the day on which the Blessed Virgin will receive our good Chinese postulants into her family and dress them in her livery!”

15 August 1894 – “Founding a novitiate is a difficult enterprise; I can’t hide that from myself. In undertaking this project, we will encounter many obstacles. However, we can count firstly on God, then on Mary, our ordinary resource.”



China, the house of Cha-la-Eul

4) Zeal for the salvation of children

7 May, 1891 – “The Chinese may be everything people say - thieves, liars, hypocrites, etc.,– but it must be agreed that they are open to education, that religion transforms them considerably. I’ve no need to tell you, my dear Brother Assistant, that we already like our children very much. They have filled an emptiness which was created in our hearts on leaving Saint-Genis. We find them sweet and thoroughly graceful with their little pigtails. Their faces are calm, open and very welcoming. We also like their clothes very much, particularly when they are clean. Unfortunately, this is rare, even among the rich. They very much like singing and music and they learn the most difficult melodies with ease, which they then sing with unshakeable composure.”

10 May 1892 – “During Brother Louis-Michel’s illness, our children were constantly asking after him. I had to lock the door to his room which otherwise would have been constantly full. When, after his recovery, he reappeared amongst them, there was a real ovation. Some of them had their eyes filled with tears. One of them said to me very worriedly, “Brother Director, you too, sick. – No, not at all. – But, yes. You all yellow. Why? – It’s because I am becoming Chinese. – It’s not that, but you very good heart, you very upset that Brother Louis is sick... many, lots of things in our heart we cannot say.” Try not loving these little fellows! Impossible.”

1 June 1892 – “Yes, I am burning up... and if God had sent me no physical suffering, no problems, no difficulty in the direction of the college. But, oh, how he tests me by making my progress in Chinese to be so slow! Pray and have others pray that I might soon be able to say to my dear, beloved children everything which I feel, everything which could make them better. Poor children, surrounded by this land of pagans, semi-pagans themselves, they need so much to be strongly and solidly instructed!”

15 November 1892 – “Cha-la-Eul is a work of the greatest importance and worth, but difficult, very difficult. If God and the Blessed Virgin do not intervene, if Father Champagnat does not perform some miracle, we can expect a complete fiasco. But, I do not fear this. I am no longer allowed to doubt the protection of heaven.”

10 February 1893 – “You see, although I am still young (37 years old), I feel that my life will be short in China. That is why I would regret depriving our dear mission of any of

my time, thus the haste that you are referring to. I would like to have something to offer God. By caring for the souls of men I would like, before leaving this earth, to pay back a part of the debt which I have contracted to Him. Dedicating what force and life I have left to these poor orphan children - foundlings, abandoned, and vagabond - that is my sole desire. To have them know God, bring them to love Him and to serve Him, that is my sole ambition."

31 May, 1893 - "In three weeks, we will be in Cha-la-Eul. I dread this date and find myself like a debtor without means. I catch myself regretting having had the presumption to aspire to this position. Will it not be beyond my powers? I fear this. Really, there will be so much to do among this mass of abandoned children, Christians, and pagans! All of them are scabby, scruffy, scrofulous and rickety. This is the quintessence of the miseries of our poor humanity. How will we ever manage to wash them all, brush them all and remove all the dirt both physically and morally? It is a mighty task and one capable of satisfying the zeal of even the most ardent. Oh, such need we will have of the protection of Jesus and Mary and the assistance of the holy angels!"

14 February 1894 - "Three days ago, a good Christian presented me with a child of eleven whom she had found straying, begging in the street in temperatures of minus 19. This morning, in the absence of my brothers, gone on a walk with those of Nan T'ang, I wished to check myself on the condition of this foundling brought by Providence. I can tell you nothing as to his moral state, but you can imagine a little bit - pagan, abandoned, fallen into the hands of show folk or some master or other, and like this for six years. I found him covered

with sores, eaten alive by vermin. I almost vomited at this sad sight. I turned him towards Our Lord. I called on my faith.

Suddenly, I saw in that miserable creature my gentle Savior Jesus. Oh, with what happiness, what consolation, I removed his rags and washed him from head to foot! It took me a long time to remove the thousands of lice without hurting him. And at that moment, when he was clean and warmly dressed, in the well-being which he felt, it seemed to me that I read deep in his eyes, I wouldn't say gratitude, but the awakening of intelligence...

I tell you that the happiness which I feel in this ministry is something difficult, to the point where it frightens me. Am I worthy of it? To heal, to bandage, to tend to Our Lord! Oh, yes, I cannot mistake the meaning our Master's words, "That which you do for the least of my children, you do for me."

5) Sincerity and openness of heart to the Superior

23 September 1891 – "Yes, my very dear Brother Assistant, captivated, absorbed by my multiple occupations, given wholly over to my brothers and my children, I do not notice the emptiness created around me by the separation from so many loved ones. I can say that I am physically and mentally acclimatized in China.

The people, the things, the customs which shocked me so strongly at the beginning now seem to me to be for the better. My brothers express themselves similarly. The mud, the dust, the smells no longer tire us. Our eyes and our sense of smell have become accustomed to all this. A few more days and, without ceasing to be French, we will become Franco-Chinese."

6 December 1892 – “Oh, how I wish for the Reverend Brother and dear Brother Assistant to know me! I write them often and at great length, and yet they do not know me well. I have had the proof of the esteem and confidence which they have in me. It is with all the sincerity of my soul that I declare to you that I am convinced of my misery and my inadequacy. I am only good for ruining everything in our dear mission which I nevertheless love with all my might.”

6) Obedience

19 July 1892 – “Reverend Brother has invited me to pronounce the vow of stability. My confessor told me to take the step forward. Therefore, I will comply with the intentions of the Reverend Brother, irrespective of my repugnance at taking a place amongst the most meritorious brothers of our dear Institute. What have I done? Frankly, who am I? Really, I will have to change my vague desires for perfection into energetic and effective resolutions. Pray, pray often for me so that I might live up to the intentions of the Superiors and be worthy of this blessing.”

10 April 1893 – “I must tell you that I surrender myself entirely to the sweet design of Providence in respect to all the measures which will be taken. It seems to me (I do not know if I am deluding myself) that I have something of that holy indifference demanded by Saint Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises.”

20 August 1894 – “The bishop opposes giving our religious costume to our Chinese postulants, and I cannot reconcile myself to making them half-brothers...”

We will wait for the Major Superiors to give their judgment after having heard both parties. Perhaps, this halt is one more of heaven’s gifts. Until now, I had always been able to thank

heaven for the obstacles which our projects have encountered. We will examine this project again and recommend it to God, whose will alone I wish to do, whose sole glory I seek.”

7) Regularity

25 October 1891 – “We are striving to be very regular, and God blesses us. He has made the most complete unity reign amongst us, given us holy joy and enabled us to love our children, our vocation and our new homeland.”

11 November 1893 – “Various transformations of our religious costume have been suggested. Some want a hybrid costume for us and our future Chinese brothers. I regret and will always regret these proposals, and here are the reasons which I offer Reverend Brother in favour of the full retention of our dear costume followed by seven reasons... I simply request that it be made looser and of lighter material while at the same time keeping its form and colour. Please recommend this serious matter to God.”

17 May 1894 – “I have just received a very good letter from the Reverend Brother Superior, in answer to my notes concerning the wearing of the religious habit in China... We were preparing an investiture but it has been opposed. The ceremony is postponed. To have the Brothers dress in Chinese style garb is like building on sand. I am absolutely convinced of this and will never go along with this practice. However, I remain calm and full of confidence in God.”

8) Devotion to the Institute

1 June 1892 – “Since last September, I have been very busy trying to bring together some novices. We receive few of them, but we test them seriously and treat them with special care.

Here is my plan, dear Brother Assistant. Please tell me what you think of it. [Brother Marie-Candide explains that he plans to teach the novices in either French or Chinese.] He then expresses his desire to make them ‘real Little Brothers of Mary, true children of Father Champagnat.’”

12 August 1892 – “The foundation of Cha-la-Eul is close to my heart as we need it for the establishment of a novitiate and as a place where we can spend our vacations, a place of retreat and rest. After a few years’ stay, every European must leave Peking to go to breathe the fresh country air. I love Cha-la-Eul because there is great good to be done with the help of God. The 300 children whom we have in our care are for now a fallow field, but one which I believe is destined to become fertile in the fruits of salvation, in merit for all.”

2 January 1893 – Having been informed of the defection of many brothers, Brother Marie-Candide wrote, “Our Brother Directors do not take seriously enough the training of our young brothers. The second year of the novitiate is not done or is done badly. The young brother is treated like an older member of the Order, very often, not as well even. There is no regard for his youth. He is shocked by the lack of respect for the rules and routines of the novitiate. Over the years which I spent as the head of the juniorate, I did little, too little, for my brothers. Nevertheless, several times I was told, ‘If I hadn’t been treated in this way, I wouldn’t be where I am today, on the verge of abandoning my vocation.’” They would then enter into dreadful details. The sight of our four new professed brothers has done much to inspire me. Everything which I have just written comes from the love which I bear my brothers and our dear Congregation. How many times have I almost given way to my emotions when contemplating these chil-

dren whom I received at the juniorate, followed through the novitiate and who have accompanied me to China!”



9) Family spirit

27 April 1891 – “Please believe me, Reverend Brother, that your Little Brothers of Peking are true Marists in spirit, in will and, above all, in heart. I am happy to observe that my brothers have the same feelings as I myself towards the dear family of the Blessed Virgin.

I miss my Superiors. The distance which separates them from me is what pains me the most. It is the sting of the sacrifice. God be blessed! Oh, that I should

do His holy will in everything and everywhere!”

10) Cheerfulness and holy joy

3 August 1891 – “We will persevere in the most complete unity. We give ourselves over to the joy, the gladness of loving each other in God... It seems to me that if Father Champagnat were to appear in our midst, he would recognise us as his own and would say, “It’s good. I approve your joy, your cheerfulness, your unity.” Indeed, when the bell sounds for recreation, not even juniorate students could rival your brothers of Peking for playing, having fun and laughing heartily.”

12 August 1892 – “Send us young brothers who are very pious, of good spirit and, above all, are of a cheerful character. It is the advice of the Rev. Fr Favier. I feel that the Reverend Father is right to request cheerful brothers. Everything here lends itself to sadness, to melancholy. Everything is ugly...Someone who is inclined to sadness would have much to suffer from: the sun is too hot, the wind too cold and too strong, the seasons too extreme. The flowers have no perfume. The fruits have little or no flavour. The birds do not sing, except the crows. The people are dirty and their appearance is off-putting.

It's true that when one thinks about it, one wonders what could attract, what could make young people of twenty happy here! It is God. It is Jesus. It is the souls. It is the virtue. But, I affirm that a young man with a basically cheerful disposition is needed; without such a disposition he will be quickly used up. He will no doubt give his life freely, but we do not come to China to die straight away. I find all missionaries very cheerful, philosophical about everything, seeing the most pleasant aspect of events and things. I am happy to find in my brothers and in me something of these attitudes.

Thus, we have managed to find Peking more beautiful than Lyons or Marseilles...It smells bad in Peking, you say ...So what! After three months, one gets used to it.”

3 October 1894 – “I would like you to taste the gladness of those who, not knowing what tomorrow will bring and having nothing to hope for from men, must place themselves completely in God's hands. It is good to say this at any time, but it is much more delightful to experience this reality as we do in the situation in which we find ourselves because of the

Sino-Japanese War. There is no point in trying to make us miss France, it will never work."

11) Good character

12 August 1892 – "Despite the heat and the other problems, we are always very cheerful and very happy. God forbid that we should complain of a situation which enables us to do our time in Purgatory at a cut rate! Furthermore, with the excessive heat, we have the advantage of always drinking very cold refreshments. Every day, a block of ice is delivered which costs us a penny. With each meal, we have a piece in our cups. And then there are the watermelons! No country is as rich as China when it comes to the cucurbitaceous family - we have at least twenty varieties of cucumbers and melons. Tea drunk very hot and without sugar is thoroughly thirst-quenching and refreshing. When we come back from our walks, we drink three or four cups. It is cheaper than beer and does no harm. We also have a "bathhouse" - we lifted a half-barrel on four raised posts. We fill it with water, open the tap and get underneath for a shower which costs less than those provided at Alleverd and which does us just as much good. Us, complain! Come now! We live in luxury. And if there were a softness that could be hard it would be that of our beds: we prefer straw mat...

In the absence of furniture, our wardrobe and our linen are still in the crates in which they were sent. We have found only four chairs, and what chairs! I have just ordered six. Our beds have neither straw mattresses nor over mattresses. There is a whole range of things, even the most basic necessities, which we lack. But, what does it matter?

What a climate! I am starting to understand what type of martyrdom God is asking of use. We are on a grill like Saint Lawrence. However, we are not to be roasted but, rather, boiled, in a simple stew. I sometimes think of this as I twist and turn on my dripping, sticky mat. Am I going to complain? God forbid, because I would not exchange my place with that of any mighty lord in this world."

14 February 1894 – "If you were to come to see me, there is a strong possibility that you would find me digging with a pick or a shovel, firing up the oven and making bread, pruning the trees, etc., etc. I have taken on many extra duties at Nan-t'ang. Here, the holding of several offices at once is authorised.

I enjoy these multiple occupations enormously. From the catechism room, we go to the linen room, then to the laundry. We garden, we do masonry, we dress wounds, we supervise, we correct, we encourage. Yes, we are really jacks of all trades."

12) Gratitude

4 March 1892 – "Yes, we have a thousand reasons to bless God, to thank Him, to thank you, Reverend Brother, and all those who by their prayers have obtained the divine assistance which we feel and the effects of which we observe. We will remember that gratitude was one of the main virtues of our venerable Founder. "

13 March 1894 – "Thanksgiving, dear Brother Assistant, is my habitual attitude. It could not be otherwise, despite the hardness of my poor heart, in view of the countless gifts which God gives me each day. When I consider all things,

when I see what is happening here, in our Chinese mission, when I think of all the blessings that it has pleased Our Lord to grant me, I feel urged to cry out, 'Thank you, my God!'"

13) Constancy

29 September 1891 – "You ask me if martyrdom is possible. It is permitted for us to dwell a little on this thought. For myself, accustomed to being spoilt by God, I sometimes dare to dream of it. I am unworthy, very unworthy, but God is God! In the end, whatever happens, we are calm, trusting in the arms of divine Providence...Let us attain martyrdom so that I may make you envious."

4 September 1892 – "At the end of the retreat and at the invitation of the Reverend Brother, I pronounced the vow of stability. I find myself thus in urgent need of becoming a model religious. This is truly what I intend doing. This is truly the promise which I made to God and my brothers. To be a new man, I am depending on your prayers and on the protection of my pious mother and my beloved sister. Yes, the poor Brother Marie-Candide, despite his ungrateful and bad character, will finish up, supported, pushed and carried, being made a saint. Oh, it would be necessary, not only for my good, but for that of my brothers, our children and the mission!"

8 March 1893 – "The 8th of March is a date which is very dear: it is the anniversary of the date on which God, agreeing to my sacrifice, allowed me to follow in the footsteps of so many saints and zealous missionaries, of so many generous confessors and martyrs for the Faith... those like Perboyre, Chanel etc., etc.

Yes, courage is needed! Onwards for God, for the souls of

men, for our dear Congregation! Let us devote ourselves, sacrifice ourselves. What could be finer!”

7 January 1894 – “Something tells me that you will not see me again. In heaven, no doubt, but not here below, my friend. Don’t even think of it. You should know that I have no teeth left and very soon my pate will be as bald as a billiard ball. Most importantly, I must tell you that we have built a superb cemetery and, every lord having his privileges, I hope very much to be the first occupant.”

12 March 1895 – “Oh, how happy I would be if in some way I could see my blood flow, my life violently taken by the rebels! Yes, yes, I know. This would not perhaps be an official martyrdom, martyrdom as the Church understands it. Before God, however, this would be a martyrdom capable of opening heaven to me. When I came here, I *foresaw everything, accepted everything.*”

The biographer adds, “Even though God did not grant our dear departed the martyrdom caused by bloodshed, He allowed him to become a martyr through his heroic devotion and ardent fraternal charity. In fact, it was while caring for his brothers that he was stricken by the terrible disease which was to take him from us.”

8 April 1895 – Brother Marie-Candide wrote, “After ten days and nights of vigil, I feel that I am at the end of my tether. Yes, my dear, good Brother, for ten days now I have known the agony of the mother at her sick child’s bedside. What did I say? The bedside of four of my children (brothers) stricken by the most terrible disease which I have ever encountered - typhus!... Oh, my dear Brother, I never knew how much I

loved these children whom God gave me ten years ago ... How can I tell you of my pain, my worries, my anguish?"

On *18 April*, he wrote again, "God tests us and supports us also. After twenty-two days and twenty-two nights of watchfulness, – during which I was unable to take off my shoes or any other garment, I am well. *My heart aches* and my legs are sore, but my head and stomach are in good condition. I would never have imagined that I could bear so much emotion. I owe so much to God! ... I cannot pour out everything to you now, my very dear Brother Assistant. That will be for later. God alone is my confidant. I will, nevertheless, say that for the holy day of Easter I neither attended mass nor took communion ... Oh, pray for me and pray for my beloved patients! Do not worry on my account. I am in the hands of Providence. Everyone here is concerned at our sorry plight."

Exhausted by such efforts which only his heroism allowed him to maintain for so long, good Brother Marie-Candide was to be an easy prey for typhus. As soon as he felt himself seriously affected, he put his affairs in order and called for a priest so he could make his last confession. "Now, he said to the brothers who served him, I may leave whenever God wants."

He was confined to bed from 24 April and the fever was intense from the start. On 3 May, the doctor of the French Legation, who visited our dear patient every day, noted a serious heart condition. He considered the danger so great that he advised that the last sacraments be administered immediately. Brother Marie-Candide died shortly after.

Fr Favier, the Vicar General of Peking, wrote, "Brother Marie-Candide has just died, a victim of his charity! After having, over more than a month, cared for and saved his *children*, he himself was stricken by typhoid fever and died from a complication caused by an illness of the heart. When I say his children, I mean his young fellow brothers, for whom he was really the father. Not only did he have all their affection and ours, but he also attracted, by his prudence, his amiability and his simplicity, the sympathy of all the Europeans. He died a saint... I would not be surprised if, seeing six of his fellow brothers in danger of death, he did not freely offer his own life to save them."

Brother Élie-François, then Director of the Nan-t'ang college, and later Visitor of our brothers in China, wrote to the Reverend Brother Superior General, "Our Congregation surely numbers one more saint in heaven and we, missionaries of China, a devoted protector... Brother Marie-Candide loved his brothers with a passion and I am not afraid to say that he sacrificed himself for them, not only by his more than maternal care, but by also offering himself to God to obtain their recovery. This is my feeling and I am not the only one to speak in this way.

Truly, Reverend Brother Superior, I believe we have reason to rejoice. If God has tested us so sorely this year, it is, I like to believe, because He loves us more, sharing His suffering with us more fully. This encourages us to serve Him better and better and to devote ourselves more than ever to these poor Chinese."

The biographer concludes, "From heaven, dear Brother Marie-Candide will continue to watch over the work which he

loved so fervently and for which he fought so generously. And his death, which made of him a martyr of charity, will be for our brothers of China the guarantee of success in the fine mission with which they have been entrusted.”

We could not conclude this biography of the founder of the Marist Mission in China without adding some historical information covering the period up to the present day.

The year after the death of Brother Marie-Candide, Brother Élie-François, who had replaced him, was struck down in his turn, also a victim of typhus. His successor, Brother Jules-André, was to come to an even more tragic end. He was a victim of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, along with two other brothers and a Chinese postulant.

On 25 February 1906, five brothers of the Nan-Chang community were massacred because they were Christians. A mandarin, the Sub-prefect of the Province, had committed suicide in the brothers' house and the populace accused them of assassinating him.

Beginning in 1949, there was the Communist persecution. Forty Chinese brothers were able to leave the country. One after the other, the Marist works were shut down. The Bamboo Curtain fell over China. Foreign missionaries were all expelled, without being allowed to take away a single page of personal notes. The Chinese brothers who had not been able to leave the country, 65 in number, were mostly arrested. Many were subjected to forced labour and “brain-washing.” Brother Joche-Albert, the catechist, was arrested on 6 January 1951 and shot on 21 April in Sichang. His biography, writ-

ten in Spanish by Fr. Eusebio Arnaiz Alvarez, Redemptorist, was translated into French by Brother Giovanni Maria Bigotto, in 2006.

The Communist persecution struck against a robust Marist Province with a promising future before it. In 1948, the last year of statistics before the borders were closed, it had 210 brothers, 106 of whom were Chinese - a fine harvest for the pioneers of 1891. And in little more than fifty years, a Province which was in the majority Chinese had been born - a wonderful example of inculturation before the existence of the term! Many old missionaries expelled after 40 or 50 years of presence in China, some of them without having returned to their country of origin, had adopted the manners of their adopted country which had marked them even as far as their physical traits - the photographs testify to this.

We hold on to the hope of one day seeing the Marist Province of China reborn. Our Province in heaven surely works towards this goal in its own way. It is up to us to help it!

Prayer with Brother Marie-Candide



In union with you, Brother Marie-Candide, we thank the Lord for your life as a missionary in China.

- You did not have an easy childhood; your father died when you were only twelve years old, and your lively and impulsive temperament made you quite mischievous, posing a problem for your mother.
- She entrusted you to the boarding school of our brothers at Saint-Didier-sur-Chalaronne where you

showed yourself to be a good student; there the example of your teachers drew you to the Marist life.

- You once walked all night on a pilgrimage to Ars seeking from the saintly Curé (Saint Jean Marie Vianney) the grace to know your vocation.
- Your pious mother offered you as a gift to God, having already done the same with your sister: *“God has asked me for both of my children; what an honour He does me.”*
- At the age of eighteen you entered the novitiate at Saint-Genis-Laval, receiving as your name in religion that already borne by your sister and one of your aunts.
- You showed yourself to be a serious, pious and helpful young brother with a cheerful and happy disposition.
- Your first appointment was to the boarding school at Neuville-sur-Saone where you remained for seven years; you had great success with the young people there.
- Then, as master of Juniors for seven years, your qualities as a formator, organiser and administrator flourished. By this time you had already expressed the desire to become a missionary.

- On 8 March 1891 you embarked for China with five brothers, the superiors having chosen you to lead this new Marist mission. On 24 April 1891 you arrived in Peking.
- The anonymous author of your biography, listing the thirteen qualities that Father Champagnat wished to find in each of his disciples, illustrated each of these by referring to your correspondence.
- 1. Piety
“My brothers and our children have an admirable disposition, but in my heart I need, in place of some rare and fleeting sparks, the consuming flames of divine love that devoured the likes of Xavier, Perboyre, Chanel and so many others (3 September 1893).
- 2. Love of Jesus
“How beautiful is our task of directing the Cha-la-Eul orphanage! Teaching the love and knowledge of Our Lord to five hundred children, could one find a more enviable mission? Don’t say that too much to our young brothers or you will find yourself in trouble. They will all want to board a ship and come to China” (25 November 1892).
- 3. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin
“Founding a novitiate is a difficult enterprise. I can’t hide that from myself. In undertaking this project we will encounter many obstacles,

but we can rely on God first of all, and then on Mary, our ordinary resource” (15 August 1894).

- 4. Zeal for the salvation of children
“Yes, I am burning up... and how the good Lord does test me by making my progress in Chinese is so slow! Pray and have others pray that I may soon be able to say to my dear beloved children everything that I feel, everything that could make them better...”
 (1 June 1892).

- 5. Sincerity and openness of heart to the superior
“I can say that I am physically and morally acclimatised to China. The people, the things, the customs that shocked me so strongly at the beginning now seem to me to be for the better. My brothers say the same thing. The mud, the dust, the smells no longer tire us. Our eyes and our sense of smell have become accustomed to all this. A few more days and, without ceasing to be French, we will become Franco-Chinese”
 (23 September 1891, five months after his arrival).

- 6. Obedience
“The bishop does not like the idea of clothing our Chinese postulants in our religious habit, but I cannot reconcile myself with making them ‘half brothers’... Until now, I had always been able to thank heaven for the obstacles that our projects have encountered. We will examine the project

once again and recommend it to God whose will alone I wish to do, whose sole glory I seek”
(20 August 1894).

- 7. Regularity

“We are striving to be very regular, and God blesses us. He has made the most complete unity reign among us, given us holy joy, and made us love our children, our vocation and our new homeland”
(25 October 1891).

- 8. Devotion to the Institute

“The foundation of Char-la-Eul is close to my heart, for we need it for the establishment of a novitiate, and as a place where we can spend our vacations, a place of retreat and rest... The three hundred children whom we have in our care are for now a fallow field, but one that I believe is destined to become fertile in the fruits of salvation, in merits for all” (12 August 1892).

- 9. Family Spirit

“Please believe me, reverend Brother, that your little Brothers of Peking are true Marists in spirit, in will, and above all in heart. I am happy to say that my brothers have the same feelings as I myself towards the dear family of the Blessed Virgin”
(27 April 1891).

- 10. Cheerfulness and Holy Joy
"We will persevere in the most complete unity. We give ourselves over to the joy, the gladness of loving each other in God... It seems to me that if Father Champagnat were to appear in our midst, he would recognise us as his own, and would say, 'It's good. I approve of your joy, your cheerfulness, your unity'"
(3 August 1891).

- 11. Good Character
"We also have a "bath house" – we raised a half barrel on four raised posts. We fill it with water, open the tap and get underneath for a shower which costs less than those provided at Allevard and which does us much good" (12 August 1892).

- 12. Gratitude
"We will remember that gratitude was one of the main virtues of the venerable Founder. (4 March 1892) Thanksgiving, dear Brother Assistant, is my habitual attitude... When I see what happens here in our Chinese house ... I feel the urge to cry out, 'Thank you, Lord" (13 March 1894).

- 13. Constancy
"The 8th March is a date very dear to me: it is the date on which God, agreeing to my sacrifice, allowed me to follow in the footsteps of so many saints and zealous missionaries... Yes, courage is needed!

Onwards for God, for the souls of men, for our dear congregation! Let us devote ourselves, sacrifice ourselves. What could be finer? (8 March 1893).

- To finish this discussion on holiness with you, Brother Marie-Candide, a few lines written by Father Favier, Vicar General of Pekin after your death: *“Brother Marie-Candide has just died, a victim of his charity!... He died a saint. I would not be surprised if, seeing six of his fellow brothers in danger of death, he did not freely offer his own to save them.”*

Thank you, Lord, for the marvellous gift of this brother. May he intercede for missionaries today, especially for those who live in difficult situations.

Amen.

PRAYER TO THE LORD WITH OUR FIRST BROTHERS

Praise be to you, Lord, for Brother

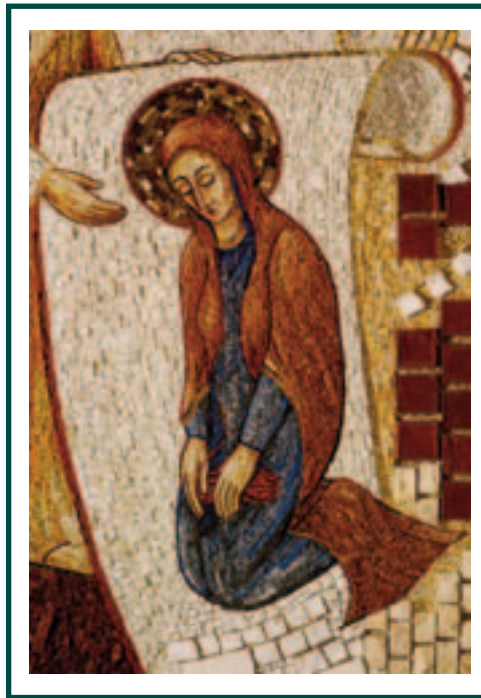
- Louis, faithful and obedient companion, his heart burning with love for Jesus and Mary.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Laurent, always ready to teach the catechism, following the example of Marcellin.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Antoine, a life poor and simple, full of confidence in God.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- François, servant of the brothers, living copy of the Founder and his first successor.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Stanislas, a treasure of the Institute, confidant of the Founder, an encouraging man.
Praise be to you, O Lord.

■ [Our first Brothers] ■

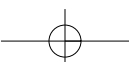
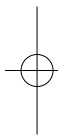
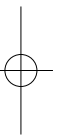
- Jean-Baptiste, chronicler and biographer, called “the second founder” by Brother Louis-Marie.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Jean-Pierre, formed at Lavalla, first brother to die, called by Marcellin “a saint”.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Bonaventure, master of novices for twenty years, one who drew the admiration of the Founder.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Dorothee, a little brother bereft of knowledge but whose heart was in God.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Sylvestre, mischief maker, won over by the incomparable patience of Fr Champagnat.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Louis-Marie, prepared by God and Mary to be the second successor of the Founder.
Praise be to you, O Lord.

■ [Marvellous companions of Marcellin] ■

- Jean-Marie, driving force behind the successful amalgamation with Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux in 1842.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Hippolyte, tailor for forty years, whose pitcher (1826) has been preserved by the brothers.
Praise be to you, O Lord.



- Jérôme, a real “child of the family” of whom Marcellin said he was worth his weight in gold.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Cassien and Arsene, two lay teachers, drawn to the Institute by the holiness of Father Champagnat.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Avit, who served the Institute with great courage as Visitor, Assistant and Annalist.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Paul, first brother of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, splendid in support of Brother Jean-Marie.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Ambroise, brother of Viviers, responsible for the success of the amalgamation with the Hermitage.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Pascal, Assistant General, totally at the service of the brothers, with generosity and humility.
Praise be to you, O Lord.
- Marie-Candide, superb educator, founder of the mission to China in 1891.
Praise be to you, O Lord.



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