

CHAPTER FOURMARCELLIN'S FINAL YEARS OF SEMINARY EDUCATION

In November 1813 Marcellin entered the Major Seminary, St. Irenaeus, at Lyon to study theology. In his first year of Theology he was in a class of 84 students. When Marcellin entered this Major Seminary, Pope Pius VII was a prisoner in the castle of Fontainebleau. Napoleon had just suffered his first direct defeat in battle at Leipzig and the seminarians, "Royalist to a man", (1) discussed the exciting prospect of a Bourbon Restoration. St. Irenaeus seminary had been in existence for 150 years, beginning in 1663 under the direction of Sulpicians. (2) The French Government had confiscated the seminary in 1790 and sold it. It became an arsenal, army ambulance, hospital, bakery and store. The seminarians were dispersed among their families, some continuing to receive instruction secretly, as did Jean-Antoine Gillibert, disguised as a schoolmaster. Ordained in 1803 he was Parish Priest of St.-Genest-Malifaux where, at his request, in 1834 Marcellin Champagnat opened the 27th school of the Marist Brothers. (3) Cardinal Fesch bought back the old seminary from the government in 1805.

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1. S. Hosie, Anonymous Apostle, New York, 1967, P. 28.
 2. The Sulpicians had been expelled from St. Irenaeus in December 1811. (Coste & Lessard, Origines Maristes, Vol. 4, Rome, 1966, p. 87). They had previously been expelled on 15th January 1791, having refused the oath of loyalty to the constitution. The last Ordination, that of 8 Deacons and 7 Priests, took place at Neuville on 9th April 1791. (In 1826 Fr. Marcellin Champagnat founded a school at Neuville, to become later on the boarding school of Notre Dame de Bellegarde). Napoleon dissolved the Sulpician Society in 1811. At the same time a Decree allowing only one minor seminary for each Diocese led Cardinal Fesch to retain as many as possible in the Philosophy class and he parcelled out the remaining students, approx. 1,200 of them, as day-pupils in the neighbouring colleges - St. Chamond, Roanne, Villefranche, Bourg and Belley. (P. Zind, Voyages et Missions, No. 123, January 1975, p.10). The Sulpicians would be allowed to return to some seminaries in 1814. In their absence others had conducted the seminary at Lyons. When the Sulpicians were expelled in December 1811, Cardinal Fesch then had to find superiors and professors among his diocesan priests. He had sent two (Fathers Cholleton and Cattet) to Paris "to complete their education" with the Sulpicians in 1809, and he was forced to recall them to be professors at St. Irenaeus. There were others of course, nearly all trained previously in their seminary days by the Sulpicians. The Sulpicians never returned to take charge of the St. Irenaeus Major Seminary.
 3. His brother of the same name was among the Marist aspirants at Fourvière (treated later in this thesis). In 1819 he acted as intermediary between them and Rome. Later on he joined his brother at St-Genest-Malifaux. (P. Zind, V & M, No. 123, p. 10.)

On 2nd November 1801, the year of the Concordat, theology courses recommenced in "La Providence" on the Montée, (4) St. Barthélémy, formerly owned by the Trinity Sisters. On 2nd November 1805 seminary studies resumed in the old seminary at "La Croix-Paquet" (near the Rhône). (5) In 1813 it was located in La Croix-Rousse at Place Croix-Paquet, near the Rhône River. A clock with four bells sounded the hours, half-hours and quarters. Louis XV had in 1738 attached the seminary to the University of Valence, with the privilege of conferring degrees in theology.

The seminary also owned a country-house, a place to which the seminarians could take walks. It was here among the trees that discussions were soon to take place, with Marcellin present, regarding the foundation of a "Society of Mary". (6) Some of Marcellin's associates at St. Irenaeus became well known in later Catholic Church history. In addition to Jean-Marie Vianney, 27 years of age, the future canonised "Curé of Ars", (7) and Jean-Claude Colin, 23, the founder of the Marist Fathers, there were Etienne Déclas, 30, Etienne Terraillon, 30, Jean-Baptiste Seyve, 24 and Philippe Janvier, 21. Etienne Déclas, in 1824, joined the two Colin brothers at Cerdon and as he made the third member, Fr. Colin regarded this as the beginning of the Marist Fathers' Society. Etienne Terraillon joined the Marist Fathers in 1836 at their first vow-taking. He had been in constant touch with Fathers Colin and Champagnat for years before that. He was interested in the Marist Sisters and proved of great value to them in their early years. He had been Chaplain at the Hermitage of the Marist Brothers from August 1825 till November 1826. He became Parish Priest of Notre Dame in St. Chamond, 1828-1839, then later became Assistant and then Provincial of the Marist Fathers for several years before dying in 1871.

Jean-Baptiste Seyve was Curate at Tarentaise when Fr. Champagnat

4. "Slope". The Slope of St. Barthélémy leads up from near St. Paul's Church to Fourvière.

5. P. Zind, "Sur les traces de Marcellin Champagnat", Présence Mariste, Lyons, April 1975, No. 124, p. 8.

6. Ibid, p. 7.

7. Who was at St. Irenaeus for only six weeks.

asked him to replace him at Lavalla for a short time in 1823. Perhaps imprudently he supported the plea to remove Fr. Rebod. (8) From 1824 till his death in 1866 he was Parish Priest of Burdignes (Bourg-Argental area), but according to Father Coste (9) he seemed not to have bothered any more with the Marist groups. Philippe Janvier went to America (Louisiana) in June 1817. (10) Ill-health caused his return to France in 1826. He became Parish Priest of St.-Paul-en-Jarez (near St. Chamond) where the Marist Brothers had had the school since 1826. Fr. Champagnat invited him to join the Marist Fathers but he did not do so. He was a friend of their Society when they came to open their College in St.-Chamond in 1856 and continually offered Masses for their intentions. Being a good friend among the secular clergy might have been his best contribution to the Marists.

For their board and instruction, thirty-nine of the seminarians in 1813 paid only ten francs; twenty-three, including Marcellin, paid fifteen francs; eleven paid twenty francs; two paid twenty-five francs and three paid fifty francs. These sums alone would not have been sufficient to maintain the seminary. All were in order as regards military conscription: Seyve was discharged because he was too small; Déclas had drawn a fortunate number that exempted him; the others had been reclaimed by Cardinal Fesch and exempted as seminarians under the same decree that exempted civil servants. Marcellin Champagnat had been exempted on 10th February 1808. As for Vianney, his younger brother had taken his place voluntarily. (11).

The teaching staff numbered six: the superior, the director and four professors. The superior was Fr. Philibert Gardette, born 1765.

8. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., p. 141. (Treated later in this thesis).

9. Coste & Lessard, *Origines Maristes*, Vol, 1, p. 312 - this document re his nomination to Burdignes is his final mention in this large treatise.

10. A 65-day journey!

11. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., p. 300.

After one year of theology he was named professor of philosophy at the seminary of Clermont-Ferrand before being ordained at Le Puy in 1791. Arrested in 1793, he was condemned to transportation to French Guiana, but his ship remained near Rochefort. Released in March 1795, he resumed his ministry as a "missionary-priest", setting up a kind of minor seminary. Later he was superior of St. Jodard minor seminary. When Marcellin Champagnat entered St. Irenaeus, Fr. Gardette, aged 48, had been superior for only one year. He combined his official position with that of Professor of Sacred Scripture until 1820.

(12) Later he would support the efforts of Fr. Colin and more especially of Fr. Champagnat. (13).

From 1812-17 the director of studies was Fr. La Croix D'Azolette, aged 34. (14) Dogma was taught by Fr. Cattet, aged 25, who had studied with the Sulpicians in Paris, as had Fr. Cholleton, aged 25, who was Professor of Moral Theology. Later he became a Marist Father and succeeded Marcellin Champagnat, theoretically, from 1840-45 in the direction of the Marist Brothers. (15) Fr. Mioland, future bishop of Amiens and archbishop of Toulouse, aged 25, taught Liturgy; whilst it was Fr. Matthew Menaide who battled away with the problems of the commissariat.

12. P. Zind, V & M, No. 125, October 1975, p. 3.

13. He would also recommend the future Br. Louis-Marie (to be mentioned later) to apply for admission to the Marist Brothers. (P. Zind, V & M, No. 125, p. 3.). Letter of Fr. Courbon V.G. to Cardinal Fesch, 25th October 1814: "Fr. Gardette is sick; he has been in great pain...He is also a bit worn out from the meticulous and never-ending twaddle of Fr. Bochard; I advised him in private to take the upper hand somewhat, but he has not the strength to do so. This Fr. Bochard is a tireless worker; he treats minute matters as things of great importance; it must be that his will prevails in everything - the major, the minor seminaries, religious communities; he is everything: superior-general, particular superior, superior, economer, etc. This annoys everyone because, in addition his mind is fickle ("au variable"); when he expects something from anyone, he is a wonderful fellow; so he promotes him; but then when he is in the high position, he can no longer bear him and seeks to replace him..." (Coste & Lessard, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 183).

14. He was chosen by Fr. Bochard as a Vicar General for Bishop Devie at Belley. Fr. Bochard founded the "Fathers of the Cross of Jesus" in June 1816. Later he would begin Brothers and Sisters of the same name.

15. P. Zind, V & M, No. 125, p.3.

In December 1813, six weeks after the new seminarians had entered St. Irenaeus, an examination was held. The results of Marcellin's class could be summarised as follows:

5	seminarians	- very satisfactory (no Marist aspirants here)
19	"	- satisfactory (Terrailon and Seyve at this level)
27	"	- average (Colin in this group)
16	"	- unsatisfactory (Déclas and Champagnat here)
8	"	- very unsatisfactory (Vianney among these)
5	"	- received no mark.(16)

It is obvious that the future Marist leaders were not yet distinguishing themselves, at least in the academic sphere. Outside the seminary the Catholic Church in France was still combatting Napoleon's enmity. A "Concordat" had been signed shortly after Napoleon's return from Moscow in 1813. The Pope had signed a document that was simply to be a basis for later discussions leading up to a formal Concordat. It had been stipulated that this basic document must be kept secret. However, Napoleon made it public and commenced claiming all the concessions for France that were mentioned in it. The Pope immediately cancelled all such items.(17)

It is of interest to look at the daily schedule of the seminarians at St. Irenaeus, so that later we may compare it with what Marcellin was to think proper for the daily schedule of young members of his newly-founded religious group of Marist Brothers. At St. Irenaeus they rose early as a first sacrifice and a pledge for the rest of the day. It was suggested they think, whilst washing and dressing, of

16. "Extraits du registre des élèves du grand séminaire St. Irénée", Archives du grand séminaire de Lyon, reg. 1, Année scolaire 1813-14.

To receive no mark meant that the student was too weak to be assessed. (Ibid).

17. New Catholic Encyclopedia, New York, 1967, Vol. 10, p. 213

Jesus becoming man and rising from the tomb. This was a period of silence during which each would invoke "all for God and for the glory and love of Mary" to help prepare himself for prayers.

Morning prayers and meditation were made together, whilst all were counselled to avoid distractions, to remain recollected (18) and to make a resolution. All then attended Mass as "the holiest and most sacred act of religion" and a special intention for the community was recommended for each Mass. Each seminarian arranged his Communion-frequency with his spiritual director.

The morning studies were followed by an examination of conscience - a "Particular Examen", (19) always begun with a reading from the New Testament. Two community visits to the Blessed Sacrament were held: one after midday recreation and one before going to bed. Courses in dogma, morals, scripture and liturgy took up a good part of the day, whilst the Seminary Rule stated, "*Time which is not taken up by any other exercise on the timetable is to be spent in study.*" In the evening there would be spiritual reading and each would say his rosary according to the method found best for his piety and attention. Supper would be followed by night prayers, the reading of the next day's meditation, and then to bed. (20)

18. The English verb "recollect", though not used in common every day language in its spiritual sense, is found in good English dictionaries. It means "to compose oneself", and it is often used in relation to religious life.

19. This was not a general examination of conscience: a person examined himself on that failing or sin that he most frequently committed.

20. P. Zind, V & M, No. 126, January 1976, pp. 6-7.

It is to be noticed that devotion to the Blessed Virgin occupied a special place. (21) The seminarians were advised to have "unlimited confidence in her goodness, recourse to her in all needs, ... doing everything in union with her ... saying the Rosary each day". (22)

We are able to read in Marcellin Champagnat's new notebook the vacation resolutions he took at the end of that first year at St. Irenaeus. We notice that they are more personal than those which were set down in Le Manuel Séminariste (23) at Verrières. He put in first place his living with his family, placing great emphasis on having good family relationships. He carefully organised his holiday spiritual life: prayer, fasting, visiting the sick and catechising: and he determined to construct an oratory in the garden. His insertion among these resolutions of "*You know it*", found here for the first time, indicates his attitude now of habitual prayer in God's presence. (24) His strong devotion to both Jesus and Mary is also apparent. (25) No doubt all this was reinforced

21. The devotion to Mary taught at the seminary was that of the French school of spirituality that stemmed from Bérulle, Gibieuf, Olier, Eudes, Condren, Francis de Sales and Grignon de Montfort. (Br. Romauld Gibson, Father Champagnat: the Man and his Spirituality, Rome, 1971, p. 93). Bérulle insisted, "Christ and Mary are so closely linked that we cannot ever separate them in our devotion". Even the deviation of French theological thought towards Jansenism at this time encouraged devotion to Mary. For instance, Jansenism criticised mediaeval piety that separated Mary from her Son; thus this very current of twisted and distorted awe of God brought the role of Jesus and Mary more markedly to the fore. It seems that the aspect of Christ's life that appealed to Marcellin was Our Lord's love of his Mother. In this he was acting in accord with John Eudes' mariological principle, "To us it is given to continue the attitude of Jesus in his love, respect and service of his Blessed Mother, whom he loved so ardently". (St. John Eudes, "La Vie et le Royaume de Jésus dans les Ames Chrétiennes", part 3, chapter XI; quoted by L. Barbe, "La Vierge Marie dans la Congrégation de Jésus et Marie", Maria, III, p. 169. R. Gibson, op. cit., p. 105).

22. P. Zind, V & M, No. 126, p. 7.

23. A booklet prepared for the guidance of seminarians by Father Bochard.

24. Marcellin considered that to be constantly aware of the continual "Presence of God" was a great aid to spiritual progress. (Br. R. Gibson, op. cit., p. 87). "You know it..." were the first words of a prayer to God.

25. A. Ballo, "La dévotion spirituelle de Marcellin Champagnat", Bulletin de l'Institut, May, 1975, p. 391.

when, on the 6th January 1814, Marcellin received the clerical tonsure, (26) the four Minor Orders (27) and Sub-diaconate at the hands of Cardinal Fesch, Archbishop of Lyons. Marcellin was then 24 years of age. For Cardinal Fesch, this was the last ordination he was able to perform in his diocese. Austrian troops marched into Lyons two months later. The Emperor resigned on April 6th and asked the Cardinal to take his mother, Letizia Bonaparte, to Rome and exile.

The professors then stationed at St. Irenaeus seminary were all young and had had little experience. The Director, De La Croix, was 34, while the professors of Dogma (Cattet), of Morals (Cholleton), were only 25. Hence Le Manuel Séminariste prescribed strict measures to be observed by all seminarians in their relationships with their teachers:

*"Never to forget that their authority comes
from God. ...
Respect for them as persons ...
Avoid complaints and grumbling ...
Prompt submission, with holy eagerness,
as to Jesus Christ Himself". (28)*

As for their superior, Father Philibert Gardette, aged 48, he was revered as though he wore a halo of glory for his suffering in the Revolution. He acted wisely by throwing all the weight of his influence in favour of his young professors.

26. The act of shaving a man's head on top when he was about to become a priest. The Tonsure was given some months, even a year, after Minor Orders in normal times. It was to signify that the aspirant to the priesthood had entered seriously the study of theology. At these troubled times in France, only ten weeks after entering the Major Seminary, the Tonsure, Minor Orders and the Sub-diaconate were all conferred - on 6th January 1814. Of course, there were protests, but Fesch was hurrying things along so as to get priests and to exclude those not really enthusiastic re their priestly vocation.

27. The Minor Orders, in ascending order, were: Doorkeeper, Reader, Exorcist, Acolyte.

28. P. Zind, V & M, No. 126, p. 7.

During the vacation of 1814, conversation topics were plentiful. There was Talleyrand's "Coup d'Etat" that deposed Napoleon on 31st March as the Allies were entering Paris. Then, under pressure from his marshals, Napoleon abdicated at Fontainebleau on 6th April. There was the flight of Cardinal Fesch to Italy and the return of the Bourbons after the declaration of 2nd May. In addition, there was the Treaty of Paris that brought France back to her 1792 boundaries and exiled Napoleon to the Isle of Elba with 800 soldiers. Great upheavals had occurred in so short a time! The 15th August was especially celebrated by the Catholic Church in France for the new king, Louis XVIII, had renewed (on 5th August 1814) the vow of Louis XIII to consecrate the kingdom of France to Mary, the Mother of God. (29)

As usual, the Major Seminary reopened on the feast of All Saints, 1st November 1814. Among the newcomers was a student who was not even tonsured although he was due to follow the second year of theology: he was Jean-Claude Courveille who had come from the major seminary of Le Puy. Since Courveille played a unique role in the early history of the Marist Brothers, a brief account is given here of his earlier life.

Jean-Claude Courville was born at Usson, some 40 km west of St. Etienne. His merchant parents had thirteen children of whom Jean-Claude was seventh, managing to survive in a family where half the offspring had died young. When ten years of age he contracted eye trouble. As related in the previous chapter, his eyesight had returned after a visit to Our Lady's shrine at Le Puy. He had consecrated his life to Our Lady. On 15th August 1812 when renewing his consecration to Mary before the statue of Notre Dame du Puy, he said that he heard an interior voice commanding him to found, "for the struggle of the Last Days" the "Society of Mary". (30) This spiritual reason had compelled Courveille to enter, in November 1812, the major seminary of Le Puy, even though since 1802 his native town Usson had been included in the diocese of Lyons. For a

29. Louis XIII had made the original consecration on 10th February 1638.

30. P. Zind, V & M, No. 120, January 1974, p. 9.

while he kept his mission secret. However, one day after hearing six successive Masses in the Cathedral, he believed he heard this order, "Speak of it to your directors, explain things to them, and you will see what they will say about it".

He spoke, therefore, to two professors who declared that his inspiration could well come from God and should not be despised. The recruitment of the future "members of the Society of Mary" was beginning when it was brought to a sudden halt by a common detail of administration. To receive the tonsure and minor orders, Courveille had to apply for permission to the Archbishop of Lyons. (31) On 3rd April 1814, three days after the flight of Cardinal Fesch, the archbishop's council refused permission for the reason that the candidate was completely unknown. He was required to apply in person.

Jean-Claude Courveille was received by Father Bochard who, very curious because of the evident dislike Le Puy had shown to parting with such a subject, asked him the reason. *"It is because of the work of the Blessed Virgin that I was hoping to establish at Le Puy"*, answered the young man frankly. (32) Father Bochard was keenly interested in this project. Was he not officially "Father", that is, the one responsible for the "Congregation of Young People" placed since 1802 under the protection of the Immaculate Conception. (33) Again, did he not also have in mind the imminent foundation of a new Religious Association? So, he quickly decided: *"My friend"*, said he to Courveille, *"You will find me as good a father as those at Le Puy; leave the Velay and you will accomplish at Lyons whatever you wanted to achieve at Le Puy"*. (34)

31. Since, by birth, he belonged to that diocese.

32. His devotion to Mary began in his earliest years. In his childhood, during the Revolution, his mother had kept two statues of Mary in their home - one of which was called the "Miraculous Statue of Notre Dame de Chambriac" before which the mother frequently gathered her children in prayer.

33. Although this present dogma of faith - "Immaculate Conception", had not yet been proclaimed by a Pope, many Catholics believed that the Blessed Virgin had been conceived free from so-called "original sin" with which Catholics believe every other human being comes into existence.

34. P. Zind, *V & M*, No. 136, 1978, p.6.

Thus it was that Jean-Claude Courveille crossed the threshold of the Major Seminary of St. Irenaeus in Lyons on 1st November 1814.

Fr. Bochard's own ideas of founding a new Religious Association, as mentioned above, were only in their early phase. He later wrote that one Tuesday in 1814, the vigil of the feast of St. Peter, when he was saying Mass in the chapel of the Cross in St. John's at Lyons, there came to him whilst he was recollected (composed in deep thought) in the early part of the Canon⁽³⁵⁾ a sudden idea, as if by inspiration, to bind himself and other priests to do good works and practise works of zeal in an association under the name of the Cross of Jesus. All would have to obey the superior without hesitation in all that would not be contrary to orders from higher superiors. He said he was so greatly affected by these thoughts that, after Mass, he immediately wrote them down.

Next day, after he had heard the confession of Abbé de la Croix d'Azolette, director of the major seminary of St. Irenaeus, they walked together and discussed the present necessity for men "who would form a society suitable for undertaking all kinds of work - missions, education, direction, colleges, even theology if needed. For such an undertaking, young men were needed who had not belonged to other congregations under the old system." The Abbé de la Croix then revealed that he had felt "for a long time" the desire for such an association; he had even spoken of it often to the other professors of the major seminary and to the seminarians themselves. Father Bochard suggested a novena of prayers be started next day to recommend to God *"the needs of the diocese in respect to the formation of some association of this kind."*⁽³⁶⁾

Bochard then drew up a discreet plan of recruitment. Firstly, he would contact seminarians who showed interest. A few days later they would be given some explanation of the work he had in mind, which was to be kept secret. This would be followed by personal interviews which would include frank disclosure of their intentions to Bochard. If the interview was satisfactory, Bochard would tell such candidates to feel honoured to be asked to share in

35. He said it occurred during his recollection at the Memento of the Living when, at least in the Canon before Vatican II in 1964, living people would be prayed for shortly before the Consecration - the most sacred part of the Mass.
 36. P. Zind, Les Nouvelles Congrégations de Frères Enseignants en France de 1800 à 1830, Lyons, 1969, p. 113.

this work which had been inspired by Providence, but to realise that it would have many difficulties and that nothing must be done without having first discussed it with Bochard. When classes resumed in 1814, Bochard had distributed, secretly at first, a leaflet he had printed under the title of Pensée pieuse. Interested seminarians were to sign it individually and hand it to Abbé de la Croix who spoke to them in his room.(37)

Marcellin commenced his 2nd Year of Theology in November 1814. The Allies had invaded France earlier in the year and on 3rd May Louis XVIII had entered Paris. Although the first Treaty of Paris between France and the Allies had been signed on 1st May,(38) it was six months before Allied troops were to leave France.(39) Hence, in November took place the spectacle of Austrian troops entering Lyons.(40) We know, especially from a letter written by Father Gardette, that the tumultuous political and military events engulfing France were a great disturbance for the seminary students. It was referred to as "a terrible year", and "On parle politique plus que théologie".(41)

Inside the seminary, in contrast to the peace of the previous year, occurred drastic changes. To start with, it was learned that the Papal Bull "Solicitudo", 7th August 1814 of Pope Pius VII, had re-established the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), and a certain number of priests of the diocese were hurrying to Paris to enter the novitiate of the Jesuits. This vocation was attracting also several of the Lyons seminarians, such as Louis Querbes, future founder of the Clerks of St. Viateur. Then the Suplicians, the Lazarists, the Foreign Missions of Paris and the Holy Ghost Missions were all quickly reconstituted and were eagerly seeking recruits.

Any projects for new foundations either by Father Bochard or by Courveille were in danger of failing unless the outflow of clerical vocations was stopped. On 12th October 1814, a fortnight before the opening of classes, the Archbishop's Council discussed this question. Father Bochard explained that *"in the new state of affairs, some minds were working in keen competition on ideas and projects of zeal that would doubtless be laudable if kept within*

37. Ibid, p.113.

38. Napoleon abdicated at Fontainebleau, 6th April 1814.

39. Pope Pius VII returned to Rome on 24th May.

40. Coste & Lessard, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 190

41. Abbé Lyonnet, Le Cardinal Fesch, Vol. 2, Paris, 1841, pp. 578 - 600.

just limits".(42) Alas, it was quite otherwise: "Each one forms his own plans and seeks to carry them out accordingly: He goes ahead without any reference to authority, even ecclesiastical. Agitators, several of them strangers to the diocese even, were exciting the minds of the clergy and preferably the best and most useful; the seminarians as a result of this are quite seriously disquieted."(43)

As a positive measure, the Council decided that no diocesan ecclesiastic could leave the archdiocese without permission from the proper authority, under pain of suspension *"ipso facto"*. With this gap blocked, both Bochard and Courveille set to work on their projects.(44) The prospectus Pensée pieuse began to circulate among the seminarians of Lyons in view of the foundation of the Society of "The Cross of Jesus", the aim of Bochard; at the same time Courveille was studying his companions with a view of recruiting for the Society of Mary.(45).

As Father Bochard did not disclose his plans and was trying to win Courveille to his own project, the two men held many interviews. The Vicar General was not sparing in his advice to the young seminarian: "*No! don't take So-and so! They are numbskulls!*" Again, to enthuse the young clerics with the apostolic and religious life, the life of St. John Francis Regis was read in the refectory during meals.

Now, Courveille had decided to cast a net to secure Etienne Déclas as a recruit. Déclas was born in 1783 at Belmont (Loire). Towards the end of winter 1814-15 one Wednesday afternoon when Courveille was cutting Déclas' hair, he said to him, "*I have a plan in mind, that when I am a priest I'll do as St. John Francis Regis did, going through the country to help the poor people, who often have greater need of a visiting priest than people in the big towns or cities*". When the plan was outlined to him, Déclas agreed to join. He had been told that a society similar to the Jesuits would be formed, with its members being called Marists.(46)

42. P. Zind, V & M, No. 136, p. 7.

43. Coste & Lessard, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, Doc. 30, p. 182

44. P. Zind, V & M, No. 136, p. 8.

45. S. Hosie, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

46. P. Zind, V & M, No. 136, p. 7.

In the month of May 1815, an important political event, the return of Napoleon and the Hundred Days, caused a great upheaval in all Europe. The excesses of the "White Terror", the discontent over deflated currency and the insincere efforts of bungling friends of Louis XVIII, helped Napoleon, Emperor of the Isle of Elba, to regain the throne of France.(47) With a few faithful soldiers he landed in the south and reached Paris on 20th March 1815. The royal Bourbons had fled to Belgium. Napoleon set up a more liberal imperial rule than previously and had Carnot appointed Minister of the Interior, of Worship and Commerce. For Carnot, "the noble and beneficent institution of Primary schooling" was a basic element "for the perfect development of man", because primary education was "the one real means of raising by steady degrees every person to true human dignity". On 27th April 1815 the Emperor signed a decree requiring Minister Carnot to examine and prescribe the best pedagogical methods so as to endow France quickly with a system of primary schools in all the communes.(48) It is obvious that Marcellin's plan to found a society of teachers to help the young children of France was to fulfil a social need that was nationwide. Marcellin, although still only a seminarian, had this as one of his aims.(49).

The news of the events in France astounded Napoleon's uncle, Cardinal Fesch. *"My nephew is mad! He will be killed this time!"* Nevertheless the prelate decided to leave Italy although he had been appointed, by Napoleon, Minister Plenipotentiary to the Holy See on 22nd April 1815. King Joachim Murat(50) was being defeated time and again,(51) so Fesch took refuge in the castle of Gaeta from where he managed to escape and sail for France. He reached his episcopal city of Lyons on 26th May.

However, his stay there was only three days. He called on the Police Commissioner to ask that imprisoned priests be liberated, and he appeared in public at the cathedral services. He tried to visit his major seminary,

47. L. Romier (A.L. Rowse translator), A History of France, London, 1964, pp. 369 - 370.

48. P. Zind, V & M, No. 136, p. 2.

49. Br. Jean Baptiste, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

50. Murat, Napoleon's brilliant cavalry leader, had been made King of Naples, by Napoleon, in 1808. Although he deserted Napoleon in 1814, during the "Hundred Days" he allied with Napoleon and called on all people in the Italian peninsula to fight for the independence. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Chicago, 1971, Vol. 15, pp. 1003, 1004).

51. D. W. Brogan, The French Nation: From Napoleon to Petain, 1814-1940, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1957, p. 15.

St. Irenaeus, since many complaints had reached him concerning the frame of mind that prevailed there. It was said that even some of the most moderate seminarians were writing to their families and friends inflammatory letters filled with hatred for the "tyrant" Napoleon. The most rabid had enrolled as volunteers in the "royal united troops" whose headquarters were in the Forez mountains. The police, knowing all this, had demanded several times that the major seminary of Lyons be closed.(52)

Wishing at all costs to save his seminary, Cardinal Fesch with his Vicars-General Courbon and Bochard, went to St. Irenaeus on Sunday, 28th May. When the seminarians saw the red soutane in the distance they quickly "disappeared", hiding in their rooms or elsewhere. After much trouble the Vicars-General managed to assemble a few nondescripts, but their murmurings showed the cardinal clearly enough that he could not reason with them and so he withdrew in despair. Whilst the cardinal was getting into his coach, Louis Querbes, "a royal volunteer in a cassock" and future founder of the Clerks of St. Viateur, took chalk and wrote on the carriage, "*Long live the king!*" Fesch departed Lyons next day for Paris.(53)

We have no mention of these upheavals in any document written by Marcellin. Although Br. Jean-Baptiste claims Marcellin was then at the seminary, but acting as though oblivious to the upheavals in the countryside (54), Pierre Zind considers that Marcellin may have been absent from Lyons for reasons of health or peace of mind, living with his people at Marlihes.(55) In any case, it seems that political happenings were far from his mind on 3rd May, vigil of the Ascension, as his notebook reveals that his thoughts were on the liturgical anniversary of his baptism. On this day he renewed his previous resolutions under the auspices of the Blessed Virgin, of his patron Saint Marcellin and of St. John Francis Regis, along with St. Aloysius Gonzaga whose life he had heard read in the seminary refectory.(56)

52. P. Zind, *V & M*, No. 137, p. 2.

53. P. Zind, *V & M*, No. 137, p. 3.

54. Br. Jean-Baptiste, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 31,32

55. P. Zind, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

56. *Ibid*, p. 3.

In his new resolutions for 1815 he revealed a generous fidelity to act always where and when he thought God would wish him to, together with further emphasis on study and prayer. He was giving attention to the matter of combating lies and slander, whilst charity assumed a new importance for him. His vacation resolutions were more in keeping with seminary life. Preparations for the priesthood led him to "deprivation of self, renunciation, life of prayer, of rule, of study; manual work is relegated to an alternative recreation". He appealed strongly to Our Lady since he felt well aware of his weaknesses.(57)

For resolutions when at home he listed that he would avoid travel except to visit the sick. He strove to adapt to the manner of living of those around him, treating all with respect, kindness and charity. He noted down, "*I will strive to win them all to Jesus Christ by my words and example; I will not say anything that might annoy or offend them*". He used to get up between 5.00 and 5.30 a.m., undertake at least fifteen minutes meditation and go to Mass in the parish church. On his return he would spend an hour studying theology; since in lieu of a 4th year at the major seminary, the students were to study theology during the vacation. A quarter of an hour before dinner he made his examination of conscience as at the seminary, and said the grace before meals. He ate sparingly and fasted on Fridays in honour of the Passion of Christ.(58)

In his room he had set up a little shrine to the Blessed Virgin and St. Aloysius Gonzaga. There, before the crucifix, he said his prayers. He made use of favourable circumstances to "instruct the ignorant, both rich and poor", in the Catholic Church's "truths of salvation". He devoted another hour in the afternoon to his theology and in the evening presided at the family's night prayers. Before going to bed he prepared the next day's meditation.

On Sundays people came from hamlets about Le Rozey and from Marlies to hear the seminarian teach catechism. His room was too small and they occupied the kitchen, whilst at times he stood on a rise near the doorway to

57. Br. A. Balko, "L'Evolution Spirituelle de Marcellin Champagnat", Bulletin de l'Institut des Frères Maristes des Ecoles, Vol. 30, No. 217, May 1975, p. 392.

58. P. Zind, V & M, No. 137, p. 3.

speak to them. *"He taught so well that both adults and children often remained two hours without getting tired"*, declared Julienne Epalle who had known Marcellin since 1812.(59)

However, political events were moving quickly in France. On 18th June Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo; on 22nd he abdicated for the second time and gave himself into the hands of the English. Next day, 23rd June, was the vigil of the feast of St. John the Baptiste, patron of the Lyons cathedral; hence all the seminarians were assembled for the conferring of ordination in the chapel of the major seminary of St. Irenaeus. Cardinal Fesch had been obliged to leave France again after Napoleon's fall from power. Before departing on 19th July, he had delegated his powers to the Bishop of Grenoble, Bishop Claude Simon.(60) Since there was not sufficient time to confer the tonsure and minor orders on those who were ready, and since authorisation to confer the sub-diaconate had not yet reached Lyons, Simon contented himself with ordaining 38 priests and 62 deacons.(61)

Marcellin was one of the new deacons. Also in this group of deacons were St. Jean-Marie Vianney (future Curé of Ars), Venerable J-C. Colin, J-B. Seyve, E. Terrailon and E. Déclas, all future aspirants to the Society of Mary (J-B. Vianney excepted); but at this date, only Etienne Déclas had been informed of the foundation proposed by J-C. Courveille whom the haste of Bishop Simon to return to Grenoble(62) had prevented from receiving the tonsure and sub-diaconate.

Marcellin was now nearing the first main goal in his life, ordination to the priesthood. With but one year of seminary life and study remaining, there is little doubt that he would have been leaving no stone unturned to make sure he finished this final year as perfectly as possible - whether in study, liturgical prayer or free-time activities. He had already formed

59. Ibid, p. 3.

60. Fesch reached Rome in August and remained there till his death in 1839. Though asked to resign his archbishopric, he firmly refused; he was a member of several congregations in Rome.

61. Fr. Bochard, writing next day to the cardinal, "This whole ceremony was carried out with great edification".

62. Coste & Lessard, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 203. No one knew how the political situation would change after Napoleon's abdication; the presence of the Bishop in his diocese was an urgent necessity.

strong friendships with certain other seminarians, especially those in the Marist group, that would be providing added confidence for him. Although he had already revealed himself as an individual with strong personal aspirations, such as his determination to found a society of Brothers to educate country children even when no one else in the Marist group was keen on this idea, he was also a person always eager to help those around him. This quality no doubt influenced many of the Marist seminarians later to provide Marcellin with real assistance when he needed it - at times, desperately.

Marcellin commenced his final year at St. Irenaeus in November 1815. He was now in the Third Year of Theology, a class of 76 students. The most important item, as it later proved, was his decision to join J-C. Courveille's group of Marist enthusiasts. Courveille (1787-1866), as we have already seen, had previously won over Etienne Déclas (1783-1868) and from the beginning of this 1814-15 academic year they both sought more recruits. Courveille recruited Jean-Claude Colin (1790-1875), Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840) and Jean-Pierre Perrault-Maynard (1796-1850). Déclas managed to recruit Thomas Jacob (1792-1848) and Etienne Terrailon (1791-1869).⁽⁶³⁾ Soon they had 15 members who were to spend this year hammering out the fundamental principles for their future Society of Mary.

These fifteen Marist enthusiasts were men in their 20s and 30s and they all sprang from hardheaded French peasant families. The tall, graceful, elegant Courveille with his smouldering eyes and vibrant voice was their unquestioned leader. Terrailon recollected:

"The place of our meetings was usually the groves of trees in the garden of the country house. Sometimes we met in one of the rooms of the house or elsewhere, according to circumstances. We took advantage of these meetings to kindle our purpose, sometimes by considering our good fortune in being the first children of Mary, again by thinking of the great need of people. Periodically Monsieur Courveille addressed a few ardent words to us. These few words usually concerned the necessity of imitating Mary, above all in her considerable humility. He repeated to us often those

63. P. Zind, V & M, No. 138, p. 2.

beautiful words of King David, "Not to us, Lord, but to thy name give glory"."(64)

In addition, they tested out their ideas on Fr. Cholleton, a man of their own age but respected as a priest and a professor of moral theology. He approved their plan, saying it was based on common sense.

The general scheme was that they would endeavour to form an all-embracing Society of Mary in which the priests would be joined by auxilliary brothers, cloistered sisters and lay tertiaries. The assumption was that the Society of Mary had to begin with and primarily be, at all times, a society of priests. These ideas were common to all except the "stormy petrel" (65) of the group, Marcellin Champagnat. Champagnat, at the first meeting he attended, proposed the idea of his founding a branch of teaching brothers. *"I shall be happy to help procure for others"*, said the earthily direct Champagnat, *"the advantages I was deprived of myself"*.(66) Champagnat conceived the Society of Mary as being an organisation of associated congregations loosely linked under a Superior-General-priest. Champagnat's ideas were not welcome to the other members, but his stubborn persistence eventually led them to agree that teaching brothers would be a branch of the Society of Mary and their foundation would be the personal responsibility of Champagnat.

It will be remembered that Fr. Bochard, at this same seminary, was also at this time in the process of obtaining recruits for his proposed "Society of the Cross of Jesus". On 22nd April 1814 Cardinal Fesch had signed at Pradines an ordinance which stated, *"No religious association will be allowed even temporarily, and no alterations will be made to existing ones without our special order"*. This ordinance was obviously a barrier to both Bochard and Courveille in their future plans. Bochard's proposed Society of the Cross of Jesus sought to achieve about the same objectives as the future Society of Mary: missions in the country and the education of

64. Hosie, op. cit., P. 39.

65. Hosie, op. cit., p. 40.

66. Fr. Maître-pierre, "Notes rédigées à l'intention de mes novices", Archives générales des pères maristes, Rome. Father Maître-pierre had been the priest who often heard the confessions of Marcellin in the Sacrament of Penance (or Reconciliation).

youth. It seemed that the Marists were having the ground cut from under their feet when, on 2nd August 1815, the archbishop's council had approved in principle the foundation of the Society of the Cross of Jesus and entrusted to it all the important works of the archdiocese, such as inland missions, spiritual retreats and the direction of all the seminaries, major and minor.(67) Finally, on 11th June 1816, this new Society of the Cross of Jesus was approved in the Diocese. It seemed that the Society of Mary had been left behind.

Marcellin, it seems bitterly regretted his failure to have gained a school education in his early youth. Perhaps he often contrasted his academic shortcomings with the outstanding intellectual talents of his father. The Revolution had promised great things in education, but nothing less than the word 'disaster' could describe what happened. As Guizot wrote, "*There were people in charge and they promised great things; but they did nothing; wild fancies floated above the ruins.*"(68) Whether they were hostile, indifferent or favourable to the new order, Prefects and General Councillors answered with one accord the questions of Minister Chaptal who summarised their replies thus: "*Before the Revolution there were primary schools almost everywhere ... All that has disappeared ... In Cher, the position of the schools is about the same as in other Départements, that is to say that the first stages of instruction are completely missing.*"(69)

The report added, "*Youth is given over to the most profound ignorance and to the most alarming dissipation.*" In Jura, youth was falling "into

67. P. Zind, *V & M*, No. 140 p. 16. In the spring of 1816 there were eleven aspirants to this new society, ten of whom already had, or would soon gain, positions of importance in the Archdiocese - the final member was the sub-deacon J-M. Ballet.

68. François Guizot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de mon temps*, (1858-67), T. III (8 vols.), Paris, 1860, p. 28.

69. In Herault, "the primary teachers scattered through the country are for the most part unsuitable and unauthorised" ... In Vaucluse, "public instruction is non-existent" ... in Deux-Sèvres, "the primary schools are worthless in the towns - even where they exist... For twenty years to come the country towns will not provide a single man who can read and write...". (Jean-Antoine Chaptal (Ministre de l'Intérieur): "Rapport et projet de loi sur l'Instruction Publique an IX," *Moniteur*, No. 49 de l'an IX. (Bibl. Nat. R. 31 074).

insubordination, even into lawlessness from which it is difficult to rescue it".(70) These documents are formal and official. During the Revolution, education had collapsed; the number of schools closed was infinitely greater than the number opened, and the withdrawals of masters were far more numerous than applications to become new school-masters.(71) France was struck with a gaping wound: that caused by its failure to educate its youth.

No doubt encouraged by Napoleon's efforts to remedy the harm done to the Catholic Church by the revolutionary governments, in 1801 from almost all regions of France came the call to restore the Brothers and Sisters of the Christian schools. That year, Portalis (72) in a well-publicised speech to the Legislative body said, "*It is time that theories gave place to facts; there is no education without moral teaching and without religion. The teachers have taught in the desert because they were told never to speak of religion in the schools*".(73) The De La Salle Brothers and the Sisters were restored in 1803 by Napoleon: by Article 109 of the Decree of 17th March 1808, any religious order or association could conduct schools, provided they had the approval of the university; the Brevet (74) was not demanded.(75) The news of such events must have reinforced Marcellin Champagnat's determination to found a society of teaching Brothers to aid, not the urban children who were being cared for by the De La Salle Brothers, but the neglected country children. Marcellin might well have had knowledge of the report on education adopted in 1814 by the Consul-General of the Rhône which stated, "*There is no parent who is not*

70. Moniteur, loc. cit. In Aisne, "the children have been betrayed into a most dangerous idleness, a most alarming vagrancy; they have no idea of a Divinity, they are without any knowledge of justice or injustice; therefrom spring savage and barbarous morals, and so a wild people". (Ibid).

71. Albert Babeau, L'Ecole de village pendant la Révolution, Paris, 1881, pp. 247-256. Ernest Allain L'Oeuvre Scholaire de la Révolution (1789-1802), Paris, 1891, pp. 349 ff.

72. Portalis was the chief architect of Napoleon's "Civil Code".

73. P. Zind, V & M, No. 113, p. 6.

74. The Brevet was the equivalent of official "Teacher Registration" in Australia.

75. Napoleon declared in August 1805, "I must have pupils who may learn to be men. Now do you believe that a man can be truly man if he has not God? On what foundation will he be able to base his power to raise up his world, the world of his passions and frenzies? The man without God - I have seen him at work since 1793. Such a man cannot be governed, ... of such a man I have had enough... No, no, to form such men as we need, I will take my stand with God..." (M. Gontard, L'Enseignement Primaire en France de la Révolution à la Loi Guizot (1789-1833), Paris, 1959, p. 236.

inwardly distressed for his children. If some attempts have been made to instruct children publicly, their results have been without real success because they set aside correct principles. It is necessary to say that without Religion, without religious dedication in our youth, nothing useful can be attained...where Religion is not the basis of the total education of youth, the result is ineffectual.(76) This report concluded by stating that religious congregations were best able to give youth the education they needed. It concluded, "*This report has been sent to the Minister of the Interior and we have asked that it be presented to the King so that it may proceed to success under his authority*". Furthermore, things were so faulty in the sphere of education at this time in France that, in the country as a whole in 1815, there were more than 25,000 communes which lacked any sort of school.(77).

When Marcellin commenced his final year at St. Irenaeus seminary in November 1815, France's lack of education facilities was publicly admitted. On 7th November 1815 the Commission of Public Instruction, which had replaced the University of France as organizer of national education, adopted a project in which Article 14 stipulated, "*Every commune must take the necessary means to ensure that its local children receive primary education, and for poor children it is to be free*". Article 30 of this decree stated, "*The Commissioner of Public Instruction will see to it that all primary education is based on religion*".(78)

During one of the meetings of the seminarians who had a future Society of Mary in mind, Marcellin said, "*I have always felt within me a particular attraction for an establishment of Brothers. I would voluntarily join them to you, if you judge it proper, and I would be responsible for them. My own early education was lacking; I will be happy to help contribute to others the advantages of which I was deprived*".(79) The other members of the group did not oppose him, but for them Champagnat's idea seemed of minor importance.(80)

76. P. Zind, *V & M*, No. 138, p. 3.

77. J. Bury, *France 1814-1940*, 4th Edition, London, 1969, p. 17.
This was out of a little more than 35,000 communes.

78. P. Zind, *V & M*, No. 138, p. 3.

79. Hosie, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

80. P. Zind, *V & M*, No. 138, p. 3.

Marcellin's first great goal was reached on 22nd July 1816 when he was amongst the group of young men upon whom Bishop Dubourg conferred the powers of the priesthood of the Catholic Church. Amongst the newly-ordained were seven other members of the Society of Mary group: J-C. Colin, J-C. Courveille, Etienne Déclas, Philippe Janvier, J-A. Gillibert, J-B. Seyve and Etienne Terrailon.(81) The above eight newly-ordained priests demonstrated their deep resolve for a Marist Society when on the following day, 23rd July, along with four seminarians who were also members of the Marist group, they made their historic pilgrimage to Fourvière.(82).

On this particular day the above twelve "left St. Irenaeus at dawn, crossed the Saône in the morning mist and climbed the hill of Fourvière. In a sense everything they did that day was not so much an act as a symbol. On the ground trodden by Pothin (their bishop) and the first Gallic christians seventeen hundred years before, they, the pioneers of the Society of Mary, felt themselves to be linked with the Apostle John. Through the Mass, the sacrifice of Calvary renewed, they stood with the Apostle John beside the Cross and heard the dying Christ give Mary to John and to them in the words, '*Behold your Mother*'. Mary had been the support and inspiration of the infant Church. The same Mary would be the support and strength of the embryonic Society of Mary".(83)

Courveille, whom the others considered their leader, said Mass for them all whilst they were in the chapel of Fourvière. All received Communion and then, at the conclusion of Mass, all twelve renewed their signed pledge dedicating their lives to Mary. Father Colin, who later would officially found the Marist Fathers, always regarded this day, 23rd July 1816, to have been the foundation day of the Society of Mary. A copy of this pledge, originally written in Latin, may be found in an Appendix to this thesis.(84). Since this pledge is the only contemporary document on

81. Hosie, op. cit. p. 42.

82. It seems that there were, at this stage, sixteen who wished to attach themselves to the future Society of Mary. Besides the eight newly-ordained priests, there were: J-P. Mainand, B. Perra, Thomas Jacob, Benôit Journoux, F. Mottin, P. Pousset, Joseph Varrier and P. Orsel. (P.Zind, V & M, No.140, p.17).

83. Hosie, op. cit., p. 43.

84. Printed as Document 50 in J. Coste and G. Lessard, Origines Maristes (1786-1836), Vol. 1, Rome, 1960.



The chapel of Our Lady at Fourvière in Lyons. A statue of Mary appears on the top of the tower at right. It was at this location, on 23rd July 1816, that twelve young men (including Marcellin Champagnat), eight recently ordained and four seminarians, took a pledge to strive for the formation of a Society of Mary.



This photo is taken from the other side of the Saône River (wherein lies the central section of Lyons). Lyons city is situated at the junction of the Rhône and Saône rivers.

the Marist project at the major seminary at Lyons, and since it is also the first historical evidence in existence of the Society of Mary, it deserves some attention. Three copies are preserved (one was Marcellin Champagnat's); all were written by Colin, but bear no date, or signature or any kind of information.

'Mariistarum' (85) is in two of the three copies; perhaps it was the first use of the word. The words, "The Society of Mary" do not appear in the text; "The Society of the Holy Virgin" was used - and would be used again. The promise of fidelity to the Pope is explicitly mentioned in this document, and the same sentiments will be found strongly expressed also in the Rules of the various branches later on. The pledge speaks of a Congregation, and not simply of an association: and it alludes to ONE society, not several. It seemed the various branches were to count for little as against the unity of the whole work. The heading of the pledge is characteristic of Courveille and perhaps much of the text was also composed by him. It is obvious that all who signed knew quite well that they had really done nothing up till then except to elaborate a plan for a new society, but they were pledging themselves to act in the future so that such a society would be forthcoming.

In the weeks following their ordination (22nd July 1816) the promoters of the Society of Mary received their first pastoral appointments in the vast diocese of Lyons which included three Départements: Ain, Rhône and Loire. Jean-Claude Courveille was appointed curate at Verrières, in which was the minor seminary where Marcellin Champagnat had studied from 1805 to 1813.(86) Jean-Claude Colin became curate at Cerdon (Ain) where his elder brother, Pierre, had recently been appointed Parish Priest.(87) Etienne Déclas, Etienne Terrailon and Jean-Baptiste Seyve also became curates,(88) Jean-Antoine Gillibert became a professor at the minor seminary of l'Argentière whilst Philippe Janvier, later to become a close friend of Fr. M. Champagnat went to the missions in North America. Marcellin Champagnat himself was appointed curate to the parish of Lavalla.

85. This Latin word referred to a Congregation of Marists.

86. This appointment had, it was alleged, an ulterior motive since Vicar-General Bochard had hopes of attaching Fr. Courveille to his own Society of the Cross of Jesus. (P. Zind, V & M, No. 141, p. 2.)

87. Replacing Fr. Furnion S.J. (S.J. signifies "Jesuit").

88. J-B. Seyve went to Tarentaise, a parish adjoining Lavalla.

It was there, at Lavalla, that this young priest was to found the Institute of the Marist Brothers within six months of his arrival. We have briefly followed his years of seminary life which, for a person with his vigorous personality but non-academic background, contained many severe trials. He had, however, strongly maintained his determination to reach his first goal - priesthood in the Catholic Church. No doubt he often remembered how his father had also survived tough times, whilst during the same period he had been assisting his fellow-citizens of Marlies to survive the trials and tribulations of the Revolutionary years. Marcellin, now a priest, wanted also to show his leadership qualities and to give real assistance to others, above all in the sphere of providing education for neglected country children.

We cannot really understand a saint properly nor why he acted in a certain way, unless we have investigated the milieu in which he lived. Thus for Fr. Champagnat, the ignorance of the people of his time, especially in religious matters, was one of the main causes that impelled him to found an institute of teaching Brothers. Furthermore, the period in which he lived influenced his method of providing for this instruction. His years of preparation for the priesthood had contained many hardships for him, but these difficulties would fade into relative insignificance alongside the gigantic obstacles and trials that would beset him at Lavalla. It seems that only a most extraordinary person could have come through these troubles successfully.

CHAPTER FIVELAVALLA AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE MARIST BROTHERS

The region of Lavalla begins just above the present Hermitage of the Marist Brothers which is about 3½ kms due South from Saint-Chamond, and 48 kms South-West of Lyons. It rises higher as one moves westward, reaching its summit, Mt. Pilat, at 1,430 metres altitude. (1) Before the time of Father Champagnat Lavalla had been known as Le-Thoil-Saint-Andéol de Lavalla. (2) This title, so strange to us today, sums up very well the whole history of this area and expresses its triple origin; geographical - La-Valla; historical - Le Thoil; religious - Saint-Andéol. The word Lavalla (the valley) is deceptive, for a valley generally means a pleasant place, but Lavalla extends over the valleys of the Gier and the Ban, the two rivers forming a 'Y', both enclosed by steep banks carved over the centuries by their roaring torrents. The whole Lavalla region forms an ellipse with axes of 8 and 10 kms of such rugged terrain that to walk across any section of the region in a straight line is a most hazardous undertaking. Perhaps Br. Jean-Baptiste's description is fitting:

"The parish of Lavalla, situated on the slopes and in the passes of Mt. Pilat, was one of the most difficult to serve. Its population of about 2,000 was mostly scattered among the deep valleys or about the rugged heights of the mountain. It is impossible to give an exact idea of the situation and aspect of this parish. From every point of view there is nothing to be seen but abrupt declivities, rocks and precipices. Several of

1. The Hermitage is 9 kms due North of Le Bessat on the map, but it is 13 kms by road. Lavalla is 3½ kms due South of the Hermitage. The Hermitage is 420 metres above sea level and Lavalla is 650 metres. Hence Lavalla is about 2,000 feet in altitude.

2. F.M. (no surname given), Monographie des Communes de L'Arrondissement de St.-Etienne, St. Etienne, c.1900 (no date given), p.277. You have not always St.-Thoil forming part of the name in very old documents. You may find: Sanctus Andéolus in Vallibus: (as there were at least three valleys: Gier, Ban, Jarret); as there was another St.-Andéol not far away (between Lavalla and St.-Genis Laval): thus this was a way of distinguishing between the two places. Even today, since there is another La Valla not far away, this town of Lavalla is now spoken of as "La Valla-en-Gier".

its hamlets, situated in the ravines and defiles of Pilat, were four or five miles distant from the church, and were almost inaccessible then for want of passable roads."(3)

At the end of the 18th Century Mr. Messance of St. Etienne(4) described the valley thus:

"Parish situated in the mountains; land extensive and dry; rye is grown there for food. (5) Woodwork and the making of ribbons for St. Etienne and St. Chamond constitute its main resources; nails are also made there."(6)

Marcellin Champagnat, on receiving his appointment as curate of Lavalla and in view of the approaching feast of the Assumption,(7) went straightway to the parish, arriving there on the Tuesday evening of 13th August. When he came in sight of the church steeple, he knelt down to recommend his parishioners to Jesus and Mary.(8) No doubt he also surveyed

3. Br. Jean-Baptiste, Vie de Joseph-Benoît-Marcellin Champagnat, Lyons, 1856, Vol. 1, p. 38.

4. M. Messance, Recherches sur la population des Généralités d'Auvergne de Lyon, de Rouen, et de quelques Provinces et villes du Royaume, 1776 edition re-edited in 1973, Paris. Mr. M. Messance was "Intendant de la Généralités de Lyon" - Senior Administrative officer.

5. To 'rye' one could add 'potato'. Rye was a substitute for wheat. The flat part of Forez (or Loire) is very good for growing wheat whereas the mountainous areas are able to grow only rye.

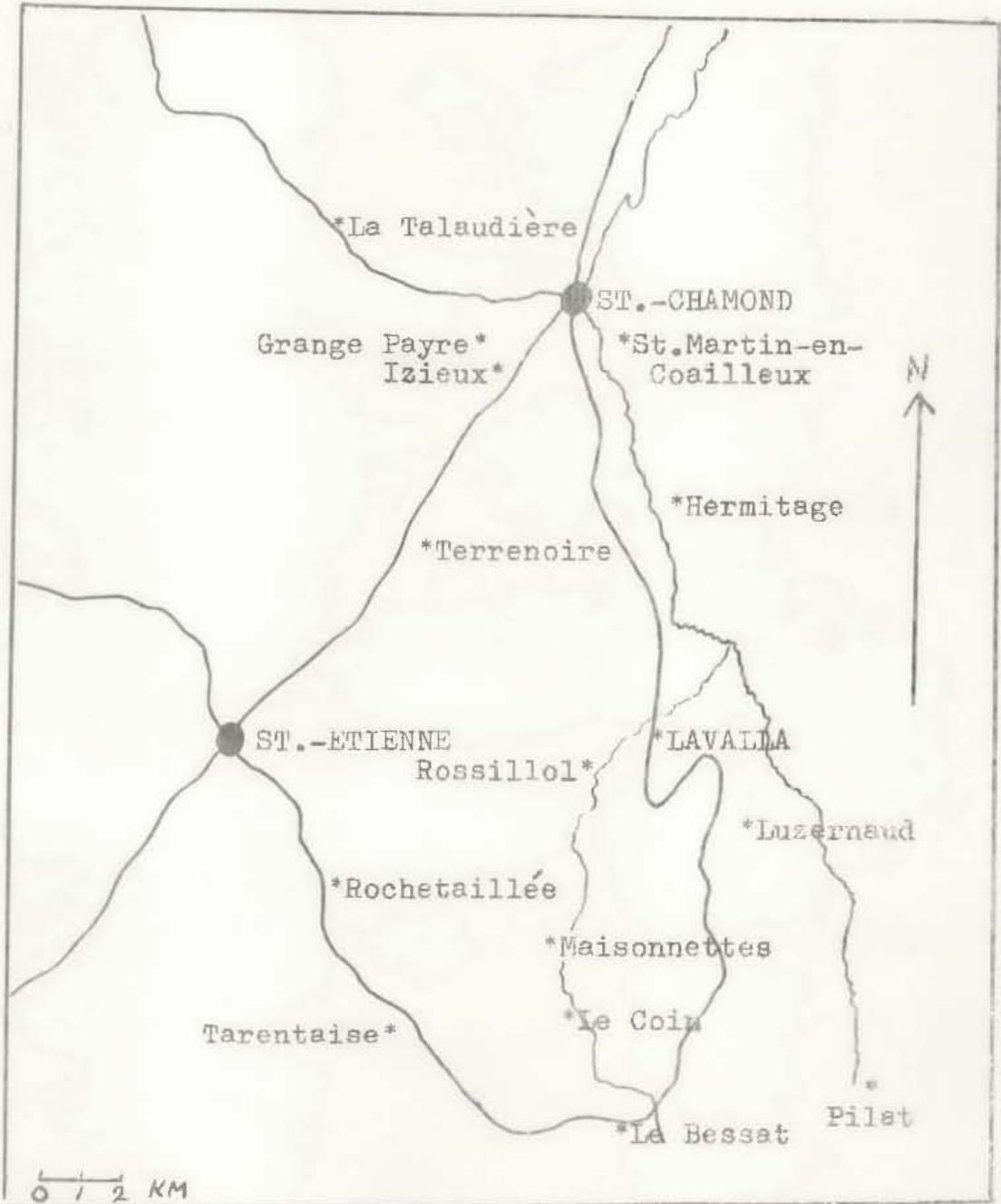
6. The first Brothers also, as we shall see, made nails.

7. The Assumption of Mary into Heaven is one of the most important feast-days in honour of Our Lady in the Catholic Church's calendar. In France, since Louis XIII, the 15th August had become to some extent the national feast of France. Napoleon himself agreed with it and assigned also to this day the feast of the mythical "saint Napoleon".

8. Br. Jean-Baptiste, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

This vantage point may have been on the road near Le Plateau above Laval hamlet, if Fr. Champagnat was coming from Marlihes direction; or if he had come from Lyons, this spot would be on the path from St.-Chamond to Lavalla. Today, a large red cross may be seen on this latter path, denoting the spot where he would have gained his first real view of Lavalla. However, from both access routes, Lavalla and its church are visible, with the scenery picturesque, especially in August (mid-summer).

MAP OF LAVALLA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS





Lavalla is on the slope of a hill. This photo was taken from higher up the slope and behind the centre of the town. The main building in the town, the Council Chambers, is in foreground and behind it may be seen the top of the tower above the Catholic Church. Note the rugged terrain.



Above is the main street (the only real street) in the town of Lavalla.

with admiration the beautiful countryside, as picturesque as one could wish. Lavalla itself, at an altitude of 2,000 metres, clings to the slopes above a wild gorge covered with majestic rocky summits, fields and patches of dark forest on the Pilat range. In the depths gurggle the rivers Ban and Gier, the latter cascading down a waterfall of 33 metres. Nowhere can be found even ten square yards of level ground, and the many hamlets nestle wherever they can find a footing.

The Lavalla parish, as determined by the Concordat of Napoleon in 1803, was very extensive, including the present towns of Lavalla and Le Bessat. Probably the new curate paused for a few minutes to pray in the church - a poor small building, over 700 years old, tracing its origins back to 1005 - a cornerstone bore that date. The church stood surrounded by a small cemetery where the Mayor's house and public park are situated today. The present church, built between 1844 and 1848 has the three bells from the old church; they were cast in 1532, 1535 and 1584 during the Renaissance, under François I and Henry III. (Their gothic inscriptions are now quite illegible). These bells were saved during the Revolution. Our new curate was not encouraged on entering this church; he found that it was dirty and very badly kept.

In the presbytery nearby lived the Parish Priest, Jean-Baptiste Rebod, appointed in February 1812 and now 38 years of age.⁽⁹⁾ He it was who opened the door to Marcellin Champagnat. The stifling impression of neglect that had choked him in the parish church was intensified at the presbytery; empty wine bottles lay about everywhere. Fr. Rebod fancied himself as a poet and indulged his poetic turn whenever he could. He had an unfortunate stammer and he gave the new curate to understand that he did not preach, but was content to give a little advice to his faithful parishioners on Sundays. ⁽¹⁰⁾ The new curate was struck immediately with the realisation that his first appointment to Lavalla was an appointment to a parish that seemed to be spiritually adrift.

9. Fr. Rebod died in St. Chamond in January 1825, a short time after his removal from Lavalla in June 1824, aged 48 years.

10. Fr. Rebod, it seems, had belonged to that generation of priests who had been hurriedly trained under the Revolution and the early days of the Empire - a period of spiritual misery when the Church was reduced to resorting to any means available. (P. Zind, "Sur les traces de Marcellin Champagnat", Présence Mariste, (formerly Voyages et Missions), No. 141, Lyons, 1979, p. 2.

The 15th August each year is, in the Catholic Church, the feast of "The Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven". It was on this day in 1816 that the new curate at Lavalla preached in public for the first time. It was probably not a gem of sacred eloquence, but the tense preacher would have been sincere and animated. He used the pulpit, a thing unknown there for several years, and his audience was appreciative. To understand Marcellin's actions over the next few weeks it is essential, I feel, to delve briefly into the history of Lavalla prior to 1816 so that we may appreciate the milieu into which this new priest had been thrust. In similar fashion, before dealing with Champagnat's founding of the Marist Brothers it will be necessary to understand the people with whom he was dealing and the influence he was having upon them.

The statistical tables for 1806 list the Lavalla population as 2,316 (11) whilst the 1825 census lists 2,568. About 30% of babies died before reaching their first year, whilst half the funerals were of children less than ten years of age. (12) Of the 36 marriages in the three years 1816-18, 21 were between partners of the same parish. Few of the witnesses to marriages or baptisms were able to sign. This fact, together with the many clumsy signatures, leads me to conclude that the number of illiterates was high.(13) Father Champagnat signed his first parish ceremony, a baptism, on 6th September 1816. During this same year he celebrated six baptisms and a burial.(14)

11. Lavalla is also listed as having a population of 1,675 in 1788, but this would not have included Le Bessat; whereas the 1806 and 1825 figures listed above are for Lavalla plus Le Bessat. (Tézenas du Montcel, *L'Assemblée du département de St. Etienne*, Société de l'Imprimerie Théolier, St. Etienne, 1903).

12. In those days some babies were brought to Lavalla for nursing (as also to other country areas) from cities such as St. Etienne. Many well-to-do women in larger towns considered breast-feeding of babies was beneath their dignity and hence had them cared for by women in country areas.

13. When witnesses could not sign, they were often supplied for, either by J. M. Badard (sacristan) or by Montmartin (town secretary), or even by one or other of those close to the church. In 1817 Jean Marie Granjon (to be met later in this thesis), who signed "Grand Jont", was present at three of the marriages celebrated that year.

14. In 1817 Champagnat celebrated 47 baptisms, 3 marriages and 19 burials. In 1818 he celebrated 34 baptisms, 2 marriages and 17 burials.

The population was virtually 100% Catholic, but during the Revolution their church was open only on the "decade" days for the worship of the goddess of reason (or of UNREASON, as Barge says). (15) However, parishioners gathered in the chapel of Our Lady of Pity (16) on Sundays and feastsdays. On 27th September 1793 the police arrived unexpectedly during the singing of Vespers, "entering the chapel on horseback, with swords drawn", and dispersed the panic-stricken people.(17) The next Sunday two members of "The Club" (18) came from St. Chamond to knock down the crosses in the cemetery. One parishioner, Jean Thibaud, "could not restrain his anger and pitched into these two ruffians from the Club very vigorously".(19) He was arrested, but owed his later release to the end

15. Jean-Louis Barge, Le Manuscrit de Jean-Louis Barge (Notes des principaux événements arrivés à Lavalla depuis 1789 jusqu'à ce jour, le 1 janvier 1819, 1789-1819, sheet 12. This manuscript is now in the Municipal Library of St. Etienne. Barge was Secretary-Registrar of the Commune of Lavalla during the French Revolution - a similar position to that held by Jean-Baptiste Champagnat, so that what he wrote gives us a good indication of events at Marlies also. It seems that Barge had no faith in the new system; he too failed to round up deserters from conscription. It seems he was well educated and very capable; he certainly had the confidence and support of the people of Lavalla.

16. This small chapel is 500 m north, slightly east, of Lavalla town, overlooking the valley of the Gier and the Soulages Dam with the Hermitage beyond in the same straight line. It was first built in 1640 for the plague-stricken; later it became a place of local pilgrimage. It is a very simple structure in dire need of repair (today in 1983) and plans are underway to do this. Father Champagnat was often there - with First Communion groups, with people making a pilgrimage, etc. It was a quiet place away from the town, away from the interference of the Parish Priest. The very old (some say 900 a.d.) statue, the Pietà, is now in the sanctuary of the parish church; it had been stolen from the old chapel but later recovered. Repairs had been effected to the chapel in 1817 - as we note from the parish accounts, and this also may have induced Father Champagnat to make use of it as much as possible.

17. Barge, op. cit., sheet 23.

18. The Jacobin Club, of course.

19. Barge, op. cit., sheet 23. (It should be noted here that several sheets of Barge's work have the same number: thus there are several "sheets 23").

of the Terror and, perhaps, to the summoning to Paris of Javogues.(20)

The Parish Priest Gaumont, however, was less fortunate; he died on the scaffold for having refused the oath set out in the constitution.(21) (Not one of the St. Chamond priests took the oath). Father Gaumont wished to replace the oath tendered him with this one: *"I swear fidelity to the Nation, to the Law, to the King, and to maintain the Constitution decreed by the National Assembly..., but to be faithful to the doctrine and discipline of the Catholic Church in all that concerns spiritual matters and the care of souls."* For his courageous stand this priest was hounded for two years, but was protected by the people of Lavalla. Bourgeois, magistrate at St. Chamond, sought in vain to arrest him. Finally he was captured and taken to St. Etienne on 23rd Aug. 1794. He was condemned and executed at Feurs. Lavalla Council and people were told to remember that it was *"to serve as an example for the fanaticism that has caused so much havoc in the commune*

20. Barge, op, cit., sheet 23 bis.

Javogues was a lawyer at Montbrison; elected Deputy in 1792 to the new Convention. He perhaps represents the worst elements in the government of that time. Many felt thankful when he was killed in 1796 since he had established a real reign of terror at St. Etienne (which name he had changed to Arméville), sending many to the guillotine, confiscating fortunes and properties by false lawsuits or by sheer fear and force. He was violent in speech and ruthless, "a bloodthirsty madman". He was sent to subdue Lyons which had revolted, 1793, and a great many were executed there. He had three henchmen who carried out his orders in the region of St. Etienne. He led the anti-religious aspects of the revolution (in this area) - against worship, churches, clergy, saints. It seems he delighted in massacre...by the guillotine, shooting, torture, fear. Poor Mr. Barge from Lavalla had to meet this "terrible Javogues" in St. Chamond. Javogues threatened to kill the people of the town for not supplying enough goods. It seems, however, that Barge was a match for him. To their credit the St. Etienne people refused to have the guillotine there, so Javogues sent it to Feurs where, alas, a great number of executions took place, including those of the Parish Priests of Lavalla and of St. Sauveur. Yet, in 1794, Javogues was called to Paris because Robespierre, Couthon and St. Just were not satisfied with his cruelty and toughness in getting rid of opponents to the new government. He had to defend himself, was released but remained in Paris, trying to live a hidden life but being actually surveyed by the numerous enemies he had made and who, one day, succeeded in having him condemned to death (1796).

21. "14th October 1794: Four non-juring and fanatical ecclesiastics were arrested during the course of our administration; their heads have fallen under the sword of the law. Their names are: A. Robert (curé de Saint-Sauveur), C. Briery (curé de Pavezin), Gaumont (curé de Lavalla), J. Mathivet (curé de Maclas)" ("Archives de la Loire", Liasse 156, J.B. Galley, *Saint-Etienne et son District pendant la Révolution*, (3 volumes), St. Etienne, 1904, Vol. 2, p. 691.

of Lavalla." (22)

Peace would be certain only after the abdication of Napoleon, thus enabling Father Champagnat to accomplish his work in comparative freedom. Catholicism, "a declining, emasculated force in the eighteenth century, was now moving towards a new militancy on the crest of a wave of religious revival" (23) and Champagnat would be a real leader in this revival at Lavalla.

The general family life of the people of Lavalla is perhaps best described by J. B. Galley:

"Family life was solidly established by tradition, by religion, by respect for authority. Many books today vouch for the authority of the father, deference to women, obedience of children. When several generations lived under one roof, respect for grandparents was sacred; the authority of father and mother was not questioned; children spoken to as "thou" did not answer their parents in that way; it was the father who sat first at table, shared the bread and asked the blessing; examples of disrespect seem to have been rare; the education of children, imparted orally and tenderly, was based on the inflexible laws of work and respect". (24)

We might consider that one criterion of good morality, in the Christian sense, at Lavalla was the small number of children born "father unknown". There were 3 in 1816, 1 in 1817 and 1 in 1818; that is 2.2% for the three years, whereas the figure for St. Etienne was 3.8%, and in 1805 for France the figure was 4.8%. (25) Again, as Galley remarks:

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22. J-L. Barge, op.cit., sheet 16 (many sheets with this number).
 23. A. Cobban, A History of Modern France, Vol. 2, Middlesex, 1965, p.74.
 24. J. B. Galley came originally from Lavalla; he was a Protestant. He was librarian at the Municipal Library at St. Etienne. (Bibliothécaire was his real title of profession, and it means a great deal more than Librarian in the Australian sense; it means a research man, a scholar, an historian - the point of reference for questions on events, people, etc.) He was a Deputy for Loire Department. The above quote is taken from L'Election de SAINT-ETIENNE à la fin de l'ancien régime, St. Etienne, 1903: a book of 604 pages commonly called St. Etienne Before the Revolution, which treats also the surrounding areas of St. Etienne, page 31.
 25. Br. Jean Roche, op. cit., p. 5.

"As a general rule the moral value of the people cannot be doubted; family honour, uprightness, acceptance of hard work - these were the social pattern, and religion would bless them with its approval and its sacred ministrations".(26)

In summer, outdoor work occupied the whole day; in winter there was a long time after the evening meal which was spent in weaving, repairing tools, or sitting by the fire. Neighbours might come in to talk, to help, to sing; the great thing, it was said, was warmth and company.(27) Sunday was different; all who could went to Mass at the church, mostly in family groups. Afterwards the women could make a few purchases in the shops or even visit the doctor, whilst the men generally took something in the inn or tavern. Again in the afternoon some would return to play games, or to relax among friends. The pastime for men and women was dancing; dances usually taking place on festival occasions outside of Lent.(28)

Since the dances at Lavalla were something that the new curate, Fr. Champagnat, was to attack strongly, it is fitting to make some mention of them here. Since the Revolution and the Empire, the old regional dances had been replaced by a new one, the waltz, brought back from the German States by the soldiers.(29) Contrary to the old dances in which the partners touched each other only occasionally and lightly with the hand, this new dance was performed by couples in a close embrace and moving together as one. The Church had traditionally opposed the

26. J. B. Galley, op. cit., p. 109

27. G. Duby and A. Wallon (Eds.), Histoire de la France rurale Editions du Seuil, 1976, Vol. 3, pp. 334-335.

28. Ibid. Lent is the liturgical name of the forty days prior to Easter each year.

29. P. Zind, "Sur les traces de Marcellin Champagnat", V & M, No. 141, p. 2.

old dances,(30) so it was not surprising that this new dance was looked upon as scandalous. The fiddlers who exercised their profession at public balls found themselves forced to renounce it if they wished to receive absolution for their sins at the Catholic confessional: nevertheless, exception was granted in favour of family dances such as on the occasion of a wedding.(31)

The clergy were not alone in their opposition to the waltz. On 8th July 1807 the Journal de Paris wrote:

"For a long time now, husbands, mothers and all sensible people have protested against the waltz. J. J. Rousseau had said he would never allow either his daughter or his wife to dance the waltz. No dance, certainly, is more apt to upset women and to put fire into all their senses."

But besides these moral reasons, the newspaper adduced medical arguments:

"There is another objection which will perhaps appeal more than all our moral reflections, namely, that there is no

30. A book in the St. Etienne Library: J. A. Guer, César Aveugle et Voyageur, London, 1740: is relevant here. It's a sort of romanticised story ("histoire un peu romancée") of a man born in Lavalla who was named César Epinay. He becomes blind, has a life full of all sorts of adventures; finally lives in Paris, being helped by the noble family of Saint-Chamond. He is a good christian, has gone twice to the pilgrimage of La Louvesc (St. Regis having just been canonized). As he is gifted as a fiddler, he earns his life playing music at dances. But in Paris he meets Fr. Bouchetar, from Montbrison, who is scandalized at hearing that he provides dance music for girls, and tells him he is damned. Fr. Bouchetar belongs to the Lazarist Order. César told him that if Bouchetar would not give him confession he would go to some other priest. However, he finally goes back to Bouchetar and offers him his violin; but that priest seized it and immediately flung it back into his face. Thus, well before Marcellin Champagnat's time, the Church had taken a strong stand against dancing.

31. P. Zind, V & M, No. 141, p. 2.

other dance which impairs the features, causes more fatigue to the body or occasions more serious accidents; last week a young woman experienced the proof of this: she left the child she was breast-feeding to rush into the whirlwind of a waltz. Her blood and milk rushed to her head; she had hardly time to say she was unwell, when she fell dead into the arms of her partner." (32)

Naturally, Father Champagnat shared the opinion of the time against dances,(33) and he did not favour them at Lavalla. The almost total lack of documents at Lavalla or elsewhere to cover these first few years of the apostolate of our young curate, (34) plus the fact that the actions of Fr. Champagnat concerning dances comes virtually solely from Br. Jean-Baptiste, an author who was not always accurate in his reproduction of documents (at times changing words, or adding items so as to alter the meaning), must lead us to regard with some suspicion what he has written on this matter. It was alleged that when the parishioners warned the curate that a dance had been organised for such and such a time and place,

32. Journal de Paris, 8th July 1807. Most newspapers in those times were of four pages. Unfortunately, very few of such have been collected, The "depot legal" did not exist then, and even when it commenced in 1847 it was, at first, little observed.

It is also worth noting that opposition to dances has not been unknown even in the 20th Century. For instance the London Evening Standard of 13th December 1927 reported that the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini was attempting to regulate dancing on the ground that modern dances were "immoral and improper, evil germs that will breed immorality in the minds of my people". (Quoted in Denis Mack Smith, Mussolini, London, 1981, p. 160).

33. It is almost certain that the seminary of St. Irenaeus would have had the following book in its library: Abbé Gautier, Traité contre les Dances et les Mauvaises Chansons, 2nd Edition, Paris, 1780; in-12.

34. In Barge's manuscript (J-L. Barge, op. cit.), towards the end, there is an allusion to the parish priest and his curate prohibiting dances, but Barge and others were successful in finding a hidden location for their dances; but it seems that the allusion rather corresponds to 1814 or 1815. He does not give the name of the curate.

Champagnat hastened to announce from the pulpit that he would hold a catechism session that same day in the hamlet concerned. This announcement was usually sufficient to have the dance cancelled.(35) Br. Jean-Baptiste records one occasion when our priest surprised quite a large gathering who had their singing and dancing going at full swing:

"After waiting a moment at the door, he suddenly opened it, entered, and, without saying a word, stood looking gravely at the assembly. The amusement instantly ceased. All instinctively rose and stood for a moment in dismay; then dancers and spectators made their escape, pell-mell, by doors and windows, while a few of the less active stole under the tables. The mistress of the house, thus left alone, begged pardon with clasped hands and tearful eyes, alleging, in excuse, that it was her first offence, and that the like would never again happen in that house. Father Champagnat replied, in his characteristic fashion, "Yes, the first time; and the first time you've been caught".(36)

Since Rigorism (37) was the accepted thing in the seminaries where Champagnat had studied and since it seems that the waltz was causing some scandal in France, Marcellin's strong opposition to dances, as depicted by Br. Jean-Baptiste, probably occurred.

More serious problems existed at Lavalla. When Catholic worship had been officially restored at Lavalla on 15th November 1801, there had been general rejoicing.(38) However, the revolutionary years had sown the seed of much intra-parochial animosity. Bitter passions divided the inhabitants, "who were more concerned about their private property than about public welfare".(39) Many became intent on entering into lawsuits, often gaining favourable decisions by double-dealing and

35. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 57.

36. Ibid, p. 58.

37. Referred to in the Introductory Chapter to this Thesis.

38. P. Zind, *V & M*, No. 143, p. 2.

39. Ibid, p.2.

bribery. Many lost their Catholic faith and Parish Priest Rebois was not really the man capable of redressing this sad state of affairs for the Church.

Father Champagnat felt that his pastoral mission was first of all the Christian renewal of the parish, and to achieve this with success he was firmly convinced that he had to give the example of a high spiritual standard. Following Sulpician ideals, the first condition for this essential requirement was to be had in the strictest possible observance of the rule of life. This he drew up, for himself, under eighteen points.(40)

He rose at 4 a.m. each morning; washed and dressed, then spent a half-hour in his room making a meditation which he had foreseen and prepared the previous day. His daily morning Mass was always preceded by a one-quarter hour's preparation, followed by a similar time of thanksgiving at its conclusion. Once a year he made it a duty to read the various Rubrics of the Roman Missal. After Mass each morning he made himself available to any parishioners who wished to go to Confession. He returned to his room to devote the rest of the morning to study, unless occupied with the duties of ministry; but in any case he was careful to allot one hour each day to the study of Theology. In general, no instruction would be given without serious preparation. At some time each day he went to the parish church to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, and to entreat the Blessed Virgin for his people.(41)

Remembrance of God's presence was habitual in all his actions; while as to meals, recreation or leisure time he conformed to the custom of the major seminary of St. Irenaeus at the Croix-Rousse in Lyons.(42). Part of the afternoon was generally spent in visiting the sick in their homes. Part 13 of his rule stipulated: "*I will apply myself in a special way to the virtue of gentleness, and to gain my neighbour more easily to*

40. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., pp. 39,40

41. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., p. 50

42. P. Zind, V & M, No. 143, p. 2.

God, I will treat everyone with great kindness." (43)

We know that the people of Lavalla were soon inspired by him. Everything about him, his gestures, his stirring words, his strong manly voice and his kindness, appealed strongly to these parishioners. His first sermons were short and simple, but so impressive that, on leaving the church, people remarked that they had never before had a curate in their parish who preached so well.(44) In a short time a wonderful change was visible throughout the parish. The Catholic faith revived and the sacraments were frequented.

Br. Jean-Baptiste remarks that on Sundays and Feast-days, Fr. Champagnat would go to the church early in the morning, where he would find a large number of parishioners already awaiting him. He began hearing confessions immediately and did not cease till eleven o'clock, in order to sing High Mass. The visible transformation in the parishioners towards prayers at their church induced this priest to institute evening devotions there on Sundays. Vespers were always sung after the morning High Mass, so the evening devotions consisted of the singing of Compline; being followed by some further evening prayers, a short reading from a pious book and some comments from Fr. Champagnat. (45) As one person, Mr. Joseph Violet, later said, "*I was a boarding pupil at Fr. Champagnat's school at Lavalla and I still remember how every Sunday, a number of men used to gather at the rectory to spend the evening with him. He did this to keep them away from the tavern*".(46)

These evening devotions at the Church were soon attended by most of the parishioners, since all felt the desire to hear more from their new young priest. However, when Fr. Champagnat started his religious group of Marist Brothers, the Parish Priest, Fr. Rebod, was one of his foremost antagonists. Fr. Rebod did not hesitate to condemn the actions of his curate publicly and would reprimand him in front of the congregation. One Sunday evening, whilst Champagnat was giving a short talk at the

43. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., p. 40

44. Similar eulogies on the preaching of such "new" priests at this time were common enough; so long had the people been without good sermons.

45. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 52.

46. Testimony given before the archdiocesan commission which was investigating Marcellin Champagnat's reputation for sanctity, Lyons, 19th November 1888. Joseph Violet was born at Lavalla in 1807. (Br. G. Michel, FMS, January 1974).

conclusion of Compline,(47) Fr. Rebod brusquely entered the church from the main entrance and intoned the hymn, "O crux, ave", this being the hymn by which Compline was always terminated. The congregation, startled and even scandalized, turned and gazed at him and, with an air of indignation, listened to his singing. We have been told that their attitude showed plainly how much they disapproved of his conduct. Champagnat, however, with masterly self-control, went on continuing his instruction after the Parish Priest had finished singing.(48)

For a young, dedicated priest, to have had to live with a pastor who, as Pierre Zind has put it, '*worshipped the bottle*',(49) must have been an excruciating ordeal. When, in spite of this, he achieved so much, we realise what a great man he must have been. Br. Jean-Baptiste, in his initial account of Father Champagnat in 1856, dealt at some length with the unfortunate excessive drinking habit of Father Rebod. He wrote that Marcellin tried to help rid Rebod of his sad affliction by such means as ardent prayer, friendly advice and that he even went to the extent of depriving himself of wine hoping his example might help Rebod. However, although he failed to cure Rebod of the habit, it was claimed that he had lessened this priest's excessive lapses.(50) The new Superior-General of the Marist Fathers, Fr. Favre, complained of this passage(51) and demanded alteration. Hence, the initial edition was with-

47. Compline is the official (liturgical) evening prayer in the Catholic Church.

48. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 137.

Since Rebod knew that Champagnat's new congregation of Brothers was being opposed by Vicar-General Bochard, perhaps he felt obliged to oppose his curate and at times may have been doing so at the behest of Bochard.

49. P. Zind, Les Nouvelles Congrégations de Frères Enseignants en France de 1800 à 1830, Lyons, 1969, p. 127.

50. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 42.

51. He complained of three passages in all, to be treated herewithin where appropriate. (See O.M., Vol.2, pp.795-796 where Courveille's fault is treated.) However, it seems that Br. Jean-Baptiste was right: we are quite sure of the complaints that "kept coming in" to the archbishop in 1824, so that he removed Rebod from Lavalla in June of that year. Fr. Rebod died the following January though he was still in his 40's. It seems clear that Fr. Rebod was a real cross to both Marcellin and the parish. For eight years Marcellin had to live and work with this state of affairs: a true martyrdom for a young priest. Only a strong man could bear up against all this. (No wonder Fr. Champagnat went to live with the Brothers at the first opportunity!). Reference to these three passages may also be found in Epistolae Variæ Generalium, Archives générales des pères maristes, Rome, N. 272, p. 308.

drawn and a revised "First Edition" was published in 1857. In this revised edition Br. Jean-Baptiste used this space to insert a fine eulogy on Champagnat by Rebod that, curiously enough, is something similar to what Rebod later said to the schools' Inspector concerning Champagnat.(52) Br. Jean-Baptiste reported Rebod as saying:

"The conduct of Fr. Champagnat, for the eight years during which he was my curate, was so regular and edifying, that I never had occasion to point out anything that might be truly called a fault. In order to please him, and at his own request, I watched him very closely, but I had frequently to moderate his ardour for work and his spirit of mortification. Had I permitted him to do so, he would have spent a great part of the night in study and prayer, and would have injured his health by privations and austerities. It was on these two points only that I had to restrain him, and he was not one of those headstrong devotees, who will only follow the weak light of their own reason: he always received any remonstrances with respect and submission".(53)

It is time now to look into Champagnat's adventures in founding his group of teaching Brothers. We know that even in his seminary days he had formed the firm intention of founding such a group. A brief investigation into the schooling system at Lavalla and nearby areas must convince us that Champagnat had been sent to an area where the proper education of children was a serious problem. Of course, the whole nation had been experiencing a difficult period in education. The following extracts from official inspections during the Revolution are revealing.

52. This occurred in 1822 and is treated below in this thesis.

53. Br. Jean-Baptiste, Life of Father Champagnat, English edition (translated from the Third French Edition), Rome, 1947, p. 38.

Br. Gabriel Michel (France) in a letter to the author, wrote: "Many a time I thought: when may Rebod have said that? If he had survived Marcellin Champagnat his words would have been normal, for instance on the day of Champagnat's funeral; but having died in 1825, it looks a bit strange that he ever had the opportunity of saying that. But drunkards have moments like that when they try to repair in words what they did wrong". Yet, it is a fact, that Rebod did say something of this nature when he gave his report on Champagnat to the Inspector of Schools in 1822.

Cambry, an Inspector of the Academy, after visiting the schools in the Département of Finistère, (54) 1794-95, summarised the state of school education in the whole Département thus:

"I declare it with frankness since my rounds in so many communes, the word teacher ("instituteur") is for me synonymous with ignoramus and drunkard." (55)

Again, in 1798:

"With the exception of a very small number of Départements the primary schools (of France) either do not exist or have a very precarious existence." (56)

We are told that in the years VIII and IX of the Republic,(57) whether for or against the new ideas of government, the replies of Prefects and the General Councils could be summarised thus:

"Before the Revolution there were primary schools almost everywhere,....All that has disappeared..." (58)

Gregoire, in his Annales de la Religion wrote, *"The greater part of the teachers are irreligious, drunkards, immoral and are the dregs*

54. Finistère is in Brittany, North-West France.

55. Cambry, 'Voyages dans le Finistère en 1794-1795', Paris, an VII, quoted by L. Grimaud, Histoire de la Liberté d'Enseignement en France, t. II, Paris, 1898, p. 167.

56. Message du 3 brumaire an VII, de "Messages, arrêtés et proclamations du Directoire exécutif", t. VI, p. 58: quoted by Grimaud, op. cit., t. II, p. 210. One might also add the words of an outstanding French romanticist of the 19th Century, A. de Musset, "Il faut être ignorant comme mon maître d'école..." (He must be as ignorant as my school-teacher.)

57. Year VIII began 23rd September 1799.

58. Report presented by Chaptal, Minister of the Interior, to the Council of State, 18 brumaire an IX. Cf. Dictionnaire Buisson Pédagogique, Vol. 5, "Consulat", pp. 514-515.

of the human race".(59) It is important to note that opposition to the situation of the post-Revolution state of education in France came from both secular and religious quarters. Guizot, later to become Minister of Public Instruction, wrote, "*Many promises were made but nothing was done*".(60) Lavalla was in the St. Etienne district, Département of Loire, in which Département primary schools virtually disappeared during the Revolution.(61) For instance, it was written that in Cher, "*The school situation is almost the same as in other Départements, that is to say that the first stage of instruction is virtually non-existent*".(62) The Loire report added, "*The young are living in the most profound ignorance and are given to the most alarming dissipation*".(63)

There was some slight improvement under Napoleon, especially after his signing of the Concordat with the Catholic Church in 1801. Contrary to a commonly held but erroneous opinion, when Fr. Champagnat arrived at Lavalla the 75 parishes of the St. Etienne district were conducting a relatively important number of primary schools and had been doing this for some ten years past.(64) Since 1807, the year in which Napoleon legally

59. Grégoire, 'Annales de la Religion', t.II, p.210; quoted by Grimaud, op. cit., t.II, p. 245.

60. F. Guizot, Mémoires pour Servir à l'Histoire de mon Temps, t.III, Paris, 1860, p. 28.

61. E. Allain, L'Oeuvre scolaire de la Révolution (1789-1802): Etudes critiques et documents inédits, Paris, 1891, pp.349ff.

62. A. Babeau, L'Ecole de Village pendant la Revolution, Paris, 1881,p.251.

63. Ibid, p.261.

64. Abbé D'Regel, "Etat de la situation scolaire dans l'Arrondissement de St. Etienne", Archives Nationales (Paris), F17-10377: 30th July 1819.(Abbé D'Regel at that time was Rector of the Academy in Lyons). One may read in this document: "Il y a peu de cantons où l'Instruction primaire soit aussi bien organisé qu'à St. Chamond, et le comité paraît presque également content des Instituteurs du chef lieu et des Frères (= des Ecoles Chretiennes) qui y tiennent école.... L'aisance est répandue dans toutes les communes de ce canton, parce qu'elles prennent plus ou moins part à la fabrication des rubans, et à celles des étoffes. Les environs de St.Chamond sont pour cette raison des plus favorisées de France." Later, it adds, for the canton of St. Genest-Malifaux wherein is found Marlihes: "Le canton de St. Genest-Malifaux est un de ceux ou on s'est mis le plus tôt en devoir de se conformer à l'Ordonnance de 29 février..."(There are few cantons where primary education is as well organised as at St. Chamond, and the committee seems almost equally happy with the teachers in our town and also the Brothers (De La Salle) who have a school there... Prosperity abounds in all the towns of the district since they all take some part in the making of ribbons and of cloth. The area of St. Chamond is for this reason the most favoured in France...The area of St. Genest-Malifaux is one of those which has quickly undertook to conform to the law of 29th February..."

authorised 15 communities of women devoted to teaching,(65) 18 of the 75 parishes in St. Etienne district had set up 37 boys' schools, with 45 men and 5 women teachers for 1,501 pupils. Six of these schools were Communal.(66) St. Chamond had three boys' schools: one taught by the De La Salle Brothers in St. Chamond itself, plus private schools in Doizieux and Lavalla. In fact, Lavalla in 1807 had both a boys' school and a girls' school.

In 1808 a law, passed in March, established the University of France and granted it the monopoly of all stages of instruction. However, primary education was not allotted any monetary grants: there were no salaries for teachers, no allowance of any kind.(67) The whole situation was altered by Louis XVIII's Ordinance of 29th February 1816 which stipulated that 50,000 francs annually be assigned from the Royal Treasury for the compilation and printing of books suitable for needful instruction, for establishing model schools and to pay lay teachers.

65. P. Zind, *N.C.*, p. 621

66. Since 1807 primary schools were divided into two groups: (a) Parish schools where the teachers were chosen by the town council which had to provide lodging for them, and arrange fees which parents had to pay. These were called Communal schools. (b) Private schools established on the personal initiative of the teacher apart from any local authority: the school fee was a matter arranged between master and pupil's parents.

There were boys' schools, girls' schools and mixed schools. In addition to the 37 boys' schools, St. Etienne district in 1807 had 34 girls' schools and 30 mixed schools. Fourteen of the girls' schools were communal, but only one of the mixed schools was communal - the one in Izieux taught by Sisters. Official figures for 1807: 101 schools: 2,114 boys and 2,073 girls. Teachers: 59 male and 204 female, including 8 De La Salle Brothers and 147 Sisters. Almost all the communal schools were in the hands of religious teachers. Pierre Zind remarked, "If we include clandestine schooling - in homes, in presbyteries, by itinerant teachers and add thereto the new schools opened since 1807, we reach the conclusion that when Fr. Champagnat became Curate at Lavalla, almost half the children of the area spent some time in a primary school. Br. G. Michel noted for the author, "I think we have to insist on 'spent some time'. That is: you register a school (a house) and the statistics say: such village has a school. But you may have a good room in a farmhouse with 5 or 6 boys and girls, and that's all - when the village has 500 boys and girls between 6 and 12 years of age. Because, for instance, even in 1837 a statistic for France says that only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the boys and $\frac{1}{6}$ th of the girls are really at school. Even if Loire was one of the best Départements, I'm not sure at all that it could have been very different from the rest of France".

67. P. Zind, L'Application de l'Ordonnance du février 1816 et la situation de l'Enseignement Primaire dans l'Arrondissement de de St. Etienne (Loire) (1815-1822), Lyons, 1956, p. 45.

Article 14 of this Ordinance gave a strong impetus to primary education. It stated that every parish was required to make provision so that all children therein could receive primary schooling and that indigent children could be received gratuitously.(68)

It seems obvious that the intense national interest in education encouraged our young Marcellin in his plans to found a society of teaching Brothers. We will soon see, however, that he faced incalculable hardships and setbacks. Firstly, let us examine more closely the education system at Lavalla in 1816. Young girls had been catered for ever since 1533, when religious Sisters first set up a school there. Later, (69) these ladies took the name of Sisters of St. Joseph. Furthermore, after the Revolution, they amalgamated with the branch of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Lyons, then in 1803 reestablished their school at Lavalla. Probably they had a small room in the convent to which some girls came to learn to read, to write and to sew. They paid a fee.(70)

According to Pierre Zind, a boys' school was set up at Lavalla in 1807. (71) This was probably true. In any case, the schooling situation for boys at Lavalla in 1816 was very different from what has previously been thought. Unfortunately, Br. Jean-Baptiste incorrectly wrote: "*there was no school for boys in Lavalla*": (72) whereas the well-qualified Jean-Baptiste Galley (73) was the schoolmaster at Lavalla from 1816 till 1818. After marrying in 1818 he went and taught at St.-Julien-en-Jarez, and he then became the best-paid teacher in the whole St.-Chamond area.(74) Admittedly, after he left Lavalla in 1818, no worthwhile successor was found; but people's forgetfulness is well illustrated by what the next Parish Priest of Lavalla had to say concerning the situation of 1816. Father Bedoin, Parish Priest at Lavalla 1824-64, wrote:

68. Ibid, p.45.

69. When their main body was founded at Le Puy in 1650.

70. Schooling for girls at Lavalla would become much more important 1820-1840 when many could acquire work in the factories along the river, where the ability to write and to handle arithmetic could give a girl a better position than just stitching and weaving all day.

71. Zind, *L'Application de l'Ordonnance...*, p. 27 and map No. IV.

72. Br. Jean-Baptiste, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 83

73. Born 1774, he gained 3rd Degree Brevet 12th December 1816.

74. He was assured of 300 francs annually, plus each student's monthly payments of 1.50 francs. He had 40 students in winter and 35 in summer. ("Etat de la situation scolaire....de St. Etienne", *Archives Nationales*, Paris, F17 10 377; 30 juillet 1819.

"Well may this parish thank God that it did not have up till then a lay teacher. If unfortunately it had possessed one of those men (as happens at times) who dishonour their profession, we like to think that he did not extend his influence, for then (in a locality like this) the flag of vice would have floated on almost every roof." (75)

Others have written that if there had been any school at Lavalla for boys it would have been held only in winter, using some itinerant teacher. It is true that we have a great deal of evidence concerning the poor quality of many such teachers: most of them had no pedagogical training and were not "commissioned" by the Academy. However, this document recently discovered in the National Archives by Pierre Zind gives the lie to these earlier opinions. For instance, Father Bourdin wrote (76) of an itinerant teacher being at Lavalla in 1816 and that such a man was a friend of Father Rebod. He must be referring to Jean Montmartin, the man who succeeded J-B. Galley. Born 1794, he had a 2nd Degree Brevet; (77) unfortunately he was a drunkard, which perhaps explains his friendship with Fr. Rebod.

When Fr. Champagnat started his school at Lavalla and it drew pupils from Montmartin's school, Father Rebod, as we will soon see, did his utmost to prevent any students deserting his friend; in spite of the fact that many parents were anxious to remove their children from this teacher whose gambling and drunkenness had become scandalous.(78) Perhaps the existence of such a school gave inner strength to Father Champagnat's resolve to found a truly Christian school for boys where, as in the Sisters' school, the students could work together with their teachers as a

75. M. Bedoin, Critique de la 'Vie du P. Champagnat', Lavalla, 1860, p. 35. (Copy in FMS Archives, Rome).

76. Bourdin was one of the early chaplains of the Marist Brothers; arriving at the Hermitage 1828 and writing in 1830 some early history of the Brothers. ("Notes de M. Bourdin sur les Origines des Frères Maristes (1815-1826)", FMS Archives, c.1830, p.2).

77. There were only three teachers in the whole St. Chamond area who had 2nd Degree Brevet or higher at this time. Montmartin earned 100 francs per annum plus monthly payments of 1.50 francs by each of 40 students in winter and 25 in summer. (Archives Nationales, loc. cit.)

78. Bourdin, op. cit., p. 3. Again, Pierre Zind refers to their together worshipping the bottle thus: "Soutenu par M. Rebod, Curé de la paroisse, avec qui il partageait le culte de la bouteille..." (Zind, N.C., p.127).

living entity - with competition, progress, rewards, a sense of purpose and of family, plus the bonus of the opportunity, as we shall see, of having his teachers employ the then-acclaimed simultaneous method of the De La Salle Brothers: a method of teaching that even J-B. Galley had not used.(79)

Champagnat visited St. Irenaeus seminary in Lyons to make a three-day retreat early in December 1816. (80) It seems certain that he would have discussed his future intentions with his life-long supporter, Fr. Gardette, who was still the seminary's superior. He returned from Lyons on Saturday, October 5th, and next day, the Feast of the Holy Rosary in the Catholic Church, he decided to speak to a young man, Jean-Marie Granjon, about becoming a teacher. This young man's piety and decorum had impressed Marcellin ever since the priest's early days at Lavalla. (81) The fact that this young man of 22 years had been a Grenadier in the Imperial Guard of Napoleon, no doubt gave him some prominence in the Lavalla community. Marcellin simply wished to talk to him and to make his acquaintance. The brief conversation revealed to the Curate that this farm worker might become the first member of the teaching institute he so much desired to found. (82)

Three weeks later, Jean-Marie Granjon came and asked Father Champagnat to visit a sick person in his hamlet, La Rive (near the first dam on the Gier River as you leave the Hermitage and head towards Lavalla). It was Saturday 26th October and night had fallen, but Marcellin set out immediately with his companion. As they walked, Marcellin had a good chance to sound out further the dispositions and qualities of this young man. "Sage" is the word Father Bourdin wrote, "*good, sensible, well-behaved*". (83) Champagnat spoke of God, of the Christian beliefs and of the futility of a life on earth that was not lived in spiritual union with God. (84) Marcellin was so satisfied with Jean-Marie's responses that next day, when he returned to the sick person, he also took time to meet with Jean-Marie again to whom he gave a copy of Le Manuel chrétien.(85) The

79. Pierre Zind informed the author that Galley was using the old teaching method. The simultaneous method is described in the appendix to this thesis.

80. Archives générales de St-Sulpice, fonds de Lyon, reg. 3 et 4.

81. Br. Jean-Baptiste, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 67.

82. P. Zind, V & M, No. 144, p. 3.

83. M. Bourdin, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

84. P. Zind, V & M. No. 144, p.5

85. The Christian's Manual.

young man refused to accept it, pointing out that he could not read. "Take it just the same; you can use it in learning to read and I will give you lessons, if you wish". Jean-Marie accepted.(86)

Next day, Monday 28th, an event took place that convinced Marcellin he must immediately set about the founding of a teaching congregation.(87) He had been called to a carpenter's home in Les Palais, a hamlet beyond Le Bessat where a young lad, Jean-Baptiste Montagne, was lying grievously ill. (88) What was the priest's horror to discover that this lad of 17 years did not know the principal mysteries of the Catholic faith, nor even of the existence of God. "God? Who is that?", was his answer to the priest's first question. What was to be done? The directives of the Diocese to the clergy were definite: "*Priests should not give confession....to those who are ignorant of the principal mysteries of the faith*". (89) Fr. Champagnat spent two hours trying to instruct him in the basic Christian beliefs. He then heard his confession and prepared him to die in good dispositions. Father Champagnat went away for a short while to minister to another sick person in a nearby house, and when he returned he found the parents in tears; their son had died a few minutes after the priest had gone.(90) A twofold feeling of joy and fear flooded the Curate's heart: joy at being just in time to help the dying person meet his God, but also fear at the thought of the many other children growing up without any instruction in Christian values. He could not help reflecting on his way home, on the religious plight of France in the wake of the Revolution and the Empire. Deciding he had no time to waste, Marcellin went straightway to Jean-Marie Granjon to ask him to become the first member of a community of teaching Brothers.(91)

86. Zind, *V & M*, No. 144, p. 5.

87. Br. Jean-Baptiste, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 67, 68.

88. Though close to Tarentaise, Les Palais was in the parish of Lavalla, which at that time included Le Bessat. Today, Les Palais is about midway between Tarentaise and Le Bessat.

89. P. Zind, *V & M*, No. 144, p. 5.

90. The death notice gives 7 p.m. as the time he died.

91. Br. Jean-Baptiste, *VIE*, Vol. 1, p. 69. It takes more than two hours to walk from Les Palais to Luzernod (the hamlet of Jean-Marie) passing through Le Bessat and the hamlet Flurieux.



This sign is on the roadside near the ruins of a house in the remote hamlet of Les Palais in the hills of Le Bessat. It was here that Champagnat was appalled by the religious ignorance of a teen-age dying boy and he was impelled to found a congregation of teaching Brothers as soon as possible. It reads: "Here, at Les Palais in Bessat, on 28th October 1816, Blessed Marcellin Champagnat came to visit a dying boy aged 17 years. He noticed the young man, J.B. Montagne, knew nothing at all about the God he was soon to meet. He prepared him for his entry into eternal life; but, frightened by the spiritual ignorance he had just observed, decided to wait no longer before commencing to gather together some followers who would become, under the protection of Mary, the Congregation of the Marist Brothers, today spread in 70 countries of the world."



A photo taken from a hillside in Iuzernod area (about 6 km south of Iavalla), showing typical countryside. In middle distance is hamlet of Laval with the old road to Le Bessat behind it. In left foreground is hamlet of Le Coin.

Why found a society of teaching Brothers? Why not simply insist on the itinerant teachers imparting the Christian faith to the children? Marcellin knew that such was impossible. A certain number of school-teachers in the district, for fear of being unable to furnish certificates of good life and morals (necessary to obtain the Brevet before 1st January 1817) had made up false certificates. The only pedagogical training for many of them had taken place in the barracks and on the battlefields of the Revolution and the Empire.(92) At St. Etienne the teacher Guerin was an anarchist, "a frenzied revolutionary, so dangerous a man in all respects that he was feared by everyone". (93) Inspector Guillard wrote of one such teacher at Lavalla, "...a bad fellow from Dauphiny, whose name is not known, who imparts immorality and irreligion to such an extent that families of the children he teaches no longer frequent the Sacraments, nor even go to Church".(94)

Father Champagnat found Jean-Marie well disposed and eager to offer himself for the work. "I will consider myself extremely fortunate to consecrate my strength, my health and even my life to the Christian instruction of children, if you believe me capable", was Jean-Marie's reply. Delighted, Marcellin answered, "Courage! God will bless you, and the Blessed Virgin will bring you companions". (95) Thus, on this day of 28th October 1816 was taken the first real step in the foundation of the Institute of the Marist Brothers.

We are now about to witness the extraordinary energy, boundless faith in God and absolute trust in Mary's assistance with which Marcellin set forth on his project. He had only one recruit so far, but he immediately rented a small house close to the presbytery. His main purpose was eventually to buy this house, which also contained a small garden and a piece of ground. Its owner, Jean-Baptiste Bonner required 1,600 francs.(96)

92. P. Zind, V & M, No. 144, 1980, p. 5.

93. P. Zind, L'Application de l'Ordonnance du 29 février 1816 et la situation de l'Enseignement Primaire dans l'Arrondissement de St. Etienne (Loire) - (1815-1822), Grenoble, 1956, p. 92.

94. Archives de département du Rhône: Vers. de l'Univ.; XLVIII 3^o partie Comités de la Loire 1826-1830; Rapport de Guillard sur sa tournée de 1830, Canton de St. Chamond, le 9 juillet.

95. P. Zind, Présence Mariste, No. 145, p. 3.

96. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p.72.

On 1st November Marcellin went and asked his Parish Priest would he please buy this house for a teacher; expediency obviously leading him not to divulge all his plans until he had a chance to set things in motion. Fr. Rebod was aghast! He strongly opposed the idea and tried to cancel the tentative contract that Marcellin had already made with Bonner, but Marcellin courageously replied, *"You may not want me here as your curate, but nothing in my status as a priest prevents me from buying this house. I will get the money from friends and it will belong to you: so that when I leave Lavalla you may sell it or do with it whatever you wish"*.(97) In time, the Parish Priest softened and agreed to give some money to help in the purchase.

Marcellin contacted his friend Fr. Courveille, now curate at Rive-de-Gier and gained his support. Courveille would furnish half the money, whilst Marcellin obtained the remainder from other friends. Marcellin immediately set to work on the old house, repairing and cleaning it and making, with his own hands, two wooden bedsteads and a small dining table.(98) Since Bonner and his son quarrelled over the sale of this house, (99) the legal document of transfer to Champagnat and Courveille was not signed until 1st October 1817.(100)

It is somewhat amazing, to some people perhaps providential, that simultaneous events elsewhere were already producing a second recruit. Jean-Baptiste Audras, on Sunday 27th October of this same year, although

97. M. Bourdin, op. cit., p. 3.

98. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 72.

99. Bourdin wrote, "The merchant had sold the house (i.e. before Champagnat could buy it, owing to Rebod's opposition) so Father Champagnat went to see the son (Bonner) to whom it had been sold. He did not want to sell it (to Fr. Champagnat) but the father (old Mr. Bonner) wanted to sell it because his son abandoned him because of two contracts". (Bourdin, op.cit., p.3). Fr. Coste points out that the meaning is not clear: it seems that the old father had a contract giving him power to sell, or perhaps it means that the son was going to leave his father in that house (it was in bad condition) because he (the son) was too busy with two contracts and did not want to have the old man in his house; or because of the state of the house, the old man did not want to be left in it. (Coste & Lessard, O.M., Vol.2, p. 742.)

100. The original document may still be seen in the preserved papers of lawyer Mr. Finaz, kept in the study-room of Mr. Cartier of St. Chamond: Bull. P.F.M., t. 22, pp. 90-91.

only 14½ years of age, had visited the De La Salle Brothers (101) at St.-Chamond and requested permission to join the congregation. Being told he was too young, he was advised to talk over his future with his confessor-priest, who in this case happened to be Father Champagnat. Jean-Baptiste told Marcellin that after reading the book Pensez-y bien (102) he had resolved to consecrate his life to God. Immediately, Marcellin believed that he had found the second stone of the edifice he was trying to build. After praying to God for guidance, he was induced to accept the lad and to propose that he could live with Granjon. The day was Saturday, 2nd November. Jean-Baptiste's parents placed no obstacle in the way of their young son's going to live near Fr.Champagnat at Lavalla but, because of later events, it appears that they had not understood fully Marcellin's plans.

It is interesting to note the seeming speed with which Marcellin had acted, his contract with Bonner being formulated only three weeks after his first talk to Jean-Marie Granjon and two or three days before he had acquired his second recruit - Jean-Baptiste Audras. However, it took about two months hard work on the old house he had bought from Bonner before he judged it to be in good enough condition for his two recruits to start living there and so begin their religious life. They moved into this former Bonner house, the dwelling that was to become the

101. Article 109 of the imperial decree of 17th March 1808 which established the University of France recognised the De La Salle Brothers; who had been teaching since 1803 in the first three schools they re-opened: Lyons, Villefranche and Orleans. In 1815 they had 310 Brothers in 89 schools and 18,290 pupils. In 1816 they resumed wearing their original costume and, at a General Chapter, upheld their own simultaneous method (used by them since about 1700) against the newly promoted mutual method. In 1816 they conducted seven schools fairly close to the region of Mt. Pilat: St. Etienne, St. Chamond, Condrieu, Rive-de-Gier, St. Bonnet-le-Château, St. Galmier and Annonay: these schools forming something of a circle around the parish of Lavalla. (P. Zind, V & M, No. 145, p. 2.)

102. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 61. Pensez-y bien (Think Well On It), a book of 140 pages was written, it seems, by many unknown authors. It had a very wide distribution throughout all European countries, being translated into several languages.

"cradle" of their Institute on Thursday, 2nd January 1817. This date has henceforth been considered the real "birthday" of the Brothers of Mary. Alone they lived there during the winter, with Marcellin teaching them how to pray together, work together making nails from which to earn their living, learn how to read and then to begin educating themselves so that, in time, they would be able to teach little children. They also would have helped Father Champagnat to visit and help the sick and old in the hamlets of the parish - cleaning dwellings, gathering wood supplies for them, and also assisting in the transport of food and medicine.

It was on 30th March that Marcellin decided that, since his congregation was to be under the protection of Mary the Mother of God, its members should be called "Brothers of Mary." Furthermore, he decided that a distinctive uniform should be worn and this was to be a black coat which reached a little below the knee, black trousers, a mantle (loose, sleeveless cloak) and a round hat. (103)

Shortly afterwards, in May, Marcellin was able to engage the services of a teacher from a nearby hamlet of Le Sardier to train his two Brothers in the methods of teaching.(104) The following letter of the two sisters Louise and Marie-Anne Duvernay, widows Jayet and Moulin, written at St. Chamond on 17th November 1888, tells of an episode not recorded in any earlier writings or documents on Champagnat:

"We saw Father Champagnat arrive at Lavalla as Curate to Father Rebod. He set to work at once and won the affection of the parishioners by his kindness, simplicity and engaging manner. To attain the end he had proposed to himself, namely the reform of the parish, he undertook to

103. Although Br. Jean-Baptiste (VIE, p.79) says that their first coat was blue, this colour being chosen by Marcellin to remind them of their association with Mary, this is obviously an error. The fact that Champagnat had chosen a long black coat had been noted by school-inspector Guillard (whose school inspection at Lavalla will be mentioned below). Later on, in 1824, Fr. Courveille was to change their coat to blue, but this will not last. In 1828, when Brother Louis (the religious name later taken by Jean-Baptiste Audras) took his perpetual vows, he wrote down that he had first received the religious costume of a Marist Brother on 30th March 1817. (Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux de l'Institut des Petits Frères de Marie, Premier Volume 1817-1848, Lyons & Paris, 1914 pp.147, 148. "Voeux Secrets 1828").

104. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, pp. 83, 84.

instruct the young and to found the community of the Brothers. For this end, he brought from the Marthes area a young man named Maisonnnette or Maisonneuve and placed him in our hamlet which is rather distant from the town and of easy access to nearby hamlets. We gave him lodging in our house and his meals were supplied free of charge by my mother; the children from round about who came for lessons paid a small fee. On seeing them arrive, our good mother said, 'This Father Champagnat is joking!' (We were six). When she had seen him at work, she spoke differently.

Each month the Curate came to see his dear little school, held an examination, and gave rewards to those boys and girls who merited them, and gently scolded those who were not working hard enough. This arrangement lasted too short a time as he soon had to bring the young man to the town to help him, train his Brothers how to teach."(105)

Abbé Chausse has written,

"Father Jourjon, parish priest of St. Victor-Malescours (10 kms west of Marthes), had formed a close bond of friendship with Fr. Champagnat in the minor seminary of Verrières; he endeavoured to help him with his project. He sent him two teachers who were a great help to him for the education of his first novices."(106)

The first of these teachers,(107) Claude Maisonneuve, was apparently engaged by several hamlets for the winter months (there were three sawmills in the area) and perhaps Fr. Jourjon asked Marcellin to find him a lodging

105. Lugdunen, M. Champagnat: *Processus ordinaria autoritate constructus*, Session No. XVII (12 January 1892), pp.140-142. (Copy in FMS Archives, Rome).

106. Abbé Chausse, *Vie de Jean-Louis Duplay*, Lyons, 1887, Vol. 1, p.274.

107. Reliable documents mention only one such teacher. Some people wrote later that Montmartin was a teacher helping Marcellin, but, as the recent discovery in the National Archives reveals, Montmartin (the teacher, friend, gambling and drinking off-sider of Fr. Rebod) was conducting a school in opposition to Marcellin's.

nearby. It was providential that this young teacher had formerly been with the De La Salle Brothers and had thoroughly learned the simultaneous method used in their schools, the method which Fr. Champagnat wished to adopt for his Institute.(108) His "school" (possibly a large kitchen or barn), containing both girls and boys, was visited monthly by Marcellin who would always give the children a catechism lesson. It seems to have been located in the hamlet of Le Sardier, 6 kms from Lavalla. The letter of the two Duvernay sisters mentioned above, also included this revealing paragraph:

"As regards his catechism lessons (at the church) we used to hurry to them eagerly, and in spite of the cold and distance; it would take us over an hour and yet we were always the first to arrive. So he would chide our companions from the town by saying to them, 'You are lazy; look at these children from the Saut-du-Gier, they have over an hour's journey to make, and they are always the first ones here...' In this way he made us feel proud."(109)

Marcellin, convinced that a person's life depends upon the principles learnt in youth, threw himself wholeheartedly into instructing the children of Lavalla and neighbouring hamlets in the beliefs of the Catholic Church. He gave catechism lessons every Sunday of the year, and in winter on most week-days also. The children, it seems, were in raptures over him. "Neither rain, nor cold, nor snow, nor any other obstacle could keep the children away".(110) He seemed to be readily able to adapt his method and words to suit the age, the understanding and the wants of each listener. His instructions became so well-known and appreciated that crowds of grown-up persons, in addition to the children, would flock to hear him every Sunday. It was said, "*He has something for everybody, and no one leaves his Catechisms without having learned some useful truth.*"(111)

108. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 84

109. Lugdunen, M. Champagnat, loc. cit., p. 141.

110. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 47.

111. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 49.

The teacher Maisonneuve, out of school hours, gave the two Brothers lessons in the different subjects connected with school work. At times they would go to Le Sardier and assist him in the class work. Marcellin made it clear to them that the purpose of his congregation would be to teach the ignorant and neglected country children.(112) He regarded poverty and humility as essential virtues for members of his Institute.

When the parents of Jean-Baptiste Audras heard more about the life Marcellin wished his recruits to live, they sent an elder son, Jean-Claude, to visit his brother and get him to return home. Jean-Baptiste Audras, when told of his parents' wish, went to seek Fr. Champagnat's help. The following conversation is as reported by Br. Jean-Baptiste in 1856:

"My brother has come to take me home, but I won't go. Will you please urge my parents to leave me alone?" Marcellin calmed him down and went outside to speak to his brother. In a pleasant but determined tone of voice he addressed him, *"you have come to take your brother home?"*

"Yes, Father, my parents have sent me for him."

"Instead of taking your brother home, you should ask leave of them to come here yourself".

"What would you do with me, Father?"

"I would make a Brother, a good Religious of you."

"O Father, I am too stupid to be a Religious; I am fit for nothing but digging in the fields."

"Come, come, don't speak ill of yourself like that, it is a good thing to be able to dig. Come here and join us, I am sure I can make something of you."

"But, Father, I am too bad a boy to be a Religious."

"No, no, I know you better; you are not a bad boy, but a fine fellow, and I promise you that, if you come, you will never regret it, for I am sure you will succeed."

112. Br. Laurent, "Notes du F. Laurent sur le P. Champagnat", FMS Archives, c.1842, p. 1.



The northern aspect of Lavalla, where some new development has occurred in recent years, extending the former area of the town.



The Sardier area: the first hamlet where Marist Brothers ever taught.

"You almost make me feel as if I would like to come: but people will laugh at me if they hear that I am going to become a Brother."

"Let them laugh as much as they like; God will bless you. You will be happy and you will save your soul, and that's all that is wanted. So you will go now and tell your parents that you want to join your brother here. I expect you back next week."(113)

This young man did as Marcellin had recommended and entered the Institute on 24th December 1817, becoming its third member. Later, he took the name of Brother Laurent. It is of interest to note that, of the early Brothers, the only writings of the early years that have come down to us have been those of this Brother Laurent. We know that Br. Jean-Baptiste made use of his memoirs when he wrote his Vie du P. Champagnat, published in 1856.(114) Hence, the conversation given above between Jean-Claude Audras and Marcellin should be reasonably authentic. Brother Laurent will become an outstanding member of the Institute and we will be mentioning him several more times in this thesis. A fourth recruit entered on New Year's Day 1817, this being Antoine Couturier, who later became Brother Anthony. Each member, as he commenced his novitiate, took a new name, the name of a Catholic Church saint. Jean-Marie Granjon became Brother Jean-Marie, whilst Jean-Baptiste Audras became Brother Louis.

In May 1818, when teacher Maisonneuve's winter assignments in the hamlets had ended, he was free to come to Fr. Champagnat at Lavalla - at least for the summer months, May to October. A school was started in the Brothers' house at Lavalla under this teacher, with the young Brothers learning from him and helping him at times with his classes of girls and boys. On 2nd May a further recruit had joined up - Bartholomew Badard, who later became Brother Bartholomew. Four days later a young lad, Gabriel Rivat from the nearby hamlet of Les Maisonnettes, was also accepted by Marcellin. A few words should be given here concerning this event.

113. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., pp.74,75.

114. Coste & Lessard, op. cit., Vol. 2, p.759.

Fr. Champagnat's catechism lessons, as mentioned above, became enormously popular. However, when he started preparing a group of children for their First Communion (115) he feared for those children whose parents, for various reasons, including distance, were not keen to send their children to the lessons. He hit upon the plan of promising a reward to each one who would bring another child with him. The plan was a great success, for next day several children stood waiting at the church, one holding his little brother, another his little cousin, while another brought a neighbour's child whom he had promised to take care of and to return safely. One of the young ones, his hand being held by his elder brother, was this Gabriel Rivat. Marcellin was particularly taken by the piety and intelligence of this young Gabriel and asked his parents could he live with the Brothers and so obtain a good education.(116) The parents agreed, since they were most pious Catholics: in fact the mother had consecrated this child to Mary before his actual birth on Saturday, 12th March 1808. (117) Moreover, the mother took him, when he was barely five years old, on a pilgrimage from their hamlet of Maisonnettes to the sanctuary of Our Lady of Valfleury, near St. Chamond. The child was dressed in blue, believed to be the colour symbolic of Our Lady; and it has been alleged that young Gabriel kept wearing this blue coloured clothing for a full year afterwards, in honour of Mary.(118) It might be imagined that such a child would not grow up with proper balance, but, as we shall see, this young Gabriel Rivat was blessed with both great intelligence and common sense.(119) On 6th May 1818 young Gabriel went to Lavalla and lived with the Brothers. Although still so young, Fr. Champagnat decided, next year, that an exception could be made with such a splendid recruit and on 8th September 1819, Feast of Our Lady's Birthday, young Gabriel began his novitiate and took the religious name of Brother François.(120).

115. Communion, for Catholics, is being able to consume the Divine Species during Holy Mass.

116. Br. Jean-Baptiste, *op.cit.*, p.66.

117. Br. Jean-Baptiste et alii, *Biographies de Quelques Frères*, Lyons, 1868, p.408. (This first edition was printed by J.Nicolle and C.Guichard of Lyons. An English translation titled *Our Models in Religion* was printed in Belgium in 1936.

118. Br. Jean-Baptiste et al., *Biographies...*, p. 408.

119. Br. Jean-Baptiste, *VIE*, p.77.

120. This, perhaps, may be considered as one of the extraordinary steps sometimes felt warranted in the early days of the launching of some project. We should also be aware of the fact that there was no regulation or canon law for such groups (as Marcellin and many others were forming) regarding the age of novices or length of novitiate.



The house of the Rivat family in Les Maissonnettes, a small hamlet close to Lavalla. Another family, however, lives there today.



This photo shows typical country around Lavalla. Shown herein is the area near the hamlet of Péalussin, about four kilometres north-west of Lavalla.



The above two photos were taken on either side of the present-day crescent-shaped road that goes through Les Maissonnettes. It branches from a larger road from La Rive (about 3 km north of Lavalla, but on the main road from Lavalla to St. Chamond) that connects several hamlets (including Les Maissonnettes) that are strung along the hillsides that form the valley of the Ban River. (The Ban River connects with the Gier River just north of La Rive.)

Later, we shall see, he will become such a respected religious that, just prior to the decease of Fr. Champagnat, the Brothers in the congregation democratically elected him to succeed their beloved Founder as their future leader.

We have noted that in 1817 Marcellin had obtained the services of Claude Maisonneuve, an ex-De La Salle member, to explain the so-called simultaneous teaching method to his Brothers. (121) However, it was not long before this man's disorderly conduct (122) was becoming so scandalous that Marcellin took the immediate step of sending the Brothers into neighbouring hamlets, such as Luzernaud and Chomiol, to set up schools. Up until now the Brothers had been observing and assisting Maisonneuve at the classes Marcellin had set up at Lavalla, but they were already beseeching Marcellin to allow them to run the Lavalla school themselves. Marcellin, no doubt feeling obliged to Maisonneuve for the help he had given, decided that he should allow him to continue his teaching at the Lavalla school whilst the Brothers could go out to the neighbouring hamlets and set up their own small schools in such areas. They were told, "*I wish you to concentrate the first fruits of your zeal on the most ignorant and neglected children*", and so they willingly undertook to begin their first real teaching in the hamlets of Luzernaud and Chomiol.(123)

However, after Easter of 1818, Maisonneuve lost interest in his schoolwork at Lavalla, whilst his manner of living was becoming such a scandal to the young Brothers that Marcellin told him he must leave.(124).

121. Maisonneuve had no teaching diploma simply because such was not required of teachers who belonged to the De La Salle congregation at that time in France.

122. Details have not been documented, but it must have been something seriously not in keeping with the religious life of the Brothers with whom he lived: such as excessive drinking of alcohol, an unbridled temper, etc. Also, it seems that he was 'living it up' socially (mentioned below). Of course, for Lavalla in those days, about the only social event would be an occasional dance: but if he attended one or two of these, Marcellin would not want him living with the Brothers.

123. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1. p. 85.

124. When Fr. Bedoin, Rebod's successor as Parish Priest of Lavalla (1824) wrote his Critique de la "Vie du Père Champagnat" in 1860 he said that Br. Jean-Baptiste should not have mentioned the misconduct of Maisonneuve, a man who had given real help to Champagnat and the first Brothers. Bedoin admits that Maisonneuve's conduct was irregular and hints that his social life may also have been scandalous ("*... par sa conduite irrégulière et trop mondaine...*") but says that not a word of this bad conduct should have appeared in Jean-Baptiste's VIE. (Chapter 7 of his Critique ..., FMS Archives, Rome.)

So, in June 1818, Br. Jean-Marie was asked to take over the main teaching position at this Lavalla school. It was not long before Marcellin and Jean-Marie had so reorganised the Lavalla school that children from all parts of the parish began attending. (125) Marcellin was careful not to admit any of those children already enrolled at the other Lavalla school. As mentioned above, the respected teacher J-B. Galley, who had run this particular school since 1816, after getting married in 1818, had moved to the school at St.-Julien-en-Jarez. He was replaced at Lavalla in 1818 by Jean Montmartin, a friend of Parish Priest Rebod, but unfortunately also a gambler and a drunkard. Naturally, the sudden and widespread popularity of Champagnat's school meant that virtually no new enrolments were taking place at Montmartin's school.

Fr. Rebod angrily accosted Marcellin and accused him of trying to render Montmartin 'unemployed'. (126) Marcellin explained that he had taken no students from the other school. However, many parents were attempting to have their children transferred; yet, Marcellin assured Rebod, none would be taken unless the parents had first gained permission for the transfer from Fr. Rebod.(127) The teacher Montmartin, to the

125. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 87.

In Br. Avit's Annales (p.27) he mentioned that a seventh recruit, Jean-Pierre Martinot, entered Marcellin's group of Brothers during 1818.
 126. Following the educational ordinance of 29th February 1816 which stipulated that every commune must have a primary school, the University of France had circularised instruction to the Prefects of the Départements that no teacher could set up a school without having both authorisation from the university and the approbation of the prefect. Hence, strictly speaking, Champagnat was at variance with the law. The archives of the Département of Loire contain several complaints from people who wrote to the Prefect to attempt to have unauthorised teachers removed. For instance, on 4th May 1818, the teacher Escoffier at St.Paul-en-Jarest was complaining of a Mr. Robert who was still teaching in this commune, in opposition to Escoffier, in spite of the fact that the canton of Rive-de-Gier had revoked their approval for Robert the previous year. Robert was not teaching in the commune's school building, but was doing it in various houses. ("Lettre au préfet, St. Paul-en-Jarest, 4 mai 1818", Archives de Département de la Loire, T.14)

127. M. Bourdin, op. cit., sheet 4.(FMS Archives).

relief of the Lavalla people, very soon decided to quit the scene.(128)

These winter months, November 1818 to April 1819, witnessed real action. The Lavalla Brothers' school was functioning well, Brothers were still teaching in the hamlets, and in November Fr. Alliot of Marlies (the man who had baptised Marcellin) requested Fr. Champagnat to begin immediately a Brothers' school at Marlies.(129) Marcellin readily agreed and sent there Brothers Louis and Antoine, who took up residence there towards the end of 1818.(130)

At the beginning of this winter period, during the month of November, Marcellin decided that he should no longer be living in the presbytery, but should go and live with the Brothers. Fr. Rebod, perhaps not unexpectedly, agreed with his request. Marcellin carried his own furniture to the Brothers' house, doing it at night to prevent people from talking:(131) obviously being at least subconsciously aware of the truism, 'not much happens in a small town, but what you hear makes up for it!' He found it a great consolation to be living with his Brothers,

128. Montmartin departed Lavalla at the end of the 1818-19 academic year. Born 1894; possessed a 2nd Degree Brevet; earned 100 francs per annum at Lavalla, to which would be added monthly payments of 1.50 F from each of 40 students in winter and 25 in summer. ("Etat de la situation scolaire dans l'Arrondissement de St. Etienne", Archives Nationales (Paris), F-17: 10377, 30 juillet 1819).

129. The previous teacher at Marlies was Barthélemy Moyne, born in that parish in 1756 and possessor of a 3rd Degree Brevet since 1817. He was not paid by the commune but took only the monthly payments of 1.5 F from each of his 60 students in winter and 15 in summer. He was now 62 years old and, it seems, his health was failing (he died in 1820): hence Fr. Alliot decided to replace him. (P. Zind, V & M, No. 153, p. 2).

130. Br. Louis Audras was aged 16 and Br. Antoine Couturier was 18. When they arrived the former school had not yet terminated, whilst furniture and other items did not yet exist in their future dwelling. For the time being they took residence at the presbytery. The priests at Marlies thought the Brothers were good, pious and modest, but also that they were too simple and not sufficiently learned for teaching. One day, Brother Louis heard the curate (who was a nephew of Alliot) say to the parish priest, "These two young Brothers will never do here....not sufficient experience to run a school..." The two young Brothers decided to open their school next day and prove to the priests that they were fit for the work. Next day the school commenced and it wasn't long before all, including the priests, were loud in praise of their work.(Br.Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p.97).

131. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 88.



This is the present-day residence of the Marist Brothers at Lavalla. The gates open into the school yard. The Brothers' residence is still located on its original site, obtained by Marcellin in 1816.



This sign on the outside of the present-day Brothers' residence at Lavalla (its location may be seen in top photo near bottom window at left). It reads: "In this location, on 2nd January 1817, Father Champagnat founded the Institute of the Marist Brothers."



This table, in the museum at the Marist Brothers' house at Lavalla today, is said to be the one made by Champagnat. It seats 12 places and is made of pinewood. Unfortunately, it has been chipped by visitors. The VIE (p.73) mentions "a small dining table", so the above would be the second one made after Gabriel Rivat's arrival in 1818. Legend says that when Mme Rivat brought Gabriel, she found Champagnat "in the room below, planing a board".



This was Champagnat's room at Lavalla, "the best in the house". The large stone held the gear for making nails, viz. anvil and moulds for making various types of heads, and a cutter to cut the iron bar to the required length when hot. This stone and gear was brought in from a farmhouse in Piney hamlet nearby. In the corner may be seen some of the thin iron bars as supplied by factories ready for treatment in a coal fire. The press with glass doors was built to save the contents, especially the table, from thefts by visitors. The painting, on canvas and still in good shape, was presented to the Catholic Church by Rivat's mother, in 1818, in thanksgiving for her two elder sons returning safely from the Napoleonic wars.

working with them, eating the same food, organizing and helping them with their teacher-training, praying with them and, whenever possible, taking his recreation with them. Br. Jean-Baptiste wrote that the uncouth country upbringing of these early Brothers led them to treat Fr. Champagnat almost as an equal: for instance, it was said that they had lived with him for four years before any one of them offered to tidy Marcellin's room and to make his bed.(132) However, it seems more likely that Marcellin would have opposed any such inequality in the housework since, as Brothers Laurent and Avit have written, whenever manual work had to be done it was Champagnat who revelled in doing whatever job was the hardest and most difficult.(133) Outside of school-time, the main task for the Brothers (with Champagnat helping whenever possible) was building, adding extensions either to their house or to one or other of their schools.(134)

Marcellin considered the time opportune for the Brothers to begin living as a real religious community. He judged it expedient that they themselves elect their own Director, a man who would become their leader and guide in their religious and community life. The oldest member, Jean-Marie, received the majority of votes. A daily timetable was then agreed upon. They would raise at 5.00 a.m., say their morning prayers together in the community, then make a half-hour's meditation before attending Mass. After Mass they would say together the "Little Hours" of the Office of the Blessed Virgin, (135) then study till 7.00 a.m. when they would take breakfast. If it was not a school day, after breakfast they would do manual work till lunch. After lunch they would make a community visit to the Blessed Sacrament, then would take their recreation together for a short time, to be followed by manual labour. At six o'clock in the evening they would come together to say Vespers, Compline, Matins and Lauds of the Office of the Blessed Virgin; to be followed by the recitation of the Rosary and then some spiritual reading. They then took supper. This was followed by more recreation,

132. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 88

133. Avit, op. cit., p. 37; Laurent, Notes du Fr. Laurent sur le P. Champagnat, FMS Archives, c. 1842, p.4.

134. Laurent, op.cit., p. 4.

135. Office in the Catholic Church is divided into various sections to be recited at different times of each day.

night prayers and then to bed at nine o'clock.(136) Their prayers were said in one of the rooms in their house which they, under Marcellin's guidance, had turned into a small chapel. Marcellin detested laziness and he himself would always rise early and would then celebrate with them each day's Holy Mass which would commence at 6.00 a.m.(137)

Each Brother took a weekly turn at the cooking. It seems that their food was predominantly soup, milk and vegetables, with their only drink being water.(138) Fr. Rebod had told Marcellin that he would tire of living in such poor conditions, but Marcellin seemed to revel in it. What is more, considering that the Brothers had been making good progress with their spiritual life, Marcellin was now prepared to allow selected ones to begin teaching in places more distant from Lavalla than the nearby hamlets where they had set up their first schools.

For instance, in 1819, Br. Laurent was allowed to go and teach catechism to the children and adults at Le Bessat, a neglected and remote part of the parish. Actually, this particular Brother had been requesting this permission from Marcellin for some time. He must have realised that it would not be an easy assignment. Le Bessat, at an altitude of 1,170 metres was the highest town of the Département of Loire. It was a small town strung along two streets, containing 71 homes at that time. The situation was particularly difficult: the people of Mt. Pilat, like those of Velay and Vivarais of whom they were a part, were generally regarded by their contemporaries as extraordinarily wild ('féroces')people.(139) Deprived from father to son of

136. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 79.

137. Br. Laurent, op. cit., p. 3.

138. Br. Sylvestre, Mémoires (Vie du Père Champagnat), St. Genis-Laval, Lyons, 1886-7, p. 60. (FMS Archives, Rome).

139. "For the least grudge", wrote M. de Chateaneuf in 1750 to the Chief Justice, "they fight and kill one another without fear of the punishment due to their actions, the courts of justice in the region taking only slight notice of the crimes they commit; for when the guilty person is arrested, witnesses will not come forward to give evidence, and this for the reason that if they did so, they would certainly be killed or burnt to death in their houses". (Pierre Lafue, Histoire de Peuple Français de la Régence aux Trois Révolutions (1715-1848)), p.159.



Le Bessat in summer.



A photo taken from the same spot as the one above, but taken in winter. This town is about 1,200 metres above sea-level. (i.e. approximately 4,000 feet).



Part of the old road to Le Bessat, taken close to Lavalla in mid-November when the first snow had fallen. During winter this road would normally be impassable.



A road-sign about 10 km (as the crow flies) S.S-E of Lavalla.

religious instruction, they wallowed, in the words of the Prefect of Loire, "*for over three centuries in ignorance and in a kind of brutishness that is truly deplorable*".(140) Le Bessat, snowcovered for six months each year, was 8 kms from Lavalla, from which it was separated "by ravines, rocks, gorges and passes dangerous in winter and often impassable", to such an extent that corpses lay "in their houses for four or five days and corrupted before it was possible to have them buried".(141) There were no roads: on 30th July 1819 the Rector of the Academy of Lyons stated, "*It is impossible to penetrate it except on horseback*".(142)

It would seem that for such unfortunate people a learned man was not required, but a saint. Brother Laurent happened to be a saintly person. Through many acts of zeal and hardship, he was to achieve fantastic results in a region spiritually abandoned since the time of John Francis Regis.(143) He lodged in a private house, prepared his own food, a soup made in the morning for the whole day, a few potatoes and a piece of cheese. Each Thursday he came down to Lavalla to replenish his supplies. Twice a day, bell in hand, he assembled the children, entering the houses "to ask for the smallest ones and even the grown-ups whom he knew were poorly instructed in their religion." (144) Such was the veneration he inspired by his dedication for them that everyone uncovered their heads as he passed. His catechetical work here would continue for two years,(145) manifesting his special gift for making the teachings of the Catholic Church understood, loved and esteemed by both adults and children.

140. "Délibération du Conseil Municipal de Lavalla, 28 mars 1827: Lettre du préfet de la Loire à Frayssinous, 7 juin 1827", Archives Nationales, Paris, F-19: 750B.

141. Ibid.

142. M. Devun, Pétite Géographie du département de la Loire, St. Etienne, p. 16.

143. St. Jean Francis Regis, a recognised "saint" in the Catholic Church, (born 1597, died 1640), ordained a Jesuit priest in 1631; renowned for his missionary work amongst the French Huguenots: responsible for a great revival in Catholic faith in many parts of France, especially in such places as Montpellier, Privas, Montregard and Le Puy.

144. P. Zind, N.C., p.203.

145. In late 1821 Br. Laurent was sent to Marlies to replace his brother, Br. Louis Audras, whom Champagnat wanted for the novitiate at Lavalla instead of Br. Jean-Marie Granjon. In November 1822 Br. Laurent opened the Marist Brothers' school at Tarentaise at the request of Fr. Préher P.P. He still visited Le Bessat on Sundays and Thursdays.

One further recruit, Etienne Roumsey (who became Br. Jean François) entered in 1819, bringing the total membership of the institute to eight. The following extract from Positio I Super Virtutibus (Lyons, 1903),(146) helps to show just how much the local people were in support of Marcellin and his Brothers:

"My name is Claude-Marie Tissot. I am Parish Priest of Balbigny (Loire)...I am 79 years old (in 1889); I was born at Lavalla.... It was from Father Champagnat, at that time curate at Lavalla, my birthplace, that I received the first elements of secular and religious instruction. It was he who prepared me for my first Holy Communion; and I will always remember very happily how he took us, twice each day, to a little isolated chapel, some distance from the town. There he used to instruct us, make us pray, sing, keep silence, etc. - all these things made a deep impression on me.

"I saw the first members of his Institute arrive. I witnessed the first lessons of virtue he gave them. I was young then, and nevertheless I regarded both him and his first disciples as men of God for their piety and mortification. Father Champagnat, while training his first Brothers, in no way neglected his functions as curate, and the remembrance of his zeal has remained among the whole population.

"Today, as also during the course of my studies and of my first years as curate, I can certify that all the people of Lavalla and elsewhere who have had the chance of speaking to me about him, have always considered Father Champagnat as a man predestined, one possessing the priestly virtues in a high degree.

"...My parents always regarded him as a humble, pious priest, of untiring zeal and of extraordinary mortification...."(147)

146. This large latin book contains the evidence of the large number of people who wrote testimonies on Marcellin when the Marist Brothers' Institute sought to present details of his life to Rome, seeking official recognition of his holy life.

147. "Enquêtes du P. Detours", archives générales des pères maristes, Rome, 922/121 (15 mars 1889).

Possibly, whilst reading this chapter on the beginnings of Marcellin's institute, the reader's mind has been troubled by the following questions: surely for such a recently ordained young priest the founding of a new religious institute must be an unheard-of event? Marcellin's acceptance of some very young boys into his institute looks, on the surface, to be quite wrong. How possibly could it be justified? and also, perhaps, how was his institute financed? Let us examine each of these seemingly serious problems.

Firstly, how could it be that such a young priest, ordained less than six months, was actually founding an institute that was to be such a success? Well, when we examine the foundations of other religious congregations we discover that there were several founded by young leaders. It seems they all began works of social relief of some kind and it seems they needed to be young to enthuse others, withstand the trials and launch their work successfully. For instance, Father Colin was 35 when he brought together his first members of the "Marist Fathers" in 1825; Father Coindre was 34 when he founded the Brothers of the Sacred Heart in 1821 and Fr. Querbes, founder of the Clerks of St. Viateur, was 37 when he founded them in 1830. The Brothers of Christian Doctrine were founded in 1819 by Fr. J-M de Lamennais at the age of 39. Several women founders were much younger. Sophie Barat was 23 when she started the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in 1802 and Jeanne Antide Thouret was the same age when she founded the Sisters of Charity in 1810; whilst in our own time Mother Cabrini and Chiara Lubich began very young, as also did Mother Mary of the Cross, McKillop, in South Australia. Marcellin, of course, was but 27 years of age when he founded his congregation. We have the witness saying, *"Some people could not and would not accept that he could undertake such a work with the little talent he had and in the absolute lack of resources; they felt he must certainly fail and cause a scandal..."*(148).

148. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 113.

How could it be that Marcellin accepted into his Institute the eleven years old Gabriel Rivat and the 14½ years old Jean-Baptiste Audras who had just been refused entry by the De La Salle Brothers because he was too young? Firstly, we must understand that the De La Salle Brothers were an official Catholic Church religious body whose members took vows. They were subject to canonical law which prescribed that no one may be accepted until that person was at least fifteen years old.(149) Marcellin obviously felt that there was such a pressing need for education in the country areas with which he had contact that he did not worry about getting official church approval (he would worry about that later, when there was time, as we shall see). His first recruits did not take any vows, each was free to leave whenever he so wished. Marcellin, it seems, considered both Gabriel Rivat and Jean-Baptiste Audras had excellent characters and that both would gain better personal education by becoming Brothers and also, as long as they wished, help in the education of other children. All of this illustrates a striking difference in the characters of the two priests, Marcellin Champagnat and Jean-Claude Colin. Colin was to spend many frustrating years trying to obtain Church approval for the founding of his society of Marist priests, (150) whilst Champagnat didn't bother with such a time-consuming business that seemed to him so much 'red tape': his project just had to be done, he thought, so nothing would stop him.(151)

However, in one of the oldest documents extant on his Institute's beginnings, Marcellin did require his Brothers at the conclusion of their twelve months' novitiate (i.e. training in prayer and community religious life) to make the following affirmation:

*"We, the undersigned
for the greater glory of God and the honour of the august Mary,
Mother of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, certify and assert that we
consecrate ourselves for five years, from this day, freely and*

149. Then, after at least 12 months' novitiate, they would take so-called Simple Vows, binding them for no more than one year to their congregation.

150. S.M. - Society of Mary. Commonly called "Marist Fathers".

151. S. Hosie, Anonymous Apostle, New York, 1967, p. 41.

voluntarily, to the pious association of those who devote themselves under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to the Christian instruction of country children.

"We intend above all to seek only the glory of God and the good of this Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church, and the honour of the august Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Secondly we pledge ourselves to teach gratuitously the indigent children whom the Parish Priest of the place will send us: 1. catechism, 2. prayer, 3. reading; respect for the ministers of Jesus Christ; obedience to parents and to lawful rulers.

"We intend, thirdly, to engage ourselves to obey our Superior without reply and those whom by his order will be placed over us. Fourthly, we promise to preserve chastity. Fifthly, we hand over all our goods to the community."(152)

Although this document is undated, Br. Jean-Baptiste gives 1818 as the date for the "Promises" of the first Brothers and Br. A. Balko, after much research, agrees with this date.(153) The clumsiness of expression suggests that Marcellin was making one of his first attempts. The absence of any precise name for the institute makes it earlier than 1824.(154) It refers to only one superior, others being still in the realm of the hypothetical. The word 'vow', whereby a person binds himself under pain of sin to certain practices, is never once used. Rather, it is more akin to a legal Deed, signed before witnesses,(155) by which one bound himself to this educational institute. The engagement is not made directly to God, as with religious vows, but is in the form of a civil contract with a few pious expressions, such as were commonly used in Wills. The wording, in many ways, is similar to the formula that Marcellin and the other recently ordained "Marists" had taken at Fourvière on 23rd July 1816, thus illustrating that Marcellin hoped that

152. Coste & Lessard, Origines Maristes, Vol. 1, pp. 417-8.

153. A. Balko, The "Promises" of the First Brothers, short essay, Rome, April 1978, p.1.

154. The Institute's name would be settled in 1824, with the aid of the diocesan authority, as is evidenced by the Prospectus of that year signed by Fr. Cholleton (discussed later in thesis).

155. Br. Jean-Baptiste, *op. cit.*, pp. 181, 182.

eventually his institute would become but part of a much larger Society of Mary containing congregations of Priests and Sisters as well as his Brothers. Finally, we might note in passing, that Br. Jean-Baptiste in his 1856 Vie du P. Champagnat edited this document (as he did with so many others) by changing the words so as to make the Brothers' engagement to God, not to the institute; whilst the name of "Little Brothers of Mary" is given, although at that time it did not exist. He also rearranged the text and the expressed intention of Fr. Champagnat, giving them a new direction, so as to make the formula one of religious profession.(156)

How did Marcellin finance his fledgling institute? Firstly, we know that Fr. Courveille helped him in the purchase of the first house. Admittedly, much work had to be done on it as well as their first schools, but we must first acknowledge that Marcellin insisted that the Brothers be able to devote themselves to manual work as well as their studies and spiritual life. As the third recruit, Brother Laurent has written, *"It is he who has by himself built our house at Lavalla...when he came in in the evening, it often happened that he was in tatters, all covered with sweat and dust. He was never more content than when he had worked hard and suffered much. I have seen him several times working in rainy weather and when it was snowing. We on our part used to leave the work, but he continued to work, and often he was bare-headed in spite of the severity of the weather."*(157)

Again, and the comparison is sometimes made with the birth of Jesus Christ in the manger at Bethlehem, although the first recruits made no vow of Poverty, they certainly lived such a life. *"We were very poor in the beginning; we had bread that was the colour of the earth, but we always had what was necessary"*, wrote Br. Laurent.(158) Br. Jean-Baptiste later added:

156. Br. A. Balko, The "Promises" of the First Brothers, p. 4.

157. Frère Laurent, "Notes du Fr. Laurent sur le P. Champagnat" FMS Archives, Rome, c.1842, pp.4,5.

158. Ibid.

"The food of the community was of the simplest and plainest quality: coarse bread, cheese, potatoes, vegetables, sometimes a little salt pork, and always water for drink".(159)

To support his institute Marcellin had nothing but his moderate salary as curate and the collections which were made in the parish of Lavalla. It was said that one day, Fr. Rebod, passing through their dining room during supper, and seeing on the tables nothing but salad, the quantity of which was far from being sufficient for the eight persons at the table, shrugged his shoulders, exclaiming, *"Poor fellows! I could carry off your supper in my hand".(160)*

It must also be remembered that, as was outlined in their "Promises", the Institute's aim was to teach only those children who could spend little time at school. The fact that only catechism, prayer and reading were to be taught, and no fees to be charged, illustrates this.(161) A note by Fr. Champagnat confirms this hypothesis:

"Great zeal for the poor, but not to teach them writing, if they do not pay for it; and even if they offer to pay, show much resistance; finally speak to the parish priest".(162)

However, when establishing regular schools outside Lavalla parish, such as that in Marthes, Marcellin demanded a "Communal" school: that is,

159. Br. Jean-Baptiste, LIFE, English Edition, p. 381.

160. Ibid.

161. Br. A. Balko, Lecture at St. Chamond, April, 1978.

162. Notebook of Fr. Champagnat in FMS Archives, Rome, Chapter 9, p.4. 20th Century readers might easily be shocked by such a statement. However, it must be remembered that the many items in Marcellin's notebook are quite disjointed and must not be taken too seriously. It is impossible to find out (from reading his notebook) how he intended using this material, or what its source was. Many people in the early 19th Century, including many of the Catholic Church clergy, had a fear of educating the masses beyond the absolute essentials. It seems that at least one parish priest in a commune with a Marist school, objected to a widespread teaching of writing. We have a somewhat similar position today in the Solomons where, after Primary school, most of the boys must leave school, and there are further severe cutbacks in the following years so that only a few really finish High School: no jobs for the educated, fear of many with an education won't return to village life but crowd into the towns - there to become idle and a cause of trouble.

the official town school in agreement with the Mayor and town councillors. Such an arrangement would allow Marcellin to claim the allowance commanded by the law of 29th February 1816, which was generally around 200 francs per teacher, plus an allowance from the town council. Marcellin would ask for 400 francs per Brother (per annum). Also, he allowed the Brothers to charge a small fee and also to take in boarders where this was possible, but normally on a Monday to Friday basis. The Brothers are said to have worked a garden also to help their food supply, whilst some children paid their fees in kind. Such practices would normally allow the 400 francs per Brother to be attained even in poor Communes. In 1822, Inspector Guillard included in his report for the university the following information on the Marist Brothers' school in the commune of Saint-Sauveur:

"The Primary School is conducted by two Brothers of Lavalla who receive from the Commune 150f. per year for the two of them. They receive besides a payment set at 50c., 75c. and 1f. from the children who are able to pay, and the others are admitted freely."(163)

At that time, the De La Salle Brothers insisted on 600 francs per Brother from the Town Councils of those towns where they had schools.(164)

163. Archives départementales du Rhône, T - XXV: "Rapport de Guillard 1822".

164. It is inappropriate to include, for comparison, schools conducted by the Jesuits and the Marist Fathers (later on) since they conducted secondary schools only (in which they charged higher fees than did the De La Salle Brothers in their secondary schools). However, the Jesuits did not have teachers paid for by either the government or by the parishes. Of course, parents simply had to pay high fees to have their sons educated in the Jesuits' and Marist Fathers' schools. By contrast, Champagnats' schools were not for the bourgeois or aristocratic classes, but for the "populaire" class - the members of which rarely had much money. In a Circular to all the Brothers in 1846, the then Superior-General Brother François wrote: "Because of the extraordinary cost of living this year, we cannot afford to receive from the parishes less than 30f. per month...no dessert...wine diluted with 75% water...Yet in Champagnat's time, for instance 1830, often the Brothers were getting only 20f. per month.

Marcellin was both generous and "down-to-earth" and hence would remove the Brothers (as we shall see later) from any parish where the required amount of money was not forthcoming.

The making of nails by these early Brothers was an additional factor in the Institute's early self-sufficiency. For centuries St. Etienne had made weapons, whilst St. Chamond and Rive-de-Gier had factories where iron (often bought in Germany, transported by water as far as Givors and then by land) was cast into rods of various sizes, and from these nails were made.(165) Marcellin Champagnat had probably learnt this trade at home since the more important farms had a forge and an anvil for the many needs of tool repair and farm equipment.(166) Jean-Baptiste Champagnat, Marcellin's father, being also a miller and "jack-of-all-trades", could hardly have managed without one; as for Jean-Marie Granjon (the first recruit), he had learned the trade during his years as a farmhand.

At the commencement of the year 1820, after its first three years of existence, Marcellin's fledgling institute had but seven recruits, was certainly existing in material poverty and had not been given official recognition by either government or church authorities. However, we do know that Marcellin had visited the seminary at Lyons before he started recruiting his first young man to become a teacher. It seems certain that he kept Vicar General Courbon, in Lyons, aware of all he was doing. Champagnat later wrote that he undertook nothing without their consent; (167) thus Courbon and Gardette were later able to shield Champagnat from

165. G. Michel, "To Know our Founder Better", Bulletin, No. 205, January 1967, p. 479.

166. A. Balko, FMS, No. 19, 1976, p.10. The anvil now in the Founder's room at Lavalla (1982) was brought in from a farm in the Lavalla neighbourhood.

167. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, Rome, lettre à cure à Lamastre (Ardèche), 22.10.39: C RCIA p. 142; SII.154. included the words, "... our practice being to make foundations only with the previous and truly formal consent of the higher authority, whether ecclesiastical or civil ...".

Again: "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, Rome, lettre à M. Beurrier, Prêtre à Vauban: C RCIA p. 174-175; SII.206: 14.02.40: which included the words, "... the end of our Society which is to second the zeal of the Bishops for the good of their dioceses, and to have a perfect understanding with them, undertaking nothing and doing nothing without their consent and approbation."

the attempts of Vicar General Bochart to put an end to the new group of teaching Brothers. In 1820 the Institute's three regular schools, at Lavalla, Marlhes and Le Bessat, were greatly esteemed by most local people and it was natural that both Marcellin and his Brothers would endeavour to expand their work elsewhere. There is no doubt that they had both existed and grown during a difficult three years, but these early troubles would appear as trifles alongside the much more severe crises that would befall both Marcellin and his Institute during the early years of the next decade.