# To Be a Marist

**Retreat talks by Justin Taylor, s.m.**

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# Contents

# Prologue

Our Founder left us a heritage consisting of three items: a Vision, a Spirituality and a Rule. Over the next few days we are going to look closely at each of these three parts of Fr Colin's legacy, in the hope that this will make us more faithful Marists.

Colin's original vision has been recaptured and brought into focus over the last fifty years, thanks largely to the work of two Marists, Jean Coste and Gaston Lessard. We have become familiar with it, as it has been presented in retreats, workshops and many publications, generally in the form of a number of Great Themes, some of which are prominent in our Constitutions.

In one sense, there is no need to go back over all this material, which is already very familiar to you. Too familiar, perhaps, and sometimes the focus has got blurred. For that reason we are going to look again at three key elements of the Founder's Vision: Mary support of the Church at its birth; Mary support of the Church at the end of time; and the early Church as sole model of the Society. We will also look at some themes that can be grouped together under the heading 'Mary, the Church and her Society'.

Our Founder did not leave us only a Vision. He also left us a Spirituality, which is the spiritual underpinning of the Vision. We need to look at this, especially since it has often been neglected or misunderstood, or simply confused with the Vision. That this should be so is easy to understand. Unlike some Founders, who left a spirituality to their followers, Fr Colin did not sit down and write it out in the form of a book or a series of lectures. He often talked about it, but usually in passing; some aspects of it he never expressed but only implied. So we are going on a search for the sources of Colinian spirituality, followed by a study of some spiritual writers who we know influenced Fr Colin. With them we shall be led deeper into what it means to be contemplative in action.

Whatever else Fr Colin did or did not leave us, he left us a Rule. In fact, this is the only part of his legacy that he committed himself to providing. The history of the Rule lasts as long as Fr Colin's own history and is as complex. However, the Founder's intentions are clear. What he wanted to leave behind was a rule of life for Marists from which they would learn in concrete detail and in daily life what it is to be a Marist.

# Mary Support of the Church at its Birth

'On July 23, 1816, at the shrine of Our Lady of Fourvière, Lyons, twelve priests and seminarians pledged themselves to found a congregation bearing the name of Mary. Those who worked for the next twenty years to carry out this promise were convinced that they were responding to a wish of the Mother of Mercy, which found expression for them in the following words: "I supported the Church at its birth; I shall do so again at the end of time"' (*Constitutions of the Society of Mary*, n. 2).

## 1. A Colinian theme

We have here a theme that keeps coming back when the Founder speaks (cf. *FS*, p. 36). Take the four quotations collected by Fr Mayet that Jean Coste has brought together near the beginning of *A Founder Speaks*.

*FS* 4,1 (c. 1837): 'The blessed Virgin said, "I was the support of the new-born Church; I shall also be at the end of time. My embrace will be open to all who wish to come to me."'

2 On September 25th, 1844, in reply to a remark made by Mayet: 'Yes… "I was the support of the new-born Church; I shall be also at the end of time" … these words presided over the earliest days of the Society.'

3 On October 26th, 1844, he repeated these words once more, adding, 'It is some thirty years since that was said to a priest.'

4 He repeated these same words at Puylata on December 2nd, 1847, saying 'About thirty-six years ago.'

Notice the set form of the expression – always the same words; also the fairly precise reference to an historic moment (in both senses of the word). Fr Coste has shown beyond doubt ('Marie dans l'église naissante et à la fin des temps', *Acta SM*, vol. 5, pp. 262-281; 418-451; vol. 6, pp. 52-87; 178-197) that the priest in question was Jean-Claude Courveille, and the words attributed to Mary were those he had 'heard' on 15 August 1812 in the cathedral of Le Puy and shared with his fellow seminarians in Lyons – at least in the form that Jean-Claude Colin remembered (there are other versions). Colin continued all his life to reflect on this saying, sometimes imagining more concretely how Mary would

have supported the new-born Church, sometimes drawing consequences for the Society that bears her name.

Fairly typical is *FS* 141,18 (1847). In the preceding paragraph, Colin invokes the examples of Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Francis Regis, Saint Francis Xavier, finally the example of Our Lord himself. He continues: 'And our heavenly mother, she was the light, the counsel, the consolation of the new-born Church. And did she create a stir? The Gospel says little about her, very little, yet it was she who drew down graces from heaven upon the earth. Let us imitate these holy models in their zeal and their humility. Let us go everywhere, let us do all the good that we can, all the while remaining unassuming and hidden.' Colin loves to stress the paradox of Mary hidden in the midst of the Church at its birth, while being at the same time the support that the Church cannot do without. This manner of presence and action is the model for Marists.

One final introductory remark. The two parts of the saying attributed to Mary are inseparable: we are not meant to contemplate the theme of 'Mary support of the Church at its birth' in isolation. This first part of the saying is completed by the second part, where Mary is the 'support of the Church at the end of time'. However, in this talk and the next, we shall look at each part in turn, beginning with the first.

Note. The expressions 'the Church at its birth', 'the newborn Church', 'the early Church', etc. are all ways of translating the French 'l'Eglise naissante' – literally, 'the Church in the process of being born'.

## 2. Mary in the Church at its birth

I want to insist on this point: in the Marian saying that we have put at the head of our present Constitutions in n. 2, the reference is to the presence and action of Our Lady *in the new-born Church*, and not to her presence 'among the apostles' referred to in n. 3 of the Constitutions, and not to her presence at Pentecost, which is mentioned – along with her presence at Nazareth and at the end of time – in n. 228 (cf. also n. 8). 'Mary in the Church' is a much broader concept than 'Mary among the Apostles'. Furthermore, when Fr Colin talks of 'Mary in the early Church', he is usually thinking of the period *after* Pentecost, rather than at or before the descent of the Holy Spirit. Mary supported the Church not only at the moment of its birth (Pentecost) but especially in the period after that, protecting and nurturing its new life.

In the talks that he gave during a retreat at Valpré in France in 1988, Jean Coste was critical of the place being given to Pentecost in Marist spirituality in recent years, for example in the declarations and decisions of the 1969-70 General Chapter (n. 128): 'Why is Pentecost mentioned there? Because people suppose that, if Colin speaks of Mary in the midst of the apostles, he must be referring to the only text in the New Testament which shows us Mary with the apostles, namely the Pentecost scene.' Coste refers to Acts 1:14, only to remind us once again that, when Colin speaks of Mary in the Church coming to birth, he is not simply thinking of the scene depicted there, but rather of the much more detailed picture drawn by Mary of Agreda, a Spanish Franciscan nun of the 17th century, in her book *The Mystical City of God*, which our Founder, like many others, valued highly. (*A Marian Vision of the Church: Jean-Claude Colin*, pp. 362-364; see also G. Lessard, 'Marists and Pentecost', *Forum Novum=FN* 5,1 (2000) 53-68).

Fr. Mayet collected several passages in which Fr. Colin took inspiration from Mary of Agreda in order to imagine the Blessed Virgin in her role as support of the Church at its birth. I shall quote two. First *FS* 116,7: '… That our Lord left the Blessed Virgin behind on earth after his Ascension is without doubt a great mystery. The apostles needed her to guide them, and to be in a sense the foundress of the Church. At the end of time her protection will shine forth in an even greater way…' As a matter of interest, there is one detail here in which Fr. Colin does not follow Mary of Agreda. In her scheme of things, the Blessed Virgin did indeed go up to heaven with her Son at the Ascension, but decided to return to earth to be the support of the new-born Church – it was her descent that John describes in Apoc 21:2 as 'the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God' (cf. the title of her book, *The Mystical City of God*). By contrast, our Founder seems to adopt the usual scenario, according to which Mary remained in the midst of the early Church until her Dormition and Assumption.

The second example is *FS* 133,2: 'I recommend the superior very strongly to take care to call his council together whenever he has some business to deal with (for three reasons): 3. To imitate the blessed Virgin after the ascension of her divine Son. Although she held the first place when the apostles met to consider the interests of the Church, she often said nothing, she who read all in the heart of her divine Son. And when finally the apostles turned to her, Mary, always the last to speak, would say to them, "My lords and masters, it seems to me that one could do such and such. This would be in accord with the spirit of my Son."' Coste has shown that these words of Colin paraphrase Mary of Agreda, *The*

*Mystical City of God*, III, pp. 105-107. The text is reproduced in *ActaSM*, vol. 8, pp. 167-169.

On the other hand, as Jean Coste points out, Colin cites explicitly Acts 1:14 only a few times (cf. *FS* 141,20; 160,6; 188,19), 'and each time it was in connection with special moments of deliberation and intense prayer'. In *FS* 140,13, Colin says to the novices: 'Come, let us take courage! Look upon yourselves as the apostles, gathered together with the blessed Virgin in the cenacle. Make good use of this time. Warm yourselves at the fire of God's love. Have courage!' Coste concludes: 'The upstairs room, then, is a model for certain special moments in Marist life; it is not the place in which Mary's presence in the Church becomes the symbol of a whole mode of existence.' ('Mary in the Newborn Church and at the End of Time: Analysis of Data in Jean-Claude Colin', *FN* 3,3 (1996) 245-263, p. 249).

I am in complete agreement with Fr. Coste in protesting against the way in which, for many Marists, 'Mary in the new-born Church' has become simply 'Mary at Pentecost'. On the other hand, *pace* Jean Coste, we are going to spend some time on Acts 1:12-14, for three reasons: first, because one shouldn't dismiss too lightly a passage of the Scriptures; second, what Mary of Agreda has to say about the blessed Virgin in the Church at its birth belongs, I believe, to a literary tradition going back to the Church of the first centuries which does have something to do with the Acts of the Apostles; finally, by looking closely at these verses of Acts, we can make our own what Mary is believed to have said at Le Puy, without necessarily having to depend solely on Colin's own interpretations. For in fact those words 'I was the support of the Church at its birth, etc.' do not really come to us from Jean-Claude Colin but from Jean-Claude Courveille, and ultimately from the Blessed Virgin herself.

If today's Marists – despite Coste's protestations – have opted for the image of 'Mary at Pentecost' as the icon of the Society of Mary, it is no doubt because it seems to offer a symbol of Mission, to put alongside that of 'Mary at Nazareth' as a symbol of the hidden life. After all, wasn't it at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles with the result that they went 'to the ends of the earth' (cf. Acts 1:8)? As Jan Hulshof – I mean the author, not the Superior General – reads the history of the Society of Mary: 'The paradigm of the missionary community of the apostles at Pentecost retreated more and more before the paradigm of the hidden family of Nazareth' (*Constitutions, New and Old*, p. 75). In that case, wouldn't we agree that today's Marists have at long last recovered the first model as better adapted to their renewed idea of the Society?

Coste, at any rate, would insist that this is not really what Colin had in mind. I would add that it draws on a reading of Acts that is conventional but rather superficial. No doubt the visual power of the image of Mary among the apostles at Pentecost has exercised a considerable impact in concentrating these diverse themes in one simple scene. It is our job right now to unscramble them and examine them one by one: first, Mary in the Church at its birth; then, Mary in the midst of the Apostles – neither can be reduced simply to 'Mary at Pentecost'. Later we shall also see that 'the new-born Church' is not really a symbol of Mission and in fact was easily interchanged in Fr Colin's mind with 'Nazareth'.

## 3. Acts 1:14

In Acts 1:12-14 Luke depicts the scene in the Upper Room after the Ascension. He names the Eleven disciples – Judas, of course, is missing and has not yet been replaced by Matthias. He continues: 'With one heart all these (the Eleven disciples) joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with his brothers' (NJB). This single verse is on the face of it disappointingly little on which to base everything that has been said or written down through the ages on the role of Mary in the Church at its birth – and in particular by Fr. Colin. All the same, it is a text that attracts our attention and calls for reflection and meditation (see 'Biblical Approaches', *FN* 3,4 (1996) 521-537).

For one thing, there is the fact that this text exists. It is the sole mention of Mary in the Acts of the Apostles, and indeed the sole mention of her outside the Gospels, except for Gal 4:4 (and, probably, the Woman of Apocalypse 12). This verse has nourished the contemplation of those who wanted to know more about the role of Mary in the Church at its birth. As Fr. Coste remarks: 'In testifying to Mary's presence in the first little group of Apostles after the Ascension, St Luke removes from Christian tradition the right to limit its thinking to the fact of the divine maternity and to the Blessed Virgin's activity during the earthly life of her Son' (*ActaSM*, vol. 5, p. 450; cf. 418).

Luke draws our attention to Mary's presence in the post-Paschal Church and at the same time tantalizes us by telling us next-to-nothing about her. Next-to-nothing, but not quite nothing. The mention of Mary's presence among those who were waiting for the Holy Spirit to 'come upon' them and to be filled with 'power' (Acts 1:8) recalls the scene of the Annunciation, when the angel told Mary: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will rest upon you' (Luke 1:35). We are encouraged to think that

the Church, which is about to come to birth, is to continue the earthly existence of Mary's child. In his 'Infancy Gospel' Luke shows us Mary taking care of her newborn baby and looking after him throughout his childhood. In Acts 1:14 he seems to invite us to suppose that Mary nurtured the newborn Church as well.

How did Mary support the Church at its birth? Luke gives us a valuable hint in the way he constructs v. 14. Let us hear it once again, in a slightly more literal translation: 'All these persevered unanimously in prayer, together with some women *and* Mary the Mother of Jesus *and* his brothers.'

Notice that Mary is not situated 'in the midst of the apostles', as is so often said – nor is this the scene of Pentecost, which does not occur for a page or so of the Book of Acts. Rather, Mary is 'in the midst of the community', of which the Eleven disciples form part, and if she is 'in the midst' of any particular group it is that of the women. Luke, it seems, in composing this scene, is not simply portraying the apostles awaiting the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. He intends to depict the earliest Church itself as a community. Further, this community is complex, made up of several groups and tendencies, and it finds its centre of unity in Mary.

Let's look at the scene more closely. Observe the twofold 'and' before and after the mention of Mary. The first 'and' links her with the disciples and the women (these will be the women who accompanied the apostolic group, cf. Luke 8:1-3); the second 'and' links her with the brothers of Jesus (these are his 'folk', his clan, led by James called 'the Lord's brother', who is not named here). Now these two extremes – disciples and believing women on the one hand, and Jesus' brothers on the other – are far from being unanimous in the gospels, even if Luke does not emphasize their opposition as strongly as do Mark (3:21) and John (7:5). In our passage from Acts, the very structure of the sentence (1:14) gives Mary a mediating role between these extremes. The third gospel has already prepared the ground for this mediating role. There, it is clear, Mary belongs to both groups. By blood, of course, she belongs to Jesus' natural family, along with his 'brothers'. By faith, she belongs to his new family consisting of those who hear God's word and put it into practice (Luke 8:19-21; cf. Mark 3:31-35).

The presence of Jesus' brothers in the upper room tells us that they have learnt to believe in him (the same is implied by the apparition of the risen Jesus to James, cf. 1 Cor 15:7). But, even though they are now believers, they have not become his disciples: when Peter, freed from Herod's prison, rejoins the community that is praying for him, James and the brothers are not there (cf. Acts 12:17). If Jesus' disciples and his brothers are found

together after the Ascension – at least as Luke paints the scene – they still remain two distinct groups. The way that Mary is mentioned between them suggests that it is she who has brought them together. Luke seems to imply that, if their potential rivalry has been settled peacefully, it is thanks to Mary, who occupied the middle ground between both parties and knew how to use it in order to keep the peace.

In fact Mary may have fulfilled a specific role of mediation in the new-born Church that was of the highest importance for the future, namely by preventing a schism that could well have broken out between the disciples and the brothers of Jesus concerning his succession. (Cf. Lucien Legrand *L'annonce à Marie (Lc 1,26-28). Une apocalypse aux origines de l'Evangile*, Paris, Cerf (Lectio Divina 106), 1981, pp. 339-341.) Who will take over the leadership after the Founder or Prophet has left the scene: one of his former companions or one of his close relations? This has been a problem for more than one religion. It is the basis of the schism that divides the Muslim world between the Sunni, who accept the succession of Kalifs since Uthman, the first who did not belong to Muhammad's family, and the Shi'a, who recognize only his son-in-law Ali and his descendants. A similar quarrel divides the Mormons. It could have been the case with the Christians as well. The New Testament bears traces of a kind of balancing act between Peter, chief of the disciples, and James, brother of Jesus. According to Acts, Peter quits Jerusalem and leaves the field free for James. In fact, right into the 2nd century the family of Jesus and their descendants were at the head of the believers in Jerusalem, who were all observant, practising Jews. The mother of Jesus might have upheld the rights of his brothers, as the mother of the sons of Zebedee had promoted theirs (cf. Mt 20:20). On the contrary, Mary renounced for herself any power in the Church that she might have had as mother of Jesus. We can infer that from the New Testament and Church history. Mary of Agreda conveys the same by showing us the Blessed Virgin always respectful and obedient to the apostles.

Acts 1:14 supports the tradition that after the Ascension Mary lived in Jerusalem with the apostles and disciples. One of the apocryphal writings even names them: Evodius, Peter and Andrew, Alexander and Rufus, Salome and Joanna and other virgins. On the other hand, once the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' had been identified as John, writer of the Fourth Gospel and of the Apocalypse, then the text of John 19:27, where Jesus on the cross gave his mother to the beloved disciple who 'from that hour took her to his own', was taken to mean that Mary lived in the house of John, and even that she went with him to Ephesus.

We will stay with the version of the tradition according to which the apostles remained in Jerusalem during Mary's lifetime and only dispersed on their various missions after her Dormition and Assumption. The tradition that Mary lived with the apostles after the Ascension is closely associated with the role that patristic and medieval writers – up to and including Mary of Agreda – assigned to the Blessed Virgin in the newborn Church. This was predominantly a teaching role. Mary as teacher of the apostles, *magistra magistrorum*, is a very ancient theme, being found at least as far back as St Ambrose in the 4th century, and may well be solidly founded. The tradition that the evangelists, especially Luke and John, derived information concerning Mary and the infancy of Jesus from the Blessed Virgin herself, has been taken seriously by some modern exegetes (Harnack, Lagrange, Laurentin, Benoit). Some writers also attributed to Mary a role as counsellor and comforter of the apostles, which brings us closer once again to Mary of Agreda and Fr. Colin. This theme can be regarded as a development of the general theme of Mary's maternal role in the newborn Church.

It seems then that the Church kept the memory of Mary after the Ascension among the apostles and first believers, remembering her as uniting, caring for, and even instructing the newborn Church. The first and most authentic expression of this memory is to be found in the New Testament. Later tradition continued to express it, often with considerable embellishments, not all of which are of equal value. It could be, however, that certain elements that are found in the later tradition but not in Scripture, such as Mary teaching the apostles, are authentic. In any case, it was the living memory of Mary in the community that prompted Christians of a later age to find in the brief words of Acts 1:14 a witness to their own belief in the supportive role of Mary in the Church at its birth.

We are entitled to infer from those words that, for Luke, Mary has, even more generally, a role that is central and mediating in the new-born Church, a body that he knew was made up of several *blocs* that were different and liable to disagree, even violently. That is, of course, the basic meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia* that we translate as 'Church': it is an 'assembly', which brings together distinct groups or parties. By exercising this role of mediation or even reconciliation, Mary 'supports' the newborn Church. This is the scripturally based paradigm of the 'work of Mary', in which Marists are called to take part – our Mission.

## 4. Mary in the midst of the apostles

It is already clear that the theme of 'Mary support of the Church at its birth' is wider than that of 'Mary in the midst of the apostles' and cannot be reduced to it. It is essential to the first theme that the apostles are only one of the elements forming the new-born Church. Still, according to the Constitutions, n. 3: '(The Society) would learn from Mary's presence among the apostles how to be present in the Church in such a way that the more hidden it was the more effective it would be.' In fact, Fr. Colin has a lot to say about Mary in the midst of the apostles. For the most part it could be summed up in this way: *Mary Queen of the apostles, hidden but effective*.

One classic expression of this theme is *FS* 85,2 (1844): 'Indeed, Messieurs, the blessed Virgin (as the Church tells us) is the channel of graces, the Queen of Apostles, and what great good she did for souls. Yet in this world she was hidden and as it were unknown.'

Four years later, in 1848, Colin comments (*FS* 161,5): 'Nowadays, faith and prayer alone can convince people's minds, enlighten their intellect and touch their hearts. Let us set to, therefore, to have this spirit of faith and of union with our good Lord. Let there be no love of show among us, no seeking after reputations… Let us imitate her who is our Queen, what a model Mary is for us! She bears the title *regina apostolorum* and rightly, and yet she is more hidden than any of the apostles.' Mary the hidden Queen of the apostles is presented here as our 'model', but nothing is said – at least explicitly – about anything she *did*. At the moment when Fr. Colin was speaking – at a time of republican and anticlerical revolution in France and elsewhere in Europe – there was in fact nothing to do except to keep a low profile.

According to n. 3 of the Constitutions, the presence of Mary in the midst of the apostles is 'more effective' for being more hidden. There is something of the same idea in *FS* 140,4 : 'But look at our mother after the Ascension of the divine master. She is the support, the director of the newborn Church. She is called *Regina Apostolorum*. Yet she seemed to be doing nothing, although she did more by her prayers than the apostles by their preaching. Look also at Our Lord Jesus Christ in Nazareth for thirty years. These are your models.'

It is true that 'Mary Queen of the apostles, hidden, but more effective than them' is presented here as a model. However, two things should be noted. The first is the context in which Colin is speaking. In fact he is talking to novices, a certain number of whom would already be priests. He prefaces his remarks by recognizing that they are bored with being shut up in the novitiate with nothing to do: 'People are bored, too, at doing nothing, for we

are made for action and we feel a need for it.' So in this precise context 'Mary in the midst of the apostles' and also 'Jesus at Nazareth' are presented as 'models', not for all Marists, but for the novices. (I have already quoted another paragraph 13 of the same document where Colin encourages them to regard themselves as the apostles gathered – implicitly in prayer – with Our Lady in the cenacle.)

The second factor to bear in mind when interpreting this document is that the 'more' that Mary was able to do, although she 'seemed to do nothing', was thanks to her prayers: 'she did more by her prayers than the apostles by their preaching.' This is not the only time that Fr. Colin expresses this idea; he returns to it when speaking to professed Marists and reinforces it with more modern parallels (*FS* 115,7): 'The blessed Virgin made no stir but she prayed a lot. (He continues with an exhortation to pray for the missionaries in Oceania.) Without facing the same dangers or enduring the same deprivations as they suffer, we will have a share in their merits and their crown. Perhaps they will owe to us the conversion of their islands. I read somewhere that it was revealed that Saint Teresa (of Avila) converted more souls by her prayers than Saint Francis Xavier by his missionary labours' (cf. also 132,13 ; 188,7). Fr. Colin might have been speaking to Carmelites! However, he was speaking to Marists, who, this time, were not novices. It begins rather to look as if the presence of Mary in the midst of the apostles is not for Colin simply an image of Mission!

Finally Fr. Colin manages to integrate the theme of 'Mary hidden but achieving even more by her prayers than the apostles by their preaching' into the spirituality of a missionary congregation. This can be seen in the address he gave at the retreat of September 1854, so after he resigned as Superior General (*FS* 190,2-3): 'In all things let us look to Mary, let us imitate her life at Nazareth. She did more than the apostles for the newborn Church; she is Queen of the apostles, but she did it without any stir, she did it above all by her prayers… I said she did more than the apostles by her prayers. Let us therefore unite silence and prayer with action. The Society of Mary desires that we, her children, should be missionaries of action, and missionaries of prayer.'

We find the same idea at the end of n. 50 of the Constitutions of 1872: '… so combining a love of solitude and silence and the practice of hidden virtues with works of zeal, that while they must take up the various ministries by which the salvation of souls may be furthered, they may appear unknown, and even hidden in the world.'

There is without doubt a tension here. In fact, as we shall see in other places as well, certain aspects of Colinian spirituality on which the Founder laid great stress appear, at

least at first sight, to be better suited to a contemplative community than to an active Congregation. And yet, Colin insists that the Marists are an apostolic group, who are to ‘go everywhere’ doing ‘all the good that we can’. Now I personally think that there could be a legitimate contemplative expression of Marist spirituality. On the other hand, I am perfectly clear that that is not meant to be its typical expression, which is apostolic and, for our branch of the Marist Family, priestly.

A tension, I said, between action and contemplation, which may even be experienced painfully. We have no right, in my opinion, to avoid it, for example by reducing the contemplative dimension to a personal trait of Jean-Claude Colin, a complex of psychological bent and early childhood experience. Rather, Colin challenges us to become ‘contemplatives in the midst of action’. Of that more anon.

# Mary Support of the Church at the End of Time

## 1. A Colinian theme

As we have already seen, the Blessed Virgin's message at Le Puy – at least in the form that Fr. Colin passed on – has two parts. In the first, Mary says that she was the support of the Church at its birth; but that's not all. Immediately, we are projected into the future, where the true emphasis of the saying lies. So, to return to a text that we have already seen, *FS* 4,1: 'The blessed Virgin said, "I was the support of the new-born Church; I shall also be at the end of time. My embrace will be open to all who wish to come to me."'

And there's the point of the whole saying. Now, if 'these words presided over the earliest days of the Society' (cf. *FS* 4,2), it's not so much in order to recall the first moments of the faith, but rather to prepare us to welcome an intervention of Mary in the future and to co-operate with it. Thus also Colin in another text we have already seen, *FS* 116,7: 'Messieurs, that our Lord left the Blessed Virgin behind on earth after his Ascension is without doubt a great mystery. The apostles needed her to guide them, and to be in a sense the foundress of the Church. At the end of time her protection will shine forth in an even greater way. The apostles had their reasons for not making it known to the world, but she will make her presence felt even more then than in the beginning.'

Mary will do still 'more' at the end than at the beginning, because the need will be still greater. I quote *FS* 117,3 (1846): 'And the blessed Virgin, who did such great things then, will do even greater ones at the end of time, because the human race will be even more ill.' In fact the human race is already ill: *FS* 152,1 'We must admit that we are living in very bad times; mankind is really sick. At the end of time it will need a great deal of help, and the blessed Virgin will be the one to give it.' 'We are living in very bad times' – more literally, 'The times are evil': Colin is quoting – no doubt fully aware – Eph 5:16. We are in the year 1848, and contemporary events – the outbreak of revolution in France and elsewhere – seem to justify the quotation. But the Founder has always lived with the feeling that the times are bad, so bad in fact that the end could well be near. Notice, all the same, that with Colin there is a certain space, expressed in the tense of the verbs he uses, between the present times – bad as they are – and the end, which is still to come: 'mankind *is* really sick. At the end of time it *will need* a great deal of help.'

It is likely enough that Jean-Claude Colin believed in his heart of hearts that the end of time was already very near. On 25 September, 1844, Mayet said to him (*FS* 4,2): ‘’The great number of wonders the blessed Virgin is working seem to herald the end of the world, for devotion to Mary is usually the last resort of Providence to bring back a sinner.’ We have seen Colin’s reply: ‘Yes… “I was the support of the new-born Church; I shall be also at the end of time” … these words presided over the earliest days of the Society.’ All the same, when speaking to the Marists he was his usual prudent self:

*FS* 160,7: ‘Times are bad (1848), but Mary who consoled, protected and saved the new-born Church will save it in the last days. I am not saying that Judgement Day is almost upon us, but still, it will be soon enough when it does come. When you have meditated on these words: “Do you think that when the Son of Man comes, he will find faith still on earth” [Lk 18:8] you cannot but be afraid, for there is so little of it to be seen in these days.’

In other words, when he contemplates the present situation, the Founder thinks spontaneously of the phrase from Ephesians that we have seen, and also of sayings of Christ such that in Luke 18:8 and he draws the conclusion that we are already entering the last times. However, he does not want to ‘say that Judgement Day is almost upon us’, even if it will come ‘soon enough’. In any case, his purpose is not to announce the end of the world but rather to declare what will be Mary’s role at the end, Mary’s role and also that of the Marists who will be her instruments. Fr. Colin continues in the same number of *FS*:

‘Mary will make use of us, her sons. Let us make ourselves worthy of that trust. Through us she will struggle with the devil and the world, and through us she will overcome it, if by the purity of our lives and innocence of heart we put ourselves in the way of deserving her favour and graces.’

Jean Coste comments more than once on these statements of Colin, notably in ‘Mary in the Newborn Church and at the End of Time: Analysis of Data in Jean-Claude Colin’, *FN* 3,3 (1996) 245-263. According to him (p. 254), Colin’s thinking about the Church at its birth or at the end of time ‘does not seem to be systematically and exclusively dependent’ on the set expression ‘I was the support… etc.’; again, pp. 262-263: ‘While the set expression came from Courveille, Colin furnished its content, and the latter coincides with what is best in his apostolic insights.’ Coste sums up Colin’s ideas about the end of time in five points.

1. The role of Mary (pp. 254-255): the conviction that Mary 'will save the Church in the last times' (*FS* 160,7), even that she will do 'more' at the end than at the beginning (thus *FS* 116,7), because the need will be greater.

2. The role of the Society of Mary (p. 255): 'To this conviction another is added immediately, namely that the special role which Mary is to play at the end of time is also foreseen for the Society which she has chosen and which bears her name' (thus *FS* 143,2; 160,7).

3. What does Colin mean by 'end of time'?

One set of statements by Colin presents the end as a reality still to come, but already near. The basis of this conviction is very clearly shown. It is a confrontation between what the Founder can see with his own eyes and two Gospel texts that speak of the end: Luke 18:8 ('little faith'), and Matthew 24:24 (the false Messiahs and false prophets who will show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect) (pp. 257-258).

On the other hand, Fr. Colin does not calculate the days until the end. Coste cites Fr. David (*OM* 886,2): 'As for whether the time for these great events [the end of time] was near or far, I have never understood that he had received any special enlightenment.' Coste notes Colin's feelings of repugnance for the 'secret' of La Salette concerning the end of the world and concludes: 'Thus, Colin spoke very freely according to the occasion, without reference to any fixed calculation' (p. 258).

According to other things the Founder says, we are already in the last times. As Coste comments: 'In other words, if, in one way, the end of time is yet to come, in another it is already there.' And he adds: 'At this point, we cannot help wondering what Colin found in the New Testament itself on the Kingdom of God which is to come, which is near, and which is already there' (p. 259).

4. The end of time provides a key for reading any given time (pp. 259): 'Eschatological reference, thus freed from any gratuitous calculations as to the future, is basically a key to understanding the era in which we live, an invitation not to get settled in it, but to feel all its instability. It is in this line of reference that we must situate Colin's many utterances which set up a relationship between his time and the end of time.'

5. The name of the Society of Mary has been held in reserve for the last times (cf. *FS* 118,2; pp. 241-242).

## 2. Jean-Claude Colin's eschatology

Colin thus finds plausible signs that the end is near in the events of his own time: the 'little faith' that there is to see on earth, also Mary's interventions in the world; but he doesn't insist on it. His intention is not to announce the imminent end of the world, even as a means of motivating conversions, but to prepare the Church of the end times. Furthermore, if Mary is to intervene at the end of time, it is not in order to protect the faithful from the effects of a universal catastrophe, but rather to 'support' the Church then as she already did at the beginning. In the last analysis, Colin puts the emotional stress not on fear but on encouragement.

I imagine that Jean-Claude Colin's eschatology has embarrassed more than one Marist, probably ever since the second generation, which didn't necessarily share the enthusiasms of the first aspirants. We may be embarrassed for any one or more of three reasons. First is the embarrassment of the modern Christian who does not want to listen to talk about the end times – unless in a theoretical or historical context that puts it at a safe distance: people believed in all that in the 1st century, but not now. Edwin Keel is one Marist author who has faced up to Colin's eschatology. He makes the apt comment that 'Our own late twentieth century … has relegated talk of the end to the rantings of fanatics and the credulous. Yet, ironically, ours is the first age in which an imminent end of human history is no longer metaphor but concrete, demonstrable possibility' ('The Work of Mary at the End of Time', *FN* 1,4 (1991) 427-444, p. 431). Today, in fact, doomsday scenarios abound, according to which human history will end either 'with a bang' or with a 'whimper'.

In another article ('On Colin and the Telling of Time', *FN* 3,3 (1996) 338-357), Keel quotes the theologian J.-B. Metz (p. 339): '[F]ollowing Christ is not something that can be lived without the idea of the Parousia, without looking forward to the second coming… [S]urely we Christians offer the world a painful spectacle: that of people who talk about hope but really no longer look forward to anything.'

A second source of embarrassment is the role that Colin sees as Mary's at the end of time: even if you can envisage the end of the world, can you assign a special role reserved for the blessed Virgin? Jesus spoke of his coming at the end of time. Isn't it unnecessary and a bit exaggerated to speak of a special Marian intervention? The third source of embarrassment is the idea of associating the Society of Mary in some particular way with

the end times. Let's just get on with our work 'under the name of Mary' without daydreaming about the parousia!

Aware of and indeed sharing this embarrassment, I want nonetheless to take up the challenge. Let's decide to take seriously the eschatology of a Colin – and of the Bible. There *is* something more to come: a final divine intervention in the history of the world. In order to speak about it, the Bible uses symbolic language: last judgment, victory over Evil (or over the Evil One), new creation. This last idea has given rise to the disturbing images of the dismantling of creation (stars falling out of the sky, sun and moon darkened); this turns out to be the prelude to the creation of a 'new earth' and a 'new heaven'. For this reason, one can call the final catastrophe rather a 'eucatastrophe' – to use the neologism coined by J.R.R. Tolkien. This is the way – as a catastrophe that turns round unexpectedly to end well – that the New Testament invites us to think of the end of time; thus 2 Peter 2:6; Luke 21:25-33. According to the Judeo-Christian revelation, this eucatastrophe will be the crowning moment of the whole of human history. As for the second and third sources of Marist embarrassment, Edwin Keel asks this challenging question ('On Colin and the Telling of Time', p. 339): 'Could a recovery of the eschatological edge in Colin's faith make for a crucial Marist contribution to the Church of our own days? Is there an important lesson to be learned from Colin's manner of telling time?'

## 3. The parousia of Christ

One way of approaching this subject is to contemplate the Ascension of Christ (see 'Biblical Approaches', *FN* 3,4 (1996) 520-537). It would probably be true to say that the Ascension does not receive much attention from exegetes and theologians today. On the whole it would be regarded as simply an aspect of the Resurrection of Our Lord, a kind of coda, perhaps, to a movement whose themes have already been fully developed. It is, therefore, important to focus our attention on the episode of the Ascension in the New Testament, where we will find that it is not presented as an after-thought to the Resurrection, but as its culmination: Jesus is raised from the dead *so that* he can be exalted to the right hand of the Father.

The Ascension of Christ is a distinctively Lucan episode, although it is implicitly mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, notably in John 20:17. Saint Luke in fact tells the story of the Ascension twice over, at the end of his Gospel and at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. Each time he tells it a little differently, bringing out different aspects

of the meaning of the event. We are going to look closely at the narrative in Acts, where the Ascension of Jesus is essentially linked to his parousia, his return at the end of time.

Acts 1:6-12 begins with a question put to Jesus by his disciples: 'Lord, has the time come for you to restore the kingdom to Israel?' The question expresses the expectation of many Jews that God was going to raise up a liberator who would restore Israel's political independence under God. Jesus' disciples had been hoping that he was the one chosen by God, but his death on the cross seemed to put an end to their hopes (cf. Luke 24:19-21). Now Jesus, by returning from the grave, has proved that he was after all the one sent by God, so he must be the awaited liberator. Was this the moment when he would set about the great work of national liberation? Jesus does not give a direct answer to this question, but replies first that it is not for them to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority. He then diverts his disciples' minds to something that is going to happen to them quite soon, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and to the task that lies ahead of them. 'After saying this, he was taken up to heaven as they watched him, and a cloud hid [or carried] him from their sight.'

Anyone familiar with the Old Testament who read or heard this account of the Ascension of Jesus would have been reminded irresistibly of another person who was taken up to heaven. That was the prophet Elijah, the story of whose ascension or assumption in 2 Kings 2:1-18 lies in the background of the narrative of Acts. The parallel is clear in the general structure of the two stories and is made unmistakable by a direct quotation of the Greek expression 'he was taken up to heaven' from the Septuagint. Jesus is presented here as a new Elijah (elsewhere in the New Testament, that is said of John the Baptist, but that is another story). Now the Jews of Jesus' time believed that Elijah was going to come back to earth to prepare God's people for the Last Day. This expectation is expressed in Malachi 3:23-24 (which are the last words of the Old Testament in 'our' Bibles): 'Know that I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before my day comes, that great and terrible day. He shall turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the hearts of children towards their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a curse.' In other words, Elijah's work of preparing for the Day of the Lord is one of reconciliation and restoration of unity and peace. It is therefore highly significant that in the account of the Ascension in Acts 1:10-11, two men in white garments (angels) tell the watching apostles: 'This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, *will come back* in the same way that you saw him go to heaven.'

So Jesus, like Elijah, has been taken up into heaven, whence he will return to prepare God's people for the Day of the Lord. Peter expresses this same expectation in Acts: 'Repent, then, and turn to God, so that he will forgive your sins. If you do, an hour of consolation will come from the Lord, and he will send Jesus, who is the Messiah he has already chosen for you. He must remain in heaven until the time for the restoration of all things…' (Acts 3:19-21). In Peter's thinking, Jesus' Ascension is oriented towards his return: he has gone up to heaven precisely in order to be held in reserve there until the destined moment when God will send him as Messiah to restore all things. According to the logic implicit in the reference to Elijah's return according to Malachi, this 'restoration' concerns essentially the unity of human beings among themselves and with God.

## 4. Mary at the end of time

And Mary? How is Mary going to 'support' the Church at the end of time?

One author who comes close to the Colinian idea of a special intervention by Mary at the end of time is the Russian Orthodox theologian Serge Boulgakov (see 'Biblical Approaches', p. 528). In his work published in French under the title *L'épouse de l'agneau*, Boulgakov does not hesitate to use the expression 'Marian parousia', which he believes will come no later than that of Christ, and even before: 'Remaining in the world after the Ascension, alone, so to speak, without her Son, the Mother could alone still anticipate his coming, if that was necessary for humanity which has need of the vision of her face which touches its heart.' Marian apparitions are proofs of her abiding presence to the world. Boulgakov continues: 'By reason of this general drawing closer of heaven and earth, which precedes the Parousia, a particular manifestation of the Mother of God, prior to the Coming, becomes conceivable.' The writer then evokes the vision of the Apocalypse (21-22): 'And (the angel) said to me: "Come, I will show you the Betrothed, the Bride of the Lamb." And he took me in spirit on to a great and high mountain, and he showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, which was coming down out of heaven from God…' 'This symbolic language used by the Visionary of the mysteries,' asks Boulgakov, 'has it not something to do with the appearance in the world of the Spirit-bearing Bride who makes smooth the ways of the Lord?' I would draw your attention to Boulgakov's application to Mary of the image of the city of God coming down from heaven (Ap 21), an image which plays such an important part in the thinking of Mary of Agreda and provides the title of her work.

Although Boulgakov admits that Scripture has nothing to say of Mary's participation in the Parousia of Christ, he cites the testimony of Tradition in the form of the Byzantine and Russian iconography of the Last Judgment, where Mary is always represented at the right hand of her Son. (The same is also true for Western iconography.)

In his article 'Marie dans l'église naissante et à la fin des temps', Fr. Coste expresses the view that '… present-day thinking on Mary and the Church will perhaps reach its full maturity when, in the light of the recent dogma [of the Assumption] and the new perspectives of biblical theology, it is in a position to set out clearly the eschatological consequences of Our Lady's unique mission in God's plan' (*ActaSM*, vol. 6, p. 188). I propose to take up Coste's insight and try to understand Mary's Assumption in the light of the narrative of Jesus' Ascension in Acts. When you look closely at the parallel between these two events, you are led to this conclusion: if Mary – like Jesus – has been taken up to heaven, it is so that she – like Jesus – can return from heaven at the end of time to prepare God's people for the Day of the Lord. This, I allow, is not how we have usually understood the dogma of the Assumption. On the other hand it is, I submit, a legitimate way of understanding the 'eschatological consequences of Our Lady's unique mission in God's plan.' It corresponds to the intuitions of Fr. Colin and Serge Boulgakov concerning the role of Mary at the end of time.

If Mary's Assumption, understood in the light of Acts 1:6-12, authorizes us to speak of a 'Marian parousia', what more can we say about the Return of Mary? When Mary comes again, what will she do? Let us recall that, according to the prophet Malachi, Elijah – the prototype of Jesus ascended into heaven and of Mary assumed into heaven – will come before the Day of the Lord. In order to prepare the people for God's coming and to avert the divine curse, Elijah will 'turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the hearts of children towards their fathers.' We might infer that Mary is to play a part in preparing God's people for his coming, and that her part will consist in reconciling the children of God with one another, so that they will truly be God's family.

## 5. In search of time present

Time past and time future – but what about time present? We have been looking at the newborn Church and the Church of the end time. How should we regard the Church of the present time? How should we regard – with the eyes of Jean-Claude Colin – the moment of history in which we live?

Edwin Keel, commenting on the words of Mary at Le Puy, makes the following point ('The Work of Mary at the End of Time', *FN* 1,4 (1991) 427-444, p. 430): 'The problematic of the word we are interpreting arises from the fact that there is no present time expressed – there is reference only to the past of the nascent Church and the future end of time – and yet the word is addressed to people who find themselves at neither of these two end points, but somewhere in between. We are tempted to resolve the apparent anomaly by simply reducing the "end of time" to "our time", as if all that Mary was talking about was being present now without further qualification. Or we try to insert the present, expanding the text: "Mary was the support of the new-born Church, she supports the Church today, and will do so until the end of time." But this makes of the text a meditation on Mary's constant activity in the Church, takes the edge off the prophetic character of Mary's intervention at this particular moment of history, and reduces the "end of time" to a simple temporal limit and conclusion of Mary's never-varying activity on behalf of God's people in this world.'

It is indeed tempting to situate ourselves in the present as the midpoint between past and future, according to a tripartite schema. In that case Mary's work in today's Church appears as the continuation of what she was doing in the beginning and promised to continue right to the end: Mary was the support of the Church at its birth; she still will be at the end of time; so she is the support of the Church here and now and makes use of the Marists in order to carry out her work. That is more or less what the Chapter of 1969-70 said in its declaration *Marists and the World Today*, on 'The Mystery of Mary in the Church (n. 127): 'Mary was present in the Church at its very beginnings, she was its inspiration and its support, although she held no prominent position and remained hidden among the faithful. Her presence revealed to Father Colin the place a Society bearing her name might occupy in the Church at a time of upheaval.' The same number continues a few lines later: 'The second Vatican Council showed a similar consciousness on the directly theological plane, and for the benefit of the whole Church, when it looked to Mary to deepen its understanding of the Church and its mission.' This is a beautiful text, but you will notice that the properly eschatological reference has disappeared, or rather has been translated into the reference to 'a time of upheaval'. In a similar way, the present Constitutions (n. 5) speak of 'Mary's desire to be … a support for the Church in these uncertain times, just as she has always been since the days of Pentecost'.

On the contrary, for Colin history does not take place in three moments – past, present, future – but in two only – past and future-already-beginning. No, in the last analysis, there

is perhaps for Colin only 'time-coming-to-an-end', for the end will be like the beginning, and the utopia of the newborn Church is striving to become a reality in the parousia: 'Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future / And time future contained in time past' (T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*).

It is proper to Colin to 'read' his century, not simply as a time of crisis, but as already the last time. We have to add, of course, that he did not necessarily think – at least it was not his habitual and characteristic way of thinking – that the world was literally going to end tomorrow (even if he saw more signs of the approaching end after 1848!). It's a bit like the eschatology of the New Testament, as Coste has pointed out: the kingdom of God is 'close at hand', even 'already here', although it is 'yet to come'. For Colin too, the 'close at hand' is nearer to 'already here', even though we do not know the 'times and dates' that the Father has fixed by his own authority (cf. Acts 1:7). In other words, if Mary is acting now in the Church, if – as she told the young Jean-Claude Courveille at Le Puy – 'it is my wish and the wish of my Son, that there be another Society, one consecrated to me, one which will bear my name', it's because she wants to be 'the Protectress' of the Church 'in this last age of impiety and unbelief' (cf. *OM* 718,5; Keel, *A Book of Texts for the Study of Marist Spirituality*, no. 1).

Colin thus lines up with the New Testament, where it is a matter of living *now* as if we were living in the very last days, without necessarily thinking that we are there in the most literal sense of the words. For example Saint Paul can write to the Christians of Corinth: 'I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with this world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away' (1 Cor 7:29-31). But the same apostle does not forbid his disciples to marry or have children on the pretext that the world is soon coming to an end. Christians continue to buy and sell, to work and manage their affairs. Nonetheless, to live as a Christian, is to live now as one will have to live at the very end, in accordance with the values that will then be the only ones that remain. And that's how to live as a Marist – with the assurance of Mary's 'support' for the Church.

## 6. So what are we to do?

So what are we to do in this in this time that is coming to an end? What is the task that falls to us Marists as instruments of the Blessed Virgin and so of the divine mercies? What is our Mission? Or are we simply to sit and wait for the literal end of time?

We have seen in Fr. Colin's thinking the structural link between the beginning and the end, to the point that he never speaks of one without the other: Mary will be the support of the Church at the end of time *as* she was of the Church at its birth, and even more so. As we have seen, Mary's role in the Church at its birth, as suggested by Acts 1:14, consisted above all in reconciling and uniting the disparate groups that existed in the Church. If we take the line of Malachi 3:23-24, Mary's role at the end of time will consist of reconciling and uniting God's family. Reconciling and uniting, at the end as at the beginning. Fr. Colin does not tire of repeating to his Marists that their sole model should be and is the Church at its birth. Of all the features of the new-born Church traced by Luke in Acts, Colin gives first place to the one he sums up in the well-known formula: *Cor unum et anima una* (cf. Acts 4:32).

Like the first believers of Acts 4:32, Marists are to be 'one heart and one soul' – *cor unum et anima una*. We are called in this way not only to imitate the new-born Church, but also to reproduce this same union of heart and soul in the Church of the future, 'so that, to quote the *Summarium Regularum Societatis Mariae* of 1833, at the end of time as at the beginning, all believers may, with the help of God, be *one single heart and one single soul* in the bosom of the same Roman Church and that all, walking in a way worthy of God under the guidance of Mary, may attain eternal life.' Coste comments ('Analysis of Data', FN 3/3, 1996, p. 249): (In this text) 'which probably goes back to the Cerdon rule … Colin identifies the phrase *one heart and one mind* as the characteristic trait of the people of the latter days as it was of those of the early days.'

What, then, is the Mission of the Society of Mary? That is not a question that Fr Colin answers. In his day, the word 'mission' did not bear the meaning that we have in mind: he talks about the 'end' or 'goal' of the Society, but not about its 'mission'. Based on what we have been seeing, I would say that it is our Mission to reconcile and unite God's family in order to prepare his coming. This is how Marists are called to take part in Mary's 'work', to be the support of the Church at the end of time as she was of the Church at its birth. If I am right, that would give some clear directions for our choice of ministries and for the perspective in which we carry them out.

I will only add that reconciling and uniting is not easy. It costs. It cost Jesus his life.

# The Earliest Church Sole Model of the Society of Mary

## 1. A Colinian theme

Many texts prove that the earliest Church or new-born Church (in French 'l'église naissante', literally, the Church in the process of being born) is for Jean-Claude Colin the model, even the sole model, of the Society of Mary. When we hear that, we may suppose that this is because he found in the early Church an example and symbol of Mission. We will the more easily suppose that if we see the early Church in the image of Pentecost: the first disciples, empowered by the Holy Spirit, go out to bring the Gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth; so they are a model for us.

However, when we look carefully at the newborn Church in Acts, we begin to see that it doesn't lend itself so obviously to being a symbol of mission. And when we read carefully the way Fr Colin speaks about the early Church, we realize that he is not presenting it as a symbol of mission. What, then, does he mean by saying that it is the sole model of the Society? Let us see.

Take *FS* 42,3. The year is 1841, and Fr. Colin is defending the preaching style of Fr. Etienne Séon, which some criticized as too simple and unsophisticated. This leads him to make some more general comments: 'The apostles were not liked by the rich, or those with power: they turned to poor people like themselves. Then God raised up a Saint Paul, full of magnanimity and afraid of nothing, who turned his attention to everyone. They were right in saying that he was not lettered, that he did not speak well: it did not matter … He did not concern himself with what people said about him.' Fr. Founder warms to his theme:

'As for ourselves, we do not take any congregation for our model; we have no other model than the newborn Church. The Society began like the Church; we must be like the apostles and those who joined them and were already numerous: *Cor unum et anima una*. They loved each other like brothers. And then, ah! No one knows what devotion the apostles had for the blessed Virgin! What tenderness for this divine mother! How they had recourse to her! Let us imitate them: let us see God in everything.'

Notice how the reference to the Church of the beginnings changes in the course of the discussion: from 'the apostles' then 'Saint Paul', Colin arrives at last at the Church of Jerusalem. This is one face of the newborn Church that is the sole model of the Society;

we shall see that there are others. Our Founder draws attention to two or three aspects of this primitive Church, which Marists are to imitate. First is the brotherly love that the apostles and their companions have for one another; this love is characterized by the Latin quotation from Acts 4:32, which is like a constant refrain on Colin's lips: *Cor unum et anima una*. The second feature of the nascent Church that Marists are to imitate is more likely derived from Mary of Agreda than from Acts, namely the apostles' devotion for Our Lady. Finally, 'Let us see God in everything'; this is the only point about which Colin says explicitly, 'Let us imitate them', but it is not a special feature of the earliest Church; instead, it recalls rather St Ignatius' 'Contemplation to Gain Love'.

At the end of the retreat of September 1846, Colin returns to the theme (*FS* 115,5): 'My dear confreres, may the closest bonds of charity unite us always, may we truly be one in heart and soul. The Society of Mary must re-create the early days of the Church.' There is a hint in this last sentence that, for Fr. Colin, the Society of Mary should itself be in some way the new-born Church begun again, a community in which, as in the Church of Acts, everybody is 'one in heart and soul'. The group of seminarians who signed 'a little act of commitment' and renewed it solemnly at Fourvière on 23 July 1816 numbered twelve (cf. *OM* 425,1, etc.; 294,1). Was this a simple coincidence, or was there a deliberate imitation of the original apostles?

Two days later, Colin is still eloquent on this subject, this time with more than a touch of mystery (*FS* 117,3): 'As for us, Messieurs, we must re-create the faith of the first believers. That is precisely what was foretold in our earliest days [he uttered these words in a somewhat mysterious and uneasy manner]. It was foretold that the Society of Mary was to take as a model none of the congregations which preceded it; no, nothing of all that; but that our model, our only model, was to be and indeed was the early Church. And then the blessed Virgin, who did such great things then, will do even greater ones at the end of time, because the human race will be even more ill.'

What does that mean, 'That is precisely what was foretold in our earliest days'? None of the four or five rather different versions of the 'revelation of Le Puy' states that the Society of Mary was to be modelled on the earliest Church. For Coste ('Analysis', *FN* 3,3, 1996, p. 250), 'the order to take the church as model was given to Colin himself and in relation to his work on the rule… [Here] we have a later contribution which appeared at some time after the 1816 promise, at a time when the idea of a Society of Mary began to take shape in the Cerdon curate's thinking as he attempted to "lay down the early foundations for a rule." What is the model referred to? Is it that of the great orders of the

Middle Ages, or of the Jesuits, or of more recent congregations? "No, nothing of all that. Our model, our only model, must be and is the early church."' (cf. *OM*, doc. 631).

That may well be so. All the same, the conclusion of the passage just quoted from *FS* 117,3 – 'And then the blessed Virgin, who did such great things then, will do even greater ones at the end of time' – reads like a paraphrase of the 'revelation of Le Puy' as transmitted by Colin: 'I was the support of the new-born Church; I shall be also at the end of time'. That might be a sign that Colin is in fact thinking of the period before 1816, when he says: 'That is precisely what was foretold in our earliest days.' If he is not thinking of Le Puy, he may be remembering the enthusiastic days at the Lyons Seminary. Finally, 'That is precisely what was foretold' is not the way you normally speak about an idea that has occurred to you, even if you regard it as a divine inspiration: I feel that somewhere there is a 'prophecy' in the charismatic sense.

Several days later again, still in September 1846, Colin is commenting on the other Latin phrase that he constantly repeats (*Tanquam ignoti et occulti* – 'Hidden and unknown'); he has this to say (*FS* 119,9): 'It was the approach that the Church followed, and you know that we must have no other model than the early Church.' 'We *must* have no other model': this is a duty binding on Marists.

At the conclusion of the next annual retreat, in August 1847, Fr. Colin applies the motto *Cor unum et anima una* specially to recommend a union that is psychological and affective to those who do not live together (*FS* 143,2): 'Yes, Messieurs, *cor unum et anima una*: we shall not be united in body, in the same place, since Mary does not wish it, but very much so in heart and mind.'

Our last quotation is especially interesting. It dates from September 1848 (*FS* 159): 'Let those who are leaving for Oceania imitate the apostles; let those who are staying in Europe imitate the early Church. At the end of time the Church will be as it was in the time of the apostles.' In a footnote Jean Coste notes that 'Father Colin is here distinguishing between the apostles whose voyages are recounted in Acts and the local Jerusalem community, of which Acts twice gives us a miniature ideal picture (Ac 2:42-47; 4:32-35).' Fr. Colin wants to apply the paradigm of the Acts narrative also to the missionaries of Oceania and not only to the Marists who remain in Europe. By the same token, it rather seems that the newborn Church is not for Colin a symbol of Mission. For that, as we shall see, he has recourse to other New Testament references. Finally, we see that for Colin the end is to be like the beginning: the utopia of 'one in mind and heart' finally brought about in the Church of the end times.

In any case, there is no doubt that for Colin the earliest Church is the only legitimate model for the Society of Mary. So it is all the more surprising that this major Colinian theme does not occur in our Constitutions, which set out to place in our legislation the central insights of our Founder. On the other hand, the new Constitutions, like those of 1872, adopt the *Cor unum et anima una* (cf. n. 3) This phrase – to quote Fr. Coste ('Analysis', *FN* 3,3, 1996, pp. 229-230) – expresses 'the best in that church to which Colin was referring his Marists.'

## 2. Three Faces of the Earliest Church

When we think of the earliest Church, the new-born Church, we generally think of the Church of Acts. Most of what I have to say about the earliest Church as sole model of the Society of Mary does refer particularly to the Church after the Ascension of Christ. However, it is good to remember that, when Fr Colin speaks of 'l'église naissante', he may sometimes have another reference in mind. In fact, the new-born Church has at least three faces.

One of these faces, or, if you prefer, places where we find the earliest Church is Nazareth. Nazareth is a familiar image for Jean-Claude Colin, as it is for the whole French spiritual tradition to which he belongs. It is a rich image, with several facets. Coste wrote a long article on 'Nazareth in the Thought of Fr. Colin' (*ActaSM*, vol. 6 (1961) 297-400). But it is enough to look up Nazareth in *FS*, where you will see that the reference is mostly to the hidden life of the Holy Family, especially to the thirty years spent there by Jesus before his public ministry. Sometimes there is a particular application to the Brothers (8 §1), or to Marists during their formation (e.g. 49 §1); but the life of obscurity, prayer and work at Nazareth is an abiding reference for all Marists (e.g. 44 §3). There is, however, one passage in *FS* (10) that explicitly refers to Nazareth as the cradle of the Church. The Founder is marvelling at the fact that the Society of Mary has come to birth in the remote, little provincial town of Belley. Someone remarks: 'No order has ever begun like this in a small town.' 'Yes, there was one,' replies Colin, 'but only one: the order of the Church. Nazareth was its cradle. Jesus, Mary and Joseph: there you have the Church coming into being. It began there.' That should make us cautious about taking Nazareth simply as a symbol of the hidden life. In fact, Coste shows that, at least in the period before 1850, Fr. Colin's thought passes easily between Nazareth and the Church after the Ascension as references for the earliest Church (p. 328, where, however, he points out that Colin never

uses Nazareth in reference to the external activities of the Society). After 1850, it is true, Nazareth tends to refer rather to the 'hidden life'.

There is another place where the Church comes to birth, and that is Calvary. It is true that Calvary is not a typically Colinian symbol: there is no reference to it in *FS*. On the other hand, it is deeply Marist, for it belongs to the 'revelation of Le Puy' as remembered by Jean-Claude Courveille towards the end of his life. As he recounts his own experience, he 'heard' our Lady say: 'I have always imitated my Divine Son in everything. I followed Him to Calvary itself, standing at the foot of the Cross when He gave His life for man's salvation. Now in heaven, sharing His glory, I follow His path still, in the work he does for His church on earth. Of this Church, I am the Protectress…' (*OM* 718, 5; Keel, 1). Note how this text has a similar structure to the more familiar 'I was the support of the new-born Church; I shall be also at the end of time'; we find also a similar declaration by Mary: 'Of this Church, I am the Protectress.' As remembered by Courveille, the reference to the end of time comes a few sentences later: '…in this last age of impiety and unbelief …' Where Colin's version has 'the new-born Church', Courveille's speaks of Calvary and Christ's death on the Cross. The two apparently different images come together in the traditional belief that the Church was born on Calvary from the pierced side of Christ (thus Augustine, *Tractate in John* 120:5; John Chrysostom, *Catechesis* 3, 13-19). For a magnificent reflection on these themes I refer you to Peter Allen's article in *FN* 6,1, 2003, pp. 61-79.

## 3. The primitive Church in Acts

The most familiar face of the earliest Church, which the Marists are to take as their model, is, of course, that of the Church after the Ascension as portrayed by Luke in the first chapters of the Book of Acts. In fact, Fr Colin is far from being the only one to take the church of Acts as a model; it is also central to the Rule of St Augustine and is a reference for many founders and reformers. But what was this Church really like?

A careful reading of Acts leads to the conclusion that the emergence of a Christian mission came about only gradually. The first two chapters form a synthesis that can be summed up in two phases. First, after the Ascension, the initial reflex of the apostles is to wait passively for the return of Jesus Messiah, who will come to establish his kingdom and restore the rights of all. An outlook such as that is certainly not directed towards any sort of mission. Second phase, the Holy Spirit comes on them; that opens the prospect of a

universal mission of conversion – necessarily a long-term programme.

Notwithstanding this missionary prospect, the reader of Acts may well be struck by the stability of the community of disciples in Jerusalem. The Risen Lord had given them this commission: 'You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and right to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).' However, they don't show any haste to begin missionary activity, although Peter does seize two opportunities to preach to crowds that gather (Acts 2 and 3) and 'the apostles gave testimony with great power to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus' (4:33). The Book of Acts suggests the picture of a community following its own way of life and on the whole occupied with its own affairs. Even more surprising: the event of Pentecost doesn't change things, at least not immediately. Instead of leaving on mission under the impulse of the Spirit, the apostles stay – with Mary – in the heart of the Jerusalem community. At the same time, according to Acts 5:13, the community had an appreciable impact on its environment: '… the people held them in high honour.'

According to Acts 8:1, a violent persecution broke out after Stephen's martyrdom and caused many believers (but not the apostles) to flee Jerusalem. This was the origin of different missions, although no strategy was established in advance. Here we have both facts and a thesis, which interprets the facts. The thesis is quickly stated and recurs throughout Acts, namely that the mission makes progress only thanks to persecutions. The first case, directed against Jesus, allowed Scripture to be fulfilled, thanks to Judas and the Jewish and Roman authorities, who did not know what they were doing. The second case brought about an exile from Jerusalem that turned into a mission to Jews and to Samaritans, then to the Gentiles as far as Rome.

Reading the narrative of Acts, you get the impression nothing would have happened without the events surrounding the death of Stephen. In this sense Paul was already helping the primitive community to develop even before his conversion. The facts thus interpreted by Acts were certainly less clear in reality, even may be less significant: a repression of Messianic agitation in Jerusalem, perhaps noteworthy at the time, but difficult to date, probably on the occasion of a pilgrimage. Without these events, however, the Church might still be in Jerusalem waiting for the return of Messiah Jesus.

## 4. Cor unum et anima una

The feature of the earliest Church in Jerusalem that is most emphasized in the first chapters of Acts is the quality of its community life. This life is summed up in Acts 2:42

under four headings: the preaching of the Apostles, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers. 'Fellowship' is not just a good feeling of togetherness: the apostles and their companions have a common life and share their material goods (cf. 2:44-45 and 4:32-35). The first believers practised, perhaps following more than one detailed model, a real sharing of material goods and a kind of social welfare system. Luke sees them as fulfilling in this way the demands of the Covenant, that there should be no needy people among them (cf. Acts 4:34, referring to Deut 15:4); at the same time they were fulfilling the duties of friendship as conceived by the Greeks – 'among friends all is common.' The community of goods would have been one of the most attractive features of the primitive Church for its contemporaries (cf. Brian J. Capper, 'The Church as the New Covenant of Effective Economics: The Social Origins of Mutually Supportive Christian Community', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 2 (2002) 83–102.)

The quality of common life of the first believers is expressed in the phrase that we read in Acts 4:32: 'one heart and one soul'. This phrase comes frequently to the lips of Jean-Claude Colin, generally in its Latin form: *cor unum et anima una*. We have already seen some examples. Luke in Acts makes it clear that this unity is not simply wishful thinking or vague sentiment. Nor does it exist automatically. It doesn't just happen. On the contrary, unity has to be constructed, sometimes painfully. Furthermore, the unity of which Luke writes is not simply uniformity. Finally, as we saw in the first talk, the unity of the first believers is constructed around and even by Mary. By exercising a role of mediation or even reconciliation, Mary 'supports' the newborn Church. This is the paradigm of the 'work of Mary', in which Marists are called to take part.

## 5. What sort of model?

So what sort of model does the new-born Church – taken by itself – offer the Society of Mary? It seems to me that it is the model of a community that possesses an intense life of prayer and brotherhood, but which is not precisely 'missionary' in the sense of existing for the sake of mission. It is a community from which members go out to proclaim the Gospel, to preach, to heal – and to which they return.

This is perhaps the model lived at Cerdon and Belley at the time of the missions in the Bugey, the model of the Hermitage in the early days of Champagnat and Courveille. It is also the model reflected in the 'primitive rule' and in certain numbers of the 1872 Constitutions in which Colin 'returned to his earliest ideas', such as n. 217 (see Coste and

Lessard, *Autour de la Règle*, I, doc. 22,71). This number, which is partly inspired by Mary of Agreda, evokes the example of the blessed Virgin Mary, who 'left her solitude briefly only at God's command or for the service of her neighbour', and prescribes that Marists are not to 'leave the community house except out of obedience' in precise circumstances or for precise reasons, including the 'duties of the sacred ministry.' As Jan Hulshof observes (*Constitutions, New and Old*, p. 72), 'Colin's constitutions do not draw a picture of a missionary community… "Mission" is not the key word which determines the life of a Marist community.' The emphasis is on the internal life of the community – which has, of course, an effect beyond its four walls.

I think this is an excellent example of how Colin challenges our own thinking and our assumptions. What are we to make of the fact that 'Colin's Constitutions do not draw a picture of a missionary community'? I emphasize that his 'idea' of 'the life of a Marist community' belongs to his earliest intuitions; and it is one of the points that he made sure were included in his final version of the Constitutions. I don't think we can dismiss it as some sort of retreat on his part from a supposedly 'true' idea of a Marist missionary community, which he would have abandoned from the fatigue of old age and a desire for solitude.

The general type of community sketched by Colin is one that seems to attract young people, if you look at the new communities that have arisen in the Church in the last thirty or forty years – Sant' Egidio, Emmanuel, Beatitudes, etc.: with many variations you find the same style everywhere, bringing together believers – often of every category, married, single, priests, those with vows – in a life of prayer and sharing that 'overflows' in ministries of service or evangelisation. Not that we should idealize these groups: they have their problems, too. But perhaps the first Marists would recognise in them certain features of the Society of Mary of their dreams. It is a model that might still serve to renew the Society.

In fact, I have sometimes reflected that, if Fr Colin and the others of the founding group had lived in the latter half of the 20$^{th}$ century, they would have started up something along the lines of one of these communities. So much of the original dream of a 'tree with many branches' corresponds to that. As we know, what came about was a number of separate and more or less specialized Congregations of priests, brothers and sisters, and a Third Order attached to the priests' Congregation. The name 'Society of Mary', which originally applied to the whole movement (for want of a better term) came to denote especially, if not exclusively, the priests and the brothers who lived with them. In recent years we have

tried to recapture something of the original vision through fostering the 'Marist family' and a broader based lay movement.

I have even had a wild dream in which the Society of Mary would be refounded as a 'new movement' – even, perhaps, lay led. Admittedly, that wouldn't solve all the problems of the actual Society. But it might give a chance for 'Mary's work' in the 21st century.

## 6. A Tension

In any case, it is easy to see that the earliest Church is not the most obvious model for a missionary Congregation *precisely as missionary* – no more than Nazareth for that matter. We have seen (*FS* 159) that, when speaking of those sent on mission, Fr. Colin refers to the 'apostles', whose journeys are recorded in Acts, precisely in contrast to the 'first Church', which is the model for those who remain in France. No doubt that's the reason why he sometimes has recourse to the image of Mary, who – in imitation of Jesus in Matt 28:19 – sends the Marist on mission, while promising to remain with him. Thus, to return to a passage we have already seen (FS 143,2): 'Yes, Messieurs, *cor unum et anima una:* we shall not be united in body, in the same place, since Mary does not wish it, but very much so in heart and mind.' Then his thought moves on: 'I like what was just said (by the retreat preacher). Yes, it is Mary who gives each one his mission, his task, the position he must fill. Just as her divine Son once entrusted a mission to his apostles, calling them his friends, telling them *Euntes docete omnes gentes* and to go their separate ways, just so does this divine mother, at the end of time, say to us, "Go, proclaim my divine Son to the world. I am with you. Go, we shall still be united."'

There is a noticeable tension here between the ideal of the *cor unum* and the missionary impulsion. This may very well be the origin of the problem of the missions in Oceania in Colin's time, that is to say a conflict between the needs of the mission – keenly felt by the Vicars Apostolic – and the demands of religious life in community, as perceived by the Founder. Colin, we know, resisted the bishops' policy of spreading the missionaries as widely as possible and insisted that they should be able to live in community and follow the Rule. Perhaps we should see in this conflict more than just an historical contingency, something that might not have happened, if, for instance, there had not also been a clash of personalities.

On the contrary, I believe, we touch here once again a tension that is deeply rooted in Fr. Colin's thought, a tension that is characteristic of him and distinguishes him from other

founders of the time. In fact the Society of Mary, in Colin's mind, is far from being just a copy of the Society of Jesus. The model of the earliest Church – which Colin liked to imagine in terms of the house of Mary – has to be married with that of the apostles sent on mission. The same Constitutions of 1872 that contain the text we saw a moment ago, restricting the movements of Marist religious outside their community house, also have texts such as n. 4, which says that 'their vocation is to go from place to place for the greater service of God and to spend themselves working for the salvation of the neighbour… They must show themselves most ready … to undertake such works in any corner of the world where results can be expected and for as long as obedience requires.' This number also goes back to the 'primitive rule'.

The tension between community life and mission is obvious and uncomfortable; but eliminating or devaluing one of its elements is not the way to resolve it. Turning the Society of Mary into a quasi-monastic order is no solution (but let us not be too quick to reject as 'monastic' and therefore 'not for us' concrete practices of common life and prayer). On the other hand, emphasizing mission in a one-sided way that reduces community life to a minimum or even practically excludes it, results in a Society of Mary that is far from the Founder's intentions. In particular – despite the impression that one might get from the title of ch. 3 of our Constitutions, 'Forming a Communion for Mission' – I do not think that a purely utilitarian view of community life is adequate. Here, if anywhere, we need 'creative fidelity' as we try to do justice – not simply in theory but in lived practice – to Fr. Colin's insight of a Society that would imitate both the new-born Church of Jerusalem in its intense sharing of life and prayer and also the apostles going 'from place to place' to bring God's salvation to all.

## 7. Renewal of community life today

I believe that we Marists are being called very specially and urgently at this moment to renew – perhaps reform – our community life. The model of the earliest Church *cor unum et anima una* summons us to this task. Marists themselves see it as a priority.

I don't know if you remember the report drawn up by a so-called 'redaction committee' in preparation for the General Chapter of 2001. This report brought together the responses of Marists all over the Society to a certain number of questions designed to reveal how we were feeling about our Society, its inner life and its mission. It reflected a profound dissatisfaction among Marists all over the world concerning the quality of our community

life. Clearly the realities we were experiencing often disappointed what we considered to be our justifiable expectations. Put simply, Marist community life was not living up to its promises. I have a hunch – unprovable for lack of hard data – that this has been a major factor, in one way or another, in the decision of many confreres to leave our ranks. It is a problem that our Marist leadership has put before us with concrete proposals for change.

The renewal of community life must surely be an important and urgent concern for us all. And it needs direct and focused attention. I don't believe it is a problem that would fix itself if only we individual Marists were better Christians and religious. Because we have to admit that this deep and widespread dissatisfaction with community life was being felt at a time when unprecedented numbers of individual religious had experienced spiritual and personal renewal – often more than once. I'm not for a moment calling into question the quality of this renewal or its positive results for the Marists concerned. But I'm convinced that renewal of *individuals* is not going automatically to bring about renewal of *communities*. For that we need targeted action. I mean, we have to pass beyond exhortations and statements of intent, to take concrete and measurable steps in order to bring about change, real, visible change in the way we live.

# Mary, the Church and her Society

When Jean-Claude Colin thinks of the Virgin Mary he tends to see her in relation to the Church, typically as supporting it at its birth and at the end of time. I want to reflect with you now on four ideas or expressions referring to Mary and the Church that are current in the Society of Mary and elsewhere. These are: 'A Marian vision of the Church', 'Mary model of the Church', 'A Marian Church', 'Begin again a new Church'; only this last expression is really Colinian. Sometimes Marists roll several of these together, for example to say that our mission is 'to build a Marian Church'. Perhaps we need to unscramble them and look carefully at each. Finally I want to look again at what it means to be the Society of Mary.

## 1. A Marian Vision of the Church

Fr Colin's way of understanding the Church, in which the presence and action of Mary are decisive, has been called by Jean Coste his 'Marian vision of the Church'. That was the title he gave to a public lecture delivered in Rome in 1984 and published in vol. 8 of the Maristica series bearing the same title (pp. 166-196). This expression, coined by Coste, was taken up in our present Constitutions, n. 92, in a sentence introduced after the 1985 Chapter: 'Marists are called, above all, to make their own a Marian vision of the Church.' The text continues: 'To achieve this, nothing will be as effective as a re-living of the founding experience of the Society', namely the moments of Fourvière, Cerdon and the mission in the Bugey.

Coste's Rome lecture presented before a general audience the results up till then of his work on the origins of the Society of Mary. Those who were listening to him were, for the most part, completely ignorant of Colin, Courveille and company, so it is interesting to see what Coste considers to be most important to mention. He begins with a rapid survey of Marist origins, in which he does not mention either Fourvière or the Bugey missions and has only a word or two about the Cerdon years. On the other hand, he has a lot to say about Jean-Claude Courveille and the message he brought to the major seminary at Lyons as coming from Our Lady in the cathedral of Le Puy. Coste goes into detail about it in the second part of his lecture, in which he sets out Colin's utopian and eschatological ideas on the role of Mary at the birth of the Church and at the end of time. He also speaks there of

Colin's three 'no's, inspired by the figure of Mary in the nascent Church, to the misuse of three forms of power to which an apostle is tempted: money, the power to decide and personal prestige. 'In these three areas,' writes Coste (p. 182), 'what Colin saw as the antidote to evil, to the corruption of the apostle's heart through greed, authoritarianism, and vanity, was the image of the Virgin Mary and the newborn Church for whom she was an example and a support.'

In the third and final part of his lecture, Coste wanted to 'bring out briefly the main elements which make up this Colinian vision' – his Marian vision of the Church. He makes three points. First he develops the intimate link between Mary and the Church, especially the Church in its beginnings and at the end of time, which Colin applied to the role his Congregation would be called to play (p. 184). He concludes: 'Through the belief of its founder, the Society of Mary can thus be counted among the eschatologically oriented religious foundations. Of these there have been many since the middle ages and they expressed the best of themselves by projecting unto the end of time, in utopian fashion, the values they bore' (p. 186f., referring to the sociologist Jean Séguy).

His second point follows on: 'However, and this is crucial, within this eschatological projection Mary holds a place which formerly belonged to the Holy Spirit' (p. 188). According to the main stream of the eschatological tradition flowing from Joachim of Flora in the 12th century, the Age of God the Father was followed by that of the Son, which in turn is to give way to the Age of the Holy Spirit. This is the scheme we find, for instance, in St Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, where the Age of the Spirit blends with that of Mary, who intervenes at the end of time. In sharp contrast, 'Colin never mentions the three ages. Nor does he attribute a role to the Holy Spirit in the last times: the eschatological projection is entirely directed upon Mary.' Coste comments: 'Such a development is certainly significant. How it took place and what it means has yet to be studied' – and, to my knowledge, it still needs to be studied more than twenty years later.

Coste's final point about Colin's Marian vision of the Church is that 'the dominant note of his Marian eschatology is not so much apocalyptic as it is pastoral' (p. 190). He explains: 'In the mind of their founder, Marists are to be the instruments of his plan of mercy, or more precisely, as he often said, "the instruments of the divine mercies towards sinners". Their job will be to reach sinners at all costs, while effacing themselves as much as possible so as to remove all obstacles to God's action. The leitmotiv "Hidden and unknown in the world" now becomes pastoral praxis and determines a radical reappraisal of how to behave in the pulpit, in the classroom, and in the confessional, thus preparing

the way for a new kind of Church witness that will articulate this Marian approach' (p. 190f.). To end this summary of Coste's remarkable lecture – which should not be consigned to oblivion and neglect – I cannot resist quoting its beautiful conclusion (p. 194f.):

'Whenever a Marist abandons the stronghold of one who owns the truth and becomes instead defenceless as one who knows he must disappear in order to allow God to take over, then he understands how Mary is present in Colin's vision of the Church and its mission.

'Thanks to her something stirs in the heart of the apostle, a certain image of the Church emerges which prefigures the Church of the last days. In a sense, yes, the Church begins again, the Church which, from its birth at Pentecost, is less concerned with lasting forever thanks to a solid structure than with starting again each morning, humbly, around the Lord's supper, with Peter and the apostles, awaiting the coming of the Spirit, persevering in prayer with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.'

## 2. Mary Model of the Church

In n. 10 of the Constitutions we read:

'… It is in pursuing these aims (of the Society) in the spirit of Mary that they will help to renew the Church in her image, a servant and pilgrim Church.'

A number of things could be said about this text. It too was inserted after the 1985 Chapter, with the idea of incorporating some elements of the provisional legislation of the 70s. In fact its source is in the statement of the Chapter of Renewal of 1969-70 on 'Marists and the World Today', published in *Decreta Capitularia*, n. 128. The preceding paragraph, n. 127, refers to Vatican II's Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 63 and 65, where the Council makes its own a tradition going back at least to St Ambrose, which speaks of Mary as the model and figure of the Church and of the Church as becoming more and more like this model. So the Marist General Chapter continues:

'Now that this conciliar insight must be translated into the reality of everyday life, Marists believe that their tradition has already given them a modest but real experience of the direction the Church is taking in an effort to draw close to its type, Mary: a Church always searching after Jesus Christ, a serving Church, poor, lowly, without place of privilege, so that He may be proclaimed. The Society was made sensitive to these attitudes

by the words of its Founder and the example of its elders, so that it must now feel an increased responsibility to be faithful to its early mission.'

The beautiful statement *To be a Marist* of the 1977 General Chapter takes over a shorter version of the text we have just read in its n. 15: 'Our communities witness to the Church's desire to grow nearer its perfect image in Mary: a Church which perseveres in its search for Jesus Christ, a servant Church, not wanting to domineer, without place of privilege, concerned only that He be proclaimed.'

Now listen again to our present Constitutions, n. 10:
'… It is in pursuing these aims (of the Society) in the spirit of Mary that they will help to renew the Church in her image, a servant and pilgrim Church.'

This formula 'renew the Church in Mary's image' is somewhat more independent of the vocabulary of Vatican II *Lumen Gentium* than are the Chapter texts of the 70s. Perhaps the final redactors of our Constitutions realised that Fr Colin never speaks of Mary as model, type or image of the Church, even though these expressions are traditional and even patristic; Colin speaks of Mary as model of the Marist and of the Society that bears her name, but not of Mary as model of the Church. Jan Hulshof has dealt with this fully in his paper to the Third International Colloquium on Marist History and Spirituality 'Mary Model of the Church. A Marian and Ecclesial Spirituality' (*FN* 3,4, 1996, pp. 586-602, p. 589f. and 591f.) Even so, the most recent text, in its conciseness, stresses even more than the earlier ones the idea that Mary is the model of a 'servant and pilgrim Church'.

Another observation. The idea of the 'servant Church' is already in the texts of 1969-70 and 77, but that of a 'pilgrim Church' is new. It's true that the earlier texts did speak of a Church 'which perseveres in its search for Jesus Christ', but that's not really the same as a 'pilgrim Church'.

In fact, of course, neither expression is Colinian. On the other hand, both go back to important ideas of Vatican II and the post-conciliar era. They even represent two ecclesiologies, or rather, two 'models of the Church', to quote the title of Avery Dulles' famous book. As you know, the dominant model at the Council was that of the 'People of God', or even the 'Pilgrim People of God'. For forty years already before the Council, important research in Scripture, Patristics and Liturgy had been giving the Church a renewed sense of Salvation History, of God's plan revealed through history to save the human race by means of a chosen people. This people is guided by the Holy Spirit, but is itself on the move, on pilgrimage, like the rest of humanity. The Old Testament type is of

course the people of the Exodus. This model stands at the very opposite of everything that would present itself as settled once and for all or triumphant. For Cardinal Suenens, one of the great conciliar figures, to adopt such a model brought with it 'a sort of spiritual revolution', especially for those formed in a more static and hierarchical ecclesiology. The 'Pilgrim People of God' model does not seem to have kept its primary place in the documents of the magisterium after Vatican II.

The other model, that of 'Servant Church', was favoured by the pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the modern world, and since then has been adopted and developed by the magisterium in its social teaching. In this model, the Church is regarded as called to continue the mission of service for which Christ came into the world. The Council did not invent this way of seeing the Church; instead we must look to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose writings were very influential in the 60s. The latter especially presents Jesus as 'the man for others' and argues for a servant Church that would share in human destinies, that would not seek to dominate but would agree to help and serve, after the example of Jesus. This is the tone we hear in the Marist Chapter text of 1969-70, which wants a 'a serving Church, poor, lowly, without place of privilege, provided that He may be proclaimed'

This model proposes an attitude on the part of the Church that was rather new at the time: to listen to the world and learn from it, to read the 'signs of the times' and discern the action of the Spirit. The Church's task was then to walk alongside all movements and persons of good will working for peace, liberation, justice, development, reconciliation.

There's no difficulty about wanting to renew the Church on the 'Servant' and 'Pilgrim' models. And even if Fr Colin never used these precise expressions, you don't have to look very far to find real points of contact with his own thought, especially in the *Ignoti et occulti*. On the other hand, you would have much more trouble in working out exactly how a 'servant and pilgrim Church' would thereby be 'renewed in Mary's image' or even 'grow nearer its perfect image in Mary', to quote our Marist texts. There is, to be sure, Luke 1:38, where Mary declares that she is the 'servant, or handmaid' – but 'of the Lord'! On the other hand, it's Jesus who says of himself: 'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve' (Matt 20:28) and 'the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Matt 8:20). He is really the model of a 'servant and pilgrim Church'. Surely we wouldn't be less Marist by referring from time to time to Jesus!

In any case, I would like to end this part of my talk by quoting two Colinian texts that speak, if not of Mary model of the Church, at least of Mary model of the Society in its attitudes towards the world in which we live. The first is *FS* 85,1-2, from 1844:

'… Someone said once: "The Marist Fathers … there is no need to ask what their spirit is. Their name is a sufficient indication, if they understand it properly." Colin replies:

'Indeed, Messieurs, the blessed Virgin (as the Church tells us) is the channel of graces, the Queen of the Apostles, and what great good she did for souls. Yet in this world she was hidden and as it were unknown.'

Two years later, in 1846, he expressed himself in terms that were still more specific (*FS* 120,2): 'Let us be small, Messieurs. *Nolite altum sapere*, let us be small. The blessed Virgin was so small, although in reality she was the Queen of Heaven and the first of all creatures. She is our model. Let us do a great deal of good, but like her let us do it, *tanquam ignoti et occulti*.'

Even if Colin does not think of Mary precisely as the model of the Church, she is a model – even *the* model – for the Christian and the Marist. Mary provides a model of a style of behaviour that does not refuse to move into action, even on a big scale, but which is – to quote again the excellent formula of the Chapter of 1969-70 – 'poor, lowly, without place of privilege, provided that Christ may be proclaimed'. Once we have given up, with Mary, all power for ourselves we will know how to walk alongside those who have no power; we will at last be able to speak with the true authority of the Gospel.

## 3. A Marian Church

The expression 'a Marian Church' is neither Colinian nor conciliar. It seems to be of very recent vintage, publicized, even perhaps invented, by Hans Urs von Balthasar. In the last few years it has become extremely popular in Marist usage, where it is occasionally contrasted with or even opposed to 'a Petrine Church', standing for authority and institution, a masculine Church, if you like, to which we might prefer a more feminine one, more flexible and nurturing. It might be a good idea to look again at this expression in the context of von Balthasar, to see at least how he uses it and what he implied by it.

Even though 'a Marian Church' does not appear in the Constitutions – presumably the expression was not yet current in the mid-80s – our starting point is nevertheless n. 117

of the 1987 Constitutions, which picks up, with slight revisions, n. 80 of the provisional legislation of 1977:

'The Society, like the Church, finds its model in Mary the woman of faith. Its spirituality … tries to make its own the Christian experience lived by Mary.'

A question may well occur to you: How can we make our own the Christian experience of Mary? Wasn't that unique and personal to her? I don't know what the legislators of 1977 and 1985 had in mind in composing these texts. However, the search for an answer led me to none other than Hans Urs von Balthasar. Now I don't suppose for one moment that the authors of our texts meant to send us off to Balthasar in order to interpret them. Nonetheless, it is Balthasar who does in fact speak of 'Mary's experience of Christ' and of how we can share in it. And it is precisely in this general context that he speaks also of the 'Marian dimension or profile of the Church' and even of a 'Marian Church'. So we have every interest in pursuing this line.

Balthasar writes about the 'Marian experience' in vol. I of his book *Herrlichkeit*, published in 1962; the English translation of the second edition of 1967 appeared under the title *The Glory of the Lord* in 1982; the passage in question can be found on pp. 350-365. There he speaks of the 'archetypal experiences' that certain members of the Church have deposited in the common treasury of the Communion of Saints for all to make use of. Each of these archetypal experiences is a privileged way of sharing in Christ's own experience of God. Here Balthasar asks the same question as we have asked: How can other members of the Church share in this experience?

Balthasar distinguishes four ways in which the Christian experience can relate to Christ and to his own experience of God. First, there is the eyewitness experience of the Twelve, their experience of Jesus living, dead and risen, an experience that is expressed in the 'Petrine tradition'. Next is the charismatic experience of Paul, which is particular to him and cannot be reduced to that of the Twelve. Then there is John's special experience, which puts us in contact with 'what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have contemplated and touched with our hands, the Word of life' (1 John 1:1). Finally, but we could also say in first place, at a level that is much deeper and closer to the centre, there is the experience of the Mother of the Lord. Her experience was at once intimate and total; it flows into the Church and makes it fruitful. So, four archetypal experiences, the Petrine, the Pauline, the Johannine and the Marian. Elsewhere in his works, Balthasar proposes other, somewhat more complex, schemas, but in each of them Mary's place is foundational.

In fact, the Marian experience of Christ supports or underpins the threefold experience – Petrine, Pauline and Johannine – that the apostles contribute to the Church. Her experience precedes and conditions theirs. It links faith and vision, earth and heaven, and overcomes the tension within the Church that is immaculate and at the same time the Church of sinners. The Christian who shares by prayer and contemplation in Mary's experience of Christ is able to live the perfect accord between the grace that calls and invites and the grace that responds and accepts (cf. p. 363). In other words, the Christian can make his or her own the faith and obedience to God's Word of Mary 'the woman of faith'. At the same time, since Mary 'both believed by faith and conceived by faith' – to quote St Augustine (*Sermo* 25,7; PL 46, 937; cf. St Leo the Great: 'conceived in her mind before her body', *Sermo 1 in Nativitate Domini*, 2; PL 54, 191) – she is both 'the first believer' and 'the Mother of God': the two cannot be separated. Mary's experience of Christ – and also our share in it – is both spiritual and bodily. For that reason, we cannot appeal from the visible, hierarchical, 'Petrine' Church to an invisible, spiritual Church where we would find the 'Marian dimension'. On the contrary, it is in the visible Church of sacraments and institutions – the Church formed by the distinct yet united experience of Peter, Paul and John – that we find Mary's experience of Christ and God.

In short, the Marian dimension or profile of the Church – or, if you wish, the Marian Church – complements and even precedes the Petrine dimension; this was a favourite reflection of Pope John Paul II. It would, however, be a disastrous mistake to oppose these two dimensions, to opt for a 'Marian Church' in place of a 'Petrine Church'. The one Church is Petrine, Pauline, Johannine – and first Marian. Balthasar himself wrote that, where the Marian dimension is denied, 'everything becomes polemical, critical, bitter, humourless and ultimately boring, and people in the masses run away from such a Church.' There is, of course, more than one way of denying the Marian dimension; one is by an exercise of authority that is harsh, heavy handed and uncaring. It would, however, be a sad irony if a use of the 'Marian Church' as a stick with which to beat the hierarchy – and in particular Rome – only made us bitter, humourless and boring.

A final thought. A Marian Church is not a feminized Church. The relative absence of men – of normal adult males – from our churches may not be an accident. Perhaps we are in fact getting exactly the results that the services we provide are designed to produce: a Church to which men do not feel that they belong. It would be a travesty if we Marists were contributing to this 'in the name of Mary'. Perhaps we should speak a bit more, not only of Mary, but also of Peter, Paul and John – and Jesus.

## 4. Begin Again a New Church

That being said, we all know that Jean-Claude Colin wanted 'a new Church.'

In *FS* 120,1 we read these words of the Founder: 'The Society must begin a new Church over again.' He adds immediately: 'I do not mean that in a literal sense, that would be blasphemy. But still, in a certain sense, yes, we must begin a new Church.' Fr. Colin doesn't want to start a new Church: 'That would be blasphemy.' All the same, he wants a Church that is new, renewed if you like, but so radically that, in the last analysis he doesn't refuse to repeat his first expression, 'we must begin a new Church over again.'

'Begin over again'. The earliest Church was for Colin something of a 'Utopia' (it probably was also for Luke). The function of a utopia – whether situated on a remote island, in the past or in the future – is to bring out what is unsatisfactory about present reality, perhaps also presenting a model for change. So the utopian vision of the newborn Church brings out what is unsatisfactory about the Church as she is today. On the other hand, this utopia calls us to move ahead, not to turn back; its attraction is not archaeological but teleological. The project is not to reconstruct the Church of the 1st century, or to remove from the Church of today whatever we can't find in the New Testament, which was the ideal of the 16th century Protestant reformers; the project is rather to prepare the Church of the last days – when Mary will be its support as she was for the new-born Church. From this moment, we must begin over again to be 'Church'. The young Colin was thinking especially of the Church in France and Europe, devastated by the Revolution and ensuing wars and partly compromised by collaboration with Napoleon. In our time, the notion of starting the Church again is beginning to take on an even more literal meaning.

'We have to', 'the Society must': Colin is convinced that the Marists exist in order to start the new Church again. He wants to enlist all our efforts, all our prayers in the cause of realizing this goal. He is as well aware as anyone of the enormous disproportion between the greatness of the project on the one hand, and the fewness of the Marists and the poverty of their resources on the other. But that doesn't discourage the Founder. On the contrary, he even finds in that the confirmation of his intuition: 'The Society of Mary, like the Church, began with simple, poorly educated men, but since then the Church has developed and encompassed everything. We too must gather together everyone through the Third Order – heretics alone may not belong to it.' This project is expressed in an early text of Marist legislation, the *Summarium* of 1833 (n. 109): to 'gather, so to speak, all the

members of Christ, whatever their age, sex or condition, under the protection of the Blessed Mary Immaculate, mother of God, to rekindle their faith and piety and to nourish them with the doctrine of the Roman Church' (cf. *OM* 427,2; Keel, 93).

Reading these texts, you get the impression that Fr. Colin isn't simply saying that the Society of Mary is called to work to bring about the 'new Church', but that the Society of Mary itself already constitutes the seed of this new Church. That's also Coste's opinion. Speaking of Colin's famous reply to Cardinal Castracane, that he wanted everyone to be Marist, with the Pope at our head, Coste comments that his response 'shows clearly that he envisaged more than the foundation of a congregation, albeit a multibranch one open to lay people, but the renewed Church of the last times, of which the Society of Mary is a small but effective beginning' (*A Marian Vision of the Church*, p. 187; in this context he quotes *FS* 120,1).

What are we going to do with this bold, not to say crazy project? Perhaps we should just keep quiet about it and decide that it belongs to the personal vision of Jean-Claude Colin, which in no way binds Marists! In what sense can Marists constitute, even as a seed, the new Church of the latter days? If we were to reply to a polite inquirer, that this is the purpose of the Society, we would meet with incomprehension or incredulity, if not outright derision. Nevertheless, the General Chapter of 1969-70 intended to enter into this intuition of the Founder. In DC 1969-70, n. 130, we read:

'Together with the whole Christian body, we are living through the birth of a new Church in a new world. The Council has urged us to enter resolutely upon *aggiornamento*, and this is facilitated for us by the Marist spirit. All her life long, Mary was led towards objectives which lay beyond her understanding, and found in faith the daily reply to the signs of her times. With her we also advance in faith towards the unforeseen, certain that God is leading events, and that faithful to the Spirit, we have to discover the features of the renewed Church of tomorrow.'

It is amazing that the Colinian command to begin again a new Church does not figure in our present Constitutions – unless it is represented perhaps by n. 14, which says that 'Marists are called to establish the Church where it does not exist and to renew existing communities…' – but that's not at all the same thing.

It seems that we have to do here with a central intuition of Colin. To abandon it, openly or tacitly, is equivalent – or so I feel – to disowning our Founder. But how can we make this intuition our own while remaining faithful to Colin and also clear sighted about our realities? If we were to put this question to Colin, he would probably direct us to the

end of St Matthew's Gospel, where Christ commands eleven poor guys who haven't all ceased to have doubts: 'Go and make disciples of all nations.'

At this point it would be too easy to reply that we Marists are called to carry out our ministries with this inspiring vision of Colin in the background. But for Colin, or at least this is how I read him, the vision of the new Church of the latter days is not in the background but at centre stage. If we want to follow Colin, we are going to put this vision in the centre of our personal and communal project.

But there's no place here for any sort of Marist triumphalism. We don't claim to be already this new Church in miniature. On the contrary, our first project has to be to do everything so that our communities and the Society as a whole anticipate the end-time Church as they imitate the new-born Church, precisely by being *cor unum et anima una*. After that, the goal of our efforts and our prayers will be to gather into unity 'all the scattered children of God' (cf. John 11:52). There we have the new Church of the latter days. But before we can begin again a new Church, perhaps we need to begin again a new Society of Mary.

## 5. Mary and her Society

When I went to Rome in 2002 to work with our General Administration, my task, as I understood it, was to provide applied research on the present state of the Society in context and to think creatively about its future. I was talking with my then Spiritual Director, a man who had had much experience of religious life in many forms and in many parts of the world. When I asked him if he had any ideas for the Society of Mary, he replied: What about reconsecrating your Society to Our Lady? He told me about a Marian religious community that had fallen on hard times in terms of vocations and morale. It decided to solemnly renew its consecration to Our Lady – no doubt there was more to it than simply reading out a prayer. There followed what amounted to a complete turn-around in the wellbeing of the community.

I never followed that up. It wasn't that I was sceptical about the story – in fact I was quite impressed. But I didn't have enough conviction to recommend to the Superior General and Council that they reconsecrate the Society to Mary. Such an act would have gone clean against ways of thinking that are widely and tenaciously held in the Society today. For one thing, it would have been a significant act of devotion to Mary. I think that as such it would have met with resistance from many Marists, on the grounds that we

don't have 'that sort' of devotion to Mary. It is a fact, of course, that the Society is not entrusted or associated with a particular Marian devotion, like the Rosary for the Dominicans or the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help for the Redemptorists. On the other hand, the Colinian Constitutions have a whole section 2 of ch. 5 (Common Rules) with the title 'Let them be specially devoted to blessed Mary'. This devotion is to be expressed by a number of practices, some of which are distinctive of the Society, including the three Hail Marys and 'Sub tuum' morning and evening, the Saturday fast, Mary's image above the superior's door, as well as common devotions like the Rosary. Our present Constitutions also have a section 6 'Special practices in honour of Mary' in ch. 3, art. 2. This repeats a number of the devotional practices of the old Constitutions. I also believe that many Marists do carry them out, and I've yet to see a Marist house that doesn't have a statue, icon or other representation of Mary above or near the superior's door.

On the other hand, we do seem to be somewhat inhibited about common or public acts of Marian devotion. This could to some extent be culturally determined or a 'guy thing' – not too much into flowers and candles. At least perhaps we would like to think so. But the Marist Brothers don't seem to have the same problems. They are much simpler and more spontaneous than we are in expressing devotion to 'the Good Mother'. That is one of the features of the Marist Brothers from which we might learn; others, I would say, are their sense of brotherhood and their professionalism.

Regarding Marian devotion, we may try to rationalize our own approach by saying something like, We are not meant to be looking *at* Mary so much as looking *with* her at Jesus, God, the world. True, of course, but nonetheless, perhaps, used as a rationalization of our comparative lack of common or public manifestations of Marian devotion.

In fact, the term rationalization may contain a clue and lead us much further. As a group of people, I think we are rather good at being rational. We got a solid training in it at the Seminary, and it has stood us in good stead since. We are reasoners, tending towards the abstract and the cerebral. I wonder if that's not what we have done to Mary: we are better at thinking or talking *about* her than at singing hymns or addressing prayers *to* her. In itself that might not be so disastrous – we all have our charisms. But it would be much more worrying if we have turned Mary into an abstraction; if, instead of being a real person for us, she has become a symbol, a sort of rhetorical shorthand standing for a certain number of ideas, such as how we are to be present and active in the Church, or femininity.

The consequences go wider than simply devotion to Mary. The first Marists were deeply convinced that they were doing 'Mary's work' – it was an expression that came easily and often – that Mary had chosen them to carry out her own task of supporting the Church at the end of time. Not only were they convinced of this; their conviction motivated them to do quite amazing things, like heading off to the Pacific. Do we still have this conviction and motivation? Do we think we are doing Mary's work, in the sense of being chosen and commissioned by her? Or, if we use that expression, perhaps it simply means doing what we are doing in what we would like to think is a 'Marian way'.

In order to believe that we are doing Mary's work in that strong sense, we have to have a high sense of our own calling and destiny – namely that it really does come from Mary. That means, of course, that Mary has to be for us a real person, and not an abstraction or a symbol. That would be the challenge of reconsecrating the Society to Mary, if it were to be more than merely a form of words, a lovely new prayer printed on a special card, to be recited on appropriate occasions. We would be obliged to renew our sense of Mary as a real person, who initiated the Society and still, we hope, guides it (unless she's given up on us – a possibility that Fr Colin foresaw). We would be obliged to rededicate ourselves to *her* work, to have a sense that we were personally chosen and commissioned by her. We would be obliged to renew our sense of what it means to belong to the Society *of Mary*.

Could the Society of Mary today, could we, personally and as communities, accept that challenge?

# What is Marist Spirituality?

We often speak of Marist spirituality: but what is it?

First, let us be clear that a spirituality is not simply a theology, nor is it just a vision, a charism or one or more inspiring ideas, or even a spirit (cf. Craig Larkin, 'Mary in the Church: The Basis of Marist Spirituality', Rome, 1979, pp. 10-15, who distinguishes charism, spirit and spirituality). I think that sometimes we Marists tend to call 'Marist spirituality' what is really something else. In particular, the great Colinian themes – Mary in the earliest Church and at the end of time, etc. – do not, in my view, constitute a spirituality, at least not by themselves, even if they are part of our identity.

## 1. What is a Spirituality?

What then is a spirituality? How to define this over-worked word, which – to judge from the section labelled 'spirituality' in bookshops and public libraries – refers to such things as self-improvement and psychic wellbeing, and borders on the occult.

Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote in an influential article ('The Gospel as Norm and Test of All Spirituality in the Church', *Concilium*, 1965), that every authentic spirituality – including non-Christian – comprises three elements: there is first the *movement* of the human spirit towards the absolute Spirit; the second element consists in selfless *service*; finally there is a certain *passivity*, which is really a higher *activity*, in which the human spirit allows itself to be moved by the divine Spirit. These three elements, he continues, were proclaimed in the Bible and fulfilled in the Person and teaching of Jesus Christ. In the last analysis, they 'are interiorized in the loving attitude of Jesus towards his Father in the Holy Spirit'. Next these three components are realized in the Church, of which the Virgin Mary is the prototype. The various spiritualit*ies*, which appear in the history of the Church, are only particular applications of the one spirituality of the Gospel. The individuals or communities that are identified with a particular spirituality will emphasize one aspect of Gospel spirituality – like Poverty for St Francis of Assisi – and make it the dynamic centre of life and action; but, if the spirituality is authentic, this privileged centre will be only a reference point for living the whole of the Gospel.

So we are asking how Jean-Claude Colin – for we are speaking here in particular of the spirituality of one branch of the Society of Mary – proposes to his followers to live the

Gospel in self-transcendence, in selfless service and in surrender to God's Spirit, that is to say, to make our own the loving attitude of Jesus towards his Father in the Holy Spirit? Where is the dynamic centre of life and action in reference to which Marists are called to live the whole Gospel?

## 2. Is there a Marist Spirituality?

But is there really a distinctly Marist spirituality? The question needs to be asked. For not every founder or foundress gave their followers a proper spirituality, as Ignatius gave his (see Larkin, p. 9). Many new foundations are placed squarely within an existing spiritual tradition, Benedictine, Carmelite, Dominican, Franciscan, or what have you. In other cases, the founder simply assumes what you might call the current spirituality, without seeking to add anything except may be a particular emphasis or devotional practice.

The question also needs to be asked because, in a survey of Marists conducted in association with the Fourth International Colloquium on Marist History and Spirituality, few seem to have regarded Fr Colin as a 'spiritual teacher', even though elements of his spiritual teaching emerged as enormously significant for many participants (Kevin Duffy and others, 'The Spiritual Teaching of Father Colin: A Survey of Attitudes in the Society of Mary', *FN* 4,3, 1999, pp. 313-325). This might at least suggest that Marists do not clearly recognise their Founder as having bequeathed a coherent spirituality to the Society. Instead they tend to look to St Ignatius, St Francis de Sales, St John of the Cross, or St Therese of Lisieux as their principal guides in the spiritual life.

On the other hand, Jean-Claude Colin's vision of the Society of Mary was in many ways original. Craig Larkin (pp. 53-74) has shown that his distinctive insight was to see Mary, and so the Marist, in relationship to the Church, the world and to contemporary people – a relationship that is aptly summed up in the 'hidden and unknown'. This idea was new and distinctive, and was not simply the current way of looking at Mary or the Church. It implies a new and distinctive spirituality to give it life. We want to know what are the spiritual resources that underwrite this vision, what are the spiritual forces that enable the beautiful ideal to become a reality. How can we Marists share in Mary's relationship to the Church? Or again, how do we – frail and self-centred as we are – become 'instruments of divine mercy'? Can we look to Jean-Claude Colin, or must we find another guide?

Although he never wrote a spiritual treatise, not even the *Doctrine spirituelle* that bears his name, Fr Colin has left us a fairly substantial *corpus* of spiritual teachings, to be

found in the various redactions of the Rule, in letters, including his circular letters to the Society and letters of spiritual direction, and in his conversations and informal talks recorded by Fr Mayet. As we read this material, it would be misleading to think that we should look only for elements that are unique to Colin. Any attempt to construct a synthesis of those alone would in fact give a quite distorted view of his spirituality. For the personal thought of even an original thinker consists not only of those ideas that are unique to him, but also – and even more – of those that he shares with others. In the case of Jean-Claude Colin, his spirituality is largely that of a certain religious and spiritual culture, which he shares. Nevertheless, he has left a version of this common spirituality that is sufficiently personal to deserve to be called Colinian and so Marist.

## 3. The Sources of Colinian Spirituality

How did Jean-Claude Colin learn to share in 'the loving attitude of Jesus Christ towards his Father in the Holy Spirit'?

Yves Krumenacker is a contemporary specialist in the history of French spirituality, who teaches at the University of Lyons. In the 17th and 18th centuries in France there were two main spiritual currents: the Jesuit spirituality and that of the so-called 'French school' handed on by the Oratorians and by the Sulpicians in the seminaries they ran. (There was also, of course, the school of Port Royal, but that is not our concern here.) Writing about France in the aftermath of the Revolution, Krumenacker finds that there was no longer a spirituality that is properly Ignatian, and even less one that could be called Oratorian or Sulpician. Instead, the ex-Jesuit networks and the seminaries handed on a spirituality in which the main currents of the pre-revolutionary period met and mingled (*L'école française de spiritualité. Des mystiques, des fondateurs, des courants et leurs interprètes*, Paris, Cerf, pp. 558-567). In this mix, the Sulpician current, which remained the dominant one in the seminaries, contributed the key concepts and characteristic vocabulary of what has been called the 'French School' of spirituality; memories of the Jesuit tradition opened up the perspective of a universal mission and centred around models of missionary zeal, both for the renewal of Christian life within the country and for the missions abroad.

*a) Jesuit*

Jean-Claude Colin and his companions in the seminary of Saint-Irénée at Lyons certainly underwent these influences. Jesuit memories provided the figures of Francis Regis

and Francis Xavier as the great models of missionary zeal in France and overseas. The 'promise of Fourvière' may well have been inspired by the vows that Ignatius and six of his followers took at Montmartre in August 1556 (I owe this suggestion to Fr. Thomas Ellerman). The young Colin would have come across quotations from Jesuit sources, some of which entered the Rule he was to compose at Cerdon; thus the phrase *in quavis mundi plaga*, reflecting the spirit of universal mission, which occurs already in the letter sent to Pope Pius VII in 1822 (' … *in quavis mundi plaga ad quam nos mittere volet Sedes Apostolica*'.) It is in fact a quotation from the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus (Pars III, c. II, litt. G, et *Regulae eorum qui in missionibus versantur* §2). Coste notes that the quotation does not imply that the signatories of the letter to the Holy Father were directly acquainted with the Ignatian Constitutions (*OM*, t. I, p. 264 and footnotes). From the same early period, perhaps, Colin also got the idea of the Jesuits as, in some respects, counter-models, of how not to go about certain things.

The most substantial Jesuit influence on his early formation was *The Practice of Christian Perfection*, by Alonso Rodríguez, which he rated so highly that he could tell his novice-scholastics at Belley in 1844: 'By the end of your theology, know Rodríguez as it were by heart' (*FS* 79,7). There he learned an ascetical discipline drawn from the great tradition, beginning with the Desert Fathers. We will see that Colin's spiritual formation contained influences, including Jesuit, that opened up other avenues than those laid out by Rodríguez; nevertheless, this writer was central to the pedagogy that our Founder prescribed for Marists.

Similarly, Fr Colin could tell the young student priests in 1848:

'I want you to know inside out St Ignatius' method of mental prayer, with all its acts. I should like to test you on it myself. This should be the one taught in all our novitiates and houses. It must be the same everywhere. It will be in the Rule.' He added: 'I prefer St Ignatius' method of meditation because it is the one most suited to our understanding. I believe God himself revealed it to him' (*FS* 165,2-3).

Notwithstanding his extreme reverence for the Ignatian method as a pedagogy for meditation, the same talk to the student priests reveals that the Founder was well aware that it was not necessarily going to be the one 'most suited' to everyone at all times:

'He added with a laugh: If later on God wants you to break away from the rules, we shall leave you in his hands; he will guide you far better than men. It must be quite certain, however, that it is he who is inspiring you, and God lets that be known by quite other means'

(*FS* 165,4). This last remark could well be an allusion to the teaching of St John of the Cross, on the passage from discursive meditation to a prayer that is simpler and more contemplative.

In any case, Colin was far from being a thoroughgoing Ignatian. Even though he wanted every Marist to have a copy of Jean-Joseph Petitdidier's edition of the *Spiritual Exercises* and use it as a manual of meditation (cf. *FS* 9,5), he did not ever, as far as I know, make the *Exercises*, even in the way they would have been given in the first half of the 19th century. Decisive also is the way he views the Particular Examen, which is the cornerstone of the *Exercises* and of any properly Ignatian spirituality. On the one hand, Marists are to be faithful to it (*FS* 182,3.22.25); on the other hand, it is meant to be 'a quarter hour of prayer, of union with God, to get your breath back in the middle of the day' (*FS* 39,38). Thus it is not for Colin what it is for Ignatius, the moment when we check in precise detail the progress we have made in overcoming a sinful habit or tendency or in acquiring a virtue, noting every victory and every fall. Colin's understanding of the Particular Examen points in a quite different direction.

*b) The 'French School'*

The influence of the 'French School' on Colin, no doubt from his seminary formation, is also clearly discernible. Thus in *FS* 33, from 1838-39, we read that 'He often said that people do not pay sufficient *honour* to the blessed Virgin in the services she rendered her son during his childhood. He recommended this practice to the Marists and to the boys in the college.' The same note adds: 'Father Colin was also very devoted to *honouring* Mary in the prayers she offered for the spreading of the Gospel, and he used to join his prayers to hers. He often urged us to follow this salutary practice.' (Italics mine.)

Jean Coste's introduction to this number is highly instructive. He writes:

'To honour Jesus or Mary in a mystery, in the terms of the French School of spirituality upon which Father Colin depends here, means to recognise the greatness of the actions they performed and the attitudes which prompted them, to fix one's attention upon them, and to let one's own [attitudes and – added JT] conduct be impregnated by this meditation.' Coste adds a remark that is highly significant for us: 'It is in this perspective of a spiritual identification that Father Colin insists on two moments of the life of Mary: her exercise of a twofold motherhood towards the infant Christ as he grew to manhood, and towards the infant Church expanding among the nations.' As the Founder himself put it on another occasion: 'When Jesus Christ was born, he was the object of all (Mary's) thoughts and affections. After his death, her sole thought was the extension and development of the

mystery of the Incarnation' (*FS* 60,1). In other words, we have here important elements of an answer to our question, How are we able to share in Mary's relationship to the Church? Our Founder recommends us to unite our minds and hearts with Mary praying for the spread of the Gospel and to join our prayers with hers. This exercise provides a pattern for other 'mysteries' of Mary at Nazareth and in the early Church which we could 'honour', thus opening ourselves to receive the imprint of the interior attitudes of the blessed Mother. We also have an answer to another question we saw: How can we make our own the 'Christian experience of Mary'?

A second example cannot be properly appreciated in the English translation of *A Founder Speaks*, n. 61, 5. In the course of conversation at La Capucinière in 1842, Fr Colin commented on an experience he had had while celebrating Mass: 'That Mass made me feel something I cannot express. I sensed how all the wisdom of the world was folly.' Then he declared (translating literally): 'Oh! How the *state* of our Lord, dragged like a fool through the streets of Jerusalem, seemed fine to me! I could see nothing more elevated than that *state*.' (Italics mine.) The twice-repeated word 'state' – in French *état* – is a key-word in the vocabulary of the 'French School'. It refers here to the interior attitude of Jesus as he was dragged like a fool through the streets of Jerusalem: the event took place 2000 years ago, but the 'state' or 'mystery' – the terms are practically synonymous – abides; it is, as it were, permanently available to us to enter into and contains a particular grace that is imparted to us. By uniting himself with this state, Fr Colin made his own the interior disposition of Jesus as he was being treated as a fool and so was able to sense 'how all the wisdom of the world was folly'.

A final example is provided by the devotion recommended in n. 34 of the 1872 Constitutions 'to spend a quarter of an hour on Fridays, with head bowed at least part of the time, praying in union with Christ in the garden of Olives.' This practice is included among 'Mortifications and Penances'. It did not feature in the 1842 Constitutions. On the other hand, it evidently belonged to the Rule and is typical of the 'early ideas' to which the Founder returned in the period after 1868. The way Colin writes about this devotion in some early texts shows clearly the inspiration of the 'French School'. So, in the local Rule for the Mother House, as revised after September 1843 (*AR*, 8, 19), we read: 'On Fridays, spend the last quarter hour of the meditation on one's knees (if possible) in a sort of self-annihilation, in the presence of the divine Majesty, in honour of the agony of the Saviour in the garden of Olives and of the anguishes of his Sacred Heart.' Here the expression 'in honour of' bears the special sense of 'honouring' that we have just seen; as for 'self-annihilation' – in French

*anéantissement* – it is another key-term of the 'French School': we realise our nothingness before God. The draft Constitutions of 1868 have: 'On Fridays, during the last quarter hour of the evening meditation, pray with head bowed and, during this time, offer to God the Father the prayer of Jesus Christ in the garden of Olives.' Once again, offering to the Father the prayer of Jesus is typical of the 'French School'; it is also now clear that this is what is implied in the 1872 text by 'in union with Christ'. Far from being simply an act of penance, the Friday devotion to Jesus in the agony in the garden, appears as a particular way of sharing interiorly in the dispositions of our Lord. It entered deeply into Fr Colin's own spiritual life: on one occasion he could recommend to Marists: 'In times of difficulty, let us say with our Lord in the Garden of Olives: "Let this chalice pass from me; but not my will but thine be done"' (*FS* 182,59). This shows that he had learnt to unite himself with the 'state' of Jesus praying in Gethsemane.

*c) Favourite Authors*

Besides the spiritual formation that he would have received in the seminary and which was common to all, Jean-Claude Colin received through his personal reading a spiritual culture that was eclectic but, in the last analysis, profound and coherent. He was already a serious reader as a boy: while he was a student at the minor seminary of Alix his sisters gave him two volumes by Henri-Marie Boudon, one of the foremost writers of the 'French School'; one of these works bore the significant title, *Dieu seul* (*God Alone*), and for 10 years it was Jean-Claude's inseparable companion (cf. *OM* 574 and 499, additional note *l*; D. Kerr, *Jean-Claude Colin, Marist: A founder in an era of revolution and restoration : the early years 1790-1836*, Dublin, 2000, pp. 89-90). Colin also tells us that, from the age of 13, in 1803, he was familiar with a work by Giuseppe Ignazio Franchi called *Treatise on the Love of Self-Contempt* (cf. *FS* 62). Charles Girard has shown the influence of Boudon and Franchi on Colin's ideas about humility ('On the Sources of Colin's Teaching on Humility', *FN* 4,2, 1998, pp. 257-293). Another book which he constantly read and 'knew by heart' was a compilation of letters of spiritual direction by St Francis de Sales (*OM* 574,1).

Around the years 1838-39, he spoke more than once with Fr Mayet of the spiritual authors whom he had read 'in the past' – so before 1836 and perhaps already in the seminary – and whom he recommended to Mayet personally or more generally to Marists (cf. *FS* 35). These authors are (in the order in which Colin mentions them): Francis de Sales (several times), Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Henri-Marie Boudon, Jean-Joseph Surin and in particular his *Catéchisme spirituel* (several times), Louis Lallemand (*sic*), François Guilloré,

Lorenzo Scupoli author of the *Spiritual Combat* highly recommended also by Francis de Sales, and Alonso Rodríguez. Our Founder also read and recommended the *Imitation of Jesus Christ* by Thomas à Kempis and the *Imitation of the Blessed Virgin* by Abbé d'Hérouville; he also assumed that Marists were constantly reading the New Testament (cf. *FS* 79,7; 182,13).

It is interesting to note that the spiritual authors recommended to Mayet are the same, by and large, as the identifiable sources of the spiritual teaching of Jean-Pierre de Caussade, a Jesuit writer of the 18th century in whom more than one Marist has found affinities with Marist spirituality, although Colin did not know him – the most notable difference is St Catherine of Siena, who is an important influence on Caussade but whom Fr Colin does not appear to have read (cf. *Traité sur l'oraison du cœur ; Instructions spirituelles*, Texte établi et présenté par Michel Olphe-Galliard s.j., Desclée de Brouwer, 1979, Introduction, pp. 24-25). Of these authors, Boudon we have just met, and we also know Rodríguez and Scupoli; Francis de Sales, Teresa and John of the Cross need no introduction. On the other hand, three names will almost certainly be unfamiliar, those of Lallemant (the usual spelling), Surin and Guilloré. These I call the 'mystical Jesuits'; they had a decisive influence on Fr Colin, and I will discuss them in the next talks. But first, I need to speak about someone who is never mentioned by Colin and whose works he seems not to have read, but who is crucial for understanding much that we have seen and will see about Colinian spirituality, Pierre de Bérulle.

## 4. Pierre de Bérulle

Bérulle (1575-1629) is in fact the founder of the 'French School' of spirituality, not only as a writer but also as the founder of a religious order, the Congregation of the Oratory of France, which existed to live out this spirituality. From the Oratory came the Society of Saint-Sulpice, dedicated to the formation of priests, through which the influence of Bérulle reached a seminarian called Jean-Claude Colin. For Bérulle's mission was the sanctification of the French clergy. This is especially interesting for us, as it means that Bérulle is a spiritual teacher who addresses himself to priests and, by extension, to apostolic religious, whereas so often the great spiritual classics are addressed to monks and enclosed nuns. The influence of Bérulle went far beyond those who acknowledged themselves to be his disciples. It was all-pervasive in the spiritual circles of France of the 17th and 18th centuries and reached every sphere, including Jesuits, despite the unfortunate quarrel that broke out between the Oratory and the Society of Jesus. Bérulle knew Francis de Sales – who greatly admired him – and all

those who were bringing about the renewal of Catholic life in France after the Wars of Religion; he was instrumental in bringing the Teresian Carmelites to France. But if I draw your attention to Pierre de Bérulle, it is not just because of his historical importance, and in particular for his indirect influence upon Jean-Claude Colin. It is also, and perhaps especially, for the inherent value of his spirituality, which is both beautiful, even sublime, and also practical. We shall follow the synthesis given by Henri Bremond in vol. III of his *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, pp. 22-154. For him, the doctrine of Bérulle rests on two principles: theocentrism and devotion to the incarnate Word, and is expressed in two practices: in the way of prayer called 'elevation' and in 'adherence' to Christ.

*a) Theocentrism*

'A genius of our times (Copernicus) maintains that the sun, and not the earth, is the centre of the universe; that it is motionless, and that the earth … moves around the sun… This new opinion, little followed in the science of the stars (Bérulle is writing before Galileo), is useful and is to be followed in the science of salvation. For Jesus is the sun, motionless in his greatness, and moving all things… Jesus is the true centre of the universe, and the universe is in continual movement with respect to him. Jesus is the sun of our souls, from whom they receive all graces, lights and influences. And the earth of our hearts should be in continual movement towards him, to receive in all its powers and parts the favourable aspects and kindly influences of this great star. Let us therefore exercise the movements and affections of our soul towards Jesus, and lift ourselves up in the praises of God, on the subject of his only Son and of the mystery of his incarnation, by the following thoughts and words…'

Thus Pierre de Bérulle in his *Discourse on the State and Greatness of Jesus*. And there you have it all, really: the sublimity, the theocentrism, the devotion to Christ, 'adherence' to him, the prayer of 'elevation'. From this passage, it is clear that he sees himself as bringing about nothing less than a 'Copernican revolution' in spirituality by introducing a Christocentric theory of the spiritual universe, as Copernicus had introduced a heliocentric theory of the physical universe. Christocentric, but we have to say immediately that, since Jesus is entirely turned towards God his Father, Bérulle's outlook is really theocentric. In the last analysis, every heart, beginning with that of Jesus, is or should be in continual movement towards God.

A Copernican revolution? Few believers will disagree that God is the true centre and prime mover of the moral and spiritual universe. But for how many is this truth the real foundation of their spiritual life? Bérulle, at any rate, saw that the victorious humanism of his

age put human beings at the centre of the moral universe, and that even spirituality tended to be in fact if not in principle anthropocentric. A notable exception to this tendency are the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius, and in particular their Principle and Foundation, which begins: 'Man is created to praise and reverence the Lord his God, and in serving him to find at last his salvation.' Here human salvation is not forgotten; but the accent is not there, but rather on the worship and service of God: human beings exist for God and not the other way round. However, when Pierre de Bérulle looked at contemporary Christianity, even at its best, he found that we human beings were at centre-stage, ourselves and our salvation, our sins and our needs, the development of our virtues; even morality and asceticism often resembled a more-or-less Christianized stoicism.

In contrast to this anthropocentric Christianity, Bérulle put God in the centre; specifically, he asserted the virtue of religion, which seeks to give God what is due to God, and in the first place worship and praise (he was known in his own day as the one who restored the virtue of religion). From this springs the great care given in the Oratorian and Sulpician traditions to the worship of God, especially in the liturgy. From it also springs a new attention to God that spreads everywhere in French spirituality, among others to a Boudon with his *Dieu seul*. In Bérulle it expresses itself in the lyrical outpouring of praise that he calls 'elevation'.

*b) The Incarnate Word*

Bérulle and his followers look at Jesus primarily in relation to God. Before being our Teacher and our Saviour, Jesus is the true Adorer. Because he is God as well as man, Jesus can at last give God a worship that is adequate: his first mission on coming into the world is to offer a perfect adoration (cf. Heb 10:5-7, quoting Ps 40). 'The man for others'? to quote Bonhoeffer. Yes, but first 'the man for God'.

Yet Jesus is also close to us. We can unite ourselves to him and in particular to the interior 'states' that encapsulate, so to speak, the different moments of his life, death and resurrection: we can make our own – for our salvation and sanctification – the essence of the mysteries of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin, born at Bethlehem, hidden at Nazareth, preaching and healing in Galilee and Judea, suffering and dying in Jerusalem, risen and ascended into heaven. Bérulle, just as much as Ignatius, encourages us to meditate on the details of the Gospel narratives; but we are to penetrate beyond the event itself to the attitude of Jesus towards his Father and towards his fellow human-beings.

Union with Christ thus becomes the dynamic principle of spiritual growth. Bérulle exploits systematically the implications of Johannine and Pauline texts such as 'May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, that they also may be in us' (John 17:21) or 'Anyone who attaches himself to the Lord is one spirit with him' (1 Cor 6:17). This union with Christ is not something reserved for the chosen few, but is established in us by baptism, which already identifies us with Christ. By contemplating the image of God's glory, we are, to quote Paul, 'being transformed into the same image from glory to glory' (cf. 2 Cor 3:18).

Our project then is to 'adhere' to Christ, to use a characteristic expression. We thus open ourselves to receiving a deeper imprint of Christ's own features – a sort of spiritual photography. It does not spare us from effort in overcoming our faults and growing in virtue; but the accent is not on our efforts. So, to grow in the virtue of patience, I could engage in regular self-examination and renewed resolution: that is the method of St Ignatius' Particular Examen; or I could seek to become more closely united with Christ, asking that he might impart to me the patience he showed with his disciples, with the crowds, in suffering: that is the practice – the word 'method' is probably not appropriate – of Bérulle and, I suspect, of Colin.

*c) Mary*

Theocentric and Christocentric as is Bérulle, he and, with him, all of French spirituality at this time associates Mary closely with Christ: *Jesus and Mary* is the motto of the French Oratory. This approach leads to extending to Mary many features of devotion to Jesus: thus Fr Colin can 'honour' the 'mysteries' of Mary; he recommends devotion to the Infancy of Mary (Const. 200), an extension of the devotion to the Infancy of Jesus that – even more than devotion to the Sacred Heart – is characteristic of the 'French School'. We will see that he is able to make a 'Marian transposition' of language originally used of Jesus. Bérulle can even say: 'Speaking of you, Mary, we speak of Jesus.' This is in no way, however, a confusion of Jesus and Mary, let alone a substitution of Mary for Jesus. The relation between the two is fundamentally that of creature to Creator, even if Mary is the mother of the Creator incarnate. Bérulle puts it this way in a remarkably beautiful formula that reaches the level of poetry: 'Mary is pure capacity for Jesus, filled with Jesus' – as Jesus, we might say, is pure capacity for God, filled with God (cf. Col 1:19). It follows that the better we resemble Mary, the better we resemble Jesus, and the better we resemble Jesus, the better we resemble God.

# Crossing the Threshold

## 1. Recapitulation

We saw in the last talk that the spiritual formation that Jean-Claude Colin received in his early years, principally in the seminary, consisted of two strands. One of these was Jesuit. The Jesuit element belongs not only to Colin's personal spirituality but also to the spirituality he wanted to inculcate in Marists. Notably, he saw in St Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* the manual and method of meditation *par excellence* – which, by the way, was not the intention of their author; at the same time he acknowledged that God might lead even Marists in other ways of prayer. He also regarded Alonso Rodríguez' *Practice of Christian Perfection* as an indispensable guide to the ascetical tradition. Besides the Jesuit strand, Fr Colin's early formation also included important elements of the 'French School', stemming ultimately from Pierre de Bérulle, but conveyed to Colin and his classmates rather through Sulpician traditions at the seminary. So the Founder recommended to Marists the practice of 'honouring' the 'mysteries' or 'states' of Jesus and Mary, that is, of uniting themselves or 'adhering' to the interior attitude or disposition at the heart of some act, such as Jesus' Agony in the Garden or Mary's care for the new-born Church; the act itself is past, but the 'mystery' remains, with its distinctive grace, in which we can share.

We also saw that Jean-Claude Colin put himself through a very solid reading programme in spiritual authors. It would be useful and interesting to look at the influence on him of Lorenzo Scupoli, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales. As I explained in the article published in *FN* 5,4, 2001, pp. 405-442, my attention was drawn especially to the mystical tradition in the Society of Jesus in 17$^{th}$ century France as an unacknowledged source of Colinian Spirituality. It was in a writer of this tendency, Jean-Joseph Surin, that I first came across the words 'inconnu et caché' – 'unknown and hidden' – outside Colin and was excited to realise that Surin was an author read and highly appreciated by the Founder. Since then, I have found the expression also in Caussade (*Traité sur l'oraison du Coeur*, ch. 12, par. 146) and in the Dominican Chardon (*La croix de Jésus*, quoted by Bremond, t. 8, p. 66), so it seems to have been 'in the air' in the 17$^{th}$ and 18$^{th}$ centuries. Even more recently, I was reading in the *Mémoires de guerre* of Charles de Gaulle (vol. 3, ch. 3, Paris, Plon, 1959, p. 128): 'In my present position, nothing concerning France is for me unknown or hidden (Au poste où je suis, rien de ce qui est de la France ne m'est inconnu ou caché)' – so perhaps we

are dealing with a pairing of words that comes readily to a French writer or speaker. In any case, as I read the Jesuit authors of this period whom Colin read and recommended, I came to see some most interesting points of contact and even of probable influence, which went well beyond simply the 'hidden and unknown'.

## 2. The 'Mystical Jesuits'

These were a group of Jesuit formators and writers in France in the 17th century who proposed a mystical interpretation of Ignatian spirituality; Caussade in the 18th century is their natural successor.

Let me explain immediately that by 'mystical' I refer to all those aspects of the Christian and spiritual life in which God's action, and not our own, is dominant. Of course, on this understanding, there is a mystical – or better, infused – element in every Christian act. But there are moments – and even entire phases – of the spiritual life that are marked by God's action in us and upon us and where our action may be reduced to accepting what God is doing. By contrast, by 'ascetical' I mean all those aspects of the Christian and spiritual life in which the accent is upon what we do – always, of course, with the help of God's grace. Although we are never finished with the need for personal effort, the great tradition represented by, say, St Teresa and St John of the Cross teaches that there is a normal progression from a life characterized by our effort (the 'ascetical') to one that is characterized by God's sovereign action (the 'mystical').

The 'mystical Jesuits' claimed that the mystical life – including but not restricted to contemplative prayer – is nothing more nor less than the full flowering of the Christian life and as such is essential for the apostolic religious. This teaching went against the common opinion in the Society of Jesus (and elsewhere) that the 'ordinary way' of holiness – the normal one for most Christians including Jesuits (or Marists) – was characterized by discursive meditation and the practice of 'solid virtues' and asceticism. The mystical way – by definition 'extraordinary' – was for a few chosen souls, typically enclosed nuns; for lay people, priests or active religious to aspire to it was presumptuous and exposed them to dangerous illusions. The 'mystical Jesuits' begged to differ.

## 3. The School of Louis Lallemant

Some of these 'mystical Jesuits' formed a distinct school of spirituality; its founder was Louis Lallemant, one of the authors whom Colin names and recommends. Born in 1588, he died in 1635, so was a contemporary of Francis de Sales, Pierre de Bérulle and Vincent de Paul, in the most flourishing period of French spirituality. He was the novice master and tertian master of Surin and many other Jesuits of the northwest of France, and his *Spiritual Teaching* – it exists in English as well as in French – is based on notes taken by his novices and second-novices and was published a long time after his death.[1] A good number of his disciples went as missionaries to Canada, including several future canonized martyrs. This reassures us that Lallemant's spirituality was truly apostolic; he was certainly not a would-be monk who ended up in the Society of Jesus and then tried to turn Jesuits into Trappists. For all that, he was and remains a somewhat marginal figure in the Society, which, by and large, has preferred its ascetical tradition to the mystical: Rodríguez is a more representative figure than Lallemant or Caussade.

In a nutshell, Lallemant teaches that one who surrenders entirely to God will be truly guided by the Holy Spirit, not only in his or her interior life but also in the apostolate. This latter point obviously has important implications for apostolic religious. In my view it gives Lallemant's spiritual teaching an interest for us that goes well beyond its historical relevance for the background of Colinian spirituality. In Bremond's synthesis (t. 5, pp. 3-65) it consists of four chief points: the second conversion; criticism of action; the watch on the heart; the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We will see each of these in turn, looking also for contacts with the spiritual teaching of Jean-Claude Colin.

### *a) The second conversion*

Lallemant insists that a person arrives at religious maturity and real apostolic effectiveness only after the turning point of the 'second conversion'. This is the moment when the religious launches out into the fullness of the mystical life. More precisely, one renounces self once and for all and lets oneself be united with God and so fully responsive to the movement of the Holy Spirit. The result will not only be great growth in holiness; the

[1] *La vie et la doctrine spirituelle du Père Louis Lallemant, de la Compagnie de Jésus.* Introduction et notes par François Courel, s.j., nouvelle édition revue et augmentée (Collection Christus 3 ; Paris : Desclée et Brouwer, 3e édition 1979); English Translation by Alan G. McDougal, *The Spiritual Teaching of Father Louis Lallemant of the Society of Jesus, preceded by an account of his Life by Father Champion, S.J.* (London : Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1928). There is a recent reprint.

religious will also become a perfect instrument in the hands of God for the apostolate. In fact, it is only then that he or she will be really able to enter fully on the apostolic life, to which up till then one has only been, as it were, apprenticed. In the mean time, the chief occupation ought to be to purify one's heart. The second conversion is not, of course, automatic or mechanical. On the other hand, the Jesuit tertian year – or 'second novitiate', after ordination and a few years of apprenticeship in the apostolate – is meant, in Lallemant's view, to prepare the still young religious for the second conversion, which will normally come during this period of retreat and recollection or at least as a consequence of it. Therefore, the 'third year of novitiate' should be so organized as to provide a favourable environment and a stimulus for the second conversion.

This doctrine implies that all, at any rate all Jesuits – and why not all Marists? – are called to a high degree of the mystical life. Therefore, the mystical life is not something rare, reserved for a chosen few. Rather, it is simply the flowering of the life of God infused at baptism. As the divine life develops in a person, God comes to play a more and more important role, and the human partner, in a sense, less. This change of roles is liable to be felt in prayer, in terms of a persistent and unaccountable inability to meditate as one used to. This is one of the classic signs of the transition to a more contemplative prayer. From this perspective, contemplative prayer is not at all extraordinary, but is the normal prayer that accompanies the second conversion, surrender to God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So it is the prayer that characterizes the mature religious.

Prayer is indeed the privileged occasion of deeper union with God. The mystical life is not, however, restricted to prayer but extends to every facet of the person's existence, including, in the case of a Jesuit (or a Marist) the apostolate. There too God takes over more and more – a situation to which the human partner may find it more or less difficult to adjust. It is therefore clear that the call to the mystical life is not simply to be identified with a call to the monastic life. On the contrary, the Jesuit (or Marist) who launches out into the fullness of the mystical life does not then retire into a monastery or hermitage. Rather, he gives himself now at last to the apostolate as a true instrument of God. His formation as an apostolic religious is complete.

But let us hear Lallemant himself (*Spiritual Teaching*, a. Principle II, Sect. I, Chap. I, art. 2 – 'We must give ourselves wholly to God'):

'3. ... We fight against God for whole years, and resist the movements of his grace, which urge us interiorly to rid ourselves of a part of our miseries, by forsaking the vain "amusements" (i.e. the things with which we fool ourselves) which stop our course, and

giving ourselves to him without reserve and without delay. But burdened with our self-love, blinded by our ignorance, deterred by vain apprehensions, we dare not take the step (*franchir le pas* – better, cross the threshold); and for fear of being miserable, we continue in our misery, instead of giving ourselves fully to God, who desires to possess us only to set us free from our miseries.

'We must renounce, then, once for all, all our own interests and all our satisfactions, all our own designs and all our own choices, that we may henceforth be dependent only on the good pleasure of God, and resign ourselves entirely into his hands.'

'We dare not cross the threshold', or, as we might say, 'take the plunge', like one who hesitates on the brink of the pool, trying the water with his toes. Lallemant seems to suppose that it is possible to change the course of one's life suddenly and totally. We are to give ourselves to God 'without reserve and without delay' as we once made the decision to enter religious life. Is this possible, psychologically and morally? We stand on the edge of the precipice, seized by an existential vertigo – the fear of losing oneself. For, at the heart of this spiritual drama is the certainty that we will be taken at our word: things can never be the same again. To change the image of place, we are at the crossroads: a new path presents itself, which we are invited to take; but we cannot see very far along it, before it turns a corner and disappears out of sight. In fact, we are being invited to cross the frontier into a new land, where the rules that have so far governed our existence are reversed. Once we have given all, God will do the rest: 'I live, now not I but Christ lives in me' (cf. Gal 2:20). This new land is none other than the mystical life.

Jean-Claude Colin does not use the language of 'second conversion'. On the other hand, he can say things like: 'All I know is that if we wanted to, we would become saints' (*FS* 27,2); 'When you enter upon your apostolate – this to the novice-scholastics at Belley – you must be saints, and to be saints then, you must become saints now' (*FS* 79,1); 'Only saints, then, can do good there (in Oceania, but also in France), saints – that is to say, missionaries who will lead a life of sacrifice, of death. But we must die completely: if you only half die, you will achieve nothing and be tossed about, dragged this way and that, without securing any fruit' (*FS* 106,4). Lallemant could have said that.

It is significant that the Founder wanted to establish the second novitiate as a regular institution in the Society of Mary and that he understood it very similarly to the way Lallemant understood the Jesuit tertian year. Articles referring to a second novitiate appear constantly in the various drafts of the Rule, from 1833 to 1872.

According to no. 95 of the *Summarium Regularum S.M.* of 1833 (s),

'After six or eight years from first profession, or ten or even more, as the Superior shall decide, taking into consideration the age and virtue of each religious, let those who have made their first profession return to the Novitiate for a second probation, so that for an entire year they may renew their fervour for piety; and during that time let them give themselves wholly to the study of mystical theology, prayer and the acquisition of solid virtues…'

As with the Jesuit tertianship, this 'second probation' is clearly conceived, not as 'on-going formation', as we have nowadays, but as the completion of initial religious formation. The time for it is not at 'mid-life', or at change of apostolate, but – normally at least – within ten years of first profession. Of course, 'first profession' here is what we mean now by 'perpetual profession'. Even so, the age intended is that at which the religious has attained maturity, but is still comparatively young, after the completion of his studies and some years' experience of the ministry.

Why mystical theology? Not, I think, simply in order to round out the study of dogmatic and moral theology of seminary days; nor merely in order to prepare the religious to be a competent spiritual director, although these reasons are given by Fr Colin talking to the novice-scholastics at Belley in 1844 (*FS* 79,7). The study of mystical theology – not simply as an abstract subject, but hand in hand with growth in virtue – is surely for the benefit of the religious himself. It is implicit that he has very probably reached the stage in his own spiritual life where a knowledge of mystical theology becomes practical and relevant; the stage, let us say, when, according to the teaching of St John of the Cross and other masters, active meditation is no longer appropriate or even possible and progressively gives way to prayer of a more contemplative type.

But, if it were only the Marist's own personal prayer life that were in question, we might doubt whether the Founder would consider it important to withdraw him from the active ministry for anything up to a year, just at the stage when he was becoming experienced and competent, in order to study mystical theology and concentrate on his own spiritual growth. For that, fidelity to prayer and the guidance of an experienced spiritual director would suffice. No, the 'second probation' is meant to prepare the Marist for the next and definitive stage of his apostolate. One must infer, therefore, that, in Fr Colin's view, the development of the mystical life and growth in solid virtue are the important issues at this moment of his life, the moment of transition between formation and maturity, and that the outcome is of great importance for his apostolate.

Colin's idea of the second novitiate is maintained – with certain changes of detail –

right through to the 1872 Constitutions (n. 153). What he expected of this experience is illustrated by various reflections on this theme as gathered by Fr Mayet during the 1840s (*FS* 121,5-8):

[5] 'When you are in the active life, you fail to see your own true motives. There are many things mixed up together in our souls, many things that escape detection (own words).'

[6] 'That is why the Rule says that there shall be a second novitiate after four, five, ten years of ministry. It is a breathing-space. A man takes a year's rest, to concern himself with God alone, and to root himself firmly in the spirit of God.'

[7] 'We are fools if we think that we can do anything without the spirit of God (own words).'

[8] 'Once this novitiate is made, then we shall have some men of God…'

### *b) The Criticism of Action*

By 'action' here Lallemant refers to the various apostolic activities undertaken by the Jesuit: he directs upon these activities a merciless criticism that exposes many illusions – for the active life too has its illusions. What surprises or even shocks the reader is that Lallemant does not stop at the deviations – self-promotion, domination, avarice – or excesses such as hyper-activity, that we could easily recognise and criticise. His criticism of action is radical and universal: action *as such* is never the greatest good and is almost always dangerous and often bad; to action are always to be preferred contemplation and the exercises of the interior life. We must first have within ourselves a 'very perfect life, by the continual application of the understanding and the will to God'; then we can go out to serve our neighbour, not only without harm to our interior life but with the greatest benefit to others. This sounds extreme. What can he possibly mean?

Remember, Lallemant is not talking to Trappists, but to Jesuits, and not to adolescent novices, but to grown men, who have completed their studies in the humanities, philosophy and theology; they have already had some years of experience in the ministry and are shortly to return to it and to receive responsibilities of leadership in the Society. He cannot fool them easily; at the same time, he can be confident that he is not going to be misunderstood: he is not advising them to retire from apostolic activity to devote the rest of their lives solely to contemplation. His meaning quickly becomes clear: when – but only when – they have 'crossed the threshold' and surrendered to God, they will be able to carry out the works of the apostolate, not only without danger to themselves, but also with the greatest profit to those to

whom they will minister. In other words, only the religious who has undergone the second conversion and is truly united with God can be a fully effective apostle. In bringing about this development, prayer and contemplation have a crucial role to play by uniting us with God.

This is what he has to say.

d. Principle V, Chap. II, art. 2 – 'Without prayer we cannot acquit ourselves of the duties of our vocation, nor gather fruit from our ministrations':

'2. It is to God we ought to look for every success in our employments. We are his instruments, and we work under him as under a master-architect, who, directing singly the whole design, allots to each one his task, according to the end he proposes, and the idea he has conceived. Thus we shall produce the more fruit the more united we are to God, and the more we yield ourselves to his guidance, always supposing we possess the talents and the capacity requisite for the active service of our neighbour. Now it is prayer that unites us to God. It is by this holy exercise that we dispose ourselves to receive the impression and movement of grace, as instruments to work out his designs.'

e. Principle VII, Chap. IV, art. 4 – 'Contemplation, so far from being opposed thereto, is necessary to the Apostolic life':

'1. Contemplation, far from hindering zeal for souls, on the contrary augments it…

'2. Without contemplation we will never make much progress in virtue, and shall never be fitted to make others advance therein. We shall never entirely rid ourselves of our weaknesses and imperfections. We shall remain always bound down to the earth, and shall never rise much above natural feelings. We shall never be able to render to God a perfect service. But with it we shall effect more, both for ourselves and for others, in a month, than without it we should accomplish in ten years…

'3. If we have not received this excellent gift, it is dangerous to throw ourselves *too much* (italics mine) into active occupations of charity towards our neighbour. We ought to engage in them only experimentally, unless imposed on us by obedience, otherwise we ought to occupy ourselves but little in external employments, the mind in such case having enough to do in acquiring self-knowledge, in purifying continually the natural acts and sentiments of the heart, and in regulating the interior, so that we may walk always in the presence of God.'

Lallemant states the essential of his teaching in the following principle (Principle V, chap. III, art. 2 – 'How important it is that we should join the interior life with our exterior occupations'): 'We ought so to unite action and the exterior life with contemplation and the interior life, as to give ourselves to the former in the same proportion as we practise the

latter.' In consequence, 'If we make much mental prayer, we ought to give ourselves much to action'. Notice that, after the second conversion, apostolic activities are no longer a hindrance to union with God but a primary means to growing in that union: 'the exterior action will aid us in the interior life'. This is a truly apostolic spirituality.

The model is, of course, Our Lord Jesus Christ himself. If we can fast-forward from the 17th to the 21st century, here is Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI in his new book *Jesus of Nazareth* (ET Adrian J. Walker; New York, etc. Doubleday, 2007), p. 7:

'Again and again the Gospels note that Jesus withdrew "to the mountain" to spend nights in prayer "alone" with his Father. These short passages are fundamental for our understanding of Jesus; they lift the veil of mystery just a little; they give us a glimpse into Jesus' filial existence, into the source from which his action and teaching and suffering sprang.'

The Pope is not, of course, stating anything new. The theme of Jesus' prayer was certainly familiar to Lallemant's students, who would have meditated on it many times. He had no need to remind them of it. The question for him was, however, whether they were convinced in practice of its application to themselves and their own apostolate. Hence the relentless logic of his argumentation. His listeners are not going to be swayed by rhetoric or mere appeals to piety. They will only give way to solid demonstration arguing from premises to conclusions in the best Aristotelian way.

Jean-Claude Colin is no logician, but he is just as pitiless and as paradoxical as Lallemant in his criticism of action. What are we to make of statements such as this? 'I asked God what the Society of the blessed Virgin should do, and these words came forcibly to mind: "Nothing" – Yes, nothing. Otherwise it would seem that the Society could achieve something by itself, whereas we can do nothing. You know well what I mean by that' (*FS* 19,2). Like Lallemant, he is sure that we are not going to think he wants us to fold our arms and literally do nothing; only to be aware that our activity *by itself* has no deep or lasting effect. Take another quote. 'If I were in charge (of the novices) … I would try simply to unite them to God, to bring them to a spirit of prayer. Once they were united to God, everything else would take care of itself. When the good Lord dwells in the heart, it is he who sets everything in motion. Without that, everything that you do is completely useless; no matter how you plant the seed and tire yourself out, the life-giving principle is still lacking' (*FS* 63,2).

Fr. Colin, like Lallemant, knows that an instrument – especially an instrument of

divine mercy – is only as effective as it is properly adapted to and at the disposition of the one who uses it: 'What is an instrument by itself? Let us place ourselves in the hands of God like the implement in the hands of a workman. As long as you rely on yourself, you can expect nothing' (*FS* 140,11). He might have added: When once you rely on God, you can expect everything.

### *c) The Watch on the Heart*

Until we have finally surrendered to God and passed under the regime of the Spirit – and so become effective apostles – our chief concern, according to Lallemant, is to purify our hearts. Indeed, 'the two elements of the spiritual life are the cleansing of the heart and the direction of the Holy Spirit. These are the two poles of all spirituality' (Principle IV, Chap. II, art. 1). He can even say that 'the shortest the surest way of attaining perfection, is to study purity of heart rather than the exercise of the virtues, because God is ready to bestow all manner of graces upon us, provided we put no obstacles in their way' (Principle III, Chap. I, art. 2) – a provocative statement that puts him in a different camp from that of Rodríguez and the ascetical tradition.

In order to arrive at purity of heart, Lallemant prescribes keeping watch on its movements, observing what goes on within ourselves, so as to discern what comes from the Spirit of God and what from another spirit. The discernment of spirits is, of course, characteristically Ignatian. As you know, a feature of the contemporary Ignatian renewal has been to recommend what is often called 'consciousness or awareness examen' – being in touch with ourselves and with what goes on in us, not from self-preoccupation, but precisely in order to discern the promptings of the diverse spirits. Fr. Colin too recommends this practice, in n. 37 of the 1872 Constitutions: '… each one shall assiduously scrutinise (better, watch over – JT) the inner movements of his heart in order to direct them properly.' This practice belongs to a very ancient tradition of spiritual teaching. Thus Diadochus of Photice writes in the 5th century (*Chapters on Spiritual Perfection*):

'We must maintain great stillness of mind even in the midst of our struggles. We shall then be able to distinguish between the different types of thoughts that come to us: those that are good, those sent by God, we will treasure in our memory; those that are evil and inspired by the devil we will reject. A comparison with the sea may help us. A tranquil sea allows the fisherman to gaze right to its depths. No fish can hide there and escape his sight. The stormy sea, however, becomes murky when it is agitated by the winds. The very depths that it

revealed in its placidness, the sea now hides. The skills of the fisherman are useless.'

Finally, it is worth noting that, with an emphasis that we do not find in all spiritual writers, Lallemant stresses the place of the sacrament of Penance in bringing about purity of heart, recommending frequent, even daily, confession.

### *d) The Guidance of the Holy Spirit*

'The end to which we ought to aspire, after having for a long time exercised ourselves in purity of heart, is to be so possessed and governed by the Holy Spirit that he alone shall direct all our powers and all our senses, and regulate all our movements, interior and exterior, while we, on our part, make a complete surrender of ourselves, by a spiritual renunciation of our own will and our own satisfaction. We shall thus no longer live in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ, by a faithful correspondence with the operations of his divine Spirit and by a perfect subjugation of all our rebellious inclinations to the power of his grace' (Principle IV, Chap. II, art. 1).

The guidance of the Spirit is the pivot of Lallemant's spirituality; it occupies the place that is given to adherence to the incarnate Word in that of Bérulle, which it so much resembles in other respects. This emphasis is Lallemant's characteristic contribution to spiritual theology, and one in which he goes further than most spiritual writers. About one fifth of his *Spiritual Teaching* is devoted to the action of the Spirit, to docility to the Spirit's guidance, to the operation of the traditional seven gifts of the Spirit in the fruitful exercise of the apostolate as well as in bringing the apostle to the heights of holiness. Lallemant in fact attributes the mediocrity of so many religious to our failure to develop the gifts of the Spirit in our daily life and ministry. He puts especial emphasis on the role of the gifts of Wisdom and Understanding in giving us a 'real' apprehension of the truths of faith – as opposed to one that is purely 'notional', to borrow Newman's famous distinction: Lallemant himself compares looking at a painting of a lion and coming face to face with a living one. The gifts of Knowledge and Counsel come into their own in confession and spiritual direction, and generally in advising others. Fortitude gives us the strength and courage we need to persevere; Piety and Fear of the Lord form our fundamental attitude towards God and others.

I hope that I have said enough to whet your appetite to read Lallemant for yourselves. There are mystical authors who are more poetic or uplifting, but few or none who are more balanced or more reliable. Sober and sobering, his prosaic and logical pages assure us that

this is no dreamer or fanatic. At the same time, he challenges us to go beyond the limits we have set ourselves and God, to ‘cross the threshold’. For all these reasons, no doubt, he is highly recommended by our Founder.

# Being Contemplative in the Midst of Action

To be contemplative in the midst of action – *contemplativus in actione* – is often held up as an ideal. We've seen that for Lallemant and his school contemplation is necessary for a fully fruitful apostolate. What is the connection between the two; what is the real link between action and contemplation? Our authors tell us that contemplation brings us closer to God, that contemplation forms us into better instruments of God. All that is true, and more could be said along those lines; but that still does not answer the question, Precisely how are they are linked? The best treatment of the question that I know, and one that I think proposes a precise answer to our question, is to be found in Jean-Joseph Surin's *Spiritual Catechism*. This is a book that we know Fr Colin read and recommended. I'm not, however aware of any traceable influence on Jean-Claude Colin of the particular section of Surin's *Spiritual Catechism* that I'm going to talk about. So I'm not, this time, going to try to show any links or provide parallel texts of Colin. I am assuming, however, that there is some kind of general influence on Colin, that something would have rubbed off; perhaps thorough research may reveal particular parallels but that's not going to be our concern today. Instead I'm going to present Surin's teaching for its own sake because I believe it to be of great value and importance. I can add that his *Spiritual Catechism* was greatly appreciated by Jacques and Raïssa Maritain and played a decisive role in their own Christian and spiritual growth (see R. Maritain, *Les grandes amitiés*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1949, pp. 162-167).

We will go through, step by step, a large section of Surin's book. The precise reference is to Volume I, part III, chapters 3-6. I'll be quoting or summarizing what he says, and I'll add my own comments as we go through. The book is, of course, a catechism and is, therefore, composed as a set of questions and answers all the way through. Each new step of the way is a question, which sometimes can be an objection to what Surin has just been saying, and then an answer to it.

## 1. Chapter 3: Of the supernatural or extraordinary way

The first question is, 'What is the supernatural and extraordinary way?' Surin answers that 'it is a state in which the soul acts no longer by itself but by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the special assistance of his grace'. This, therefore, corresponds to what I have called the mystical life. By using that term we avoid using ambiguous terms like supernatural

way and extraordinary way, which I don't want to use even though those are the terms that Surin uses. In a sense everything in the Christian life is supernatural; and if we use extraordinary it gets us into all kinds of arguments about what is ordinary. I've already said that according to the teaching of Lallemant, and many others too, the mystical life is part of ordinary Christian life. It is a further stage of that life and it is only confusing to call that further stage extraordinary. So I'm going to leave those expressions right out of discussion and use my term, mystical life: the soul acts no longer by itself but by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the special assistance of his grace.

We note there the role of the Holy Spirit, which is very prominent in this part of Surin's book. This, of course links up directly with the last point which we saw from Lallemant, namely that the whole point of the spiritual life is to enable us in the apostolate, as well as in our own spiritual life, to be fully responsive to the Spirit. By contrast, what Surin calls the ordinary life corresponds to what I call the ascetical life. The Holy Spirit and divine grace are at work there, but they are not normally seen so clearly as they are in the mystical life. Surin makes the point, of course, that we cannot acquire the mystical life; it's not something that we decide we're going to have. So there's no magic formula – I'm not going to suggest to you some set of exercises or even a method of prayer or anything like that by which you will automatically acquire this stage of spiritual growth. Obviously not: it is a gift of God. All we can do is dispose ourselves, put ourselves in a position, as it were, to be able to receive it as God's gift – a gift that we know God wants to give us.

Surin says that we progress in the way through three states. I'm not going to go into all this in detail, because these states correspond more or less to what St John of the Cross calls the illuminative way, the night of the spirit and the spiritual marriage. So if you've read St John of the Cross you will know what Surin has to say. He gives good advice for people who find themselves in one or other of these states. It's broadly the same advice as that given by all the classic mystical writers. Interestingly enough Surin uses, for example, St Teresa of Avila's famous simile of the silkworm, from the fifth mansion of the *Interior Castle*. Here she compares what's going on in the person with the silk-worm which, up till now, has been leading a perfectly normal silk-worm's life, doing the things that caterpillars do, eating all the mulberry leaves. Then, at a certain moment, the caterpillar weaves or winds a cocoon around itself and 'dies', as it were, inside the cocoon. It doesn't, of course, literally die, but it stops living the caterpillar life; after a while it emerges from the cocoon as a butterfly, a totally new kind of creature with a new kind of life. It can fly, and it can see – neither of which caterpillars can do. So, after the end of one sort of life in which things have been going along

quite normally and happily, comes a kind of a death; everything stops. In reality all kinds of important things are happening, but they are completely out of sight. Then, lo and behold, this new life takes off. Teresa of Avila uses that simile to describe what goes on during the development of the mystical life.

Our author also uses John of the Cross's image of the action of fire on green wood. You set fire to a piece of green wood, and at first you get a lot of hissing, spitting and smoke and the piece of wood which might have looked quite nice as a piece of wood becomes quite ugly to look at. And then, at the next stage, the wood itself turns incandescent and becomes fire.

So, far then, Surin is classic, sound, well written but not yet original. I wouldn't be recommending him to you if all he said was what I've summarized so far. He does, however, introduce an original point in his discussion of the passive purifications. This is a classic term in the mystical writers, a stage at which God cleanses the soul of sin much more thoroughly than we have been able to do up till now by our ordinary efforts – contrition and penance. God cleanses the soul of the roots of sin, of hidden faults and of self-love, which remain, of course, very tenacious. Here Surin mentions, without going into detail, some of the experiences of a number of mystics; experiences of great interior suffering and darkness. And then comes this question – remember this is a catechism: 'How is it, then, that there are some saints about whom you never hear tell of such things?' His answer sketches what we might call the *passive purifications of the apostolic life*. That's my term, not Surin's. Passive purifications of the apostolate are what an active apostle might go through in the course of his or her developing spiritual life that would correspond to some of the things you read about in the mystical writers.

Surin writes: 'Often the place of these sufferings is taken by the great labours undertaken in the service of souls and by other things.' Well, that's rather tantalizing, I find, and I wish he had gone on a little longer and said a bit more. Instead he leaves the subject saying that writers don't know much about these things, which are very secret. But they are, he says, for all that fairly common, as experience shows, and St Ignatius is one who demonstrates this in his own life. He is one saint about whom you don't read of these enormous periods of interior sufferings and darkness. Surin puts him forward as an example of someone who has these purifying experiences but in a different way: it's something to do with the great labours undertaken in the service of souls.

I think we could, without too much difficulty, fill in some of the gaps here to describe what the passive purifications of the apostolic life could be. Through them God is at work

purifying the soul much more thoroughly than the person has been able to do up till now of all their hidden faults, secret self-love, the deep roots of sin. Surin mentions apostolic labours with all their demands and fatigues, including being at other people's beck and call all the time. We could add also the experience of failure, the experience of adversity, of criticism, even of calumny, perhaps also ill health, scrupulosity; things like that which are 'trials' of the apostolate. Sometimes there may even be an impression of diabolical opposition, which is one of the trials that often have afflicted the great mystics and the great 'apostles' too: the evil one in person seems to be opposing them and causing great difficulties for them of one sort or another. Ultimately the apostle may go through an experience of feeling the insignificance and worthlessness of all that he or she has done. And this I think, could correspond to something that the great mystics describe where, at a certain point in the night of the soul, they see everything that they have been doing up till this time, and all their efforts for God, the holiness of their lives and their virtues as absolutely worthless. It is apparently a quite common experience in the mystical life and I think that something corresponding to this can happen also in the apostolic life.

Take the example of someone who has been working away at some project, or just working faithfully in the Lord's vineyard doing a whole lot of different things. It's not simply that they might fail, although failure may trigger it off. Something deeper happens and the person may have the very strong impression that it's all been worthless; it's meant nothing and it's of absolutely no account at all. This is a deeply purifying experience because we tend to build up our identity on our sense of worth and our sense of achievement. If the rug is pulled out from under our sense of achievement it can cause an extreme shock to our sense of identity. Who are we now? what was it all about anyway? We might have spent thirty years or more in doing something, and without being boastful or vainglorious about it we're quietly proud of our achievement: I've done this and done that, that's me. Who am I? I'm the person who has written these books, or I'm the person who built up this school or parish, or whatever it might be. And then, suddenly, a point comes when we ask: What was all that about anyway? (like St Thomas Aquinas' 'so much straw') That can of course be totally negative; or it can be turned into a positive experience if it leads us to transfer our sense of who we are, from ourselves and our own achievements, to God and our relationship with God. But here too there is purification, as we sense our unworthiness before God. This is the teaching of St John of the Cross, who speaks of it as the purification of the memory.

As I have said, I think that something like this can in fact be a part of the apostle's purification. Such an experience should lead, or can lead, a person to find their meaning and

their hope, not in their achievements but in God alone. Whatever their achievements are or have not been, in the end that's not so important or of no importance at all. Finally, like the former silk-worm emerging from its cocoon, the soul enters into a new life which is now perfectly in the hands of God. This is the stage at which the person can undertake and carry out all things for God's glory. And God himself provides the occasions for his service.

So all that, I think, is directly applicable to the apostolate. It is therefore very significant that Surin refers to the *Acts of the Apostles* where the Holy Spirit takes over the apostolate of St Paul and his companions and prevents them doing some things that they were going to do and then tells them to do other things that they were not intending to do. They, for their part, are totally responsive to the movements of the Spirit. In Acts 16:6-10 Paul and company were intending to carry out a mission in several parts of what is now Turkey, Asia Minor, and each time they were prevented. We're not told how, or exactly what it meant to be prevented by the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Jesus. And then comes this direct and very clear message from the Holy Spirit, from God, to go over to Macedonia, to go over to Greece, which they may not have intended to do at all. Maybe they had some long-term goal, which included going to Greece; or maybe, having been prevented from carrying out their mission where they thought they were going, they are now sent to a place where they didn't originally think of going. I think that could be a paradigm for every Spirit-led apostolate.

## 2. Chapter 4: Prayer suitable to the Mystical Life

The fourth chapter is all about the prayer suitable to the mystical life. In answer to the question, 'What is it?' he replies, 'It is contemplation', which he calls 'an ease of dealing with God'. Surin has already discussed contemplation at some length earlier on in the book; at this stage he simply refers back to this. But we need to say more. So here I am now diverting from this part of Surin and summarizing what he's already said earlier in the book.

He generally speaks of contemplation in terms of a 'simple and loving look towards God'. This is a classic description of contemplation. He hasn't invented it. You find it, for example in St Francis de Sales and other writers as well. In those writers it's generally presented as a way of prayer reached after a more or less long practice of discursive meditation, e.g. according to the Ignatian method. At this period of history, everybody was being recommended to start off a regular personal prayer life – it might be at a moment of conversion – by methodical meditation, or methodical mental prayer; to pray according to a method, in other words. This emphasis goes back before St Ignatius, in fact before the

Reformation to the late Middle Ages, but St Ignatius' was the method that the Jesuits spread through the use of the *Exercises*. Other writers like St Francis de Sales adapted the Ignatian method, the Sulpicians developed their own variant of it. The idea was to start off with the exercise of the imagination, then of the reasoning powers; then to make acts of will and desire, petition and so on, all according to a method. What everybody observed was that after a certain time the method doesn't work any more. People, often, at that stage get fed up and give up their mental prayer, whereas John of the Cross and Francis de Sales, Surin and all the rest of them are saying, 'No, at this stage what God is wanting you to do is to simplify your prayer so that instead of having a whole lot of acts of imagination and intellect it becomes simpler and simpler, until you're simply looking towards God, looking at God. Similarly the acts of will become simpler and simpler, so that your prayer consists essentially of a *loving* look towards God.

Today, of course, there are other methods of prayer, or other means of prayer, that are being recommended to people when they start off and so they won't necessarily go through all the stages that are set out by a St John of the Cross. If people are practising *Lectio Divina*, for example, they might arrive at this loving look towards God in a rather different way. The centering prayer of John Maine would arrive at it in a different way again, but I can't speak from personal experience of that. And then I think there always have been people who were not much good at methodical prayer and who have arrived quickly and spontaneously at a very simple prayer. But, however, you get there, the loving look towards God is the contemplative prayer that Surin says goes with the introduction into the mystical life.

There was much discussion in the early 20th century about whether initial contemplation is active or infused; but it seems to me rather a waste of breath. You can say the beginnings of this prayer are the interchange between active prayer and infused prayer. We simplify our prayer but then it is the Holy Spirit praying within us who is more and more the source of this loving look towards God.

Before returning to Surin I'll make one final remark, which is important in view of what is to follow. Contemplation, the simple loving look towards God, becomes habitual. It becomes habitual in two senses of the word, both in the sense that it becomes one's habitual way of prayer – even though occasionally you may use some other, it's the one you keep coming back to – and it also becomes a habit of mind and heart. In other words you get to the stage, progressively, where you're never far away in thought or affection from God, and the loving look towards God is frequently renewed through glances towards him. That in fact is a word that Surin uses: glances towards God, even in the midst of action.

Surin next discusses three sorts of contemplation, each corresponding to one of the three states of the spiritual life already described. We can go through this fairly quickly.

Corresponding to the illuminative way is a prayer of quiet, a resting in God's presence, without many words or distinct acts.

The night of the spirit is often an experience of powerlessness; corresponding to that is what he calls a prayer of silence. He writes: 'The soul remains fixed and stopped, feeling an operation of the Holy Spirit that penetrates it and attaches it simply to God. This may take a painful form; this silence and powerlessness may be painful and the prayer of silence a painful prayer, purifying the soul or, on the other hand, it may be one that's rather more consoling.'

Then in the final state the soul receives back full freedom of action in a sort of new life. It's the butterfly, now, able to do many things that the caterpillar could not do.

Surin gives some advice to those who experience contemplative prayer. First, to proceed with great simplicity, not bothering about the kind or degree of one's prayer. That's very good advice: not looking back at yourself all the time wondering, 'Am I in the illuminative way? Is this the prayer of quiet?', just letting one's self be guided by God. The next bit of advice is not to interrupt quietude: if we are in this state of simple gazing towards God with a loving look, then not to interrupt that by our own clumsy actions. Not to think, for example, 'Oh, I'm only on point one of the meditation. I'd better stop this and get on to point two.' Or, 'I've still got a whole page of my *Lectio Divina* reading to get through'. Instead, you simply stay there. The third piece of advice, however, is to avoid the other extreme of passivity. In fact Surin keeps making this point: contemplation is an act, though a very simple one, which may be hardly perceptible. So it is not inertia. He clearly wants to defend contemplation against the charge of being a sort of reverie.

The means to prepare one's self for contemplation again are three. (Surin constantly uses a schema of three; I suppose that aided memorization.)

The first means is self-renunciation. Secondly there is the habit of recollection – the English word suggests re-collection, so collecting together again, the opposite of dispersion: instead of letting one's self go all over the place, a habit being *re*-collected. The third means to prepare oneself for contemplation is interior simplification: to let yourself become simpler, have fewer things that you are bothered about. Obviously you have to be bothered about

really important things, especially concerning other people, but the simpler your life can be, especially your interior, the better. We could talk a lot about all this, of course. We could ask what interior simplification would mean in terms of one's daydreaming, one's reading, television viewing, use of internet, distractions of various sorts but also even of curiosity, including intellectual curiosity. All sorts of things could come in there.

Next Surin defends contemplative prayer against the charge of being useless compared with a more active prayer and meditation. He says that by submitting to God and by humility, contemplation obtains all things for one's self and for others. He seems to be implying that it can take the place of long complicated prayers of intercession. We don't necessarily have to be thinking all the time of all the people we want to pray for, but in this contemplative state they are all included. And also he says that contemplation gives an infused light that understands many truths. It's the prayer of the saints, he says, as seen in their lives and recommended in their teaching. He quotes St Francis de Sales who says he wants to remain, 'without thought and without acts of understanding or of will in the simple presence of God.' We'll come back to that statement a little bit later.

And then the inevitable question, well, 'What about St Ignatius?', because St Ignatius doesn't seem to be recommending contemplative prayer in the *Exercises* in the sense that we've been talking about. Is he an exception? This is a particularly good question for a Jesuit. And it's the objection that Jesuits have often thrown up to Lallemant, Surin and company: whatever might be true for other people, Ignatius meant them to pray by the active use of imagination, the understanding and the will. Forget about contemplation; you don't find it in Ignatius. Surin replies that Ignatius in the *Exercises* gives a repetition of each meditation, which is to be made through what he calls the 'taste' of the mysteries and virtues, adding the application of the senses, which, says Surin, is true contemplation. Now, that's precisely the answer that's being given today by contemporary Jesuits who are encouraging contemplative prayer, and who also have to cope with exactly the same objections. They make the same appeal as does Surin to the repetitions and the application of the senses in the Ignatian *Exercises*, which is a form of contemplative prayer. Hans Urs von Balthasar has a similar understanding of contemplation in his book *Prayer*.

For Surin contemplation is the true prayer not only of 'contemplatives' but also of those who have done much for God, active apostles. He has to answer an objection which, of course, is phrased as a question: 'Doesn't contemplation enervate people?' – so that they get used to being in a state of torpor, all their energy drains away and they've got nothing left for

the active apostolate. All they want to do is remain inert. Quite the contrary, he says; contemplation gives new strength and motivation in the apostolate and a greater desire to spend themselves for the salvation of their neighbour. That is a direct fruit of contemplation. At the same time, of course, contemplation being also a repose can be a source of rest from labours, which gives you refreshment and renewed strength for the apostolate. Chapter five is advice for those on the way to contemplative prayer. I'm going to skip that, it's all very interesting but he's said it before in a lot more detail.

## 3. Chapter 6: The Perfection and Excellence of this Way

I want to move on to chapter six which is the climax of his teaching. The title of the chapter is, 'The perfection and excellence of this way'. Surin teaches that this way, the mystical life, has three perfections which are simplicity, strength or energy and truth.

So the first question is, 'In what does the simplicity of this way consist?' He replies, 'It is a single look of understanding and an acquiescence or consent of the will.' We now see that the act of contemplation is in fact two acts fused together. In the 'loving look towards God', the *look* is an act of the understanding; the *loving* aspect of it can be analysed as an act of the will, precisely an act of acquiescence or of consent of the will to God: wanting what God wants. This double act then, as we now recognize it to be, is scarcely perceptible. But the soul is not idle – despite the language used above by St Francis de Sales, that he wanted to remain 'without thought and without acts of understanding or of will in the simple presence of God'. However, writes Surin, 'these acts are so profound and delicate that the soul can draw no satisfaction from saying that it's made such and such an act.' For this simple look, or 'regard' – that word *regard* is French but it comes over into English writers, too, who talk about the prayer of simple regard – does not state distinctly and expressly this or that piece of knowledge. So the simple look towards God is not, for example, a clear or distinct idea about the Trinity, or about the Incarnation, or about Christ's Passion, or what have you. It's not an idea in that sense of the word. And the acquiescence, or consent of the will does not say formally thanksgiving, contrition or offering: it's not consciously an act of thanksgiving, or an act of contrition or an act of offering. But it's all of that in essence, all gathered together, and even in a higher way. At the same time this look and this acquiescence are the source of a very great good.

So the second question, then, is 'In what do the strength and energy of this way consist?' And here is the gem: 'This simple look and acquiescence in God's good pleasure

gives a capacity to the soul to do a quantity of things that highly surpass its natural power. The Holy Spirit operates in such people through this look.' That's the point: they are occupied in looking towards God, and the Holy Spirit is operating *through* this look.

The Spirit in this way causes them to have, as in a treasury, the intellectual gifts of the Spirit. These are *wisdom*, which is the knowledge by taste of things that are high and divine; *understanding*, which is the penetration of sovereign principles; *counsel*, which is prudence, discretion and light in guiding souls; the *knowledge* of many things spiritual and sometimes even human. These things are gathered together in a point; so they are all together. You are not distinctly conscious of the wisdom or the understanding, or the counsel or the knowledge; they are all gathered together in a point, just as the look towards God is not distinctly an idea about the Trinity or what have you. And they are comprised in this unique look. So, in looking towards God the soul is receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Our act consists in looking towards God, but at the same time we are receiving the light of the Holy Spirit through the look. Then Surin makes an important point. The soul does not stock or store these things for itself but finds itself provided for at need, when it is necessary to speak, for example, whether to groups or to individuals. It's beautifully expressed also by St Therese of Lisieux, you might remember, who says she doesn't have a bank account, she just holds out her open hand and finds that what she needs is there. That would be another way of putting what Surin is saying. So the look towards God is a very simple looking in which there is no clear or distinct idea about God. But at the same time the Holy Spirit is infusing, or granting, pouring, if you like, through that look these gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel and knowledge.

Similarly, the simple acquiescence of the heart contains a vigour for all things, a strength, and gives the heart affections and holy impulses. From this come the upsurges of the Spirit of God, the ardours of zeal and the operation of the other gifts of the Holy Spirit: fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord. In general it is a store of lights, affections, talents and faculties, we could say the charismatic gifts, which all flow from the spring of living water. This spring is very pure and simple and is like a single conduit that divides into several channels, which are these various gifts. The person established in this way carries with ease and all together, as it were, a soul filled and provided with all things, which he produces at need. That is the basis for being free of all care as our Lord enjoined on his disciples: Do not think how or what you will speak because the soul is full of this very simple spirit, is burdened with nothing and is provided and furnished with all good things in it.

And then the next question, 'What is this thing which is so simple and pervades the whole soul?' And the answer, ' It is nothing else than the Holy Spirit himself who is only freedom and peace for the soul and in himself fire and light. He is the principle and source of the single look and gentle acquiescence.' Now we realize that the Holy Spirit is not simply on the other side of the look or the acquiescence. 'All along it's been the Spirit who is producing the look and the acquiescence in us. Through them he does all things in the heart and in the spirit of man with very great strength and power. This was why the apostles, though without knowledge of philosophy or other human talents, drew everyone around themselves with great energy. It was said of this marvelous gift that was communicated to them, that "they should wait to be clothed with power from on high", words which show the strength and energy of this grace: power from on high.'

Now my comment on all this: we could say that the double act of contemplation is the *interface* between the human spirit and the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is the source of the simple look towards God and the loving acquiescence in his will, and he uses this loving look to communicate his gifts, and in particular those which will enable apostles to carry out their mission in a way that surpasses their own powers. The Holy Spirit causes us to look lovingly towards God, and this look is the channel through which he pours his Gifts into us.

It obviously follows that the better contemplatives we are, that is the more habitual it is for us to look simply towards God and acquiesce lovingly in His good pleasure, the more effective apostles we will be.

That seems to me to be the best explanation I've ever come across for the nexus, or link, between contemplation and action; how it is that contemplation makes you a better apostle, or what it would mean to be contemplative in action.

You might remember that at the beginning of this chapter there were three perfections of this way and the third one was truth. So, finally, and this is going to be very brief, 'In what does the truth of this way consist?' To quote Surin again: 'Such persons have a vigour in all things. Their words touch and inflame hearts as having themselves the spirit of Jesus Christ.' The truth of this way, then, means truth that makes an impact. And that's because the Spirit of God is communicating himself through their words.

Surin ends with a scattering of remarks, which I'll just bring together in three points. First of all, the special action of the Holy Spirit working through the contemplative act begins to show itself in the illuminative way. Then it may go underground in the night of the spirit;

and at that stage it might seem to the person that they are simply impeded, powerless, so nothing much at all of importance seems to be happening (that's of course the cocoon stage; you're in the cocoon and important things are happening but there's not much to show for it). Surin admits that experience of the night of the spirit is variable: some people may be in it and stay there until they emerge like the butterfly at the other end; while others – and this might in fact be the more common experience – move in and out and then back in, until finally it's over. So in that case there would be perhaps periods of alternation when the action of the Holy Spirit in the apostle is more manifest, or less manifest.

The second point is that all this has nothing at all to do with ecstasies, visions, raptures, etc. from which the soul is to remain detached. (here Surin shows himself to be a good disciple of John of the Cross.)

Thirdly, and this is a very good place to stop, the special guidance of the Holy Spirit does not exempt one from the ordinary way of obedience, taking advice, prudent decision-making, discernment (or, one might add, preparing sermons). And above all things we must prize and cultivate charity, humility and the common virtues.

# The Spirit of the Society of Mary

I suppose most Marists, if asked where to find the essential expression of Marist spirituality, would refer to the article on The Spirit of the Society, nn. 49 and 50 of the Constitutions of 1872, which the General Chapter of 1985 inserted in the text of the new Constitutions (n. 228). They would very likely add n. 1 of the 1872 Constitutions, which the same Chapter inserted into its own n. 7. Marists surely do not err in finding in these texts a special legacy from their Founder, although we should bear in mind Jean Coste's caution that the Founder's Rule 'cannot be reduced… to a certain "spirit," whose description, however precious it may be, came only later, once everything had already been said through a multitude of details' (*Studies on the Early Ideas of Jean-Claude Colin – I.* p. 222).

## 1. Living Mary's Life, Breathing Mary's Spirit

The first number of the 1872 Constitutions – which begins 'Haec minima Congregatio, This least of congregations' – introduces article 1 on 'The Name and Purpose of the Society'. It remained essentially unchanged since its first appearance in the *Epitome of the Rules of the Society of Mary* composed in or shortly after 1836. In its general structure and much of its contents, it is clearly modelled on the opening numbers of the Jesuit Constitutions, with which Colin had recently become acquainted. Except for one sentence. That is the sentence printed as sub-paragraph 1): '(This least of congregations) is distinguished by this sweet name Society of Mary: so that all who are admitted into it, mindful of the family to which they belong, may understand that they are to emulate the virtues of this holy Mother, and indeed even to live her life, above all in humility, obedience, self-denial, mutual charity, and love of God…' (Note. This is the translation of the Latin given in the edition of the 1872 Constitutions published by order of the General Chapter of 1987. This is to be preferred to the version quoted in the 1987 Constitutions: 'understand that they are to emulate the virtues of this loving Mother *as if* living her life'.) There is no parallel to this sentence in the Ignatian text. It shows us where we are to look in order to find the dynamic centre of life and action in reference to which Marists are called to live the whole Gospel: we are to 'live Mary's life'.

Fr. Colin names five virtues that are characteristic of her: humility, obedience, self-renunciation – better than self-*denial*; this virtue was added to the text by Colin as he was preparing the 1872 Constitutions – mutual charity and love of God. He tells us to 'emulate'

these virtues, which, we might say, mirror Mary's soul. But the emphasis is placed on 'living Mary's life': we are called to nothing less than to live the life of the woman of faith and obedience to God's word, the woman of the Magnificat, the woman of whom the Founder said: 'When Jesus Christ was born, he was the object of all her thoughts and affections. After his death, her sole thought was the extension and development of the mystery of the Incarnation' (*FS* 60,1).

It should be obvious from this that Fr Colin is not inviting us to find the feminine within us, for example to get in touch with our *anima*: he could not possibly have thought in these terms. He is not even asking us to develop qualities that may be thought of as feminine, to balance against more masculine traits. Is humility especially feminine? Or obedience, or self-renunciation, or love of God and the neighbour? It may be that there is a characteristically feminine way of exercising these virtues; but there is certainly a masculine way of being humble, obedient, forgetful of self and loving. Fr Colin does not ask Marists to feminize themselves – in any sense at all. With the whole of the spiritual tradition to which he belongs, he is probably thinking not so much of Mary's personality or psychology or even of her femininity, but of her part in the divine plan of salvation. She is the creature whom God made necessary to achieve his project, whose 'Yes' set it all in motion. From then on, her place is always at the side of Jesus. She was the support of the Church at its birth, seeking its unity. She could have given orders to the apostles, yet was content to remain 'hidden and unknown' among them. At the end of time she will again support the Church, preparing a people for God. This is the one whose virtues we are to emulate and whose life we are to live – and to do so as men.

At this point let us take up n. 49 on The Spirit of the Society. This number entered the history of the Constitutions quite late, its earliest form being found in the Sisters' Constitutions of 1856. We all remember how it goes: 'Let them always keep in mind that they belong by gracious choice to the family of blessed Mary, Mother of God, from whose name they are called Marists, and whom they have chosen from the beginning as their model and their first and perpetual superior. If therefore they are and wish to be true sons of this dear Mother, let them continually strive to draw upon her spirit and breathe it: a spirit of humility, self-denial (or self-renunciation), intimate union with God, and the most ardent love of the neighbour; and so they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things, otherwise they will be unworthy and degenerate sons.'

Certain things are to be found in both n. 1 and n. 49: belonging to the family of Mary and bearing her name; Mary's virtues, though the lists are slightly different – obedience is not

mentioned a second time, and mutual charity and love of God have become the much stronger 'intimate union with God and the most ardent love of the neighbour'. One sentence has a history that post-dates the General Chapter of 1872. The Roman reviser seems to have found 'they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary' too daring; he changed it to the text that Marists of my generation and above learnt (in Latin) in the novitiate: 'and so let them strive to imitate Mary in thinking, Mary in speaking, Mary in all things.' This change is not simply cosmetic; it alters Colin's thought fundamentally and substitutes a spirituality of imitation and of effort; in other words, it reinterprets Colinian spirituality as ascetical: we strive to imitate Mary.

What Colin had in mind was quite different and implies a mystical spirituality: we have Mary's spirit – we 'breathe it in and out', which is the natural translation of the Latin *spiritum haurire atque spirare* – and so we can, we must, we will think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary. This is the text approved by the Chapter of 1872, which we now have once again. It complements n. 1: because we have Mary's spirit, we live Mary's life and so we reproduce her inward and outward acts – and of course, her virtues. And we do this, not only in moments of prayer and recollection but also in our apostolate, where we will be 'instruments of the divine mercies'.

How can we do this? How are we to understand such language? What did Fr Colin have in mind? (Here, incidentally, I have to part company with Jean Coste; see my article in *FN* 5,4, 2001, pp. 427-429.)

## 2. François Guilloré

I think that an answer is suggested by certain writings of another author whom Fr Colin had read, François Guilloré (1615-1684), also a 'mystical Jesuit', though not a disciple of Louis Lallemant; he is in fact much closer to Pierre de Bérulle. I will quote two passages from one of his works called *Maximes spirituelles*. Unfortunately we do not know for sure if Jean-Claude Colin ever read this particular book by Guilloré, but in any case there are striking parallels: Colin seems to be thinking along the same lines as Guilloré, whether or not there is a direct literary influence.

The first passage is headed 'The difference there is between imitating our Lord and clothing ourselves in our Lord' (tome I, livre III, maxime xii, §1):

'We must note … that imitating our Lord is not the same thing as clothing ourselves in our Lord. We imitate our Lord when we do our action, by resemblance to those that he

worked; and when by our own operation we express in ourselves what he has done interiorly or exteriorly: in such a way that our operation is, properly speaking, an expression and an image of his.' This corresponds to what I have called the 'ascetical life.'

'But to clothe ourselves in Jesus Christ is nothing else than an appropriation and an application of his actions; so that, it is not so much I who act, but that I apply to myself the actions of Jesus; and so the only thing that remains for the soul is to offer to the Eternal Father these same adorable actions, to supplement one's own.'

This passage – in which Guilloré makes use of a well-known Pauline expression (cf. Rom 13:14) – illustrates the difference I referred to a moment ago between a likeness to Jesus (or Mary) acquired by imitation and a likeness whose source is mystical. Jean-Claude Colin does in fact tell us at times to 'imitate Mary'; but I don't think such expressions are to be interpreted so strictly as to exclude the mystical interpretation. Very interesting in this context is a quotation in Mayet that brings together both the language of imitation and that of 'clothing oneself':

'Then reverend father spoke of how fortunate we were to bear the name of Mary, and of the zeal with which we should imitate her. "… There is our model. Let us clothe ourselves in her spirit"' (*FS* 182,60).

That brings us to the second passage from Guilloré, which is headed 'Every Christian has the obligation of being animated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ in all his actions', (tome I, livre III, maxime xiii ch. 1, §1):

'This is the end of Christianity, as that of Jesus, which has been to animate us with his Spirit and to make that alone our life. All that we do of holy acts for the neighbour or for ourselves … is not … the last end that Jesus had, but it is to live his divine life; without that, with all the rest, we are inanimate corpses, and with that, without all the rest, we are in some way divinized…

'If then we are true members of Jesus our head, as St Paul assures us … we must be everywhere uniquely animated by his spirit. This divine spirit must so live in us in the smallest things, that he animate even our words, our views, our ways of behaving, our attitudes, and that it can be said of us that we behave as Jesus, that we speak as Jesus, that we see and that we act as Jesus; and so that our life is the same as the life of this admirable Saviour.'

## 3. A 'Marian Transposition'

Now listen again to Jean-Claude Colin in n. 49 of the 1872 Constitutions:

'… If therefore they are and wish to be true sons of this dear Mother, let them continually strive to draw upon her spirit and breathe it…; and so they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things…'

The parallels of language and of thought are striking. It really seems that Colin had only to make what I would call a 'Marian transposition' of the language used by Guilloré about Jesus, to arrive at the well-known formulae in his Constitutions: living Mary's life, breathing her spirit, thinking, judging, feeling and acting like her. Such a Marian transposition is, of course, already implicit in the very name Society of Mary.

But that immediately raises a difficulty. Is such a 'Marian transposition' legitimate? Is it really acceptable to transpose 'live Jesus' life' into 'live Mary's life', 'be animated by Jesus' spirit' into 'breathe Mary's spirit', 'behave, speak, see and act as Jesus' into 'think, judge, feel and act as Mary'? After all, as Paul reminds us (Gal 3:27): '… every one of you that has been baptised has been clothed in Christ.' Our Christ-identity comes first and fundamentally from our baptism: the whole Christian life, including its mystical flowering, is a development of baptismal grace. Baptism does not 'clothe us in Mary'. We do not receive Mary's life or identity in baptism.

Colin never deals with this problem, and I don't know if Bérulle or Guilloré do either. They might have answered in this way. If baptism establishes in us a likeness to Christ, it thereby – in a secondary and derived way, of course – establishes in us a likeness to Mary, who most perfectly resembles Christ. In the last analysis, the spirit of Mary is the spirit of Jesus, that is the Spirit of God. And so to 'breathe Mary's spirit' is to be 'animated by Jesus' spirit'. In fact, Fr Colin tells us in so many words that Mary's spirit is the spirit of Jesus (*FS* 176,3; cf. 188,17). In any case, we can be sure that he does not intend to substitute Mary for Jesus. This can be seen from his own words. Thanks to Mayet we have passages in which Colin uses similar language of Jesus alone and also of both Jesus and Mary. They all date from 1842.

In the first (*FS* 45,1), the Founder is speaking to Fr. Eymard: 'You must clothe yourself in our Lord. Do everything through him, as if you were body of his body, soul of his soul.' The second (*FS* 55) is part of his exhortation to the General Chapter: 'We must love all that Jesus Christ loved, abhor all that he abhorred. This conformity with the sentiments and life of Jesus Christ must be the subject of our meditations throughout our life: *mihi mundus*

*crucifixus est et ego mundo* (cf. Gal 6:14)'. It is clear that Fr Colin is well used to speaking of a conformity with the sentiments and life of Jesus similar to that advocated by Guilloré and which implies a similarly mystical spirituality: to be body of his body, soul of his soul, loving and abhorring all that he loved and abhorred. In other words, we are to live Jesus' life, be animated by his Spirit, love as he loves.

And now listen to another passage addressed to the same General Chapter of 1842; this is in Mayet (1.722) but not in *A Founder Speaks*:

'We are obliged by state and by duty to follow Jesus Christ and his divine Mother. May all our thoughts, all the movements of our heart, all our steps be worthy of our august models. Let us live their life, think as they thought, judge things as they judged them; let our union with them by prayer be such that we may never lose sight of them, and that the world with its false glory may be what it was for the great apostle: *mihi mundus crucifixus est, et ego mundo*. It's only through this, my most honoured confreres, that we will do God's work, that we will become in his hands the instruments of his divine mercy in favour of others, and that we will ourselves carry out the great work of our perfection.' Here, if anywhere, we have a synthesis of Colin's apostolic spirituality. It would not be out of place on the lips of Bérulle or one of his avowed disciples.

In the light of these texts, the 'Marian transposition' from Guilloré to the Colinian Constitutions seems less abrupt. We see that Fr Colin can tell Marists at different moments to live the life of Jesus, to live the life of Jesus and Mary, or to live the life of Mary. He can say we are to feel, judge, act like Jesus, like Jesus and Mary, or like Mary. Nothing could more vividly illustrate Bérulle's principle: 'Speaking of you, Mary, we speak of Jesus.' Even if we may have some difficulty in making for ourselves such a transposition, there is no doubt that the spirituality of Jean-Claude Colin is centred and rooted in Christ. Put another way, his Marian spirituality is Christocentric.

Still, it remains true that, in his final legacy to the Society, Colin speaks in terms of living Mary's life, breathing her spirit, reproducing her virtues, thinking, judging, feeling and acting as Mary. Here he clearly indicates where Marists are to find the dynamic centre of life and action in reference to which they are called to live the whole Gospel. At the same time, it is only after we have recognised the 'Marian transposition' that we are able to understand our Founder's words in reference to the tradition stemming from Pierre de Bérulle, which sees the spiritual life as an ever-closer union with Jesus Christ and so resemblance to him. For Marists this translates as an ever-closer union with Mary – and so with Jesus – to the point that we have the same interior attitudes expressed in similar exterior actions. As Craig Larkin

has put it, the Marist shares in Mary's relationship with God, with the world, with other people and notably with the Church.

## 4. Clothing ourselves in Jesus Christ

Jean Coste regretted that he did not write an article on Jesus in Colinian spirituality: he seemed to fear that many Marists wanted to bring everything back exclusively to Mary – precisely the sort of substitution for Jesus that other Marists mistrust, sometimes to the point of avoiding reference to Mary. In fact the Founder frequently tells Marists to unite themselves with Jesus and to clothe themselves in him, especially in the exercise of the priestly ministry.

A moment ago we heard him tell Fr Eymard (*FS* 45,1): 'You must clothe yourself in our Lord. Do everything through him, as if you were body of his body, soul of his soul.' He goes on to say (*FS* 45,2): 'Since your life is one of action, in putting on our Lord you will always be at peace and your soul, indeed, will always be caught up as in the fondest prayer. You cannot undertake many spiritual exercises, but if you keep in close union with our Lord, that will serve as everything for you. You will see everything in him, your pupils, your work, yourself – and that is very important.' Here we have in summary a profound spirituality of the apostolate, in which union with Jesus Christ is the central point.

Listen again to the Founder encouraging the members of the General Chapter of 1842 (*FS* 56,4):

'But when we know the one who is calling us, when we know that God is everywhere with us – *Ego ero tecum* (Ex 3:12 or Deut 31:23) – what, then, should we fear? Is not that the most worthy object of our desires, that life which gives us a share in the mission of the Incarnate Word? Let us then put on Jesus Christ, to that end working with all our heart so that Jesus Christ will work with us. We must put the man in us aside, and so ask ourselves when we are in the pulpit, Who am I to announce to these souls the good news, to distribute among them the bread of the word of God? Why have I entered this pulpit? It is to beget them for Jesus Christ. To obtain God's blessing on our ministry, let us pray the blessed Virgin to guide us in all things. Let us say to her, "Blessed Virgin, show me the will of your divine Son." Having done that, let us have no more fear…' Here we have the expected reference to Mary, but as the one who shows us the will of her Son: we recall her last recorded words in John 2:5, 'Do whatever he tells you.' It is in his mission that we share; we identify ourselves with him.

Similarly – this time for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (*FS* 102,27):

'In the confessional we need to put aside our human nature. In one phrase which says everything, we must put on Jesus Christ. We are not there in the capacity of a mere man. Who, as a man, has the right to probe into the secrets of the heart? Who has the power to forgive sins? God, and he alone. We must therefore be close to God, with one ear to our penitent and the other to Jesus Christ. It is he who is listening through us. Let us put on Christ's feeling for sinners, for the Samaritan woman, for Mary Magdalene. Jesus Christ is my model, Christ is to speak with my lips.'

On another occasion Fr Colin speaks of union with Christ in terms suggested by John 15:1-6 (*FS* 134,1):

'Missioners, all Marists, must be men who are grafted into Christ, and follow no will but his, just as the shoot springing from the main branch has no life of its own, other than the sap which comes to it from the vine. If it is cut off from that sap, from that vine it dies, and so it is the same with us.' He might have added: 'The one who remains in Christ, with Christ in him, brings forth abundant fruit.'

And finally this beautiful text (*FS* 160,6), which recapitulates much that we have been seeing:

'I repeat: never will any other means than those which Jesus Christ taught to his disciples succeed in changing the world. Meditate, therefore on those means during this precious retreat; do not emerge from this cenacle except as men dead to themselves, living the life of Jesus Christ, the life of the apostles, the life of renunciation, and of the cross. It was for this that you became missionaries.'

These quotations suffice to show that Colinian spirituality is not *exclusively* Marian. Living Mary's life, breathing her spirit, emulating her virtues: there is the dynamic centre of life and action in reference to which Marists are called to live the whole Gospel. At the same time, the whole Gospel is not reduced to that essential and characteristic reference: Mary does not replace Jesus.

## 5. Unknown and Hidden

If we were looking for the quintessence of Fr Colin's spiritual teaching, we would, I think, go to the conclusion of the second-to-last sentence of the article on The Spirit of the Society: '… unknown and even hidden in this world' (For the most recent reflections on this expression, see P.J. Bearsley, "From Ascesis to Kenosis. The Evolution in Marist

Understanding of the 'Unknown and Hidden', *FN* 5,1, 2000, pp. 69-94.). This expression constantly recurs in the Founder's speech and writing, either in this full form or, more frequently, in the short form, 'unknown and hidden' (sometimes 'hidden and unknown', which goes better in English); in the Latin of the Constitutions the two adjectives are in the plural – *Ignoti et occulti*, referring to all Marists – but more often than not they are in the singular in Colin's French.

I mentioned in a previous talk that I came across 'unknown and hidden' in a passage quoted from Surin. Here it is:

'Contemplation is an operation by which the soul looks at universal truth. It is proper to this operation to be very simple, very indistinct, but to rest peacefully in something that is more *unknown and hidden* than uncovered and known. The higher it is, the more it is confused; and even when by supernatural notions the soul knows things that are distinct and clearly manifested, there remains something *unknown and hidden*, which it prizes more highly and which is the best object of that which touches it' (*Catéchisme spirituel, contenant les principaux moyens d'arriver à la perfection*, t. I, p. 107 (II; II), quoted by Bremond, t. 5, p. 292).

In this text, that which is 'unknown and hidden' is, of course, God: the 'hidden God (*Deus absconditus*; cf. Isa 45:15)' is a frequent theme of mystical writing. I was moved to realise that Surin's description of God as 'unknown and hidden' to the pray-er converges with the final word on the subject of Jean Coste, who appears, however, not to have known the origin of the expression *ignoti et occulti*. In his last lecture in the retreat given at Valpré, in August 1988, he said (*Une vision mariale de l'église*, p. 470f.):

'Personally, I see that the Marist vocation is summarized whole and entire along the lines of "unknown and hidden" [plural], in an understanding of the mystery of the hidden God in all its dimensions, and in an acceptance of that two-fold aspect of the hidden God: it entails comprehending from within the phenomenon of secularization, it entails full solidarity with those people for whom God is hidden (largely because of us), and at the same time, it entails keeping faith in the hidden God of the mystics, a sufficiently real faith so that other people might come and quench their thirst therein.'

As it happens, Surin uses the expression 'unknown and hidden' more than once in his writings. Not only are these three words applied to other realities besides that of the 'hidden God' of the mystics; we also find them in connection with phrases that both recall and also form a contrast with the second part of the Colinian expression, 'in this world'.

We are not surprised to find them used of the life of Jesus at Nazareth:

‘After which he entered into a life *hidden from and unknown to the earth*, until a certain time when he began from then on to appear’ (I,II,3 §1).

Other persons (Christians) can also be ‘unknown and hidden’:

‘ ... and we notice that, having been raised to contemplation, that is to this simple regard and this heavenly taste, they have been thereby buried in God, and *hidden from the world*, thus verifying what the Apostle says: *Mortui estis, et vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo* [Col 3:3]…’ (I,III,6).

The originality of Colin is well illustrated by comparing these expressions with that of the Founder, for whom Marists are to be hidden not from the world but *in* this world – where, we might add, God is hidden. At the same time, our understanding of the *Ignoti et occulti* is enhanced by seeing the richness of its context in Surin (and other authors). It is not simply a strategy for the apostolate; or rather, it is that, precisely because it is a key to union with God, who is hidden and unknown in contemplation, and to identity with Jesus and Mary hidden and unknown at Nazareth. In its context in n. 50 of the 1872 Constitutions, it expresses what Colin means by ‘contemplative in action’: ‘… so combining a love of solitude and silence and the practice of hidden virtues with works of zeal, that, even though they must undertake the various ministries helpful to the salvation of souls, they seem to be unknown and indeed even hidden in this world.’

## 6. The Practice of Marist Spirituality

At the conclusion of this long answer to the question, What is Marist Spirituality? you may well be asking: ‘Fine and good, but just how does one *do* Marist Spirituality? What is it in practice and how is it learnt?’ The spirituality we have been surveying contains several strands; among them we have identified Ignatius of Loyola, Pierre de Bérulle, Louis Lallemant, Jean-Joseph Surin and François Guilloré. These and other strands were woven into a single fabric by the prayer, reflection and life-experience of Jean-Claude Colin. How did he intend to pass this spiritual fabric on to Marists?

Ignatius left his followers the *Spiritual Exercises*; other founders, such as Fr Chaminade for the Marianists, have left substantial spiritual treatises. Our Founder left no synthesis, treatise or manual, and it would be a bold Marist who would undertake to provide one. He has not, however, left us without guidance. For he left us a Rule. This was to be much more than simply a set of regulations but, like the Rule of St Benedict, was to be a rule of life, which should lead us into holiness.

Fr Colin's Rule subsists in a certain number of texts, culminating in the Constitutions of 1872. It is also expressed in many remarks collected by Mayet, where he would say: 'This is in the Rule', or 'This will be in the Rule'. Even where there is no such indication, when the Founder speaks, he is frequently commenting on the Rule. For it was never confined to a written text but remained a living word. I believe that this word is still addressed to us and has the potential to lead us into holiness by teaching us how to be Marists. So our final talk will deal with the challenge of Fr Colin's Rule. There we will see that, as Coste puts it in the quotation with which I began this talk, the Founder's Rule 'cannot be reduced… to a certain "spirit," whose description, however precious it may be, came only later, once everything had already been said through a multitude of details'. Quite the contrary: Marist spirituality, like God, 'dwells in the details' (remark attributed to the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe).

# The Challenge of Fr Colin's Rule

## 1. 'The Rule'

In our Constitutions, n. 6, on 'The Name and Purpose of the Society', we read the following:

'In striving to understand the meaning of the Society's name, Marists turn to the Venerable Jean-Claude Colin, whom they claim as their founder. The Constitutions which he gave them remain for them the authentic expression of the nature and ends of the Society of Mary.' Thus the Constitutions of the Society of Mary approved by the Holy See in 1987 refer back to the Founder's Constitutions not, of course, as still extant legislation, but as still 'the authentic expression' of what the Society is and what it is for. This means that the Founder's Constitutions are of more than merely historical interest and retain an abiding relevance and importance.

The Society's lawmakers had in mind the Constitutions of 1872, which were reprinted with certain corrections and additions by order of the General Chapter of 1985. Those Constitutions were, however, the latest expression of something much older – and, Fr. Colin would have said, more important and venerable because not of simply human origin – namely what he called the Rule. This Rule presents a permanent challenge to every generation of Marists, and I want to talk about that this morning/afternoon, using largely the publications of Jean Coste, who devoted to it the last part of his life of Marist studies. Had he been given more time, he would have exerted himself to impress the Rule on Marist consciousness at least as much as he did to make us aware of the Great Themes, Mary in the early Church, etc. My first reference is to his paper 'A Founder and his Rule: Recapitulation', which he gave at the Second International Colloquium on Marist History and Spirituality held in 1989, and published in *Studies on the Early Ideas of Jean-Claude Colin – I* (Maristica 2) 220-262. I quote:

'It may come as something of a surprise to hear that the unifying factor in Colin's life was the Rule of the Society and not the Society itself. And yet, if Colin is recognized as the founder, it is neither for having been the first to speak of the plan, nor for having given it its name, nor for having gathered its first adherents together, for we know that Courveille was the one who did all these things. He founded the Society by giving it what he would call its

"bases", by giving the name and the plan a content, that is fundamental traits; and he often said that, unless the Society kept these characteristics, it might just as well cease to exist.

'Now this content cannot be equated with the broad themes which structured Colin's image of the Society and its relationship to the Church and to the times, themes whose revalidation in the last thirty years has contributed to restoring the full picture of our founder. Yes, Colin was sustained by a grand hope concerning the role of Mary at the end of time and the possibility of beginning a new Church over again; but, if that was all he had said, he would have been purely a utopian and not a founder. If he was a founder, it is because he was able to show the implications of beginning a new Church, because he was able to sketch the type of men and communities needed for this task and to point out how to become instruments of mercy in more than words. All of this, everything that allowed the Society to take shape and gave it its personality, is what he calls the Rule' (pp. 220-222).

## 2. Jean Coste and the Founder's Rule

I want to share with you a conviction that has been growing on me concerning the way we Marists currently understand our vocation. I have gradually come to believe that this has remained rather incomplete, and that we have only a partial idea of our Founder. If that is in fact the case, it might help to explain why – despite all the work of research and popularization done by Coste, Lessard and others – we are still so far from having brought about a thorough renewal of the Society of Mary. To put it simply – no doubt too simply – we Marists as a body stopped listening to Jean Coste in the early 80s.

Beginning in the 1950s, with articles published in the *Acta Societatis Mariae*, and then in workshops and retreats around the Marist world, Coste had been bringing to light the elements of Jean-Claude Colin's vision of the Society of Mary. This consisted of the 'great themes' that formed what Coste called Colin's 'Marian vision of the Church'. These themes excited and inspired Marists and – especially in the period following Vatican II – reassured us that our Founder and his charism were still relevant in today's Church, indeed more relevant than ever. There seemed to be a remarkable correspondence between Colin's view of the relation between the Virgin Mary and the Church and that of the Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium*. Those were years of euphoria – and Coste began to get nervous. By the time of the Framingham Workshop of 1980, he was clearly feeling that the time had come to call our attention more firmly to Colin himself, whether in this or that respect he was relevant or not, whether he pleased us or repelled us. Even so, Coste still organized the Framingham

Workshop in terms of Colin's 'original vision', followed by the 'spiritual implications of this vision' (comprising 'alien to greed', 'hidden and unknown', 'the councillors' opinion rather than his own'), finally 'Colin's vision and structures' (including 'an apostolic community'). I think it's fair to say that this is the approach expressed in our present Constitutions: the great themes of the Colinian vision; the spiritual and institutional implications of the vision, including 'communion for mission'; a formation that seeks to appropriate the founding moments of the Society (Fourvière, Cerdon, Le Bugey) that express the vision, its spiritual depth and its apostolic implications. Meanwhile, Jean Coste was moving on.

I well remember my surprise and puzzlement when Coste came to New Zealand in 1988 to lead a seminar for a Marist Renewal group of which I was the co-ordinator. I suppose I was expecting to hear once again the 'great themes' with perhaps some fresh insights into their implications. Gradually, I became aware that I was hearing something quite different and even disconcerting: Coste was in fact developing some of the topics that are expressed in what became volume 2 of the *Maristica* series, published in 1989, *Studies on the Early Ideas of Jean-Claude Colin*, which, like its companion *Autour de la règle*, published in 1991, was never completed. I wonder how many Marists have ever read that *Maristica* volume. In fact, it seems to have had little or no influence within the Society. By and large we Marists have stayed with the Colin of the utopian and inspirational vision. We have not as a body followed Coste in discovering the Colin who spent his whole life trying to write a *Rule of daily life* that would guide us all into personal holiness, a Rule characterised by concrete and often minute detail. Influenced, perhaps, by a Weberian model opposing *charisma* and institution, we could not see that Colin's charism was largely conveyed by his Rule.

## 3. The Primitive Rule

Coste was able to trace the various stages through which the Founder went in his lifelong attempt to give expression to the Rule. The first period, between 1817 and 1836, was that in which what he calls the 'Primitive Rule' was worked out night after night in the little office in Colin's room in the Cerdon presbytery, shown to the Nuncio in Paris and lived by the Marist aspirants of Belley and Lyons. Coste was able to make a partial reconstruction of this Rule from surviving fragments, contemporary comments and legislative texts that embody this or that item; he notes seven characteristic features (pp. 226-232).

1. Its 'profound utopianism'. Coste reminds us that the young Colin had no personal experience of religious life and only a limited knowledge of it from books. It is not surprising

that his Rule, in its earliest form, was utopian 'in both contemporary senses of the word as an expression of an unattainable ideal and as an intuition entailing extremely productive achievements' (pp. 226-228). Not surprising, also, that the Sulpicians in Paris who read it found it 'made for angels rather than for men'.

2. Its fundamental point of reference was to the 'house of the Blessed Virgin', which Colin imagined in concrete detail (no doubt with the help of Mary of Agreda). So the primitive Rule – and its later expressions as far as the 1872 Constitutions – contained specific references to life in a house, with everything that happens within its four walls. This explains the quasi-monastic character of many of its aspects: their presence does not mean that Colin originally thought of a monastic foundation, then changed it into an apostolic community while retaining many monastic features; it is how Colin imagined life in Our Lady's house.

3. Hence the importance given to the community. This took various forms, including having 'everything in common' – even clothing – in the manner of the earliest Church of Acts 2 and 4; also a thoroughgoing equality, according to which, for instance, the common duties were shared by all, even superiors. Here belongs also a radical accountability to the community, even in things spiritual, so the manifestation of conscience to superiors.

4. The aim of all points of the Rule was, in Coste's words, to 'eliminate from the heart (of the Marist) everything that would not preserve him in the truth of his vocation' (p. 23).

5. The vows are presented in all their demands.

6. The Rule did not concern only the internal life of Our Lady's house or the interior life of the Marist. It dealt also with the relationships between the Society and the Church and the world around it, notably with the Pope, with bishops and with civil authorities.

7. Finally, some features concerning ministry can be found in contemporary instructions given by Colin for the missionaries in the Bugey (1825) and the staff of the Belley College (1829).

Coste notes two further features. First, when Colin showed his text to the Nuncio, it was not a sketch or 'work in progress', but already a complete Rule. Further, Colin had a sense of having received it from on high; at the same time, he did not regard it as fixed and unchangeable. On the contrary, it could be revised and modified, especially at the behest of lawful Church authority; parts of it could be promulgated in the form of legislative texts, while other parts were held back because 'their time was not yet come'. Each of the texts collected in *Antiquiores Textus* and *Autour de la Règle* is an expression of the Rule, yet none of them is definitive and exhaustive – the same may even have been true in his mind of the

Constitutions of 1872. Colin could say ‘it will be in the Rule’ or even ‘it is in the Rule’ of something that is contained in no extant legislative text.

## 5. The Rule Held in Abeyance

After 1836, Colin was responsible for an apostolic and missionary Congregation on a worldwide scale. By then too he had had the benefit of experience in living religious life and of being a superior, the benefit also of criticism and advice, and he had got to know the Jesuit Constitutions. All this modified his view of the Rule, not only in certain details but also in the form it should take. He was now thinking that the Constitutions to be submitted to the Holy See for approval should contain only the ‘fundamentals and essentials’, while the rest of the Rule would be published in a kind of Directory. But we would be mistaken if we were to suppose that this Directory would contain secondary details that could be fairly easily changed: no, its provisions were to be equally part of the Rule whose origin was ultimately God and Mary.

The result of the new thinking was the Constitutions of 1842, presented to the Holy See then withdrawn before they could be approved. Other texts from the same period may also be partial expressions of the Rule. Colin retired from the Generalate in 1854, intending to devote a good part of his time and energy to writing Constitutions for the Fathers, as well as for the Sisters. Years passed, however, with little to show, until Fr Favre drew up ‘Fundamental Rules’, which were accepted by a General Chapter in 1858 and approved by the Holy See in 1860. They too were intended to be a provisional expression of the Colinian Rule and not some new departure – even though the Founder disowned them. This was a difficult period for the Society and especially for Fr Favre, with the Founder insisting that he alone could write the Constitutions but producing nothing. It must also have been most painful for Fr Colin himself.

## 6. The Rule Found Again

Then in 1868, a text of the 1842 Constitutions – thought to have disappeared – was discovered. In Coste’s words, Colin, by now an old man, ‘has it read to him, finds his style and his ideas in it once again, and re-establishes emotional and spiritual contact with his early inspirations… From then on, his mind is made up. He will take this text as the basis for his

work, and he becomes more and more convinced that he has but to return to his early ideas' (p. 248).

In fact, in great part, the work took the form of restoring to the Constitutions a number of the elements that had been removed at the time of drawing up the text of 1842. You can see this in comparing the two versions of the 'Common Rules' (ch. 6 of 1842, ch. 5 of 1872): the text that we know to be earlier reads rather like a revision of the one we know was composed 30 years later – a revision in the direction of simplifying, of removing details in order to leave broad, general statements. In fact, what Colin had done in 1842 was precisely that: he pruned the text to be approved by Rome of many particular points – which did not cease, however, to be part of the Rule but were 'held in abeyance'; now he 'goes back to his early ideas' and restores many of them to the text.

'What were these "early ideas" which, at the beginning as well as at the end of his life, expressed for Colin what God expected of the Society? (I am once again quoting Coste, p. 8.) Our spontaneous reaction would be to think of a few fundamental themes which summarize the essence and the ministry of the Society… the role of Mary at the beginning of the Church and at the end of time, the idea of "beginning again a new Church," Marists as "instruments of divine mercy", entering Nazareth and from there seeing what needs to be done, etc… Nevertheless, it must be recognized that this is not what Colin put into his rule in 1868-1869. Our intellectual training makes us want to understand the word "idea" in the sense of a general idea or broad, fruitful intuition. For a man of action like Colin, an "idea" was something quite concrete. It meant thinking of a particular line of action, of sticking to a particular solution… When we line up the items Colin thus inserted into the last redaction of the rule with reference to the origins, we realize that they were concrete practices in which he saw the touchstone of an authentically Marist behaviour. Reintroducing these was the way he came back to his "early ideas".'

It needs to be emphasized, however, that, in drawing up the Constitutions, Jean-Claude Colin did not simply follow his own ideas. He accepted the advice of collaborators, which meant more than once bowing to their judgment about the wisdom of putting in a particular item; the draft was submitted to the General Chapter of 1872 and there amended. Finally the text passed by the Chapter was submitted to the Holy See for approval in 1873, a process that also led to revisions – including, as we have seen, an impoverishment of n. 49.

## 7. The search for new Constitutions

These were the Constitutions that governed the Society until 1987; in the mean time, they were regularly amended down to the Chapter of 1961. There was a major revision in the 1920s, to bring them into line with the new Code of Canon Law. Then came the call of the Second Vatican Council for the *aggiornamento* of religious life, for a return to the original charism of the institute, finally for new Constitutions. The Society of Mary showed some enthusiasm for *aggiornamento* and was in a good position – thanks to the earlier work of Coste and Lessard – to appreciate the original inspiration of the Founder and find it surprisingly relevant and in tune with Vatican II. By contrast, it found the call to write new Constitutions more difficult and took nearly 20 years to do it, discarding several different solutions along the way. These hesitations and delays were in part the reflection of the Society's sense of the unique importance of the Founder's Constitutions.

The first project took the form of a 'Rule' drawn up by Coste on the instructions of Fr Buckley Superior General: this consisted of excerpts, mainly from the 1872 Constitutions, on points that could be regarded as 'fundamental and essential', and included also some of the newly rediscovered 'Great Themes'; it was to be supplemented by newly composed Constitutions. This solution was not implemented by the Chapter of Renewal of 1969-70, which asked for a new collection of 'Sources of the Tradition of the Society of Mary' and wrote 'Declarations and Decisions' which supplemented and occasionally superseded the Constitutions as amended in 1961, while awaiting new Constitutions. Then came the so-called 'bi-polar solution', proposed then withdrawn by Fr Ryan Superior General, when it seemed that it would not be approved by the Holy See: according to this, Marist legislation would consist of two parts: the Constitutions of 1872 and a modern document. This formula would effectively have given to the Colinian Constitutions a status similar to that of the historic 'Rules': thus, if you look at the rulebooks of many orders and congregations – Dominicans, Visitandines and others – you will find in first place the Rule of Saint Augustine, which is the foundational text but is not current law; this is followed by Constitutions and other legislative documents. Finally, when the 'bi-polar' solution was abandoned, a commission headed by Gaston Lessard wrote draft Constitutions, which were adopted by the Chapter of 1985 and approved by the Holy See in 1987.

We should note that these Constitutions represent a new departure: for the first time the Society is not governed by a rule that originates with its Founder. The new Constitutions take many things from the old: a basic framework, texts paraphrased or even quoted; there is

a constant effort to be creatively faithful to the Founder and his charism; the Constitutions of 1987 also give large scope to the Great Themes and, perhaps for that reason, have even been described as 'more Colinian' than those of 1872. Much more could be said about their qualities. But the one thing they are not and do not claim to be, is an expression of the Founder's Rule.

## 8. Fr Colin's Rule Today

So where does that leave Fr Colin's Rule? Is it now of merely historical interest, a subject for students of Marist history and fruitful source of University theses? With regard to its latest embodiment, the 1872 Constitutions, we have seen that the present Constitutions, in n. 6, recognize in them a permanent relevance. But just what does it mean to say that 'they remain the authentic expression of the nature and ends of the Society of Mary'? Does this refer only to the quotation of n. 1 of the 1872 Constitutions, On the Name and Purpose of the Society, which the chapter of 1985 ordered to be inserted in n. 7, and to the quotation of nn. 49 and 50, On the Spirit of the Society, which is inserted in n. 228? Or does Fr Colin's Rule as a whole still challenge us, even if it no longer governs our Marist life?

I believe the latter is true, and for several reasons. Once again I want to quote Coste, and at length.

'(W)hat did this founder understand by what he called the rule? Was it a sacred book, in which each comma had been dictated by God, a changeless text which was to be put into practice for all eternity? Certainly not. The turbulent history we have just reviewed has indicated the contrary well enough that no further insistence is necessary.

'On the other hand, the same history shows no less clearly, that the rule, in Colin's mind, was in no way the collection of norms which a group of priests might have drawn up for themselves for their common pursuit of a certain number of goals which they had chosen. The rule is not the result of a human decision. It has been received from on high. No one is its master, not the one who wrote it down, any more than anyone else. [Here is an interesting contrast with no. 91 of our present Constitutions, which states that "Marists … agree on rules for living their lives together …" – JT.]

'What is it then? It represents an effort to express as well as possible the intentions of those who wanted this Society and gave it birth: God and his mother…

'This rule is inevitably imperfect, in that it can never reach its definitive state because the Society for which it is destined will truly be itself only at the end of time; this rule is, at

every moment, complete and yet to be completed. None of its formulations is immutable, but none of the intentions which it expresses can be ignored, for then the Society would lose its reason for being.

'Though it is quite different from a "letter" which imprisons, it is not a very general "spirit," either, one which each man might live as best he can. It exists only as specific demands, which cut to the quick and force individuals and communities to remember that their aims are not self-imposed and that they have come together to carry on a work which is not their own.

'For all these reasons, Colin's rule has an irreplaceable role for us Marists. To be sure, none of its successive drafts can claim to constitute our legislation, and none of its regulations can be considered as binding unless it is included in our approved constitutions. Yet, if the real problem for the Society today is that of creative fidelity, and if … we ought to be able to interpret our past, it is of capital importance that this past be apprehended in truth and not reconstructed so as to suit our desires. Now the surest and truest way to grasp what Colin wanted, without inserting too much of ourselves, lies precisely in studying his rule, which constantly bewilders and shocks us. As long as we remain within the broad lines of Colin's ecclesiology and eschatology, it is easy to see ourselves in him and thus to draw him unconsciously to ourselves [for example, as one who anticipated Vatican II – JT]. By contrast, when we listen to him asking us to wear the hair shirt, to kneel before the superior, to refrain always from having strangers at table, then do questions begin to tumble down into our consciousness' (pp. 256-260).

So Colin's Rule challenges us – even scandalizes us – in at least two ways. First is the scandal of Colin's own otherness. He is frankly not our contemporary and does not think just like us. So, perhaps we should simply consign his Rule to the past, as an expression of the mentality of another age? Coste replies: 'It is that, but it also offers us the best means we have for rediscovering the past in all its demanding truth, that past to which we want to refer in our interpretation of today' (p. 262). In other words, we should listen to Colin's voice, precisely because he is not our contemporary and therefore won't be simply echoing to us our own ideas.

Second, I would say, is the scandal of the particular. As we have seen, the Rule – and this is eminently true of the 1872 Constitutions – is not the sort of document we would have written, containing a few big ideas, some general principles and a recommendation to make our own applications, with a minimum of concrete requirements; in fact, the kind of document adopted by the General Chapter of 1985, into which a number of particular

regulations were subsequently introduced at the behest of the Holy See. Quite the contrary, it is a collection of particular, practical and often minute rules – just the kind of thing that we have tried to get away from and to keep at arm's length during the last 40 years. Fr Colin's Rule won't let us settle for generalities or good intentions; it challenges us to 'come down to brass tacks' about the way we intend to live.

## 9. What are we to do?

So what could we do? I believe the time has come to reopen creatively the Constitutions of 1872, to read them again in the light of everything we now know about the Founder's lifelong attempt to express the Rule that he believed Mary intended her Society to have. I believe that we will find in them the 'authentic expression of the nature and ends of the Society of Mary' (to quote n. 6 of our present Constitutions), not as a set of general ideas but as a detailed description of a certain type of community and a certain type of person, who will do the 'work of Mary'.

There we will find a number of spiritual exercises and devotional practices. Many of these have their place also in our present Constitutions, at least as recommendations; others we have perhaps lost sight of. We might be able to look at them again with a fresh vision. In fact I believe that acquaintance with the teaching and practice of the 'French School', which influenced Fr Colin, may help to renew them for us, especially the Particular Examen and the quarter hour on Friday in union with our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane – also the Rosary.

We will also find detailed rules regulating individual and community life. If we pay attention to Jean Coste, we will look most carefully at those elements in the 1872 Constitutions that seem least attractive to us: it might be precisely there that our Founder has something to say to us, for example, when he recommends concrete practices of penance and mortification, including fasting. It's probably fair to say that, on various grounds, most of us have considered ourselves dispensed from these or would even regard this aspect of Colinian spirituality as inapplicable today. Contemporary spirituality, however, is taking a fresh look at the whole matter of the role of the body and, in that context, of bodily discipline. Should we let this renewal pass us by? Similarly, when Fr Colin's Rule reflects a view of the community that we are tempted to regard as 'closed' or unsuited to mission, or when he wants us to see in the Superior more than a human individual but the representative of God and Mary, we are tempted to dismiss it. Could we, instead, allow ourselves and our

presuppositions to be challenged? Even Colin's insistence on the manifestation of conscience to the Superior – a practice which canon law now forbids – might be the occasion of reviewing the role of the Superior as a spiritual leader – a role that has been much stressed in recent Church documents on religious life.

In other cases, the provisions of the Rule are clearly obsolete. This is so with much of the legislation concerning administrative procedures, although the new Constitutions retain a number of Colinian features on government, e.g. n. 197, inviting the Superior General to follow his assistants' advice rather than his own opinion, which goes back to the Primitive Rule. An extreme case in point is the prohibition of keeping a horse for personal use, even by the Superior General (Const. 1872, n. 141). This item disappeared from the Constitutions in 1961, no doubt because, since no one at all now had a horse, there didn't seem much point in retaining it in our Rule. It was, perhaps, a pity that the General Chapter didn't use this as the occasion for a searching discussion about the use of motor cars – not simply to substitute the word 'automobile' for 'horse' in no. 141, but to debate this issue where necessity slides easily into convenience, and where status can also be an underlying but unspoken motive: they might have come up with some challenging legislation. That's one example; I'm sure that others could be found, where a serious study of Fr Colin's Rule could provoke us to re-examine many of our practices and, perhaps more important, challenge our corporate culture.

In general, a creative reopening of the Constitutions of 1872 will mean reading Colin's Constitutions as a Benedictine reads the Rule of St Benedict: not as current law to be observed literally in all details, but not purely as an historical document; rather as the authentic voice of the Founder shaping our way of life. It will mean looking at the 'intentions that Fr Colin's Rule expresses', intentions which, according to Jean Coste as already quoted, 'cannot be ignored, for then the Society would lose its reason of being'.

To take an example (for which I thank Fr Tom Ellerman), no. 231 of the 1872 Constitutions describes the furnishings of the Marist's room: a bed, a table with a few bookshelves, two chairs and a prie-Dieu (kneeler), a wardrobe, an armchair. Fr Colin seems to envisage that a Marist is going to spend a lot of time in his room; it's not simply a place to sleep and rest, but also to pray and to read and study. That suggests that Marists are to be men who pray and who study: articles 8 and 9, on 'Spiritual Exercises' and on 'Learning', are not to be dead letters. That in turn gives concrete expression to the description of the Marist in article 10: 'combining a love of solitude and silence … with works of zeal.'

## 10. The Lever and the Fulcrum

The trick will be to identify the lever and the fulcrum with which to move the Marist universe. What do I mean by that? Well, as Archimedes knew, in order to move a dead weight, you don't have to apply massive force everywhere. It's enough to apply adequate force at the right spot. So, in order to move the Marist universe, it's not necessary – and would almost certainly be self-defeating – to bring in a whole lot of legislation. One or two key changes would be all that is needed.

I can give examples – negative, in my view – from Marist history, of apparently small changes to the law that transformed the Society. In my opinion the 1961 General Chapter was the most important in recent times, much more so than the 'Chapter of Renewal' of 1969-70 or that of 1985, which approved the new Constitutions. I say this because of two tiny changes it made to the Constitutions then operative. One was to change the time to be given to 'brief vocal prayer and meditation' each morning, according to n. 38, from a 'full hour' to half an hour. Those who argued for the change said that many Marists found it very difficult if not impossible to make more than a half hour's meditation, so it was better to prescribe this rather than to keep them in a bad conscience over it. I believe that, despite the good intentions, despite also the fact that it may not have made too much difference in practice, the change in the rule lowered the bar and reduced the spiritual aspirations of Marists. At Greenmeadows and Highden the daily rule was changed in such a way as to make it impossible to do more than a half-hour's meditation. The message went out that half an hour's meditation was not simply an acceptable minimum – which was presumably the intention of the legislators – but was the most that could be expected of Marists. We are still living with the consequences.

The other change made in 1961 was to n. 7, which had read: 'It is not appropriate for the Society to have charge of parishes (with some important exceptions).' The General Chapter simply removed the word 'not' – a nice example of the Archimedes principle. The result is that, if you go by the Index SM and not by our official statements, you would have to say that the principal work of the Society is running parishes. When all is said about the differences between parochial ministry in Fr Colin's time and now, I would submit that this result is far from the vision of the first Marists.

So where can we locate the two or three key points where pressure can be effectively applied to turn things round? Here is one possibility. The present Constitutions, n. 120, tell us that Marists 'should spend *at least* one half-hour a day in private prayer'. This is already an

improvement on 1961. What about going further and reinstating the prescription in the Founder's Constitutions of 'one full hour'? A good number of Marists do in fact make an hour's meditation. There are Marist communities that have been trying out the practice of an hour's meditation made together before the Blessed Sacrament exposed every morning. There's no pressure, and not everyone makes it every time. But overall they are appreciating the effects of this practice on the rest of their lives, their communities and their apostolates. I believe that to restore the full hour as the recommended norm for mental prayer would have a very beneficial effect on the 'spiritual tone' of the whole Society.

Serious re-appropriation of the 1872 Constitutions as the 'authentic expression of the nature and ends of the Society of Mary' will, I think, bring to light other points where significant change might follow on an apparently small modification of our current practice. I would be looking at something social and structural, rather than purely internal or spiritual; perhaps something that impinges on community life. It would be a matter of translating the 'intentions that Fr Colin's Rule expresses' into a few well chosen, concrete requirements or practices that will "have bite" in our Marist life today.

# Epilogue

At the end of this series of retreat talks on Marist themes, I will try to sum up briefly what we have seen and the connection between the parts.

I have come to regard the Colinian legacy to the Society of Mary as consisting of three elements: a Vision, a Spirituality and a Rule. These three elements complement one another: the Vision, expressed in the Great Themes, inspires; the Spirituality gives life and depth; the Rule shapes a way of living for individuals and communities. We need all three. Without the Vision, the Rule is simply a collection of regulations; without the Spirituality, the Great Themes are just slogans; without the Rule, the Spirituality is an abstraction or a self-indulgence. Perhaps some of our difficulties in recent times have been due to an attempt to direct Marist life uniquely by the Vision. With all three – Vision, Spirituality and Rule – we will, I believe, be people who can do Mary's work.