

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 Colnian 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.