

### **Forum Novum from 1989 to 1999**

*Gaston Lessard SM*

*Forum Novum* will be twenty years old next December. For me it will be twenty-five, for it really began in 1984, with the first international colloquium on the study of Marist history and spirituality. The introduction to the proceedings recalls that the idea took shape at the Marist Formation Workshop that took place in Rome in April 1983 under the aegis of Gerald Arbuckle. The following August, the Council of the Society held in Quebec approved the idea of the colloquium, which gave a new dimension to Marist studies. Since 1955, Jean Coste had been almost the only one involved in these studies. He had pursued the work on two fronts: the printing of sources (in *Origines maristes*) and a commentary on the Constitutions (in *Acta Societatis Mariae*). But Coste dreamed of the day when Marist studies would no longer be limited to one person or to one specialty. He envisioned a center where several Marists specialized in various disciplines would do research on Marist history and spirituality. The 1984 colloquium was a step in that direction. The participants then expressed the wish that Marist studies benefit from work in fields such as psychology, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, and that a periodical publish the results of the research.

The first four issues of *Forum Novum* (December 1989 to June 1991) contained the presentations given at the second colloquium, held in March 1989. Following upon the style of scientific colloquia that Jean Coste had attended, the 1989 colloquium scheduled six speakers a day, for a total of twenty four. It was a lot, but the hundred or so participants did not complain. Twenty speakers provided a written text.

To these were added three articles in connection with the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Jean-Claude Colin.

The second volume (1992-1994) looked a bit less amateurish in its presentation. Personal computers had now been around for a few years (they began in 1983) and word processors offered more possibilities. The articles circulated work that went back some time. In 1986, for instance, a workshop had been held in Quebec to mark the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the approval of the Society of Mary, and *Forum Novum* published work done then by Jean Coste, Gaston Lessard, Yvan Carré, and Yvan Mathieu. That same year, John Thornhill had given a homily in Sydney. A year earlier, Mauro Filippucci had done a dissertation on the mission of Oceania, and he provided a summary of it for *Forum Novum*. Larry Duffy wrote on Marist laity, Michael O'Meeghan on a New Zealand Marist bishop, and Antoine Forissier on the beginnings of the Marists in London in 1853.

The death of Jean Coste in August 1994 signalled the end of an era in the history of Marist studies. It could be argued that this era began in 1944, when Coste entered the Marist novitiate at La Neylière. The manuscripts of Father Colin's constitutions that he found there sparked his interest, and this led him to initiate a group dedicated to Marist studies at the scholasticate in Sainte-Foy, and then, in Rome in 1954, to edit these manuscripts in *Antiquiores textus*. Thus, the death of Jean Coste spelled the end of fifty years of Marist studies. The first two issues of the third volume of *Forum Novum* registered this event and also picked up some of Coste's unfinished work. At the same time, work had started on a fresh endeavour, the writing of a life of Jean-Claude Colin by Donal Kerr. Donal was an indefatigable perfectionist, who rewrote endlessly. By having preliminary versions of his chapters published in *Forum Novum*, he gained the advantage of submitting his work to criticism.

Meanwhile, the third international colloquium had taken place in 1992. The previous speakers had been free to choose their topic. This time, they were asked to treat the theme "Mary in the newborn Church and at the end of time." The twelve talks seemed worthy of being submitted to a publisher, but the two who were approached (in Paris and in Dublin) did not accept, and the dossier was printed in *Forum Novum* in 1996.

This brings us to the fourth and last volume of *Forum Novum* as it had existed until then. The first issues contained some of Donal Kerr's preliminary chapters and studies by Marist Brother André Lanfrey and

Professor Hugh Laracy. The issues of November 1998 and March 1999 were taken up by the proceedings of the fourth colloquium, held in April 1997, on Colin's pedagogy of humility. A preliminary sounding had tested whether Colin's spiritual teaching is still at work among Marists. The choice of topic puzzled several people; some even wondered whether it was a joke. Still, some fifty Marists bravely answered the questionnaires, the colloquium took place, and the presentations were published in *Forum Novum*.

Alois Greiler asked me for a personal testimony on the origin and the history of *Forum Novum*. The reader will find here only a brief and neutral sketch of the contents of the issues printed from 1989 to 1999. The texts speak for themselves. They witness to the vitality of Marist studies. I am happy to have served that cause. I especially remember the generous response of those I approached for articles and I thank them warmly.