

## 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