

FOREWORD

This study of Jean-Claude Colin and the Missions of Oceania is not meant to be a history of the Catholic missions in Oceania. After the older accounts of the bishops Blanc and Elloy, of the Fathers Mangeret, Montfat and Nicolet, and of many others, excellent historians have been at work. To name a few: Kevin Roach, Reiner Jaspers, Hugh Laracy, Ralph Wiltgen, K. Howe, E. Simmons and Joseph Ronzon. I have gratefully made use of their labours.

Nor are these chapters a biography of Jean-Claude Colin. After Jeantin, Philippe Gobillet and Stan Hosie, it was Donal Kerr who wrote what is as close to a definitive biography as one can get. Unfortunately he could cover only the period up to 1836, when the Society was approved and Colin became its first superior general. The Lord called Donal before he could begin the next part. In any case, before a comparable work can be written on the period 1836 – 1854, a lot more research must be done on Colin's generalate.

Colin studies have perhaps focussed a little one-sidedly on his spirituality in the narrow sense of the word. Why? Perhaps because that is what he himself found the most important. But when we look at Colin, superior general from 1836 to 1854, other questions arise: how did he handle authority and govern the young Society? How did he select candidates and how did he organize their formation? What criteria did he use in the opening of new works? How did he deal with authorities in the Church and in civil society? How did he cope with the failures of any human undertaking? And, a question often overlooked by religious when writing their history: how did he manage the Society's finances?

This study focuses on Jean-Claude Colin as the superior of a religious order entrusted by the Holy See with a huge mission field on the other side of the globe. What was his role in the foundation of the Marist missions in Oceania? How did he handle an enterprise that he would never see with his own eyes, that he found hard to form a mental picture of, and with which it was most difficult to communicate? What did he understand of the processes going on in the Pacific Islands? How did he assess the information he got, and how did he come to the decisions only he could take, but that did have a significant influence on the spreading of the Faith and the growth of the Church in New Zealand, in Polynesia and in Melanesia? In other words, how did Colinian spirituality stand up to the practicalities of the Marist undertaking in Oceania? In short, how did Colin run the missions?

In all history some documents have survived, others have disappeared. To come to a somewhat plausible understanding of what happened nearly two centuries ago, the historian must draw lines across the gaps between the documented facts. This amateur historian intends to make clear in the text, or in special footnotes, where he is going beyond the documented facts and where he makes assumptions or draws conclusions, and why. The reader will judge.

Some insights presented in these chapters will differ from what has been written in the past about Jean-Claude Colin's role in the missions, which is precisely why I think it worthwhile to present these pages for the consideration of my readers.

A provisional edition of the first four chapters was presented to the Colloquium *Colin and Oceania* in Suva, in August 2007. In this second edition, a little less 'provisional', the first two chapters are taken over, mostly unchanged, from that first edition. In chapter three the attentive reader will find some small but interesting additions. A lot of material from chapter four has been moved to chapter five, and replaced by new data. It means that especially the second half of chapter four has changed substantially from the first edition.

It is a pleasure to express very special thanks to Gaston Lessard and Charlie Girard. Without Gaston's scholarly edition of the letters of Colin and Charlie's painstaking transcription of the letters from Oceania it is unthinkable to trace step-by-step what happened in the beginning of the missions. Their comments and corrections, flowing from their incredible knowledge of Marist origins, and from their friendship, have been most helpful. Their work

has been supplemented recently by the letters from Oceania that Br. Edward Clisby has published in English on the website for Marist studies.

Behind them still towers the figure of the late Father Jean Coste who rediscovered for all of us the Founder of the Society of Mary. He inspired me many years ago to keep looking at the complex, and not always immediately attractive, personality of Jean Claude Colin.

I thank Father Alois Greiler for his encouragement and his professional assistance. His broad knowledge of the Marist sources and his writings have helped me find my way through the labyrinth of documents.

I also want to thank Father Carlo Maria Schianchi at the Marist Archives in Rome and his assistant, Signora Gabriella Pierre-Louis. Their patience and their readiness to dig out files and make photocopies turn the use of the archives into a pleasure. They also know how to get documents via cyberspace to my remote corner of Europe. Carlo Maria even knows how to get his hands on documents of Propaganda Fide.

I want to thank Fr. André Mark, SS.CC., former archivist of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts, and his successor, Fr. Juan Luis Schuester, SS.CC. Their helpfulness recalls the assistance that the first Marist missionaries received from those brave pioneers of the Pacific Missions.

I thank Mrs Odile Lolom of the Propagation of the Faith in Lyon. She produces with a smile unexpected documents out of the well kept archives of that venerable society, without which the Marist missions would not have been possible.

I thank Fr. Edmund Duffy. When the first edition had to be rushed off, he looked with a critical eye at the way this foreigner ill-treats the English language. Where my text still hurts the English ear, I humbly take all the blame.

Finally a warm word of thanks to Fr. Mervyn Duffy who opened the way for me to put this second edition on the special website for Marist studies in New Zealand. As new chapters, or revised versions of earlier editions, are ready, Mervyn will make them available on the website. Older readers will appreciate what it means to be helped along in the tricky world of digital production and cyberspace.

Jan Snijders, marist.