

*Thus says the Lord; I will rescue my people
from the land of the rising sun,
and from the land of the setting sun.
Zechariah 8: 7.*

5. Setting out

The Gospel writers Matthew, Mark and Luke seem to connect three "moments" in Jesus' life. First, at his Baptism, Jesus heard God call him a "beloved Son"; then, immediately afterwards, he was led by the Spirit into the desert in order to be tested; and finally, he left the desert and began his mission. Jesus was chosen by God; he was tested in the desert; and he set out on mission. St Mark's Gospel is full of a sense of urgency as he describes Jesus going from place to place on this mission, urging his disciples, "Let us go elsewhere so that I can preach there, because that is why I came." In one way or another every disciple of Jesus will experience these same moments of choice, testing and mission. It was the experience of Mary, the first disciple of Jesus, and it was the experience of the first apostles. The same pattern of grace was seen in the first Marists. When Jean-Claude Courveille told his fellow seminarians that he had "heard" in his heart Mary saying "Here is what I want", they began to realise that Mary was inviting them to undertake a work that she had in mind. And they understood that they had been invited into, or chosen for, something bigger than themselves. The years of preparation and foundation were years of testing as the project matured in the minds and hearts of the founding Marists Champagnat, Chavoin and Colin. For Colin, this time of testing and forming was a time of "tasting God" in prayer. But to "taste God" is also to develop a taste for those whom God cares for most particularly: – the lost, the abandoned, the confused, those on the margins, the sinners, the non-believers. And so, from the very start, the Marist project was to be a missionary venture, an enterprise which would push those who joined it to the boundaries of the church and to the boundaries of the world. Within months of the first profession ceremony for the Society of Mary, Marist priests and brothers had set out to the very ends of the known world. They were soon joined by lay women and then by sisters. And since then, the history of the enterprise has been one of setting out and setting out again for wherever there is need.

"Any part of the world"

When the 12 seminarians signed the pledge to found the Society of Mary in 1816, they did not clearly describe the activities of the congregation. The promise simply stated that they would dedicate themselves "in every way" to the salvation of souls. However, by the time Jean-Claude Colin came to write his letter to Pope Pius VII in 1822, outlining the plans for the Society, he had clarified the Society's aims, which would be to seek to care for the salvation of their own souls and those of others "through missions to non-believers and believers alike, in any part of the world." The Marist enterprise was to be a missionary enterprise, even for those who stayed in France. And even though Jean-Claude Colin never seems to have professed a personal desire to go to the foreign missions, this call to mission "in any part of the world" was explicitly part of the original plan. It was something which attracted and drew the energies of each of the branches of the enterprise. Some of Marcellin Champagnat's Brothers were among the first missionaries to go to the Pacific; and in a message about preparations for the departure of a second group of priests and brothers, Colin wrote to Champagnat's community at the Hermitage: "For me, it is so clearly something of a consolation to see the zeal of many among us who are passionately asking to be part of this second apostolic colony.... The problem that weighs on me is not one of finding workers, but rather one of making the choice; for in view of our numbers, we cannot allow every applicant to go." He may have been thinking explicitly of Champagnat, who Marist tradition says wished to go with the first band of missionaries. Colin persuaded him that he was more necessary at home in France. A similar desire for the missions was felt among the Marist Sisters. One of the first Marist Sisters was Françoise Chanel, a sister of Peter Chanel who was on the first missionary expedition. In the two letters we have from Peter to Françoise, there is a hint of the future possibility of Marist Sisters in the missions. And in 1844, when he was sending news about France to the missionaries, Mayet told them that among the Marist Sisters "many sigh for the happy day when God will call them to leave everything to fly to the aid of their sisters...." A little later, Marist Bishop Épalle consulted the Pope about sending religious women to Oceania. The Pope replied that the time had not yet come. It was in fact soon to come.

Father Colin said on September 2, 1848:

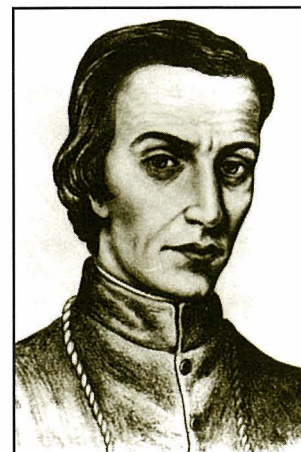
"Let those who are leaving for Oceania imitate the apostles; let those who are staying in Europe imitate the early Church.... At the end of time the Church will be as it was at the time of the Apostles."

The Mayet Memoirs.

The Islands of the Pacific may conjure up for us today fantasies of sunshine, palm trees, white beaches and blue lagoons. Places for marvellous holidays. But Europeans of the latter part of the 19th century had quite a different image. These islands were, literally, at the very end of the earth, and many navigators had brought back horrifying stories of their experiences there. The authorities in Rome had long been anxious to set up a mission in this part of the world. In 1835 they asked a retired missionary, Father Pastre, to take on this immensely vast area. Pastre declined, feeling that his age and ill health would not sustain the demands. But at the same time he looked around to see if he could find someone else. He consulted Father Cholleton, one of the Vicars General of the diocese. Cholleton immediately thought of Jean-Baptiste Pompallier. Pompallier was one of the Marist aspirants, and in fact he had been the director of the group of Marist laymen who called themselves "Tertiary Brothers of Mary". He had also expressed a desire to go to the missions. He wrote to Jean-Claude Colin telling him of the proposal. Colin encouraged him to accept, foreseeing that this could lead to the approval of the Society by Rome. He was right. In 1836 the Society of Mary was approved by the Church, the election of a Superior General and the First Professions took place, and Pompallier was consecrated bishop. The missionaries packed their bags and prepared for departure. The four priests who departed with Pompallier represented exactly one quarter of the Marist priests in France. Along with them were three Brothers, and on Christmas Eve, 1836, they set sail from Le Havre for the vast unknown.

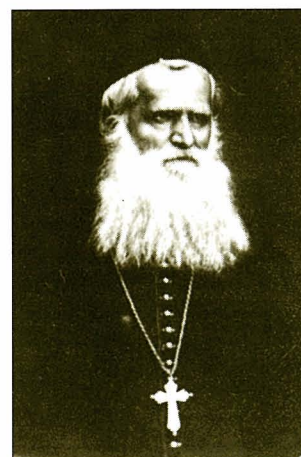
Three pioneers a priest . . .

Pierre Chanel was among the very first group of Marist missionaries to leave France in 1836. He was not one of the group of Seminarians who made the Promise to begin the Society in 1816, but he was among the group of first Marists who took their vows in 1836. Within months of his religious profession into the Society of Mary, he set sail for Oceania. After four years of seemingly fruitless work, Pierre Chanel was clubbed down and murdered by a group of men from the island of Futuna. Pierre Chanel is recognised as a Saint in the Church.



a bishop . . .

Almost in direct contrast to Pierre Chanel, Pierre Marie Bataillon enjoyed exceptional success as a missionary. He too was among the first group of missionaries to set sail from France. He worked on the Island of Wallis, about 140km away from Pierre Chanel at Futuna. Bataillon cut an impressive figure with his long beard, his forthright approach, and the sheer force of his personality. In 1843 he was appointed Vicar Apostolic of central Oceania, with authority over the vast area of Wallis, Futuna, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji and New Caledonia. Bataillon made great demands on himself and his missionaries, who paid a high price in exhaustion and isolation. Jean-Claude Colin was aware of this, and soon tension developed between the two men, alike in their zeal for souls, but so different in their approach.



a brother . . .

Both Jean-Claude Colin and Marcellin Champagnat had Brothers in mind for the Marist project, but their view of the Brothers' work was different. Colin envisaged a group of "Joseph Brothers", whose main work was to be practical helpers to the priests on mission. Champagnat saw his "Little Brothers of Mary" as catechists and teachers of children. At the start of the enterprise, the lines between the two groups of Brothers were sometimes blurred. Joseph-Xavier Luzy, for example, joined the Marists in Belley in 1833 as one of Colin's "Joseph Brothers"; but the records show that he made his perpetual vows as one of Champagnat's "Little Brothers of Mary". As a missionary he worked with Father Bataillon on Wallis Island. Like all the Brothers who went to the missions, Joseph-Xavier had to turn his hand to almost anything. In a letter to Peter Chanel in 1840, he described himself as "carpenter, baker, tailor, doctor and sacristan". Between 1836 and 1849, 26 Little Brothers of Mary set out for the missions of Oceania.



Like the Church, our Institute is missionary, and therefore we should have a missionary attitude like Father Champagnat who affirmed: "We are ready to work in every diocese in the world."

Marist Brothers' Constitutions n.90

"An uncommon deed"

The story of the Oceania mission is a story of unending courage in the face of enormous difficulties. Colin himself spearheaded this mission thrust. Between 1836 and 1849 he had sent to Oceania the very best of his men: 74 priests, 26 of Champagnat's "Little Brothers of Mary", and 17 of his own "Joseph Brothers" in 15 successive groups. This represented an enormous number for a Congregation which was still in its infancy. Of these men, 21 missionaries had died before 1854 when Colin resigned as Superior General of the Society of Mary. The rest were spread through the mission of New Caledonia, Wallis, Futuna, New Zealand, Tonga, Fiji, Samoa and Sydney, which had become the missionaries' centre.

But apart from the difficulties of missionary life in itself, personal difficulties and misunderstandings between the missionaries and their bishops, and between Colin and two bishops in particular, demanded even more heroism of the priests and brothers in those mission areas. Colin was deeply aware of the difficulties they were working under and spoke often of his admiration for them. On one occasion he wrote about a group of Marists who had to leave an area where they had worked for 14 years, because of difficulties with the bishop: *"Gentlemen, what heroism! What magnificent abnegation! These virtuous confrères have abandoned a church founded by them through 14 years of sweat, sufferings and privations of every description, saying, 'Fiat voluntas Dei' ('Let God's will be done') and after consuming their youth, and their health, they generously go to start over again elsewhere ... without looking back. The letters they send me are admirable! If the history of the Society and the missions were being written, here is a beautiful page, an uncommon deed, heroic and above all praise. One does not often see such examples."*

But Colin grew more and more concerned for the welfare of his men in the Pacific. He felt that they were being expected to live in a way that was incompatible with the demands of Religious life. From 1845, he began to slow down the flow of missionaries to Oceania. On July 14, 1849 four priests left for the Islands. They were the last that Colin would send. But almost at the same time, another branch of the Marist family began to develop, a branch which would be the source of equally uncommon deeds. In 1845 the first woman responded to the call to be Marist and missionary.

On Wednesday September 16, 1846, during the general retreat at Puylata, Father Colin turned to the young men, addressing them in vigorous terms.... "Be filled with a holy courage. When I read the letter from Father Calinon, which paints such a terrible picture of their sufferings, I said first of all: 'This letter will not be published in the "Annals of the Propagation of the Faith."' But then afterwards I said: 'It must be published. People must know everything beforehand.' How our confrères have suffered! Often, they tell us, they do not have as much for a meal as we have for one of our Lenten meals in Europe, and even then they can only have this scanty fare once a day.... In France we would give way, but out there they stand firm.... It is certainly not the place to look for what is known as a bit of comfort."

The Mayet Memoirs



Death of a missionary

Mayet recorded many stories of Colin's concern for the missionaries who went to Oceania. On more than one occasion he told how Colin was unable to face the moment when he had to say goodbye to them, and hid himself in another part of the house when the missionaries left. Mayet also tells a delightful story of how Colin and a missionary just returned from Sydney talked right through the night, and stopped only when the bell sounded in the morning for rising. But the most poignant story Mayet took from Colin's own lips. Colin was speaking of his reaction to receiving the first batch of letters from the group of missionaries who left in 1836. Among this group was Father Claude Bret, who died at sea just three months after leaving France. News of his death came in the first batch of letters from the missionaries. Mayet records Colin saying:

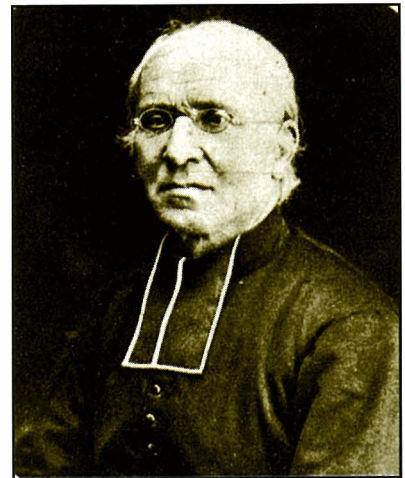
"When I received the first letters after the departure of the first band, I opened them all and glanced at all the signatures before reading them, and on the way into dinner I said to myself: But there's one who hasn't written. Why did Father Bret not write? That's wrong of him. And then, after the meal I started to read them and the first lines informed me of Father Bret's death. He couldn't write to me since he was dead! I immediately burst into tears. That is how we learned the news, and we all went to the chapel, crying, to pray for him."

Founder of the missions

It is hardly possible to talk of the Marist missionary enterprise without meeting a most remarkable personality, Father Victor Poupinel. Poupinel entered the Society of Mary as a deacon in 1838, and was professed as a Marist in 1839. Colin immediately chose him to fulfil the task of Procurator to the Missions. He carried out this work for 20 years: from 1840 till 1857, and from 1871 till 1874. In the intervening 13 years (1857 - 1870) while based in Sydney he was the roving Visitor to the Missions, which meant he travelled constantly around the Pacific. Then from 1873 to 1884 he was the Assistant General with special care for overseas missions. This means that the whole of his 45 years as a Marist was spent for the Missions. His output of letters was remarkable. On some days he would write anything up to 47 letters, and they would all be very full letters.

Victor Poupinel had personal contacts in almost every mission station in the Pacific Islands, and he was to have a great influence on the history of the branch of the Society which became the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary. A Marist confrère wrote of him:

"Father Poupinel was never a missionary in the strict sense as some would define it. In fact, he never founded nor strictly speaking directed any station or Mission. And yet his confrères, those heroic founders at the beginnings, those patient and persevering men of the first 50 years of Marist mission in Oceania, don't hesitate to give him the titles of "founder", "father" and "protector" of the Missions of the Society of Mary.... He was a man of prayer and action, both developed to a high degree, and he exercised a profound influence on those who followed him."



Marists are called to establish the Church where it does not exist and to renew existing communities rather than to participate in its activities in places where it is already established with sufficient resources.

Marist Fathers' Constitutions n.14

"A woman of great virtue"

The Marist Fathers and Brothers had arrived in Oceania in 1837. Five years later, in 1842, two women of the Island of Wallis wrote an open letter to the women of Lyons in the name of all the women of the Island. The main paragraph read:

"We have already had proof of your charity and we are making one more request: if you love us, send us some devout women (some sisters) to teach the women of Uvea".

The letter was published in the journal called *The Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* in September 1843. Among those who read it was a mature woman named Françoise Perroton. For her, it was a call to action. She made two visits. The first was to Father Peter Julian Eymard who was Colin's second in command and director of the Third Order. Eymard did not discourage her, but knowing well the difficulties his Marist confrères were suffering in Oceania, as well as the recent martyrdom of Peter Chanel, he spoke to her of the difficulties, and advised her not to speak to Colin, who was opposed to sending women to that part of the world. Not deterred, Françoise made a second visit, this time to a sea captain, Auguste Marceau. She came straight to the point: would he take her on board his ship which was about to leave for Oceania, even though she had no money? The captain was a man of the world and a member of the Third Order. He said he would think about it. But Françoise had already thought about it, and was ready. She wrote to Marceau again. This time the captain's reply was positive, and on November 15, 1845, she set out on the "Arche d'Alliance" ("Arc of the Covenant"). She was 49 years of age at the time! On the same boat there were eight Marist Fathers, five Marist Brothers, and a few passengers. Although Françoise referred to her coming as "having caused a stir", not one of the Marist missionaries' letters even mentions her presence on the voyage, which lasted a year. The boat reached Wallis on October 23, 1846. Bishop Bataillon refused to welcome Françoise: he did not want any European women on the Island. The king took her under his protection, building a hut for her; and he sent three young women, including his own daughter, to live with her. Françoise lived alone on this Island for eight years. Then she lived on Futuna for four more years by herself. It was not till she had been those 12 years alone on the Islands that any company arrived. But her heroic generosity had been the beginning of a movement.

In October, 1846 Reverend Father Superior spoke to a lady who had come to see him and who wished to go to Oceania. Father Colin spoke to her in a kindly way, neither encouraging nor discouraging her, and he even told her that if she was going to embark he would gladly agree to see her. He recommended us strongly to follow the same approach. "How," he said, "could I take upon myself to send out women like that? God has not entrusted me with that task... Let no Marist ever say to these women 'Off you go.' But never let him discourage them either. The first would be imprudent and improper, the second might be opposing the will of God. For who knows his plans? I would not be surprised if he intended to make use of such a means."

The Mayet Memoirs

Women on the missions?

Mayet records several instances of women who spoke to Jean-Claude Colin about the possibility of going to the Mission in Oceania. Mayet noted Colin as saying, *"they have pursued me in order to get my consent"*, but he never gave it. When Françoise Perroton spoke to Julian Eymard about going to Oceania, Eymard advised her not to speak to Colin. Colin was informed, after the deed, of her departure for the Pacific, and he wrote, *"I cannot but admire the courage of Mlle Perroton whose zeal has urged her to go to Wallis Island. I did not have the pleasure of meeting her for I was not informed of her departure prior to her embarking, but I am told she is a woman of merit and great virtue."* In fact, it was only under the second Superior General that in 1857 women volunteers bound to the Third Order were to leave for the Islands. When she set sail in 1845, Françoise had no specific link with the Society of Mary. When she reached Tahiti, she learned that Eymard had enrolled her in the Third Order. She made Profession in the Third Order in 1858.

Final decision

Françoise Perroton's letter to Auguste Marceau was dated Summer 1845, and in it she wrote:

"My firm wish is to serve on the mission fields for the rest of my life, and you, Sir, are the only person who can provide me with the means of doing so by taking me under your care on a voyage that is so long and so expensive. Would that I had a fortune to offer! But, as you know, my resources are very meagre and the only thing I have of value is my good will.... I want merely to be taken on board your ship as a servant, if one is needed, and I can work in this capacity at whatever has to be done.... If you promise to take me on board, please be so good as to tell me what I must do to act to the best advantage, for I shall have to give notice to my employer and get ready for the journey. I don't want to make any blunders. At my age, one can't afford to act impulsively. No, I have given the matter much thought, and my decision is final."

Characteristics


Her first striking trait is her *strong character*. She was a resourceful woman who knew what she wanted. She showed that at the outset of her missionary vocation and during her 12 long years of solitude on Wallis and Futuna. She was able to stand up to Bishop Bataillon's authoritarianism when he tried to force the sisters to give up their direct apostolate and to raise chickens and pigs instead.... She showed her *audacity* in carrying out what she had decided on, and she was willing to *risk* everything to reach that goal; but she did so very *clear-sightedly*. Her letters reveal a good *sense of humour*. She could laugh, for example, at her poor head rebelling against learning the local language; she spoke of her prayers, "colder than a Lyon January". When it was hard to find mutual support in community, she immediately reassured her correspondent that "None of us has ever thrown a bottle or plate at the head of another sister."

Claudine Nakamura, smsm

If she could speak today . . .

Françoise Perroton was not one of the founding members of the Marist enterprise, but her act of daring in going to Oceania began a movement which in fact developed into a religious Congregation. If she could speak to us today, we might imagine her saying something like this:

"Certainly, it's true: I would never consider myself the foundress of a religious family. I came to Oceania by myself because I heard the urgent call of a group of women at the end of the world. And maybe that's the most remarkable thing about the Missionary Sisters: the Congregation didn't start because of some Founding person's insight. It began because of a clear call from a group of women. Yes, there were times when I wondered what on earth I had done with my life! Can you imagine what a leap in the dark it was for a woman of my age to go to the very ends of the earth for the sake of a mission? God alone knows how often during those long years of isolation I had to struggle against discouragement and even despair at the lack of results of my work. I used to say that I had come 20 years too late for such a life! But you know, when I look back, I realise that I had been prepared for this call for a long time. For many years – 20 or so – I had been involved in the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyon, and with Pauline Jaricot's mission support group. No, I would never consider myself a founder. But I'm happy and proud to have launched a movement; it has been worth all those years of isolation and loneliness. I would never have dared to hope for the happiness of seeing what I see now. But you know, when I look at what has been the history of the Missionary Sisters, maybe the most remarkable thing is that the Congregation even exists at all!"



Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary are heirs of the pioneer sisters who were inspired by the example of Françoise Perroton and of those first Oceanians who, in seeing their way of life, desired also to give their lives to God for the service of mission.

Missionary Sisters' Constitutions Prologue

The Pioneers

Bishop Bataillon returned to France from the island of Wallis in 1856. By then Françoise Perroton had been 10 years alone in Oceania. Bataillon's presence in Lyon made an enormous impact, and as he visited different parishes in the city, drumming up support for the missions, he took the place by storm. Marist priest François Yardin, a great supporter of the Oceania Mission, wrote to the missionaries that Bishop Bataillon "made a great impression wherever he went, moved the hearts of many, gained many sympathetic ears, and in a very few months Lyon and its neighbourhood had as many as 6,000 new members for the work of the Propagation of the Faith." Bataillon did more than gain support in France. Very likely inspired by his preaching and presence, a number of young women volunteered for work in Oceania as lay missionaries. From these, three were chosen to set out with Bataillon. François Yardin wrote to Victor Poupinel about these women: "In addition to the four Fathers and three Brothers, there will be some women.... There are three of them: one destined to join Mlle Perroton, while the two others are to go to another station.... All of these women are outstanding. I received them yesterday as novices in the Third Order." These three set sail in 1857. In 1858 and 1860 seven more young women followed them. These women, along with Françoise Perroton, make up the 11 "Pioneers" of what was to become another branch of the Marist Project: the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary (SMSM). The letters sent to, by, and about these Pioneers have been collected and published in four volumes. They amount to over 800 pages. Written with that freshness found in letters never intended for publication, they tell the story of the raw reality of mission life, stripped of all its romantic illusions. These women were all rugged and generous individualists, some insensitive and others hypersensitive. Their letters reveal their conflicts with each other, the difficulties they had with some of the missionary priests, the warmth and tenderness of men like Poupinel and Yardin, the isolation - sometimes painful, and sometimes eagerly sought as an escape from the difficulties of living together. And yet, these women stuck at it, in some cases for over 38 years without ever returning to France. From the start, and through all their complicated history, the Pioneers and those who followed them clung to three burning desires: to be missionary, to be religious, and to be Marist.

On August 26, 1847 Father Colin gave a closing address at the Retreat. He told us, "You who are soon to depart with the new contingent, go to Oceania. Mary will be with you.... You are going to leave your homeland, your relatives, your friends, everything, to save souls and to suffer martyrdom. Oh yes, if it is not a martyrdom of blood, it will be a martyrdom of hunger, a martyrdom of thirst, a martyrdom of heat, of pain, of anguish, of tears. We shall pray for you here."

The Mayet Memoirs

Foundation stones

These women – the 11 who came from France and the Oceanians who very quickly joined them – are for us "the Foundation Stones of our Congregation". They gave the initial impetus. During the Congregation's long years of gestation, evolution and organisation, they were its motivating element, the main nucleus.... Each of them of course, had her own personality, which comes through in their letters and those of the priests. But there are some fundamental traits which are more or less pronounced depending on each one's temperament. To undertake such an adventure in that day and age, they had to be women with extraordinary *strength of character*. Their capacity for *adaptation* and their *enterprising spirit* are evident; like Françoise, they had great *daring*, which was coloured by *humility*. Their endurance aroused great admiration.... We find in their lives the three elements which constitute our proper vocation in the Church: missionary, Marist, Religious.... They all belonged to the Third Order of Mary. They were not only influenced by Marist spirituality, but imbued with it. One could say that they also enriched and developed that spirituality, since they lived the Marist missionary spirit on a daily basis.... They therefore gave Marist spirit that world-wide missionary coloration, since they gave birth to it in the far-off islands of Oceania.

Claudine Nakamura, smsm

Missionary, Marist, Religious

At the end of her extensive study of the history of the Missionary Sisters, Marie Cécile de Mijolla smsm outlines the “essential characteristics” of the Missionary Sisters’ vocation. She describes them as:

"Missionaries: the first sisters sacrificed everything to answer the call of mission. They left without waiting for the organisation they hoped for. They renounced the latter, at least temporarily, rather than leave their missionary work or be separated from the Society of Mary; they did not hesitate to be dispersed, since that was the condition of apostolic life in the islands.

Marist: since they first asked to go to Oceania, the Pioneers were Marist by desire. Their bonds with the Society of Mary were constantly strengthened in the course of the years. Moreover, they looked upon the Superior General of the Society as their spiritual father, and had recourse to him or his delegate in all their difficulties.

Religious, in desire: from the time of the first departures, the Marist tertiaries lived their consecration to God and to the mission in full.

Thus, the name that the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary bear truly expresses what they are, for it includes the three elements of their vocation, elements which are rooted in their history, and which can be considered as essential today as they were throughout the period of the origins."



Our specific vocation in the Church is to be at one and the same time Missionary, Marist, Religious. The effort to respond faithfully, with God's help, every day of our lives is for each of us the path to holiness and the way of sharing in the mission entrusted to the Congregation.

Missionary Sisters' Constitutions n.4

"Set out in haste"

The story of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary is a story which focusses attention on a key element of the whole Marist enterprise's life and spirituality. The life force of the Marist project is mission, and its spirituality is a spirituality of action. It is true that by its very nature the whole Church is missionary. Pope Paul VI called evangelising the Church's "deepest identity", and wrote that the Church "exists to evangelise". But while mission is every Christian's call, certain groups within the Church have taken on this call in a specific way. The Marist enterprise was a mission enterprise from the beginning, and this is strikingly evident in the story of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary. The Pioneers first left for the *missions*; they were missionaries before they were religious; and they were missionaries for life. The daring and dynamism of the Pioneers is still at the heart of SMSM life today. It explains why one of the conditions for joining the Congregation is that the Sisters must be willing to leave their own country to live in another culture. It explains how in recent times, a 74-year-old Sister from the Tongan Islands was part of the first community of SMSMs to be set up in the Philippines. It explains how SMSMs are found in situations made difficult by violence and isolation: in Peru, Colombia, and in the middle of the Sahara Desert. It lies behind some of the questions the SMSMs put to themselves today for the present and the future: "How can we live as daringly as our Pioneers did?" "How can we be in the outposts of the missions?" "How can we be present to young people - and open the Gospel to them?" "How can we be inventive, creative, in the way we do our work?" "How can we help each other to keep up with a world that keeps changing?" The history of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary highlights the apostolic, missionary nature of Marist spirituality. Marist spirituality is a spirituality of urgency for action. It is not a spirituality which simply tries to find some balance in apostolic action, but a spirituality whose whole impulse is towards action and apostolic life. The Pioneers who joined the enterprise originally as lay women were captured by the same two things that fired those Seminarians in 1816: "the joy of being in the family of Mary" and a sense of "the great needs of people"; and like those Brothers and Priests who went before them, they were willing to go "anywhere in the world" for the sake of those on the margins.

September 18, 1848

On the Monday, the day before the close of the retreat, Father spoke to us as follows after the grace:...

"Let's wake up; let faith put life into us. The Society of Mary is a pre-eminently active body; it will achieve nothing unless we unite in ourselves the man of prayer and the man of action: the man of prayer who is completely permeated with the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and the man of action, bent on securing this noble aim."

The Mayet Memoirs

Action

"Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah." (Lk. 1:39)

I was so happy to see this immediately modelled in Pope John Paul II. You must have seen the similarity. The day after he was elected Pope he went off to a hospital to visit an old friend. How real! How terribly real. But the Church isn't always that real; it is caught up in theology and a whole lot of abstractions; it is caught up in all kinds of righteousness and rituals; but Mary found a place of reality that humanity can begin to touch upon. A woman who goes to visit her cousin in pregnancy. She wasn't caught up in a salvation trip. Mary was caught up in life; and she knew what mattered in life were people, what mattered in life was the bringing of new children into the world; terribly earthly, terribly real, but she knew how to surrender herself to that, the day after she is told she is to be the Mother of God.

Richard Rohr



No baggage

The first positive response to the call in the New Testament was made by a woman. Mary of Nazareth, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, rose up in haste and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea carrying the Word in her body to share it (Lk. 2:39). Why the haste and the hurry when Elizabeth's baby was not due for three months? I understand the haste and the hurry as a symbol of total and enthusiastic commitment. If you love, you hasten to serve. There's a connection between the physical and the spiritual. Movement is a sign of life. If you're sick or loaded with baggage you can't run. Mary's song shows the free and joyful way she answered the call. Jesus, like his mother, and filled with the Spirit, was also in a hurry. In the Gospels, I notice that He feels a certain urgency about His mission. In the desert He must have searched deeply to study His mission and His attitude to it. His triumph over temptation tells me that He gave up all desire He might have had for earthly values, riches, power, wealth, glory; so being without baggage He was able to run, jump, leap. *"My beloved. He comes bounding over the mountains, leaping over the hills"* (Song 2:8). That's Jesus. Fully alive! He was so totally committed and full of love for His Father that He was impatient to complete His mission. That's the story of His life, always a prompt yes to His Father, to an officer, a beggar and an invitation to a party. I hear the urgency in His own words: "I have come to start a fire on earth and how I wish it was blazing already!" (Lk. 12:49); "I have a mission to accomplish and am in distress until it is finished" (Lk 12:50); and in a negative way to a non-starter: "Let the dead bury the dead" (Lk. 9:60). I see this urgency repeated in Paul, and in Father Colin who urged his followers to go out and build a new church; and I see this spirit in our first Pioneer Françoise Perroton who was actively impatient for the coming of the Kingdom. I understand the haste, hurry, urgency as a symbol of total commitment, so I say to Jesus: *"Take me with you. We will run together"* (Song 1:2).

Emma Martinuzzi, smsm

Pressing on together towards the fullness of the Kingdom, we wish to repond to the calls of today with the daring and zeal of the pioneers. We want to keep alive this daring - simple, joyful and prudent - based solely on the love and power of God - in order to announce the Gospel in its force and integrity, learning to adapt ourselves to different cultures and conditions of life.

Missionary Sisters' Constitutions n.9

"Buried in the rich soil"

When Rome approved the "Society of Mary" in 1836, legally it was only the branch of the priests that was approved. And yet from the beginning, the venture was much broader than something for priests only. For those who knew of the Marist plan, "Society of Mary" meant the 'many-branched tree' of priests, brothers, sisters and laypeople that had been talked about at the beginning. And from the start of the missionary venture, priests were not the only Marists at work in Oceania. The departure of the missionaries on December 8, 1840 was a good example of this. Colin wrote of this departure: *"We have done great things. Fourteen missionaries; priests, brothers, artists, engineers, booksellers, have been sent off to the other world with bag and baggage. People say that not for a hundred and fifty years had such a convoy been seen moving off at one shot for the savage countries."* Of the fourteen people in this group, only four were priests. Five were brothers, two were clerics yet to be ordained, and three were laymen. Within five years, Françoise Perroton was to break the barrier that had prevented women from taking part in the great missionary enterprise. As the missionaries set out, the words attributed to Mary by Colin: "I supported the Church as it came into being..." could well have been in their hearts. Certainly, it is worth noting that while the letters written before the missionaries set out, and the letters written during the voyage, reflect the attitude current in Europe of referring to the Islanders as "savages" and "barbarians", once the missionaries began to have contact with the people, they tended to refer to them as "les naturels", which in English would read as "the local people". Colin's insight of Mary supporting the Church as it came into being helped many of the early Marists to be sensitive to the "seeds of the Gospel" already present in the lives of the people. Today we call this the process of Inculturation of the Gospel. Colin of course never used the term "inculturation". The very concept was not used officially until 1977 when the Bishops in Synod used it for the first time in their "Message to the People of God." But the image he puts before Marists of Mary submerged in the Church provides them with a very effective way of inculturating the Gospel. Some of the spiritual principles most cherished by Colin are also principles which underpin effective inculturation. Marist historian Jean Coste describes these principles as ways for Marists to "bury themselves in the rich soil of the Church of a place."

September 17, 1849

Father Colin said: "As I look at this little new-born Society of ours, I cannot help recalling our Divine Master in the midst of His disciples, giving them His fatherly instructions before His Ascension. We see the good shepherd with His sons. Then He ascends into heaven. But He had previously told them: 'As the Father sent me, so I send you.' What a mission that was! It involved changing the face of the earth, going everywhere on earth. The apostles did not argue, they divided the world between them, and went their separate ways.... You know the rest."

The Mayet Memoirs

Barometer of vitality

The new emphasis on all sides is on a renewed sense of mission. The Church has awakened to a growing awareness that its fundamental task is to evangelise and that this requires a constant effort to relate the Gospel to the real condition of the people. In fact a sense of mission is being seen as a barometer of the vitality of the Church and of each individual Christian and religious community. Our communities are meant to be not inward-looking, closed in upon themselves, but communities of hope lived and communicated.

Frank McKay, sm

Christ waiting

I was told of a village church somewhere in New Caledonia where an artist, who was a leper, had painted on the back wall of the Church a mural depicting the arrival of the first missionaries to the island. The painting showed the sailing ship out in the bay at anchor, with the missionaries coming ashore in long-boats with all their boxes and baggage, goats and animals, while on the shore the local population was lined up with various expressions of wonderment and anxiety shown on their faces. In amongst the crowd there was a person who was different from the others, of lighter colour and partly obscured. When asked who this person was, the artist said that this was the Melanesian Christ waiting for the missionaries.

Kerry Prendeville, sm

Inculturation

Inculturation... Acculturation... The words are new, but when I read the wealth of correspondence from the Pioneers I realise that they were already living those concepts, although with the mind-set of their own times, naturally.

They were acculturated, because as soon as they arrived, they tried to learn the local language, to live among the women and girls, to share their food, their work, their sufferings and their hopes. By giving the girls a Christian formation, by working for the promotion of women and of the family, by very early suggesting consecrated life to the women of Oceania, were they not making it possible for those women to incarnate the gospel in their own culture?

For us, inculturation is an essential aspect of evangelisation; it is the foundation without which the latter remains something foreign and superficial....

I find that the Marist Spirit harmonizes perfectly with that missionary attitude: an unassuming and active presence; remaining hidden and unknown in the world; simplicity and humility; "as ready to receive as to give, having no other goal but to seek humbly with everyone else the coming of the reign of God."

Claudine Nakamura, smsm



Christ present

The Brothers have adopted, or rather, are adopting, a new strategy of spreading the Good News. It consists of recognising from the very beginning that God is present in those to whom they are sent, of appreciating the values of the latter as expressions of this presence of God, and even of making them their own. We notice that this way of acting leads the young, and also the not so young, to question their own selves and their own cultural values in the light of the Gospel. The next step is to be awake oneself and to waken others to the presence of God in them and in their cultures, so that all may say together: "Truly God is here, and we did not know it!"

In this new way of acting, we must state that the apostolate of our presence among the young in the Marial attitude of true humility, simplicity and modesty will do more for a real inculturation than a plethora of academic reflections. In the different places where the Brothers are, their very presence has created and continues to create an attitude of openness to the Gospel message. Once this attitude has taken hold, inculturation has begun. But we must learn how to guide it, and particularly how to respond to the rhythm of the people.

Theoreste Kalisa, fms

The Brothers are quick to recognise the Gospel values already present in the diverse cultures, and, by their services and example, they help to purify whatever in these cultures is not in harmony with the Gospels.

Marist Brothers' Constitutions n.91

New language

"Courage" is the best – and perhaps only – word to describe the common characteristic of those pioneer Marists who set out for mid-winter missions in the high back-country areas of Lyon, or who set out to the ends of the earth on mission to the Pacific people. It took courage not only to set out, but to carry through the consequences of their decision, particularly to adapt themselves to the life, the language and culture of the people they found there. When the pioneer Marist priests and brothers stood among the people of the Islands, everything around them reminded them that they were strangers: their appearance was different, their language was different, their mentality was different. They had to learn to understand the people, and to learn their language and way of thinking. And they knew there was no turning back from this mission. Françoise Perroton's experience was dramatic and demanded even more courage. Later in her life she wrote: "I thought in 1845 that I was going to do marvels in Oceania. There is no school here, I used to say to myself, so you will teach them to read, you will give catechism lessons to these poor little girls, you will have them learn how to love God and pray to Him, you will teach them devotion to the Blessed Virgin. What a beautiful work! I made beautiful castles, not in Spain, but in Wallis. Then after a year's travelling, I landed here. Now let's set to work, I said to myself. What a disappointment! I was 30 years too old; my old head has been able to grasp very little of the language. The result is that what I have been able to do is reduced to very little." Françoise Perroton underestimated herself. Not only did she start a movement of like-minded women who have followed in her steps, but something of her tough courage has been a characteristic of her followers. The same is true of those Marist successors of Colin, Champagnat and Chavoin. Marists who understand their life as mission realise that it is not an easy life, and that it demands as much courage and adaptability as it ever did. Even if they never leave their own country, they realise that the world they are living in is rapidly changing. They realise that they will need to adapt themselves to this new world, this new world of the young, for example, with its new language, its new way of looking at things, its new way of doing things. This is all a consequence of the decision made by their Marist predecessors – to set out and even set out again for the sake of the new Church which is emerging and coming to birth in our times.

August 26, 1847

Father Colin said at the end of the Retreat, "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, 'Go, teach all nations' and to go their separate ways, just so this kind mother, at the end of time, says to us, 'Go, proclaim my divine Son to the world. I am with you. Go, we shall be still united.' What have we to fear? Let us all be 'cor unum et anima una' (one heart and one mind) in this divine heart, in the heart of our Mother. What happiness for us, to know that we are united, that we are sons of Mary!"

The Mayet Memoirs

Daring

When I read the French text of the Constitutions of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, I am struck by the presence of the word "*audace*" – daring. The word "daring" does not come as a surprise when used by women for whom "missionary service and the Marist vocation were but one single call". Missionary experience in the traditional sense of the word is well typified in the accomplishment of that exemplary pioneer, Françoise Perroton. It consists in overcoming obstacles which everybody agreed were insuperable. It is an accomplishment to which generations of missionary sisters have devoted their best talents and energy. I take as a symbol of it the fact of daring to train sisters as medical doctors and as dentists when they felt this would help the mission. Even today the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary stand on the frontiers that need to be crossed: inculturation, justice and peace, the promotion of women. It is only natural that when it comes to expressing the mystery of Mary's presence in the church, apostolic daring should be a component of their version of "*hidden and unknown*". Through them, this new note enriches Marist spirituality.

Gaston Lessard, sm

In the shoes of others

When Marist missionary Jean-Baptiste Rolland arrived in New Zealand, he received a letter from Bishop Philippe Viard. The Bishop, in welcoming him, wrote: *"Once arrived in the diocese of Wellington, the missionary must learn the Maori language and the English language. He must forget that he is French, and dismiss all thoughts that could distract him from the only purpose for which he is sent."*

Marist historian Jean Coste, commenting on the courage of the pioneer Marists, said: *"There have been great Marists? Yes! They accomplished something really extraordinary in learning two foreign languages at the same time, Maori and English; in adapting to habits, ways of life so different from theirs and in bringing the Word of God to these new people. Let us be great Marists today. Let us ourselves learn the new language of our time, understand the reactions, the feelings, the way of life of those who are different from us; of this young generation who sometimes seem so far from us in their rejection of our artificial modern world, our affluent society."*

New world

Each of us, in his own cultural setting, knows the tension and turmoil of the younger generation as they confront the values of their society, search for truth and meaning, seek for wisdom and guidance and affirmation. We know their anguish and bitterness, their disillusionment and anger, their disenchantment and apathy... as also their faith and hope and love, their generosity and even heroism.... Perhaps at times it seems terribly frightening, too, and there is a natural tendency to turn in on ourselves, to seek our own security. What gives us the courage to open our doors, to go forth with new inspiration and determination, is the same Mary, the same Spirit of the Lord, present in the midst of our communities as in the midst of the apostles.

*Letter from the XVIIth General Chapter
of the Marist Brothers*



The call which urged them to leave all resounds in our hearts today. Their source of strength to set out and persevere in mission also opens our path into the future. Being faithful means to keep in our heart that first impulse as a daily source of daring so as to respond to the calls of God.

Missionary Sisters' Constitutions Prologue

Free people

Our vocation is to go from place to place. This was how Jean-Claude Colin described the Marist enterprise when he presented his outline to Rome in 1833. It was one of the ideas that had fired the imaginations of the seminarians in Lyon in 1815. They had been impressed by the story of the life of St Francis Régis, a missionary who preached in the country areas of France. The same phrase, "our vocation is to go from place to place", appeared in the Constitutions which Colin wrote before his death, and it appears today in the Constitutions of the Marist Fathers.

Our vocation is to go from place to place. The statement implies a degree of freedom. Freedom from the things that may tie one down physically, in the first instance: freedom from possessions and from property and properties. But as well as that, freedom from the interior attitudes which make it difficult or impossible to move from place to place: freedom from the desire for comfort, or the desire to settle. Being willing to go anywhere in the world means being willing to be not "at home" anywhere in the world. And so, being on mission means not settling down. It means being unsettled as a permanent attitude. Colin's understanding of the vows that Marists take reflects this. Marists take the three vows of chastity, poverty and obedience not only so as to be like Christ, but in order to be "more effective instruments of mercy" for others. The vows are to free people to be on the move. And so there's a sense of urgency in the statement. Colin's language was frequently spiced with this sense of urgency: "We are on top of a volcano", "Mary is sending you out in these hazy times", "a minister of souls must burn with the desire to fly to the salvation of others and be impatient for the moment when he can race to their aid". Whenever Colin spoke of saints who could be patrons of the Society, he always spoke of people like Francis de Sales, Francis Xavier, Francis Régis: outstanding missionaries with deep concern for others, people who went to the boundaries and beyond for the sake of the Gospel, and did so with a sense of urgency.

Our vocation is to go from place to place. The sense of urgent action for the sake of those on the margins is essential to the Marist enterprise.

On February 6, 1842, Father Colin spoke at the College in Belley: "Gentlemen, I will tell you something of my secret, and how I go about choosing men for foreign missions, when the time comes. If I notice a certain impetuosity in those who apply, a certain over-keenness, they are not the ones I choose. If, on the other hand, I see in them a desire that is calm and tranquil and humble, then I make my choice. And yet, if God wishes to make use of us, we must take courage, we must not be faint-hearted; that is not what pleases God. The faint-hearted will not accomplish great things for God. 'I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.'" (Phil. 4:13)

The Mayet Memoirs



"The fundamentals of the Society"

In 1846 Mayet noted in his journal what he called a "very remarkable incident". During a Council meeting, an interchange took place between Father Colin and Father Étienne Terraillon. Terraillon was one of the group of seminarians who had been in on the Marist project from the beginning. He would have known the mind of Jean-Claude Colin. Mayet took care to note that Terraillon was "one of the oldest members of the Society.... An otherwise admirable man.... An extremely virtuous man". But in another place he did comment that Terraillon "having been too long a parish priest, had not understood the spirit of the Society, and it was that which Father Colin found hard to put up with". It was precisely on the question of parishes that the dialogue took place. The Marists had been invited to take responsibility for Valbenoîte, a parish of about 5,000 people. When the topic was brought up in Council, Terraillon spoke in favour of the proposal. Hearing this, Mayet noted, Colin "stopped short, as if staggered", then, "in a tone of indescribable authority", he let forth a tirade against what he regarded as an attack on "the fundamentals of the Society". Mayet noted the key points of Colin's tirade, adding that "I have rarely seen him so worked up". Once again, it is fortunate that we have Mayet's record of the event, which touches on a fundamental feature of the Marist project. Mayet records Colin as saying: *"Gentlemen, if ever you start calling into question the fundamentals of the Society, the Society is lost! May that never happen again, never, never! If you want Marists to be parish priests, here and now I resign and I will begin again. If the Society can do good only by accepting parishes, it must come to an end, it must be wiped out, because it has no goal, no longer anything to do in the Church. There are already parish priests in the Church: that is not our mission.... Marist parish priests? Never! Gentlemen, never let anyone speak again of parishes for Marists!"* Colin's reasons for refusing to take parishes were based primarily on the fact that what Marists are called to do involves moving from place to place. Marists are to be an auxiliary force in the Church; they are not to be tied to a settled ministry, because then they lose the mobility and freedom that should characterise the life of a missionary congregation. If they were not mobile, their ministry would be one of maintenance rather than mission.

Mobile people

It is interesting that Father Colin's most frequent references to Mary are to Mary at Nazareth and in the early Church, the periods in her life about which least is known. I think this is because Colin did not wish to prescribe, to spell things out too much. He wanted Marists to meditate together on the mystery of Mary and to use their creativity. For him Marists are not tied to any one ministry any more than Christ was at Nazareth. The central Marist mission does not change; the ministries through which it is carried out may. Colin wanted us to have the freedom and mobility to meet the changing needs of society, to be mobile people with little baggage.

Frank McKay, sm

Take nothing for the journey

But there are things that will hinder us personally; not just our own personal failings, but obstacles that will attack the very heart of our common Marist vocation. Putting it bluntly, if people are not willing to live the spirit of renunciation, it will not work. Don't be possessed by possessions, I keep telling myself. For even if we have the right sentiments in our hearts, it will be ruined if our possessions reflect that we really haven't this detachment.

It takes more ruthlessness about possessions, power and pride with oneself, than is evident to others. What I am trying to say is that there is a mystery of one's sacrifice which is paralleled in the sacrifices Mary had to make - which few people ever appreciated.

Andrew Gunn

Recognising that to live in another culture means both an enrichment and a sacrifice of a certain development in our own, we accept courageously that loneliness is part of missionary life. Open to the service of the Universal Church, we will never be completely at home wherever we are.

Missionary Sisters' Constitutions n.39

"Setting out again . . ."

The first Marist mission outside of France was to the vast ocean continent of the Pacific. From an early time, all the branches of the Marist family were involved in evangelisation there – and they still are. Today, there are other parts of the world where the different branches of the Marist Family are working, and sometimes closely together. The huge continent of Africa, as immense in land as Oceania is in sea, is a good example of the Marist impetus to set out, to be present in an emerging Church, and then to set out again. The extraordinary growth of Africa has few, if any, parallels in human history. It is predicted, for example, that the population of Nigeria alone, at present at 100 million, will rise to 300 million by the year 2025. By that year the population of Africa will be equal to the total populations of Europe, the United States of America, Canada and all of Latin America. Inevitably, Africa faces all the challenges common to rapidly growing countries: poverty, racial tension, unemployment, disease, the need for further education, for freedom from inferiority and superiority complexes, for the restoration of equal rights, and care for refugees. In fact, nearly half the world's refugees are found in Africa. The growth of the Church in Africa parallels that of the population. At the beginning of the century there were perhaps 1 million Catholics in the whole of Africa. Today Catholics number 80 to 85 million. At this time in its history, the Church is entering a new period of evangelization, a period which Pope John Paul II has referred to as "the hour of Africa". Here clearly, there is a Church coming to birth or re-birth, and if Mary has indicated to Marists that she wishes to be the support of the Church "as it comes to birth", here particularly is a place for men and women to bring to this emerging Church the attitudes of Mary, the believer most open to the Holy Spirit. Here is a Church seeking a "Marian face". Today in Africa there are 451 Marist Brothers, 15 Marist Sisters, 12 Marist priests and 12 Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, as well as strong groups of lay Marists. Whether one talks of Africa, Oceania, Brazil, Peru, the Philippines or any part of the world, the story is the same: what fires men and women who are Marists to "set out and set out again" is the same thing that urged the pioneer Marists to set out to the margins of the Church and the world: they were convinced that Mary had called them to gather people everywhere into a new People of God.

In January, 1842 Father Colin spoke to the Marists of the College at Belley:

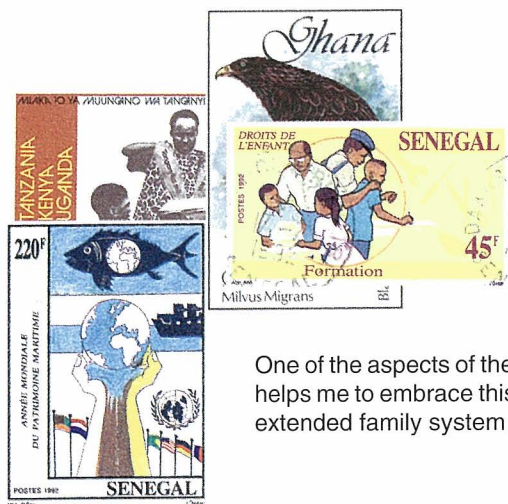
"Come, take courage, see we are growing. I have just replied to the Cardinal at Propaganda who has offered us the mission of Kaffraria, asking him to be kind enough to give us time to pray so that we may not be rash.... Come, Gentlemen, let us pray that our Society may make Mary known and loved and may spread the Kingdom of God everywhere. Our Society? What am I saying? Let us pray that all Societies may promote the glory of God. But after all, we too have a little share of good to do. We must respond to our mission."

The Mayet Memoirs

Like the early church

A century after the first evangelisation and 30 years after independence, Africa is at the boiling point and dreams of a more just and democratic world. For us, one of the most difficult challenges is: "What type of religious missionary is needed for this new world Africa is hoping for?" The rapidly growing demographic development is tearing apart the continent's socio-economic and political fabric. The exodus from the countryside and all its corollaries flow from this break-up. The figures for urban growth in Africa published by the United Nations in 1991 show that in 15 years from now the proportion of the population living in the cities and towns will reach 47%. This uprooting presents a picture of Africa in deep crisis. Whether we like it or not, there is a real need to "build society" and a deep desire for change. It is at the intersection of this need and this desire that the mission of the Church and the mission of the Society has to be spelled out. The words of the Blessed Virgin: "*I was the support of the newborn Church, and will be so again at the end of time*", may undoubtedly provide a basis and an encouragement for the development of the Society of Mary in Africa, *like the early Church!*

Sylvestre Mulangwa Sangala, sm
(Cameroon)



Marists in Africa

A Marist is not a specialist in devotion to Mary or in prayer to her. Nor is he recognised by certain things which he alone can do. He is neither a master nor a champion. He is an ordinary Christian. In simple terms, he tries to do everything he does the way Mary would, submerged among others, sharing their daily concerns, the most humble tasks they do.

Alain Forissier, sm (Senegal)

One of the aspects of the Marist charism that I underline is the "Marian spirit". My love for Mary helps me to embrace this aspect of our life. Our Family spirit also corresponds with the African extended family system which makes me feel at home with the Brothers.

Francis Amoako Attah, fms (Ghana)

For the eight years that I have been with the Society of Mary, I have dreamed of a certain way of being and acting which sums up the spirit of that "hidden and unknown". What Colin discovered and proposed to Marists is what draws my admiration. For me and for the Church today in Africa, it's a programme, a way of salvation. It implies an immersion in one's milieu of life and work in order to know it better, a great sensitivity and limitless availability. What could be better than to meet one or two people, or a community, who live like that! That's what attracts me, that's what I love.

Paul Souga, sm (Cameroon)

With three Marist Missionary Sisters, I look after the direction of a Centre of Welcome for undernourished children. Each morning 400 mothers come to us. This suburb of Dakar has become the refuge for thousands of families forced here by the encroachment of the desert. On some days four or five children die. I never get used to that. Why am I here? What can I say? Certainly, here I see no improvement, no progress. *The poor get more and more poor.* Medicine is costly and wages, when there are any, are far too low. I do the best I can; God does the rest. Before coming to Africa I was in Latin America. My superior told me to come to Senegal. So, I've been missioned. Now I'm attached to the people. I doubt that I could be anything else.

Sister Manuela, smsm (Senegal)

By the year 2000, I hope that Marist Africa will have taken its full place in the Marist world, and will have become a source of support and help to the countries that brought us the Good News, and that now are being threatened by dechristianization.

Jean-Baptiste Tamessuien, fms (Cameroon)



In complete availability, we are ready to leave our own country, to set out or set out again towards other people and other cultures, knowing that the Spirit precedes us - He whose gentle action is the source of evangelisation and who brings to birth in us the same Spirit He created in the hearts of our Pioneers.

Missionary Sisters' Constitutions n.16