



*I have come to bring fire to the earth
and how I wish it were blazing already!*
Luke 12: 49

4. Fire and rose

If we were looking for a spiritual centre point of the Marist enterprise, we might possibly find it in two "moments" in Mary's life which may at first sight seem almost contradictory: Mary's life at Nazareth and her life in the early Church after Pentecost. In many statements jotted down by Mayet, Colin calls up these two images of Nazareth and the early Church, sometimes making a distinction between them, and sometimes making no distinction, blending them together as if they were two sides of the one coin. Marist historian Jean Coste writes: "The first point of reference for every Marist is the person of Mary, of whose spirit we must partake. That Mary represents the heart of Christianity, of the Church, is brought out in two biblical mysteries, to which Father Colin ceaselessly sends us back. The first is Mary present in the Church after Pentecost: humbly immersed in its midst, animating by her prayer and her zeal that first apostolic group. The second sets before our eyes the house of Nazareth, where, in the obscurity of a little carpenter's shop, the redemption of the world began to be realised, and where we see so clearly that a person cannot truly work for God if he is not spiritually ready to accept, if need be, for God's glory, even obscurity and apparent uselessness." Colin saw great richness in these two images. They helped him to envisage the Marist enterprise as a tree of many branches. They helped him, too, to shape his convictions about the need for Marists to be united in mind and heart, to be open to the Spirit and to work zealously in a hidden way. The image of Mary at Nazareth and in the early Church is also enriching for us who feel the call to prayer, yet realise our place is in this world of activity. The Church's liturgy honours Mary with many titles, among which are two significant ones: we call Mary "Mystical Rose" and "Queen of Apostles". In Mary we recognise one in whom the fire of Pentecostal action and the rose of mystical contemplation are combined. In this she is a model for all those who wish to find a unifying point in their lives.

A place to stand

One of the first lessons given to someone beginning to learn the art of pottery is how to "centre" the clay on the potter's wheel. It is delicate work, and it takes time to ensure that the solid and unformed lump of clay is balanced and centred on the wheel. But no shaping of the clay can take place until this is done; and unless it is done properly, no matter how long it takes or how difficult it may be to do, any subsequent shaping of the clay will end in failure.

The Maori people of New Zealand are a people for whom land and ancestry are extremely important. They have a word in their language which expresses one of their deepest realities. *Turangawaewae* means literally "a place to stand". It symbolises many things: the place where a person belongs, the place where a person comes from, the homing point to which a person returns if he or she may actually live elsewhere. *Turangawaewae* is the place where one feels connected with one's ancestors, where one finds identity, where one can find a psychological and spiritual vantage point from which to make sense of a constantly changing world. Even though we in the industrialised world have largely lost our sense of the land, we too appreciate how important it is to know where we come from and where our roots are. Without this "place to stand" we are in danger of losing our balance, our identity, and even perhaps our soul.

This need for a centre point, or a place from which we can view reality is also true of our life in the Spirit. Marists find their own place to stand, their centre point, their vantage point, in Nazareth. On one occasion, Jean-Claude Colin said: "I place myself in the home of Nazareth and from there I see all that I must do." At Nazareth, even before the birth of the Church, the Kingdom existed in the ordinary life of a simple family. By inviting us to go often in spirit to Nazareth, Colin helps us to learn what is essential. Nazareth teaches us the value of the simple life of small beginnings. Nazareth reminds us that real values lie so often below the surface and are hidden from sight. Nazareth also reminds us that true, unclouded judgements can be made only when personal prejudices are stripped away and a person is alone before God.

On 29 June, 1845 Father Colin, speaking of new foundations to be made, said to us: "Gentlemen, Our Lord was born in Bethlehem, the Blessed Virgin was born in Nazareth. The Society of Mary came to life in the small town of Belley (unknown spot) and in the little hermitage near Saint-Chamond, in isolation and solitude. Let us remember our origin: let us begin without noise. It is not necessary to make noise in order to do good; and afterwards, when the time comes, then...."

The Mayet Memoirs

Nazareth

In the Constitutions of the Society of Mary he wrote: *Marists must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things.*

This is no pious sentimentalism. It calls upon us to surrender our narrow, selfish, and comfortable point of view, and to adopt the point of view of another, and one that is most challenging and demanding.

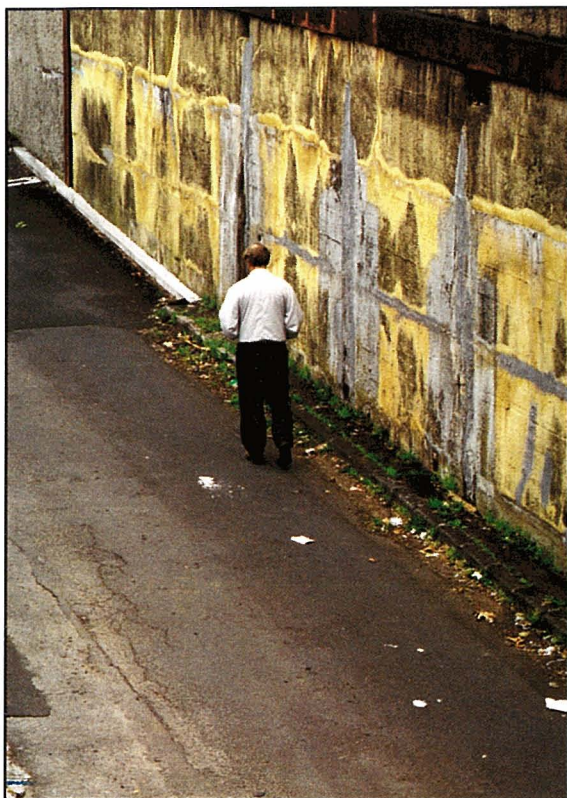
The sad fact is that we human beings are blind.

How many miracles of Jesus were cures of blindness!

We are so often blind to our own dark motives, and these motives blind us to the true nature of the world, human persons, and our own existence. But how do we get out of ourselves and beyond ourselves? As long as we stand in our own place, we risk being caught in our own interests and ulterior motives. But if we could see things from another's point of view... But whose?

Father Colin suggests one that he felt was most reliable - Mary's. And so he tells us to go to Nazareth and see things as Mary does.

Edwin Keel, sm



Getting centred

Gradually a Christian can find a "private room" literally anywhere. A Japanese Christian with a background of the tea-ceremony refers to this as the art of "creating holy space". T.S.Eliot learned to create it in a dingy lane. He was a busy man who wrote much and was regarded as England's greatest man of letters in the post-war period. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. A friend of his relates how he met his need for prayer alone with the Father. When he was working in his London office he used to slip out for 30 minutes at midday and pace slowly up and down a dead-end lane. In 1921 he had written *The Waste Land*, a poem about the weary self-consciousness of the brave new world that now lay desolate in the aftermath of World War I. That was written just after his own breakdown. But an older Eliot, in a London made still more desolate by the blitz of the Luftwaffe, in a world made almost unbelievable by Auschwitz and Nagasaki, could pen sentences of vibrant hope and optimism. He had learned from Jesus how to refresh his spirit by meeting alone with the Father.

Paul Glynn, sm

Stay still

Nazareth represents an experience of life: a time when things seem too ordinary, and nothing happens. Or when we are faced with silence. Many people cannot bear being alone for very long, and many of us take care that we are never really alone. If we have no one with us (and sometimes even if we do have someone with us) we reach for the television, a telephone, a radio, a cassette recorder - anything to divert, distract, entertain, cheer us up, make us forget that we are alone. Blaise Pascal wrote: "I have often said that the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room." (*Pensées* no. 136) Jesus' life is punctuated by periods of solitude: forty days in the desert, periods of early morning prayer, his time of solitary prayer in Gethsemane - to say nothing of his thirty years at Nazareth. They are long periods of solitary prayer - days and hours, not minutes.

Good soil

The present era is one of an even greater commitment to evangelization, and the resources with which to do this are plentiful and growing. We need to keep in mind, though, that "it is primarily by her conduct and her life that the Church will evangelize the world... by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus - by the witness of poverty, and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity." (*Pope Paul VI. Evangelii Nuntiandi*) So to be an apostle in the Church today as a Marist it is necessary to be one who has experienced the saving power and love of the Lord. The Marist is one who can stand alone in the Lord's presence. He or she will be able to enter Nazareth and from there gain power and strength. Nazareth then is the soil in which the Marist takes root, and it is only from there that we see what we have to do.

Treasuring in our hearts and pondering the words and actions of the Lord, striving to remain sincere before God and man, we shall reach that simplicity of soul which our Founders discovered in the house of Nazareth.

Marist Sisters' Constitutions n.7

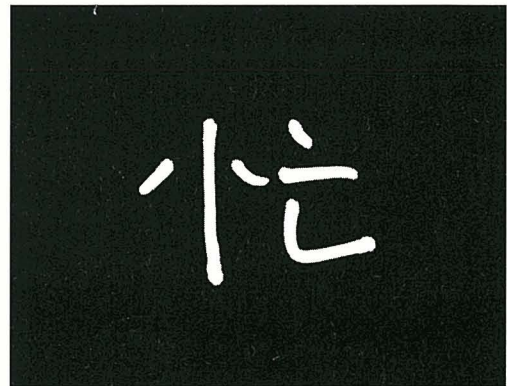
A place of the heart P 82.

"He went down with them to Nazareth...." St Luke says a great deal in this short sentence which concludes his story of the loss of Jesus in the Temple. Nazareth was the homing point for the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph: it was the place where they belonged, the place to which they returned. "They went back to Nazareth...." But St Luke doesn't stop there. He goes on to tell us what happened at Nazareth. In the first place, it was at Nazareth that "Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men". Slowly, silently, unobtrusively, Jesus grew in wisdom and spiritual stature. It was a growth and a wisdom that was so quiet and hidden that his own companions were astonished and could not believe it. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? This is the carpenter's son, surely? Is not his mother the woman called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? His sisters, too, are they not all here with us?" "Nazareth? Can any good come from that place?" For the disciple of Jesus, too, Nazareth represents a time of spiritual growth, an experience of waiting on the Spirit who is gradually, quietly and imperceptibly changing us from within. This is a work of art that requires time. To us who belong to such a compulsive age, Nazareth teaches us the hard lesson of waiting. There are many things that ought to be done; there are a number of things that are in themselves necessary; but it is not always the right time for everything. Because a thing is good and holy in itself does not mean that it has to be done now, and by us. Nazareth teaches us the value of waiting patiently for God's time to unfold. It symbolises the "fallow ground" times of our lives: those moments which seem to be empty of the things we value instinctively – action, achievement, success and acclaim. St Luke tells us also that at Nazareth Mary "stored up in her heart" and pondered the words of Jesus. For a Marian disciple of Jesus, Nazareth stands for a way of contemplating the words and example of Jesus, even in our busiest moments. It is an approach which "ponders the things of God" and treasures them in our heart. Nazareth is a place of the heart: it is a place of silence and of faith; a centre point of stillness and tranquillity. Nazareth is the place where we can learn the wisdom that comes from seeing things from God's point of view. It is, as Colin says, "from Nazareth" that we can get a balanced perspective on life.

June 29, 1847

Father Colin said: "People are bored, too, at doing nothing, for we are made for action and feel a need for it. But look at our mother after the Ascension of the divine master. She is the support, the director, of the new-born Church. She is called "Queen of Apostles". Yet she seemed to be doing nothing, although she did more by her prayers than the apostles by their preaching. Look also at our Lord Jesus Christ in Nazareth for thirty years. These are your models."

The Mayet Memoirs



Stilled hands

The Japanese ideograph for "busy" is like a sudden karate chop! You write the ideograph for "heart", and then you add the one for "destroy" and you have "busy". The Chinese of several thousand years ago who chose that combination did not have to be members of our busy busy West to know the dangers of being a "busybody". Human nature was the same 3,000 years ago on the Yellow River. When I came to the East, I had a sense of wonder to see the Oriental people joining their hands at prayer like us. Who taught the human race this universal prayer symbol? Was it not the common experience that our hands which aptly represent our human doing must be stilled in prayer? Joined hands cannot "do" anything. They dumbly, but hopefully, say, "Lord, these problems are too big for my little hands, my tiny abilities. Please help." History is full of examples of hands that were never stilled in prayer and became exceedingly destructive.

Paul Glynn, sm

Fallow times

I detect sadness in many people like myself who seem to suppose that if redemption were still going on in their lives, it ought to be producing more visible results. The trouble is that we don't give much importance to the place of fallow ground in our environmental model of the Christian life.

I'm sure we are still too close to the "work-ethic" to get anywhere near thinking of idleness as a Christian virtue, or as a sign of Christ's kingdom. Yet we cannot escape from the fact that, like it or not, the redeeming Lord seems to insert great chunks of non-eventfulness into our lives.

When we would most want to be up and doing, to be shaping the world and planning its future, we've got the 'flu, or we are not in the right spot to make the connections. We'd like to think of ourselves as being much more in control of the course of our lives; for what else could it mean to be a responsible christian?

I believe it is not by chance that the verdict many of us would have to pass on ourselves is that we have been ineffective. In one very important sense, that is what we are meant to have been. An age of activism must somehow learn again what it is to be saved by God. Being idle rather than influential makes up the larger part of human life, just as fallow ground and forests must occupy more of the earth's landscape than the fertile fields.

Eugene O'Sullivan, op

Very true

And then we will not very often work with success. We will have to work often in the tunnel, to see that our efforts have been vain, that our attempt to help this soul seems to have been completely useless. We will have to be prepared for that, for this unsuccess, for this work in the tunnel.

And also another element, this growing questioning of our young people who will oblige us to be true – equally true before God and men.

They seem to have received from God a special gift to see beyond the appearances to what really is the value of this person. And they will scrape away whatever is superficial, and that's good for us. It's a scraping which will fortunately strip us of our masks.... And then it will be fortunate that we have been trained at Nazareth, convinced that the real foundation of our life is not the appearances that we make, but really what we are in the interior.

Jean Coste, sm

Humility gives them the courage to rely on God rather than themselves alone, to seek not their own interests but those of Christ and Mary.

Marist Fathers' Constitutions n.219

A Nazareth life

Brother Hubert Vicknair was a Brother of the Society of Mary who died of cancer at the age of 51 in 1983. He had spent his life as a Marist in the work of education. It was a life which anyone might have considered "ordinary" and he may have considered "not successful". Yet at his death, one of the senior pupils in the school read this tribute which illustrates the value of a "Nazareth life".

Character is a matter of living every hour of every day and facing ordinary challenges... Right here at Chanel there has been a man who in my eyes was a real hero.... Thirty years ago he set out to be ordained a priest, but didn't quite get there.... He wanted to become a teacher, but that didn't quite work out either.... He very much wanted to coach kids, but never quite had the chance.... He accepted the next best things without grumbling or self-pity.

He became a fan of kids instead of a coach.

He became a moderator instead of a teacher.

He became a brother instead of a priest.

And he was happy, because he was giving.

Then one day, life asked one more thing of him. It took away the physical fitness in which he took so much pride. It took away his chance to work with kids, and then it took away even the opportunity to be a fan. In turn, it gave him pain. But it's through this pain that Brother Hubert has shown the real richness of his character....

Character is simply each one of us being the best we can be, not only for ourselves, but more importantly, for others. Character is keeping faith in God, faith in your family, faith in your friends, faith in yourself, and faith in your future. And it is this character that Brother Hubert has shown us in his life.

Pentecostal fire

While Nazareth represents one point of reference in Mary's life, the second major reference-point is found in the mystery of Pentecost, when the Church came to birth with fire, and when the believers, gathered round Mary in a communion of mind and heart, gave powerful testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus. (Acts 2: 1-4, 42-47)

During the 18 years when Jean-Claude Colin was Superior General of the Marist Fathers, Mayet noted many occasions when he made reference to Mary, especially during the Retreats which the Marists made each year. On these occasions, what Colin referred to most frequently was the mystery of Mary in the Church at its beginnings. Even when he referred to Mary at Nazareth, Colin frequently linked this image to the image of Mary in the Church as it came to birth, as if one idea led immediately to the other, one pole connecting intimately with the other. On one occasion he said, *In all things let us look to Mary, let us imitate her life at Nazareth. She did more than the apostles for the newborn Church; she is the Queen of the apostles, but she did it without any stir, she did it above all by her prayers.* And even though he talked of the novitiate time for Marists as a "Nazareth" experience, he made it clear that this represented only part of the spirituality of those called to the Marist enterprise: *The Society of Mary desires that we, her children, should be missionaries of action, and missionaries of prayer.*

In the life of every Marist these two realities exist in tension. Somehow the Marist, like Mary, is to be contemplative in action, and active in contemplation. It is not a question of choosing one or the other, or of choosing one at one moment and the other at another, but of keeping the two realities in balance.

Even though Jean-Claude Colin's thinking moved from the image of Nazareth to the Church after Pentecost, sometimes even merging the two mysteries, there is no inconsistency here. He saw the Church in its broad historical sweep – from the beginning of time to the end of the world. If one had said "Church" to Jean-Claude Colin, what would probably would have come to his mind would have been this picture of all the believers from the beginning till the end of time, gathered by Mary and round Mary, and all attentive to the Spirit who hovered over the world at the beginning, who descended in tongues of fire on the believers at Pentecost, and whose *power working in us can do infinitely more than we can hope for or even imagine.*" (Eph.3: 21)

In November, 1846 Father Colin said to us during recreation, "Gentlemen, the piety of the Carthusians and Trappists is one thing, that of the Marists another. The Carthusians and Trappists save souls by prayer. We save them by action joined to prayer. It is the same thing basically, but we follow a different line."

The Mayet Memoirs

Lighthouse

In the thought of Father Colin, Nazareth represents a lighthouse which every Marist ought to have clearly marked on his navigational chart of the spiritual life. However, we must also take into account the other lighthouse, which is Mary of Pentecost Sunday, inviting her children to accomplish in our century what the Apostles accomplished in the time of the early Church. Yet in the midst of all, I have the impression that another light was the profound source, namely the Holy Spirit, who hovers over the world, who gave life to the withered bones in the vision of Ezechiel, who overshadowed Mary, accomplishing in her the conception of God's son, who breathed upon the Apostles and made them witnesses of Christ, and who still continues to assist the Church today.

Nicolas Gauthier, sm

Key point

If we want a unifying principle of our Marist spirit, we could find it only in fidelity to the Holy Spirit.... It is the Spirit, acting within the Church and the Society, who sees to it that the Marists of today learn how to walk in the footsteps of Mary and of their founder.

In this sense, to live the Marist spirit is, in a word, to listen to the Holy Spirit telling us about our place in the heart of the Society of Mary.

To live the Marist spirit will amount, in effect, to being completely faithful to our vocation, that is to say, to the thousand suggestions of the Holy Spirit speaking to us about our particular situation.

Jean Coste, sm



In the house of La Neylière in France, where Jean-Claude Colin is buried, a fresco has been painted on the wall of the Chapel. The fresco depicts the central theme of the mystery of Mary in the church. The artist, Chantal Dessirier, wrote of this composition: *I did not want to do a realistic representation of the life of Mary; everyone knows that, and to do so would have tended to make the viewer become a spectator, seeing it as a picture book. I hoped rather that the visitor would enter into the scene....* The dominant image is the scene of Pentecost, with Mary and the Apostles fired with the gift of the Spirit. (*The Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world*). In the background to the Pentecost scene are five major "memories" of Mary: the Annunciation (*I am the handmaid of the Lord*); the Nativity (*The Word was made flesh*); the Finding in the Temple (*I must be about my Father's business*); the Wedding at Cana (*Do what he tells you*); and Calvary (*Behold your Mother*). Of the Pentecost scene, Chantal Dessirier says: *Mary, in the Pentecost scene, is the keystone, she is the basis of the composition; everything rests on her. But through the use of colour, I was concerned that she should remain discreet and hidden. She blends in with the apostles, who stand out, if not by their height, at least by their colouring.* In fact, Mary is not in the centre of the apostles. There are seven on one side of her, and five on the other. The key of the early Church is Peter, the first Pope. Mary submerges into the community of which she is one of the members among the others. Without words, without any dramatic actions, she witnesses to the Lord simply by her life. The apostles look to her as a visible witness to the presence of the Lord. They draw their inspiration from her. Mary does not assume the role of leader, but she is truly the Queen of the Apostles by her silent, attentive, loving, prayerful presence. The fresco seems to underline the words of Father Colin: "What a model Mary is for us! She bears the title 'Queen of Apostles' and rightly, and yet she is more hidden than any of the apostles".

Because they bear the name of Mary, Marists desire to be like her and follow Jesus as she did. Contemplating Mary in the mysteries of Nazareth and Pentecost and her role at the end of time, they come to share her zeal for her Son's mission in his struggle against evil, and to respond with promptness to the most urgent needs of God's people.

Marist Fathers' Constitutions n.8

"One in mind and heart"

At first sight, the last prayer that Jesus prayed for His disciples on the night before He died is surprising. Jesus did not pray, as we might have expected, that His disciples would become more numerous and cover the earth; or that they would be able to express His teaching in sound theological terms; or that they would have the energy to enable them to preach with power and eloquence. He prayed simply "that they may be one" so that the world would believe that Jesus was God and had been sent by the Father for the salvation of the world. The first compelling proof of the existence of God, of the divinity of Jesus, and of the truth of the Gospel would not be the eloquence or energy or even the sanctity of individual Christians, but their unity of mind and heart. This is evident in the early days of Christianity when tradition tells us that non-believers were initially attracted to Christianity not so much by the truth of the Gospel, but by the communion in love of those who lived it. "See how these Christians love one another!" St Luke in the Acts of the Apostles seems almost to make a deliberate connection between the fact that the early Christians lived in communion of mind and heart, and the fact that many were brought to belief in the Gospel, as if one were the result of the other.

From the start of the Marist enterprise, this was understood by all those who joined, and it was spelled out by those who became founders of the various branches of the enterprise. For Jean-Claude Colin, this communion of mind and heart was basic to the very mission of the Society. It would be the means by which Marists would learn to discover the Gospel together and live it as Mary did; it would be the vehicle for reconciliation and evangelisation; and it would be a way to "begin a new church over again". Individuals, even when working with great zeal to offer to people a different experience or understanding of the Church, may often be able to do little more than prove the rule by being an exception to it. When, however, a *community* reflects the exception, the effect is overwhelming. This is why it was so important for the early Marists to see the enterprise as one of several branches, including a branch for lay people, all united in mind and heart. The last days of the world will come not when God is sick of wayward humanity and decides to rain fire and brimstone on the earth, but when the whole world, like the early Church, is "united in mind and heart". The special vocation of Marists is to help to bring this about in the world.

1838

Father Colin said, "When I first presented my request (for approval of the Society of Mary) to Rome, it was with the great hope that, through it, the last centuries of the world would see what the first century witnessed: the multitude of believers having but one heart and one soul."

The Mayet Memoirs

An extraordinary impression

The first novitiate for candidates for the Marist Fathers was a house in Belley known as La Capucinière. It was one of Jean-Claude Colin's favourite communities, and he lived there as Superior of the house in his first three years as Superior General of the Society of Mary. A biographer of Colin, writing of this community, said: "... the family spirit, with its deep affection and the relaxed and cordial atmosphere that characterised mutual relationships, was one of the charms of life at La Capucinière. Despite differences of age or social condition, these theology students, who sometimes originated from 20 different dioceses, made only one heart and one soul.... It is beyond doubt that, during those years, still so close to the beginnings, and in this house in which they chiefly lived, it was impossible not to notice an extraordinary degree of good will and fervour."

A novice during those years wrote in a letter to a friend: "How wonderful, how good, to live as only one heart and soul: "cor unum et anima una". It is a sight that at my first coming to this house made an extraordinary impression on me."

Family Spirit

One very important aspect of Marcellin Champagnat's spirituality was his family spirit. We know that this was a point to which he used to refer often during his conferences to the Brothers. He wanted their Communities to resemble those of the early Christians, where all loved one another, shared with one another and prayed for one another. And further, he wanted this spirit to radiate round them to facilitate the unity of the human family. This is an important element of our mission in the Church and in the world.

Charles Howard, fms

Compelling proof

Recent Popes have laid great stress on the importance of unity and communion as a sign of "church" and as the primary means of spreading the Gospel. In his letter on Evangelisation, Paul VI wrote:

Take a Christian or a handful of Christians, who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelisation.

Pope John Paul II adds to this some reflections on the special place of Mary in bringing about this unity of mind and heart:

Every time a Church is born in a country, one can see that the Church always has the presence of the mother who guarantees brotherhood and a welcome for the Holy Spirit.

Only Mary could make one heart and one mind of Jesus' Apostles, before and after Pentecost, as if Christ wanted to show us that he entrusted to his mother's maternal care the mission of making the Church a single family where love reigns and where first of all he or she who suffers is loved more. Yes, in Mary we have the model of unbounded love which is the bond of unity for all who are "disciples" and "brothers" of Jesus, through faith and baptism.

Source of Strength

In one way or another, each of the founding personalities refers to this theme – sometimes using the precise Latin phrase "*cor unum et anima una*" ("*one in mind and heart*") – as one of the fundamentals of Marist life, and all of them stressed this attitude in their last words to their Religious Family:

MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT.

Dear Brothers, I beg of you with all the love of my heart, and by all the love you bear me, keep ever alive among you the charity of Christ. Love one another as Jesus Christ has loved you. Be of one heart and one mind. Have the world say of the Little Brothers of Mary, what they said of the first Christians: "See how they love one another!" That is the desire of my heart and my burning wish at this last moment of my life. Yes, my dearest Brothers, hear these last words of your Father, which are those of our Blessed Saviour: Love one another.

Spiritual Testament. June 6 1840

JEANNE-MARIE CHAVOIN.

Pray for me, dear sisters. Be very united among yourselves, love simplicity.... Always be a bond of union between your sisters so that all may have but one heart and one soul and so draw down heaven's blessing on this house.

Last recorded words. June 29, 1858

JEAN-CLAUDE COLIN.

Now that the drafting of our Constitutions is finished, let us bless God! Everything tells me that my mission is accomplished and that all that remains for me is to prepare for death....

May you always love one another, my dear brothers, as sons of the most tender and loving of mothers. Your unity will be your strength and your consolation, and will ensure the success of your undertakings for the glory of God and the honour of the most holy Virgin.

Spiritual Testament. May 6, 1870

We strive to be faithful to the Spirit of the risen Jesus, who gives to us, as to the believers in the early Church, the grace of being one in heart and soul. As was the case with the community of the apostles gathered together on Pentecost day, we are conscious of the presence among us of Mary, Mother of the Church. She helps us to live as brothers, bringing home to us the realisation that we make up one body in Christ.

Marist Brothers' Constitutions nn.9,48

"A bridge to souls"

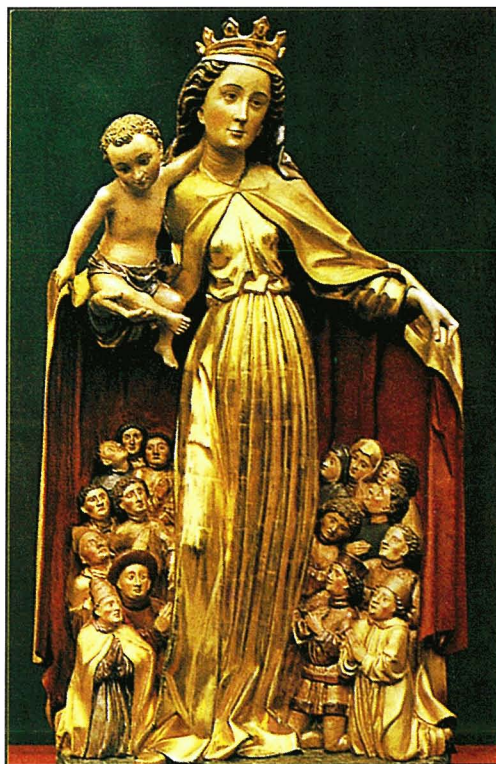
When Mayet recorded Colin's description of his voyage to Rome in 1833, he noted that one of Colin's aims was to present the broad plan of the Society as divided into distinct branches, with a Third Order for lay people. People in Rome had tried to persuade him that the plan was too big, and would never be approved in that form. Mayet noted Colin's words: "It seemed to me that everyone would laugh at me; it didn't matter. I wanted to know what Rome would think." Despite the negative reaction of his advisors and of the Curia in Rome, Colin felt that the whole plan of a multi-branched Congregation needed to be presented to Rome. The image of the "tree of several branches" was one of the things that had captured the imaginations of the young seminarians at the very beginning. Within six months of his ordination Marcellin Champagnat had formed his first group of Brothers. From 1819, the beginnings of the Marist Sisters were evident at Cerdon. And whenever Jean-Claude Colin spoke officially or unofficially about the Society of Mary and its special call to "begin a new Church over again" his mind and his pen inevitably went to the lay branch of the Society. So, in 1833, when he made his Summary of the Marist project to be presented to Rome, he wrote: "The general aim of the Society is to contribute in the best possible way both by its prayers and its efforts, to the conversion of sinners and the perseverance of the just, and to gather so to speak all the members of Christ, whatever their age, sex, or standing, under the protection of the Blessed Mary Immaculate, Mother of God... so that at the end of time, as at the beginning, all the faithful may with God's help be one heart and one mind in the bosom of the Roman Church.... For this reason, entry to the Society is open to lay people living in the world in the Confraternity or Third Order of the Virgin Mary." Thirty nine years later, at the age of 82, Colin is still captured by the same ideal: "You will be astonished to hear that I have a great ambition - to seize the whole world under the wings of Mary by means of the Third Order...." The lay association was to be a confraternity of people from all walks of life. Its aim was to be a means of carrying out the Work of Mary in the world, and in Colin's words, "to be a bridge to souls". Its spirit was to be the same as that of the Society of Mary. Its organisation was to be flexible and open. It was to be a vast association open to all - including sinners and even the unborn. Here in fact the seeds of difficulty were sown. No one knew quite what he meant by it all!

The Society of Mary has four branches: the fathers, the brothers under the name of the Little Brothers of Mary, the sisters under the name of religious women of the Holy Name of Mary, and the Third Order. Isn't the Society like the mantle of the Blessed Virgin which offers shelter to all God's children? And aren't the four branches like avenues which lead us beneath the folds of that protecting mantle?

In the Third Order, Mary extends her arms to every age, sex, condition, degree, shade of meaning which can be found in souls. Men, fathers of families, young men, children, women, mothers of families, young women, little children, those who are perfect, advancing, beginning, strong, weak, sinners, impious, even the children....

The Mayet Memoirs

The image of Mary as one who "gathers all" is an ancient theme in Christian piety. This 15th century statue shows everybody – men, women, children, rich, poor, and even the Pope – gathered under the mantle of Our Lady. Colin saw the Marist Third Order as a privileged way by which the whole world could be gathered for Christ.



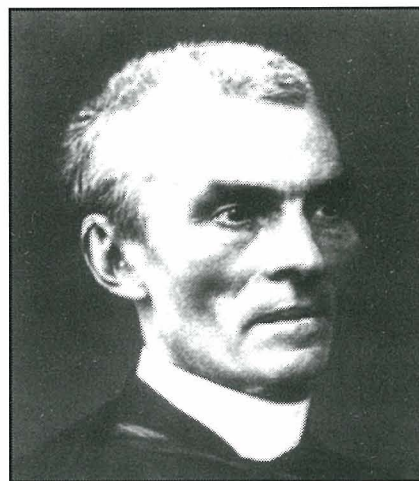
First lay group

There are indications that groups of lay Marists began in different parts of Lyon and Belley, but the first recognisable form dates from 1833 when a group of laymen began to live as "Tertiary Brothers of Mary" under the direction of Marist Fathers. We have the names of 13 of these men, they were aged between 26 and 37, and were from many different walks of life and included lawyers, officers, a teacher, an artist, an architect and an accountant. These men lived a way of life something like what we now know as a Secular Institute. What is striking about them is their involvement in the apostolic mission of the Church. Four of them became teachers in a catholic secondary school which they founded. Another member of the group went to Oceania as a layman attached to the Society of Mary. Four more were the members of the "Central Council of the Propagation of the Faith". This remarkable association of lay people developed a systematic, sustained and European-wide collection for the Church's mission throughout the world. The first meetings of the Tertiary Brothers of Mary were held in this tower house which still stands today near the Chapel of Fourvière where the seminarians made their promise in 1816.



Man of the spirit

Mayet reported that Jean-Claude Colin was waiting for someone to promote the Third Order throughout the whole world. *Ah gentlemen, he said to us one day wrote Mayet, "please ask God to send someone to spread the Third Order all over the world. I want this with all my heart. I ask God for this. I need someone with an apostolic enthusiasm, someone filled with the Spirit of God, someone who can preach like the apostles.* This prayer seemed to have been answered in Pierre Julien Eymard, a Marist priest whom Colin appointed in 1845 as director of a small group of laywomen who called themselves the "Christian Maidens". Mayet did not hesitate to call this moment "the beginning of the Third Order", and Eymard "the founder" of the Third Order. Pierre Julien Eymard was a man of extraordinary energy, zeal and holiness, and is recognised by the Church as a saint. When he took over the direction of the "Christian Maidens" in 1845, they numbered 14. Within a year Eymard had begun to form other groups: a group for mothers, a group for married men, a group for young men, and a group for young women. By June 1850 there were more than three hundred members in the various groups. Eymard said to Mayet: "Things have reached such a point that if they let me loose now, I would soon cover France with members of the Third Order." In 1856 Pierre Julien Eymard left the Society of Mary to become the founder of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament.



From the beginning the Marist project envisaged a branch open to lay men and women. In Father Colin's mind it was to be a broadly-based association available to all people, whatever their situation, age, or condition. It could assume many forms, and, where appropriate, might even be given another name.

Marist Fathers' Constitutions n.31

"Losing itself in the church"

Whatever difficulty Jean-Claude Colin may have had in making clear his ideas on the scope of the lay branches of the Marist enterprise, it seems that somehow from the very beginning these ideas were instinctively grasped, at least by the first two recognisable groups, the "Tertiary Brothers" and the "Christian Maidens". Even a cursory glance at these groups reveals some significant things.

In the first place, it is striking that at a time when there was no shortage of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, there were also significant numbers of lay people who wished to live a deep Christian life *as lay people*, and who found that the Marist way - "living the Gospel as Mary did" - was a good way of doing this.

A feature common to both these groups was their active apostolic and missionary attitude. The men in the "Tertiary Brothers" were deeply involved as lay people in the apostolic work of the Church, some even being involved directly in the Church's work of evangelization in the Pacific. Something similar was evident with the "Christian Maidens". These women clearly felt that they belonged to the Society of Mary and were caught up in its mission, especially its mission in Oceania. Sentences from the minutes of their meetings show this very often: ".... it must not be forgotten that we are united with the whole order of the Marists...." "After Father informed us that the missionaries' ship, bound for Polynesia, had arrived in Valparaiso at the end of June and that they were probably already in their Islands, he urged us to increase our prayers for them and for the success of their mission...." ".... it was recalled that, although we are dispersed in secular society, we belong to the order of the Marists, and we ought to work by our prayer in co-operation with the great work these holy missionaries have undertaken for the glory of God."

Both these groups at the beginning were distinctly lay groups. They saw themselves as lay people with their own vocation in the world, and they worked as lay people for the Church. They took responsibility for the organisation and activities of their groups. They also saw themselves as Marists, with the same spirit as the Marist priests, brothers and sisters; submerged in the Church, working quietly but effectively for the support of the Church in their parish, in the diocese, and in the missions. Later, a Marist priest would describe the essential point by saying that the spirit of Mary, passing through the priests, religious and laity, would eventually "lose itself in the Church".

1838

Father Colin said:

"Our Third Order has the advantage that it is not only for the conversion of sinners but also for the perseverance of the just, and so, consequently, it includes all Christians.... Moreover, I have asked that the simple inscription of one's name in the register of the confraternity would be enough in order to share in the prayers and good works of the members, because I foresaw that many sinners who might need such prayers and good works would be reluctant to have recourse to Mary. Also, when a family has someone who needs conversion, his relatives could have him registered secretly.... For those who would want to carry out the recommended practices, these will be very short and very simple."

The Mayet Memoirs

Not what he wanted

Despite the success of Eymard's Third Order groups, Colin was not happy. A spokesman for Colin said, "The Third Order as it exists is not at all, not at all what he would wish." For Colin, it was important that the lay branch of the Society of Mary should, like the other branches, "do good without fanfare." It should be a group for all Christians, with practices which would be "very short, very simple." And lay Marists should be fully inserted into the life of the local Church, or in Colin's words, 'support parochial and diocesan apostolates and be their hidden force.' Colin felt that Eymard's groups were growing too fast, and perhaps too noisily. He also felt that the scope of the groups was too centred on personal spirituality, and too close to being something for the spiritual elite. Finally, it seemed that these groups were not sufficiently inserted into the life of the parish and diocese. Through another spokesman, Colin warned Marists: *The way you understand it presently, you will accomplish nothing.*

A beacon

In 1873, Mayet had written to Colin begging him to put down on paper how he understood the involvement of lay people in the Marist project. Mayet candidly reminded Colin that while he had told people that the Third Order as it existed did not meet his views he had never quite said what those views were! In fact, Colin's thinking on the practical details developed, while his understanding of the essentials didn't change. The lay association should be open to everyone, with "short and simple practices", the sorts of spiritual practices "which seem suitable to all the faithful." Colin distinguished between "what is essential, fundamental, or properly constitutive", and all the rest. There was to be unity in spirit - the same spirit for all Marists - but a healthy flexibility in the practical details, and a great variety in types of groups. Colin may have disagreed with Eymard on some of the major points of Marist lay life, but he certainly agreed with him about the diversity of groups. Colin's final act before he died was to write a set of Constitutions for the lay association, which he completed in 1875. Mayet on this occasion wrote his "final word": "May God be blessed. At last... we have what we so much desired.... Very Reverend Father Founder has been able, despite his 84 years, and his infirmities, to give in 30 pages, in Latin, all his ideas on the Congregation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the form of the Third Order. Nothing has been lost by waiting. Everything has been gained. It will be a beacon."

Actually, it was not Mayet's "final word". Evidently realising the importance of all this for the life of the Society of Mary, Mayet gathered together all the notes he had taken, and placed them together under the heading: *"Third Order. Everything that I have been able to find from 1837 to 1891"*. This too has been a beacon.

Blending in the church

There is a positive side to the confusions and disagreements over Colin's understanding of the place of the laity in the Marist plan, because it enabled a greater clarity to emerge, at least in writing if not in practice. In 1874, Colin spoke of his ideas to a young Marist, Alphonse Cozon, who then made it his life's work to keep reminding Marist priests of Colin's understanding of this branch of the Marist project. A persistent man, Cozon said he would keep presenting these ideas if necessary until he died. For 20 years he did just that, until 1900 when the administration of the Society of Mary made a decision about how it would develop the Third Order. Cozon's way of describing Colin's view of the lay branch of the Marist plan is still a blueprint for today.

"In the mind of the founder, the Third Order ought not to be confined within the limits of the Society. It ought to be, in a sense, a work outside the Society, to which the Society ought to communicate its own spirit, which is the spirit of the Blessed Virgin. Its development, therefore, ought not to be restricted to the proportions of the Society; we are not to retain it in our hands, but only let it pass through them. Thus, it is not a piece of the mechanism in the Society's clockwork, it should not revolve around us, so to speak, like a planet around its constellation, but it should shine into the Church. Thus it is no longer a precious way to help the Society by drawing the interest of pious faithful to the Society, but rather it is a way to extend the Society's action over the world in such a way that the same thrust, going forth from Mary, passing through the Fathers and the members of the Third Order, might go forth and lose itself in the Church without any personal consideration."

Both within and outside our religious communities, we shall, in a spirit of poverty, share our time, our talents, our spiritual riches with others, and receive with gratitude whatever they may wish to share with us.

Marist Sisters' Constitutions n.23

Power bursting forth

It is hardly surprising that people were confused about what Colin had in mind when he spoke of the broad Marist enterprise. The whole idea was something new, something that had not been seen before, something that really didn't quite fit into the Church's Canon Law or theology of the time; which explains why neither Cardinal Castracane in Rome nor many of the early Marists themselves could grasp the full implications of the original plan. And yet, something in the project immediately attracted people. What else could explain the extraordinary spread of the movement in such a short time, drawing so many men and women to live as priests, brothers, sisters, or lay people in the Marist family? The idea of being in the Church in a Marian way gave energy to those who joined the Marist enterprise. But it is our own age that can give an even fuller meaning to the Marist insight and translate it into practice. The Church's understanding of itself and its place in the world today enables the richness and diversity of the Marist project to break open. The Church today sees itself as a body of people united in mind and heart, on pilgrimage together in faith. "Church" is a communion, where the dynamic energy of the Spirit is stirred up. "Church" is men and women filled with the power of Pentecost. "Church" is people discovering the Gospel together and living it out in service of others. "Church" is where Mary is found as a believer hidden among the believers, guiding, reminding, encouraging others by her closeness to God and her care to carry out the mission of Jesus to the ends of the earth. When Colin said on one occasion that *"the time has come when we must make her power burst forth"* his listeners knew that this was part of the mission entrusted to them and that it was to be done with urgency. Recently, a teenager wrote: "Maybe someday I'll find something worthwhile to do with my life; something I could really put my whole self into and enjoy; something worthwhile I could accomplish in the face of so vast a world. I admire so much somebody I find doing what he or she really wants to do, and who thinks it worthwhile doing. Surely there are many, but I don't think I know more than a dozen." One suspects that if this person had lived in the time of the Marist pioneers he would have found among them more than a dozen such people, and they probably would have invited him to join them. And he may have gone to the margins of the Church and the world, as they did, for the sake of the Gospel.

On January 2, 1842 Father Colin brought Fathers Jallon, Favre, Dussurgey, Lagniet and Eymard together ... and spoke to them in words burning with zeal, saying to them that zeal is the essential quality of priests, of Marists; that Marists must be like the apostles; that the apostles were only 12 in number and that they had converted the world, and we, Gentlemen, we already number 40!

The Mayet Memoirs

Rediscovery

For myself I find the "rediscovered" concept of the laity within the Society of Mary an exciting prospect. That the rediscovery of our "roots" should come at a time within the Church when people are seeking new and more vibrant forms of community life is exhilarating.

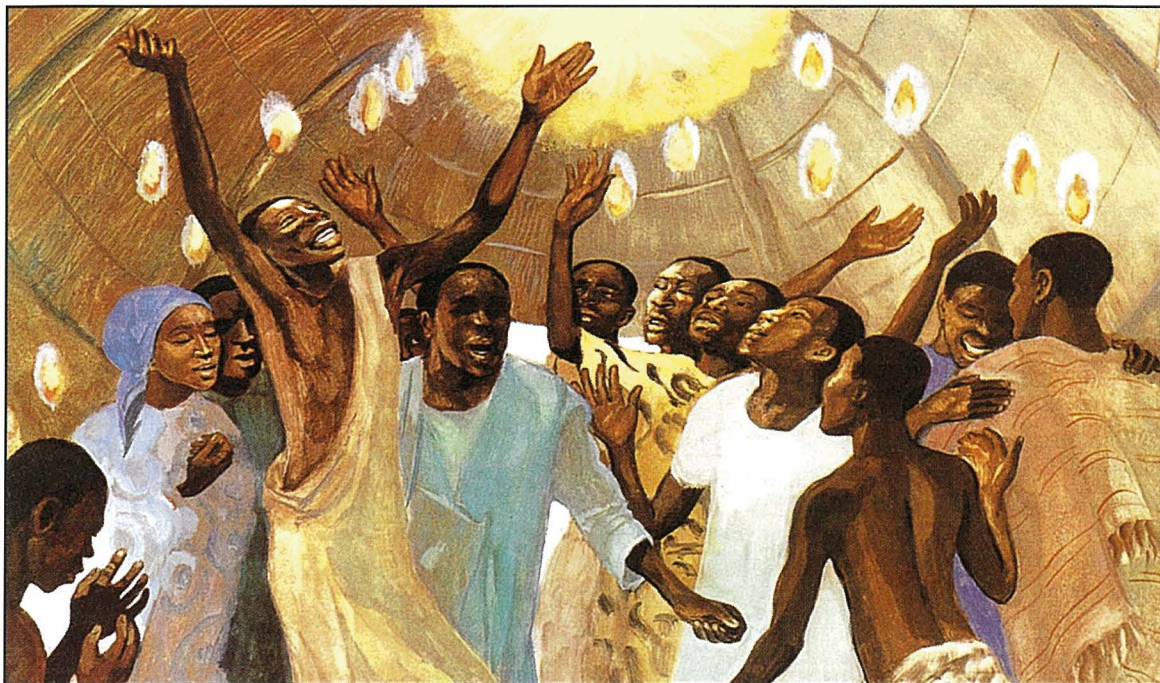
Patrick Brophy, sm

The difference

What difference does this notion of "communion" make? To call the Church first and foremost a "communion" is to place the accent upon the creation of a bond of love and service among all of its members. One cannot close in on oneself in spiritual isolation from the rest of the community. Each must take up the task of forming this communion, a reflection of the Trinity on earth, even though his or her role may be different. The priest will lead especially through his role in Word and Sacrament, and the laity primarily through taking an active role in witnessing to the Gospel by word and example in the various areas of human culture, in business, art, in law and politics, in the media, etc. But both priest and laity are to be concerned about all aspects of the Church and its worship, of the world and its works. The Church as "communion" means that laity and clergy are bound together in one work and one mission, the evangelisation of the world.

Frank McKay, sm

Fire of zeal



Those of us who have been used to a more static representation of the events of Pentecost may find this artist's interpretation surprising. And yet, it could be close to the reality of the Pentecost event which so affected the disciples that people thought they were drunk with wine. (Acts. 2:13) Mary, whose prayer hastened the coming of the Spirit, is seen as the hidden missionary force in the Church at its beginning. Something of that same zeal and urgency was felt by the early Marists. Jeanne-Marie Chavoin reminded her sisters: *"We must have confidence. God is not dead!"* Marcellin Champagnat's zeal led him to admit: *"I cannot see a child without telling him how much God loves him."* And Jean-Claude Colin said even at the end of his life: *"I have a great ambition – to seize the whole world under the wings of Mary...."* He also wanted the Third Order *"to cover the earth"*.

Living intensely

The Church cannot live today at a normal, tranquil, slow and peaceful tempo.... It is from these times that the call comes to us: it is necessary to be present with one's whole soul; it is necessary to be present with an effort and an awareness of full and generous correspondence. We cannot be creatures of habit, half-hearted collaborators. We must live intensely.

Pope Paul VI

The world needs you, the world is waiting for you. Even in its opposition, the world proclaims its hunger for truth, justice, renewal, which only your ministry can satisfy. Listen to the groans of the poor, the candid voice of youth, the complaint of the worker, the sighs of the suffering, the criticism of the thinker. But don't be afraid.... The Lord is with you.

Pope Paul VI

The more united and welcoming our community, and the more dynamic its spirit of prayer and zeal, the more effective our apostolic work will be. When our life radiates Christian joy and hope, we awaken in young people the desire to give themselves to follow Christ.

Marist Brothers' Constitutions n.82

Caught up

Everything about the Marist way of life was to be simple. It was to be a way of life that was open to all, no matter what their vocation, age, or occupation. Even sinners and the unborn could be caught up into this work of Mary. Yet "simple" didn't necessarily mean "easy". The way of life of Mary in the Church may have been "simple" and "hidden", but it was not easy. And the Marist way of life, while it is "simple" and "ordinary" is not necessarily easy. But it is possible, and it is possible for all. What seemed to strike the Marist pioneers from the start was the double-sided nature of the call they answered. On the one hand the Marist project gave them energy, because they knew that such a way of life was worthwhile for them and for others, and that living this way would make a difference. On the other hand, the project challenged their courage because they knew – and some quickly experienced this – that this way of life would call for all their faith, their generosity and their love, to the point of leaving everything and even laying down their lives. One wonders, in reading the annals of the early years of the Marist enterprise, just what it was that inspired those men and women to make such extraordinary sacrifices of life and life-blood for the sake of their mission. Was it simply a spirit of adventure, a reckless search for new fields? Or was it rather a sense of destiny, a deep conviction that they were being caught up into something bigger than themselves? Jean-Claude Colin said, "Not everyone is called to be a Marist", and in choosing people for the Marist project he and the other Founders were looking for people who would be useful to the Society's mission. On several occasions he made it clear that he was not looking for highly talented people, or a sort of élite; he was looking for people with a spirit of faith and a generous heart; people who could look to the interests of Jesus and Mary instead of serving their own interests; people who could become "useful instruments of God's mercies" to others. But the Marist pioneers also knew that this was all the work of Mary. She had a special interest in those who had been called to this work. She would form those who joined, if they drew near to her and caught her attitudes of close union with God, her deep sensitivity to the needs of people, and her concern for the "extension and development of the mystery of the Incarnation". Mary, the woman of Nazareth and the Cenacle... The key was to keep one's eyes on this woman who had made her home in both these places.

On Wednesday September 16, 1846, during the general retreat at Puylata, Father Colin turned to the young men, addressing them in vigorous terms. We were in the refectory and had just heard read the life of Saint Francis Régis.... Father Colin rounded off in a martial tone with these words: "And I shall find again another three hundred brave men, who like Gideon will drink only from cupped hands."

The Mayet Memoirs

Men like Gideon

The off-the-cuff remarks of Jean-Claude Colin that Mayet recorded show the extremely human side of Colin. It was after hearing the story of the life of St Francis Régis being read in the seminary at Lyon that Jean-Claude Courville had first spoken about the project of the Society of Mary. Colin said that he was always stirred by St Francis Régis' story, and this occasion in 1846 made him think of the courageous lives of the Marist missionaries in Oceania. He encouraged the young men to consider being missionaries, and ended his talk with this reference to Gideon. The story he was referring to is found in the seventh chapter of the Book of Judges. Gideon set out with 32,000 men to do battle with the people of Midian. God said to Gideon that his army was too big: if they won victory, they would be in danger of attributing the success to themselves. Gideon told the soldiers that all who were frightened could go home, and 22,000 men turned back. God said to Gideon that even the 10,000 who remained were too many. Gideon was ordered to take the soldiers to a river to drink, and to notice how they took their water. Those who knelt down for a rest as they drank were sent home. Those who took their water "on the run", in cupped hands and without pausing, were the ones God wanted for the battle. With this small band of only 300 men, Gideon won the victory over the Midianites.

Signed in blood

This gives rise to certain requirements with regard to the people who will be attracted to belong to Mary's family. In fact, what they are called to join is an army, and the qualities expected of them are the qualities of soldiers, prepared to leave everything, totally unencumbered with themselves, capable of facing the enemy. I find that nothing illustrates better the attitude of the early Marists towards candidates than the following passage from a letter that Marcellin Champagnat addressed, in 1832, to the "Mother Superior of the Sisters of Bon Repos" (Jeanne-Marie Chavoin):

"I am sending the three young girls of St Laurent-d'Agnay that I told you about. If they cannot bring all they would wish as regards riches, they at least have good will to do whatever you require of them. I told them that if they do not take with them real self-sacrifice, unshakeable submission, great openness of heart, a steadfast vocation and a true desire to love God as Mary did, then they should not proceed any further with their plans. They replied that such were their intentions and the desires of their hearts. I told them you would keep this letter to remind them of their promises in due time and place; they replied that they were ready to sign all this with their blood if necessary."

Gaston Lessard, sm

Decision

In his book, *Path through Scripture*, author Mark Link tells the story of Linda Marshall, daughter of the famous chaplain to the U.S. Congress, Peter Marshall. Linda was about to take a shower. She had one foot in the shower, and the other foot on the bathroom rug. As she stood in this awkward position, she thought to herself, "This is a good picture of my life." For a long time Linda had thought of committing her life to God, and had wanted to do it, but somehow she could never quite make the decision. She had always kept one foot in and one foot out. Now it seemed that the moment had finally come for her to decide. Linda paused for a long time. Then she took a deep breath and said aloud, "I choose you, Lord." With that she stepped into the shower. It was like a baptism.

Something of that sort of decision faces those who feel called to this Marist way of life. When Champagnat sent the three girls to Jeanne-Marie Chavoin, he knew and they knew that what lay ahead of them would cost them not less than everything. But Marcellin knew, as did all the first Marists, that what seemed like giving up so much was in fact a liberation. *"The Society is called to do anything, it is like a soldier who goes wherever there is danger, wherever there is need of his services,"* said Colin on one occasion. But he also said, *"What have we to fear? The Blessed Virgin is leading us."*

Incurable dreamers

While keeping alive our sense of belonging to Mary, with what it implies by way of loving concern for all, especially for the little ones, and of painstaking detachment from all that could make us less effective in Mary's work, we will also allow Mary to direct our attention to the Church. With her we will walk to a point where we can see the Church through her eyes and with her heart. This will enable us to define further good Marist decisions. Marists work in such a way that bishops don't look upon them as intruders or as competitors, but as their own. Marists care about the Church and want to serve it. They are not in the business of self-aggrandisement or of self-promotion.

At the same time, Marists are incurable dreamers. They are well aware of all the warts of the Church, but they are like the author of the Acts of the Apostles. They believe there was a time in the life of the Church when there were no conflicts, no selfishness, a time when all believers had but one heart and one soul. They also believe that Mary, the discreet mother, was the secret centre of that perfect communion. And now, faced with the divisions, the sluggishness, the rigidity of their Church, they don't lose hope. Indeed, they believe this is the time when Mary will intervene again and renew the miracle of perfect unity, all sinners brought home, all having but one heart and one soul.

Gaston Lessard, sm

It must be remembered that the Society has but one overall mission, namely, to proclaim the Gospel to the people of our time, ever conscious of the mystery of Mary in the Church.

Marist Fathers' Constitutions n.74

Life from within

Life from within. The spiritual force of Marist life is a power which bursts out, but it comes from a point of stillness. Its end point is zealous activity for the Kingdom, but it finds its source in a deep interior life. This is why the two symbolic moments of Mary's life, at Nazareth and in the Church as it came to birth, can serve as powerful beacons for Marists. Colin easily moved from one of these mysteries to the other in his conversations, sometimes speaking of both of them in the same breath, contrasting one with the other; and sometimes merging the two as different currents in the same stream. For him, the important thing was not to look at these two mysteries as if they were separate events whose meaning needed to be analysed. The key point for him was to keep looking at the person of Mary, who found a home both at Nazareth and in the early Church. Mary's heart pondered the Word in silence, and received the Spirit in power. She who is Mystical Rose is also Queen of Apostles; she who is hidden and unknown is also Queen of Martyrs; she who was the woman who pondered the Word in her heart was also the woman on mission, her heart on fire with the Spirit; she who gathered the apostles and believers who lived as "one in mind and heart" also consoled and even sent the apostles out on mission.

Life from within. The secret of the power in Mary, the secret of the energy in any saint, is life from within. The Holy Spirit is within each baptised person, and any Christian's spiritual journey will be inwards to experience the Spirit within, and outwards to recognise the Spirit at work in the world. The way Colin sees these two Marian moments of Nazareth and the Pentecost Church then is extremely enriching, because in Mary the two moments took place together. In Mary, a Pentecost had already taken place at Nazareth when the Holy Spirit came down on her at the Annunciation. In Mary, the still life of Nazareth was being lived in the Pentecost life of the early Church.

Life from within. On one occasion Jean-Claude Colin used a telling image to describe the life of prayer. He said: "Piety is like water set over the fire. It has various levels of heat. First of all it is tepid, then warm, then boiling, then so hot that it is as if it were transformed into spirit. It exists as steam, but steam that is burning hot, and very strong, rising and warming everything about it... When completely changed to steam the water seems to make no noise, to be completely still, but it burns, it is strong. That is how we must be."

September, 1854

Father Colin said,

"We must hold fast to the spirit which presided over the birth of the Society. Enquire further and further into it every day: you will only be good Marists in so far as you really put it into practice. And what is this spirit? It is the spirit of the Blessed Virgin, a spirit of modesty, of humility, of prudence, of simplicity, of discretion.... In all things let us look to Mary, let us imitate her life at Nazareth. She did more than the apostles for the new-born Church: she is the Queen of Apostles, but she did it without any stir, she did it above all by her prayers.... Let us therefore unite silence and prayer with action. The Society of Mary desires that we, her children, should be missionaries of action, and missionaries of prayer."

The Mayet Memoirs

Prayer in the city

I have a friend in Japan who is a family man with a tough job that demands a lot of overtime. He has to spend three hours daily travelling to and from work in crowded trains. He has learned to pray part of this time even though he is hanging on to an overhead strap. He usually finds the door to his "private room" in the train by opening his New Testament. Since he began doing this he has found he can "centre" his day and find meaning in the drudgery. He had tuberculosis very badly after the war, and was always down with colds every winter. Now, he says, this condition has improved remarkably. Many doctors wouldn't find that remarkable, probably, because they keep telling us that over 50% of sickness comes from our inner dispositions. If you think it's impossible to concentrate peacefully in a crowded, lurching train, watch a young mother in one with her new baby. And how few young mothers get sick despite their shocking hours!

Paul Glynn, sm



Infinite space

When Karl Rahner sj wrote the following he was writing especially for priests who were caught up in a life of action and were trying to ensure that the flame of prayer was not extinguished. But with the appropriate adaptation, his words speak to any Christian:

"In Mary, act and spirituality are one. In her, interior life has no need to fear that it will be profaned and die when it issues forth in the external work of conceiving a child, serving him as a mother, submitting to a life of drudgery, enduring an oppressive political situation, walking the way of the Cross to its end. The Spirit that was imparted to her penetrates into this work. She obtains it by losing herself in sheer, self-giving service of this work. Mary is so given over to God that she can find him in everything: experience, prayer, action, suffering. She is active in contemplation, and contemplative in action. She can be both in one, because of her willingness to be always entirely at her master's service, because she never seeks herself....

"When we look at Mary, we have no need to fear that we shall lose our souls if we allow ourselves to be consumed by our work. Of course we shall defer to Christian prudence and apportion our energies rationally. Of course only that which has been undergone by us, won in prayer and personally believed can ever really be preached. But if a man is unselfish in service, humble in perseverance, compassionate, never disillusioned by all the disillusionments of his work, never bitter and skeptical, always ready to be used to the utmost, silently and continuously consuming himself in the work of his office, not seeking himself, but truly seeking others for their own sake, then he need not fear that he is interiorly inadequate; the action of his apostolate creates an infinite space within him, a heart in which God establishes himself. Such a man will indeed have to keep rekindling in himself, by prayer and silence, that inner fire which alone can give rise to such work.

"But he will also find that in a heart grown empty in the selfless service of others, the interior life comes as it were of itself. He will find, with Mary, that the Child is nearest when he is no longer carried under one's heart, but has been born into the world and has seemingly gone far off into the darkness of the Cross, leaving one with nothing but emptiness, night, and a sense of failure."

Mary, submitting to God's word, consecrated herself fully to Him, in order to serve her Son, and further his mission. By her consent she gave Christ to the world and became the perfect model of all spiritual fruitfulness.

Marist Sisters' Constitutions n.17