

## Six thousand pages

Mayet's work on the history of the beginnings and early years of the Marist enterprise lasted from 1837 to 1854, which was the period during which his former spiritual advisor, Jean-Claude Colin, was Superior General of the Marist Fathers. What Mayet noted down in his notebooks was not just the factual information of the Society's growth; what he collected during this time reflects Colin's concern to stamp the "Marist way" on the Society, and to give its members a Marian approach to action. Mayet was aware of his mission to provide the means for future generations to discover the essence of the Marist way of life. A good portion of what he recorded was taken from the talks that Colin gave to Marist priests at the annual retreat; even more significantly he recorded the off-the-cuff spontaneous comments that Colin made at table or at informal times after a meal. In one of his entries, Mayet would take out his notebook under cover of the table and note down what he could, often with the help of others. On one occasion Mayet wrote of Colin: *"Occasionally he gave some of those lively thrusts that set hearts aflame, or uttered a few of those momentous remarks which, in a single go, express the whole spirit of the Society."* It is thanks to Mayet that many of these spontaneous remarks have been preserved for the future.

When Jean-Claude Colin resigned as Superior General of the Marist Fathers in 1854, Mayet considered that his work was done, and he handed over his *Memoirs* to the new Superior General. By this time his notes filled 11 volumes. Only 9 of these remain, but they contain six thousand pages of close writing, covering all the essential elements of Marist life and spirit in the early years. They give us in fact an excellent idea of what the Marist project was like for those who joined it at that time, and what were the foundations of an enterprise which so many were building with so much zeal. Though it may seem like beginning a story somewhere other than at the beginning, it seems right to begin our story with Gabriel-Claude Mayet. He has recorded so much of the story of the Marist origins; and so, like a chorus in a play, he will appear throughout our story, offering comments and adding details to the picture. Almost every page of our story will refer to Mayet. He was a man of piety and a man of intelligence. But above all, Mayet was a man of curiosity, and it was this curiosity that led him to unearth a good many of the hidden facts of Marist history.

## I think they will be grateful

Over the long period of 17 years during which Mayet kept his notes, he employed 17 known and named copyists, as well as 22 others who are unknown, but whose hand-writing is distinguishable in the *Memoirs*. The nine volumes are a goldmine of information and inspiration on the origins, history and spirit of the Marist enterprise. Most of what we can put together of the human stuff of Marist spirituality comes from the *Memoirs* of Mayet. Even though he considered his work done in 1854, nevertheless from then till his death in 1894 he did all he could to ensure that the original events and the primitive spirit of the Marist enterprise were preserved in their integrity. Mayet has a touchingly modest conclusion to one of the entries he wrote in the *Memoirs*:

*It can be seen clearly from my notes that a host of extremely interesting articles were collected by me on these occasions.... I think that our successors will be grateful to me for it some day.*

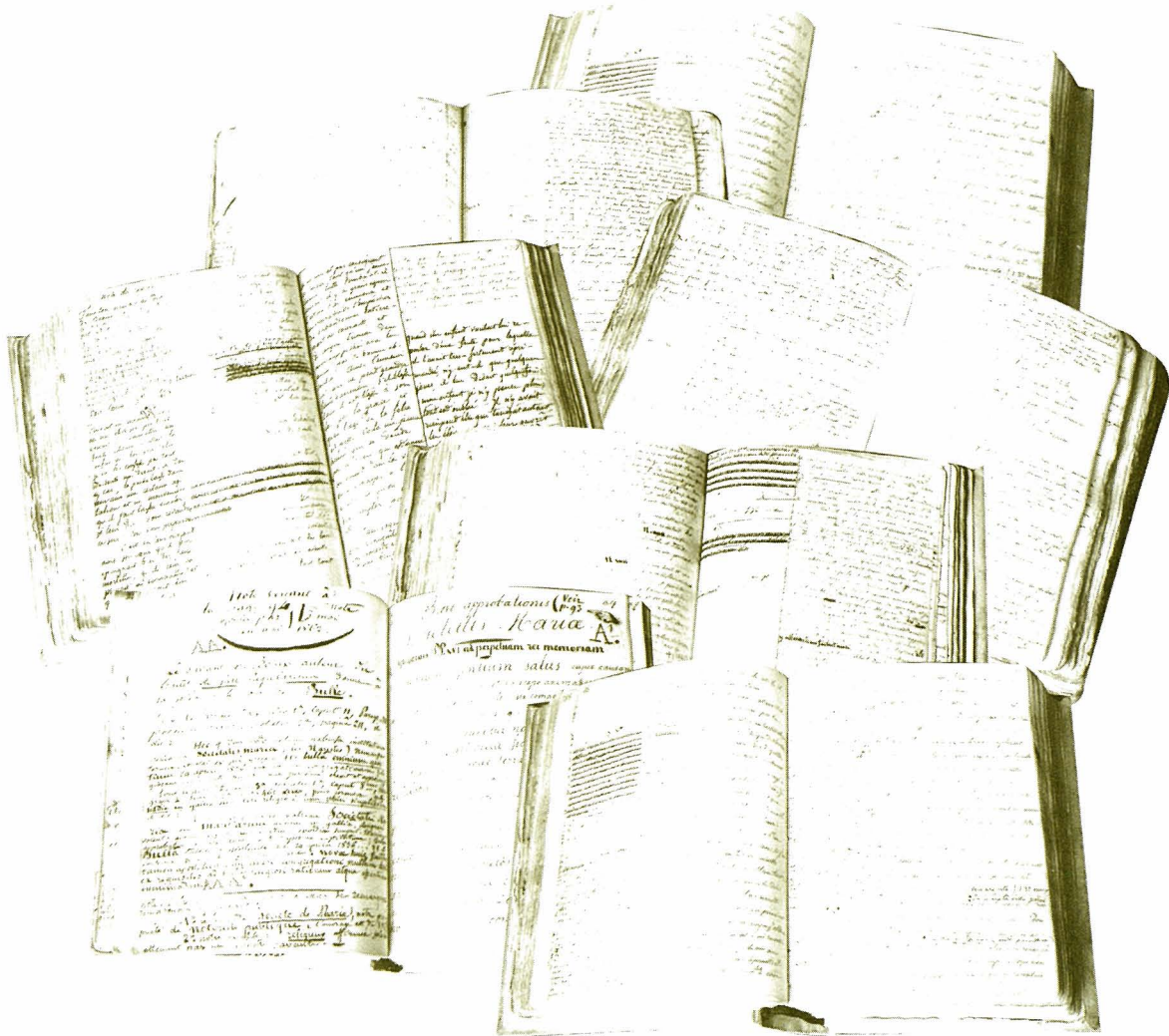




## Worthwhile service

Mayet's hope that his successors would be grateful to him some day was fulfilled even in his own day. One of his contemporaries wrote of his *Memoirs*:

*The more I read these notes, the more I am utterly convinced that it is one of the most worthwhile and fortunate services which anyone could render the Society. Far from thinking that I am wasting my time when I read them, I seem to feel the true spirit of the Society penetrating me as I read on.... These notes are the spring to which Marists will come to draw on the true character and spirit of the Society.*



Coming more to our own day, the historian for the Society of Mary wrote of Mayet:

*Father Mayet is without doubt one of the greatest and noblest figures of the first generation of Marists. What might the future have been for the seminarian who wrote the most delightful letters to his family, and the excellent teacher who was beginning to develop at the College of Notre-Dame-des-Minimes, if illness had not roughly pushed him to one side? No doubt, it is pointless speculating.... More than many another contemporary, he possessed a flair for the facts, for the exact detail, and a respect for history that one can admire on making a close examination of his notes from the period before 1854.... Rarely would you find a sick person exploiting his limitations so generously and effectively and finding therein a fillip towards the perfection of charity.*