

## Marist spirit

When Jean-Claude Colin told Marist priests that "simply bearing the name of Mary was not enough", he was pushing them to realise how deep the bond was between Mary and those who carry her name, and how great the responsibility is for Marists who have been given her name. The first generation of Marists looked on the name they bore as the result of Mary's choice of them. A favour like this implied a very special relationship between Mary and Marists, and this obviously led to consequences, chief of which was for Marists to imbue themselves as far as possible with what they understood to be the "spirit" of Mary. It is hard to explain exactly what is meant by "spirit", and Colin himself had great difficulty in trying to capture it in words. The "spirit" of a person is that way of looking at life, that unique way of doing things which belongs to each individual person. The "spirit" of Mary then, is Mary's way of judging reality, of making decisions and acting on them. This spirit of Mary should be the spirit of Marists because of the special relationship which exists between Mary and Marists, a relationship established, on Mary's part, by her free choice of them, and on the part of Marists, by the way they look on her as Mother, model and superior. Marist writer Jean Coste suggests three ways in which Marists can absorb the spirit of Mary. In the first place, by deepening their sense of Mary's presence and place in their lives. This they do by meditation on her life and personality, and reflection on the virtues most typical of her. Marists absorb Mary's spirit also by direct prayer to her, establishing a real and personal relationship with her; and at the same time by getting in touch with the spiritual inspiration of each of the Founding figures: Colin, Chavoin, Champagnat, and the Pioneers, and by learning from them how they lived the Marist life. The life of Mary the disciple of Jesus is filtered through the life experience of different Marist personalities – something like a prism reflecting the sun's light. Finally, Marists will absorb their Marist spirit by keeping in touch with the body of people who today are trying to live the Marist spirit and interpret it for our times. A spirit cannot be separated from a body: the Marist spirit is embodied today in those men and women, priests, brothers, sisters and lay people, who live it out. Each founding person in the Marist story shaped a body which would incarnate some aspect of the Marist spirit. A Marist will keep these features alive to the extent that he or she remains connected to the men and women who belong to the body of Marists.

1845

*Father Colin said: "It is useful to repeat what has already been said, to preserve the spirit of the Society. Otherwise each one seeks to put his own spirit into it; and that interferes with the harmony and puts us on a false path. A society is like an individual. Each individual has his own genius, his own character, his own temper of spirit, a certain breadth of judgment. Well, then, to expect an individual not to follow his own spirit, his own character, is to expect the impossible. It is God who has given him that spirit, that character. He has to make the best of it and not worry about the rest. A society too has its own spirit. Who gave it to it? If that spirit is enshrined in the rule, it is obvious that it is God who gave it to it. Well, then, we shall not do any good except by following that spirit. If we do not follow it, we may make noise and win the esteem of men, but we shall not do all the good that God expects of us."*

*The Mayet Memoirs*

## A liveable spirit

It's basically a very liveable and ordinary spirit. We are called to live our Christian lives as Mary lived her Christian life. This cannot be threatening to anyone, as Mary could not have threatened anyone. It is a spirituality which accepts the ordinary realities of any life but quietly seeks to make God the centre of that life just as Mary the "perfect disciple" did. Its simplicity is that of Mary. All this will mean a radical but simple following: as Mary did at Nazareth without fuss or show; brave and suffering as Mary was at Calvary; joyful, generous and loving as Mary was in the infant Church after Pentecost.



## Being ordinary

It is sometimes referred to as "being ordinary". But when you come to think of it, in the present day – or at any time for that matter – "being ordinary" doesn't mean "being like everyone else", for the simple reason that "everyone else" is *not* "being ordinary".

Most of us are acting a part or many parts, trying to "prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet". All of us could make our own that beautiful prayer of St. Augustine: "Lord, let me know myself, let me know you."

In a special way, the "spirit of Mary" is precisely the knowing of these two people, myself and God.

I suppose this attitude, to ourselves, to others, and to God, has always been attractive, because it is unobtrusive, sincere, and empty of all self-seeking, and perhaps because in any age it is always so rare. But there is no doubt it is particularly attractive today.

*Kevin Maher, sm*

## Unifying principle

Should we go... in search of a unifying principle for the Marist spirit, we can find it only in fidelity to the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who guided Mary and fashioned her soul; it was the Holy Spirit who inspired and helped Father Colin to understand the mystery of Mary; it is the Holy Spirit who, working in the Church and in the Society which forms part of it, enables Marists to discover today how they can follow in the footsteps of Mary and of their Founder. In this sense, to live the Marist spirit is to listen to the Holy Spirit who speaks to us through our position in the Society of Mary. The Society is completely defined by its belonging to Mary, whose life it wishes to live; it was moulded by the spiritual intuitions of a founder who, more than any other, realised the religious and apostolic value of effacement; it strives to bring that Marian and Marist life into the Church of today. It is insofar as they take all these elements of their vocation together that Marists are faithful to the Holy Spirit, and it is this fidelity to the Holy Spirit on the part of all Marists in their common vocation which constitutes the Marist spirit.

*Jean Coste, sm*

## First line of approach

The first line open to Marists in their attempt to get a clear idea of their spirit, is to accept in the spirit of faith and thanksgiving the reality of their vocation, the bond which it sets up between them and Mary and the resultant obligation to live the life of their mother. Calling these spiritual facts to mind... and recognising in them the principles of their common vocation, they carry its message throughout their whole lives, striving constantly to deepen their sense of living in Mary's presence. They have two means to achieve this: meditation on the spiritual personality of Mary as we find it in the New Testament, and direct prayer to her as she reigns in glory beside her Son, inspiring and supporting them in their struggle. Insofar as they find a place in their lives for these fundamental "exercises" – the life-breath of a Marist soul, – insofar as the person of Mary and the Christian values of which she is the incarnation become for them a source of light and strength, will the members of the Society be really penetrated and animated by her spirit.

*Jean Coste, sm*

