

Portraits and last words

The Marist project has this special feature: it is not the work of one founder. Each of its different branches had its own collaborator whose personality and temperament shaped and coloured the original insight. The portraits and last words of each of them can tell us a great deal about their contribution.

Jeanne-Marie Chavoin's portrait reveals a woman of strength and basic down-to-earth humility and realism. She quickly grasped the essence of the Marist project, giving it an interpretation that was fresh and new; and, despite the difficulties and contradictions she experienced, all that she envisaged for her Sisters and which Colin wished to change has become real. Just a month before her death she wrote to Colin urging him to write the Rule for her Sisters, insisting that this was his responsibility and gift to the Marist project.

The only image we have of *Jean-Claude Colin* is a photograph taken when he was an old man of 76. Mayet found it difficult to recognise Colin. "The pose he was obliged to take is really quite out of character, totally contrary to his real self and manner of bearing", he wrote. Of all the founders, Colin was the one who reflected most on the original Marist insight. He was a man of a single idea: "Mary supported the Church as it came to birth: she will do so again at the end of time." On that idea a whole spirituality has been built.

At the end of his life, as *Marcellin Champagnat* lay on his death bed, his Brothers realised that they had no painting of him. It was only after he died and before he was buried that a portrait of him was made. His face was already ravaged by his terminal illness. The energy, dynamism and expansive love which were so much part of the spirit of this man who carved his congregation's house out of the rock and built his whole life on the rock of faith, are not evident. But that energy and love for the Marist project is breathed in his dying words.

The only photograph we have of *Françoise Perroton* does little justice to the lay woman who at age 49 left everything to go to the end of the world. She would hardly have imagined being photographed in the habit of a religious sister. Yet she and the Pioneers always saw themselves as Marist, missionary and religious. More than once she was offered the chance to be other than Marist. She refused each time; and despite neglect, misunderstanding and conflict from the very people from whom she may have hoped to find help, she remained true to her wish to be Marist.



Chavoin's last words

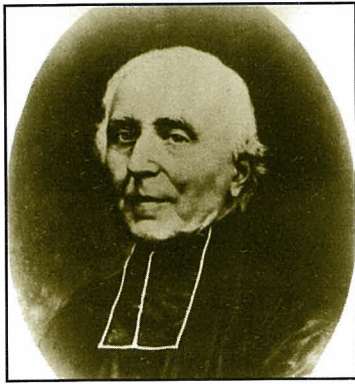
Pray for me, be very united among yourselves, love simplicity.

Look, (Mary) is your Mother, you must promise her inviolable fidelity; but remember, if you want her love and protection, you must love and imitate her: be always humble and unassuming like her, docile to superiors; love work and the hidden life. Simplicity, the very greatest simplicity, should be your only ornament; never imitate those communities who seek to please the world by adopting its ways.

A Marist sister's sole desire should be to resemble the little family at Nazareth – there she will find the perfect models of poverty, simplicity and love.

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 blessings on this house.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Chavoin'. The ink is dark and the style is fluid and personal.



Colin's Last Testament

The idea of a religious Society under the name of the Mother of God, and utterly consecrated to her, filled my heart with consolation and joy. This joy was accompanied by a confidence that I would say amounted to certitude. I was in my innermost self convinced that the idea came from God and that the Society would succeed.

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.

I leave everything in the hands of that Divine Providence which until now has cared for the Society in so fatherly a manner, and which will surely guide the Society towards its goal by the paths of mercy known to it alone. If God deigns to show me mercy when I appear before Him, I shall have you ever in mind. I shall beseech Mary to preserve and increase in you a love of the poor and hidden life, a spirit of humility, of self-denial, of close union with God and brotherly love.



Champagnat's Last Testament

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!"

I die with sentiments of grateful and respectful submission to the Superior General of the Society of Mary, and in the closest bonds of union with all its members, especially the Brothers, who in the designs of Providence were to come under my care and who have always had a special claim on my affection.

Dear Brothers, love your vocation, be faithful and steadfast to the end, with manly courage. What a consolation we have, to remember that we have lived in the favour of Mary, and in her own Society. May it please our good Mother to preserve you, give you increase and bring you to holiness.



*From the Letters
of Françoise Perrotton*

They think in France that I have done some good in Oceania. Don't you believe it, I haven't done anything yet.

For 12 years I was alone!

I thought in 1845 that I was going to do marvels in Oceania. 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 Uvean language. The same thing applies to the Futunian: the result is that what I have been able to do is reduced to very little. But let me draw a veil over the past; a new era is beginning.

I am very happy and proud to have launched the movement; my 13 years of trial will be counted among the best times of my life. I would never have dared to hope for such happiness, for I had resigned myself to die here alone.

My gratitude to God should be as great as the ocean.