

## *"Instruments of divine mercy"*

To do "the work of Mary" is not to do something directed *towards* her, but in a sense, to do something directed *by* her. It is to enter into her work. Our times require a new way of inviting people to believe in God and Jesus Christ, and as far as Jean-Claude Colin could see these times require an approach motivated always by mercy. Colin saw his age as one of "pride, madness and unbelief" where the human sickness had reached as far as the head. The spirit of the Revolution had left its mark; by means of power and violence a new form of society was to be established. Freedom, equality, fraternity were to be enforced with passionate effort – even with bloodshed. Unfortunately, the church's reaction to this new problem was not much better; she too stooped to using a similarly heavy-handed approach, with fiery sermons, imposition of spiritual power, stirring up guilt, and so on. Father Colin was convinced that the biggest obstacle to the Church's credibility was often the lives and attitudes of the priests and religious, who often enough seemed to be furthering their own recognition rather than promoting the Kingdom of God. The solution lay with people whose attitude did not place them at centre-stage; and more than that, whose attitude flowed from recognizing that Mary is a Mother of Mercy. It may be significant that the day that the first 20 Marists made their first Professions was the feast of Our Lady of Mercy. But one thing is clear: their understanding of Mary as a Mother of Mercy goes back to the first revelation at Le Puy, when she was heard to say: "Here is what I want..." What she wants is that all be gathered and brought to heaven, so that in the last days, as at the beginning, all will be united in mind and heart. Colin frequently uses the word "gathering" to describe the attitude of men and women called Marists. This word "gathering", and the other words he uses to describe the activity of Marists – "uniting", "harmonising", "in the bosom" "an embrace open to all" – are all distinctively "feminine" in tone, and the significant thing is that they are the sort of words used in the Scriptures to describe the attitude of God towards the sinner. When Colin asks Marists to be "instruments of divine mercy", he is asking them to portray the "feminine features" of God, and to help to build a church which is not perceived in terms of power, planning, control, administration and competitiveness, but rather in terms of community, compassion, simplicity, mercy and fellowship.

*Words recorded between 1838 and 1848*

*"Let us learn to understand the human heart. Let us put ourselves in the place of those we are speaking to. Would outbursts of invective against us win our hearts? Let us on the contrary find excuses for them, congratulate them on their good qualities (there are always some), but no reproaches. I do not know of a single instance where invective from the pulpit has done any good, not a single one...."*

*"In the Society we shall profess all those opinions which give greatest play to the mercy of God...."*

*'For myself, I follow the same approach as the Romans do. I am very fond of those principles: 'All for souls' and 'Salvation before law'...'"*

*The Mayet Memoirs*

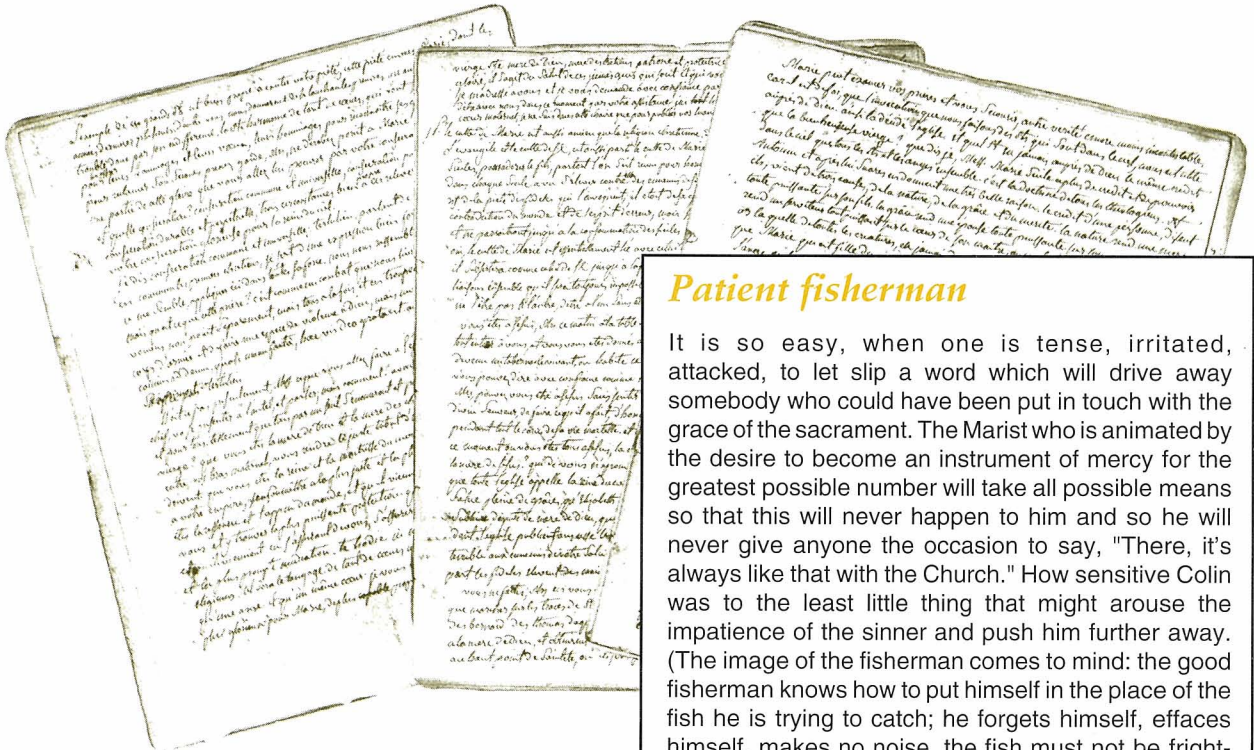
## *Care for the fragile*

If there is one characteristic about Father Colin that most impresses me, it is his deep sensitivity to the fragility of every human person. The goals he sets for Marists, the challenges he presents them, are formidable, but it seems to me that they are transmitted with a gentleness that seeks to inspire, to encourage, to urge on rather than to demand, to intimidate or to frighten. He knows how easily we and those whom we serve "get broken", so he urges us to live constantly in those Presences that mend – Jesus and Mary. He exhorts us to be present supportingly, understandingly, lovingly and frequently to one another, and he instructs us to deal sensitively, compassionately and gently with those we serve.

*John Sajdak, sm*



To Jean-Claude Colin who never really knew his own father or mother, and who was brought up by an uncle and a difficult housekeeper, Mary became the ideal Mother, the one in whom we can take refuge in all our difficulties. Reproduced below is one of his earliest sermons, in which he gives a striking description of his image of Mary. "She is the mother, who in her tenderness, is more of a mother than all the mothers on earth, the mother of all Christians for whom she underwent at Calvary all the pain of childbirth; whose motherly heart is forever open to all, and whose boundless charity extends to all ages of the new Covenant, to all nations and all people; comforts all miseries, meets all needs, grants all prayers."



### Patient fisherman

It is so easy, when one is tense, irritated, attacked, to let slip a word which will drive away somebody who could have been put in touch with the grace of the sacrament. The Marist who is animated by the desire to become an instrument of mercy for the greatest possible number will take all possible means so that this will never happen to him and so he will never give anyone the occasion to say, "There, it's always like that with the Church." How sensitive Colin was to the least little thing that might arouse the impatience of the sinner and push him further away. (The image of the fisherman comes to mind: the good fisherman knows how to put himself in the place of the fish he is trying to catch; he forgets himself, effaces himself, makes no noise, the fish must not be frightened away.)

Gaston Lessard, sm

### A message of humanness

Today's society is far more interested in what a person can achieve than in what or who he or she is. This is a very uncompassionate way of dealing with people, since they are seen solely in terms of use.... It is against this move towards inhumanity that Marists are called to keep alive the message of mercy and humanness. We have to try and develop a climate where no one will be manipulated or excluded. This means that we have to try and break down carefully all forms of uncompassion within the Church itself (exclusion from the sacraments of remarried couples, of divorced people, and of married priests). Following Colin's intention we should try to build a community between the "just" (those at home in the Church) and "sinners" (those excluded from the Church). The first inspiration to found our society was given to a person who would later very much need the mercy of God and of his fellow men, Father Courveille.

Friedrich Arnold, sm

### Compassion and forgiveness

"Neither do I condemn you."

Christ showed compassion and never condemned anyone who asked for forgiveness. To be compassionate is the first step in forgiveness. That is why I think a compassionate priest is really good to go to for reconciliation. I know one priest I used to go to was an alcoholic - and he had such a compassionate attitude - I could really feel him taking on my faults - not excusing them or anything - but from his heart he had compassion. I could tell that from his weakness he reached out to me - that was the first step in coming before God in reconciliation.