

A STUDY OF THE NAME AND PURPOSE OF THE SOCIETY: Article 1 of Fr. Colin's 1872 Constitutions¹

It is significant that Father Colin chose to open the Constitutions with a long text in which he places under the eyes of his confreres the principal elements of their Marist life and the obligations which flow from them. This first article of our code of rules thus plays the role of a fundamental meditation. This will perhaps be better understood when we remember that the beginning of the Ignatian *Formula*, from which Father Colin received some of his inspiration, followed upon the famous meditation on the Kingdom, center of the *Spiritual Exercises*. We would have, it seems, a precious key to the interpretation of our first article if we look to it, in some way, as a meditation on the Kingdom of Mary. Mary reminds those who wish to work in the Society which bears her name of the conditions of the enterprise and of the internal spirit which is necessary if we are to fight under her leadership. Having thus renewed his interior offering, the Religious is ready to read with fruit his book of Rules.

The words used here by Father Colin were chosen not for their technical precision but rather for their power of suggestion. It was his purpose to bring the novice or the professed Marist who reread this page to a generous acceptance of the service of Mary and not to define the exact place of marian devotion in the spirituality of Marists. Father Founder has chosen to address his Religious directly and to invite them to meditate on the meaning of the name which they bear. In the course of our commentary this central idea will enlighten us and it will be easier for us to determine the meaning of this and that expression in relation to the literary whole and to the spiritual intention which gives our text its individuality.

From the very beginning was given the name Society of Mary.

The expression *from the beginning* as applied to the Society of Mary is not rare under the pen of Father Colin. All Marists will readily recall the phrase of N. 49 of the 1872 Constitutions: "*whom they have chosen from the beginning as their model and their first and perpetual superior.*" But exactly what did Father Founder mean by these words?

In the *Summarium* of 1833 (s) it is clear that this expression refers to the project made at the Major Seminary of Lyons in 1816, mention of which is made at the beginning (cf. *Summarium*, nn. 1, 5 & 125). It would seem to have the same meaning in our text. Historically, it was at the Major Seminary that our Congregation received the name Society of Mary, proposed by Abbe Courveille. Father Colin is himself our witness to this fact.

Summarising Father Colin's declarations on the origins of the Society, Father Jeantin noted in 1869: "It is true that even before coming to the Seminary he entertained the thought of founding a Society dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. But he had not thought of the name Society of Mary; this name comes from Abbe Courveille".

Such a clear declaration leaves no doubt on the intermediary through which our name came to us. But in the eyes of Father Founder, the role played in such an important affair by this or that individual was merely that of a secondary cause with respect to the providential design which was being manifested through him. We are reminded of this in the words *was given*.

We would indeed be wrong should we see in these words any idea of chance or accident. The word is to be taken here in the sense in which it is found in the New Testament where it refers to the obtaining of something to which a person has been destined by God (c.f. Acts 1:17; Hb. 8:6). Another phrase of Father Founder shows us very clearly what he meant by *was given*: "Nineteen centuries after the establishment of the Church, there appears a little Society: the name of Mary had been *held in reserve* for it and given to it by God..."²

Historically, it is impossible to maintain that the name *Society of Mary* was first coined for our Congregation. It is certain that Father de Clorivière had given the name to the congregation of women known today as the *Daughters of Mary*, and that a group of French priests exiled to Spain had already in 1795 conceived the idea of founding a *Society of Mary*. It is in a manner which is totally independent of the Marists that Father Chaminade was to give, a year after them, the name of *Society of Mary* to his congregation of men. This name can be said to have been "in the air" at the beginning of what was to be a marian century and we cannot consider it as our exclusive property.

It cannot be denied, however, that no other congregation was approved by the Holy See before ours under the name of Society of Mary. This fact had been brought to the attention of Father Colin in Rome itself and he

¹ Reproduced in its entirety as the major portion of n. 7 in our current 1984 Constitutions. The text of this article was in fact written shortly after the approbation of 1836, as an introduction to the Rules of the Society. We find it for the first time in the Epitome (e), then in the Constitutions of 1842 (a) where it takes on practically the form it is in here.

² JEANTIN V, 268

did not fail to see in this a special grace of God (c.f. FS 118,2; 161,6; 172,23). But more than a source of vanity, this name was for him a source of responsibility. The important thing is not to know whether this name gives us a certain pre-eminence over other congregations dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, but rather whether we are faithful to what it implies for us. In that sense, the question which Father Colin asked of the Marists of 1848 should still be heard by us: “It is a remarkable thing (they told me so in Rome) that no one until now had thought to adopt the name which our Society bears. Are we worthy of it?”

This very name indicates the banner under which it desires to serve in fighting the battles of the Lord and what its spirit should be.

To be worthy of our name... In the rest of this first article, Father Founder gives us the main lines of this difficult program by commenting on the various “indications” which we can draw from this name.

First of all, may we be allowed to insist on the phrase *this very name indicates*. We would be wrong if we thought that this is merely the expression of a logical transition. If our name is full of meaning for us, it is because the very fact that we bear it places us in a very special relationship with the Blessed Virgin. The fact that she gave us this name and the fact that we accepted it established between her and us a kind of covenant in the biblical sense. From then on, Mary and her little Society are linked together, in a sense, and the conduct of the latter has a bearing on the honour of the former. Father Colin was acutely aware of this alliance and he used to expound with great spiritual assurance its two complementary aspects: a) Prayer to Mary in difficulties so that she will look after her own glory by coming to the aid of those who bear her name; b) generous acceptance by the Society of its obligation to render honour at all times to the name which it bears.

These thoughts bring us to the very rich consequences which Father Colin derives from our name. At the same time, they can help us achieve a deeper appreciation of our patronal feast of the Holy Name of Mary. For the subject of our meditation on September 12th should be less the literal meaning of the name “Miriam” (very common among the Jews) than the gracious gesture by which Mary had made us her sons by giving us her name. The texts of Father Founder should help us think about the responsibilities which we have contracted relative to the Blessed Virgin on the day we accepted her name by entering the Society of Mary.

We have here the first of the military metaphors which Father Colin takes up again in the second part of this article and in several other places in the Constitutions (c.f. 1872 Constitutions: nn. 311, 438, and especially n. 201 of the 1842 Constitutions). On this point Father Colin was inspired by St. Ignatius, former soldier of Pamplona, Founder of a Company which is readily compared to a well disciplined army... And yet, once we have admitted this certain influence of the Ignatian text on ours, we must rise higher to consider this question of a military comparison, failing which we would not understand its full meaning.

It is to the Old Testament that we are invited to look by the words *battles of the Lord*³ and especially by the expression *fighting the battles of the Lord* used by Father Colin in the text of 1842 (a. 355) and, since Father Favre, inserted in our first article. The Bible leaves no doubt that the wars of the Lord to which David was dedicating himself were military in the full sense of the word. On the other hand, it is to a purely spiritual fight that St. Paul calls the Christian in several passages of his epistles. The title “soldier of Christ”, which he was the first to use (2Tm 2:3), was applied “par excellence” to the martyrs of the period of persecution. Then, when the first anchorites took over from the martyrs the first places in the combats of the Church, they took to themselves the title *Miles Christi* and the military metaphors. These expressions therefore, form part of the oldest patrimony of the Religious State. St. Ignatius, when he used similar expressions, was not introducing something entirely new. And yet these military comparisons were to be enriched considerably under his pen.

Until his time, this warlike imagery had served to illustrate especially the individual and defensive character of Christian life. The armour of Christians according to St. Paul was composed only of defensive arms and the spiritual combat of the monk was directed above all against the onslaughts of the devil. With St. Ignatius, the military metaphors take a new apostolic direction. Their purpose is to invite the Religious to engage freely and generously in the service of the Eternal King and of his Vicar, the Pope, by being ready to go wherever the needs of the Church might call him. What is expressed in them is the idea of a mission given only by Jesus Christ and which is the source of complete apostolic self-renunciation.

For St. Ignatius the war-like imagery was not used to insist on the necessity for obedience and discipline, but rather to lead to generosity and sacrifice. “When we speak today of armies and military service, we think of the rigorous discipline introduced in modern armies since the time of Frederick II and Napoleon I. For St. Ignatius, the terms “soldier” and “army” recalled rather the knights of the middle ages.”⁴ This wise remark helps

³ Nm. 32:20; Jud 3:10

⁴ P. Blet, *SJ Notes on Ignatian Obedience* GREGORIANUM XXXV, p. 102

us to understand how Father Colin could himself take up again this military terminology. The spirit of military barracks is hardly compatible with the marian spirit. But if by fighting under the leadership of Mary we understand that we engage ourselves spontaneously in her service to defend the honour of her Son and her own, there are few expressions which could have better rendered the attitude which Father Founder wanted us to adopt with regard to the Blessed Virgin.

The simple word *desires* shows us how, far from evoking a picture of brilliant cavalcades, this image was rather an invitation to the practice of the most interior and mortified virtues. The famous meditation on the Two Standards, in the second week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, insists explicitly on this disposition to interior self-renunciation and places it under the protection of the Blessed Virgin. We have here the beginning of a spiritual tradition in which our Father Founder found his place.

It is only after the Renaissance that there blossomed forth the idea of taking Mary as the one who would inspire apostolic action and that the expression “to fight under the banner of Mary” implied special interior dispositions. The meaning of this fight under the banner of Mary is connected intimately on the one hand with the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 on the enmity between the Woman and the serpent, and on the other hand with the conviction that Mary has a special role to play at the end of the world. These are the very elements which we find in the mouth of Father Colin while the hypothesis of direct dependence is in fact excluded historically:

“From the very origin of our Society, I have had this sentiment in the depths of my soul, that it was destined to fight against Antichrist under the banner of the one who crushed the head of the infernal dragon”⁵

One must note, however, that allusions to Genesis 3:15 are far less frequent in Father Colin’s writings than in those of say St. Grignon de Montfort or Father Chaminade. To find a reference to the banner which is more characteristic of the spirit of Father Founder, we should consider what he told the scholastics in Belley after recommending to them the study of the *Imitation of the Blessed Virgin*: “We are enlisted under her banner; let our only care be to imitate her.”⁶ The intimate relation between the idea of apostolic work and that of imitation of Mary is, in fact, one of the points on which Father Colin went further than any of his predecessors or contemporaries. Nowhere is that relation more evident than here in our first article.

Father Colin, in 1868, decided to devote a special article of the Constitutions to the spirit of the Society. Before the writing of that article *The Spirit of the Society*, it was in this first article that Marists were to seek a description of their spirit, it is this text which our first Fathers meditated most often during the generalate of Father Colin. Today, by comparing this article written by Father Colin in the prime of life and the article *The Spirit of the Society* in which he was to express, later on, his preoccupations as Founder looking back on his work, we can get a more comprehensive view of what our spirit meant to the one who communicated it to us.

It is distinguished by this sweet name, Society of Mary so that all who are admitted into it, mindful of the family to which they belong

At the time of the Fathers, the Latin word *mellifluus* (sweet) said ‘from which flow grace and salvation.’ Later, the word lost this pregnant meaning and retained only the connotation of sweetness. Fr. Colin certainly followed the usage of his time. He would have said: the sweet name of Society of Mary. But the use of this traditional term carried with it no daintiness, and, while the image which it conveys may irk our modern taste, nothing forbids us from reading in it now the meaning which it would have had for a contemporary of St. Augustine.

Distinguished is to be found in St. Ignatius and means simply *marked*. Despite the military context, there is no allusion here to the army ensigns. The word conveys only the idea of a mark impressed permanently on a certain being. The name of Mary is fixed to the Society as an indelible character.

Fr. Colin then presents the first of two points to be developed. As the text now stands, these two points are grouped around two main images: Mary’s family and Mary’s army. The distinction underlying the twofold division is that of the two complementary aspects of Marist life, namely our *duties* towards Mary and Mary’s *support* in our toil. Duties on the one hand, free gifts on the other: here are once more both aspects of the Covenant binding the Society to the BI. Virgin. Such a reciprocity flows from the very name given to the Society by Mary. We must now, therefore, consider in detail the duties resting on us and the aids which we can rely on in fulfilling them.

The important sub-clause *mindful of the family to which they belong* was not in the text of the Epitome.

⁵ JEANTIN, VI, 242

⁶ JEANTIN IV, 45

When, to the original image of Mary's army, Fr. Founder added in 1842 that of a family, was he merely embellishing his text with a literary frill? We do not think so.

The word *family* was traditionally used in the Church to mean a religious congregation. However, at least in the Middle Ages, the mere use of the word *family* did not necessarily connote a family in the modern acceptance of the word. The original meaning, designating the body of slaves, the household, had remained alive in Christianity, which, in describing the Church as the *family of God*, refers to the body of the *family*, the servants of God. It is very likely in a similar sense that religious congregations were at first said to be *family*, insofar as their members serve God in a very special way.

At any rate, the family-idea was of current use with Fr. Colin, and this in direct reference to the Marian status of our Congregation, as can be seen by reading once more Numbers 31 and 114 of the 1833 Summarium and Numbers 22, 408 and 453 of the 1872 Constitutions. These various texts are above all appeals for mutual union: in them, Fr. Colin stresses as the ground for this union our belonging to the same family of Mary.

However, and this is where Fr. Colin's personality best appears, this reference to the family-idea extends beyond the domain of exhortations to brotherly love. Our belonging to Mary's family is a basic fact which we must ever recollect. The stress laid by Fr. Colin on remembrance in this matter is striking (c.f. nn. 1; 321; 219 49). This very stress lays bare for us Fr. Colin's mind: our belonging to Mary's family hangs entirely on a grace, on a gracious choice by Mary. This initial grace is what we must not forget, that recalled without ceasing, gives our Marist life its true meaning. The brotherly love of Marists for one another is not what makes them a family, but rather a free act of the Virgin who chooses them as her sons by drawing them into the same Society. In fact, we know how the first Marists, through spontaneous and yearly renewed consecrations, would "commemorate" that choice of themselves by Mary.

Basically dependent on that initial election, the Society's and each Marist's mission has no living meaning but through the faithful remembrance of that grace. Such a remembrance, therefore, plays a decisive part in the very understanding of our duties towards the Virgin Mary.

Understand that they are to emulate the virtues of this holy Mother and indeed even to live her life

The founders of the 19th-century Societies of Mary, Frs. Chaminade and Colin, both worked out at the same time the idea that imitating Mary can animate a religious and apostolic life. For both Founders, such an imitation flows from the very nature of their Institute and from the peculiar sonship which binds the religious to Mary their Mother. In Fr. Chaminade's words:

"The spirit of the Institute is Mary's spirit: this explains everything. If you are Mary's children, imitate Mary"⁷

That text is strikingly parallel with the one under comment. Like Fr. Chaminade, Fr. Colin considers that the imitation of Mary is directly implied in our belonging to a family which Mary brought together, to which she gave her name and which must live of her spirit. In the preface to the Copy of his Memoirs, Fr. Mayet himself admits:

"Tome VI, Love and Imitation of Mary, is of necessity very incomplete, for every article of the twenty-two tomes, every thought and word of Fr. Founder's could be summed up in these four words: 'Love, Imitation of Mary.'

For a synthesis in his own words, of how Fr. Founder conceived the imitation of Mary, one may look up the last paragraph *De Cultu B. Mariae*. There one will see how closely Fr. Founder links the call for imitation with Mary's special motherhood in our respect, and how purposely general this program of imitation remains: clearly this is not a devout "exercise" among others, but a basic principle of conduct. In fact, the expressions still to be commented upon will provide precious hints as to how to set about this imitation.

To start with, it will be well to recall the specific nature of this article: far from being the carefully measured language of a theologian, these lines are a forceful spiritual exhortation where Fr. Founder spares nothing by way of figures and evocative comparisons. Hence we must avoid taking him in a strict theological sense. Just as he has no direct doctrinal intent, still less does Fr. Colin want to lead us on to openly mystical ground. We shall let Fr. Colin explain to us, in his own tongue, the basic idea of the Constitutions' first lines:

"We stand by our state and by our duty in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and of His Divine Mother; let our every thought, every stirring of our hearts, our every step be worthy of our august models. *Let us live their life*; let us think as they thought; let us judge things as they themselves judged them. Let our union

⁷ Quoted in Neubert, LA DOCTRINE MARIALE DE M. CHAMINADE, p.87

with them through prayer be such that we never lose sight of them and that the world with its deceitful glory be to us what it was to the great Apostle; “The world is crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14)

This fine passage is taken from a Circular Letter of April 1, 1842, whereby Fr. Colin announced to the Society that he had finished his work on the Rule. It is, therefore, a particularly authoritative expression of Fr. Colin’s mind, at the time when he was about to spread in the Society the article under comment. We cannot hesitate to acknowledge it as a faithful echo of the latter.

We should note first of all the phrase used by Fr. Colin: *Let us live their life*. In French, this is a current turn of speech. One will readily say, for instance, that an officer “lives the life of his men,” or that a guest, during his stay in a home, “lives the life of the family.” Thus, to live the life of Mary, would consist in taking on the Mary “way of life.” This is exactly the kind of interpretation which fits very well in the context of Article One. Enrolled as we are in the Virgin’s army, received as we are into her family, it is natural that we should try to share her life and take her in everything as our standard. Rather than a theological or mystical ring, Fr. Colin’s phrase has, we think, a psychological import and fits in beautifully with a whole series of features which tend to arouse us to putting ourselves generously at Mary’s service.

Under Fr. Founder’s imagery, we must endeavour to get as exactly as we can, the real frame of mind that he wishes us to take on. Here the passage quoted above can be a precious help to us, for, in it, after writing the key-words: “Let us live their life,” Fr. Founder enlarges on them by pointing out to us two ways of carrying them out.

The first consists very concretely in looking up to what we know of the life of Jesus and Mary in order to liken ourselves to it: “Let us think as they thought; let us judge things as they themselves judged them.” By so placing ourselves before Jesus and Mary such as we know them historically through the Gospel, we come upon a standard which is as objective and reliable as it is highly exacting. In this way, without audacious or over-strong phrases, without deviating from the most simple path of Christian tradition, Fr. Founder lays down for us such a program as opens up to our good wills an unlimited field of action.

The second attitude proposed to us by Fr. Founder is prayer. Jesus and Mary are not figures such that it will be enough to gaze at their life in the past simply by way of meditation. Union with them through prayer is the only means of not losing sight of them and of entering the supernatural world in which they lived themselves.

Above all in humility, obedience, self-denial, mutual charity and love of God.

In the text of the Epitome (e) only three virtues were mentioned: *humility, obedience and love of God*. A fifth, namely *self-denial* was added to the text of 1869. These changes indicate already that, in Fr. Founder’s mind, there was not a closed list of Marist virtues. Fr. Colin’s fluctuations in describing Marian virtues is highly instructive. Nothing can bring out more clearly the fact that Fr. Colin did not rest on a theoretical classification of the virtues of the Virgin Mary, but was trying to put across a living reality which he could not corner once and for all, namely the life of Mary such as it appears to us in its concrete reality through the Gospel text.

As the Gospel writers set it up before us, Mary’s personality features a number of characteristics which distinctly single her out as a spiritual figure. In the infancy Gospel in particular, Mary clearly stands as the ultimate fruit of the religious trend represented by the “Poor of Israel,” which was one day to be called blessed by Christ. Humility, trust in God, poverty, submissiveness, charity, these are indeed the most typical qualities of that family of spirits, whose most genuine representative is to be found in Mary. By thus firmly underlining these virtues for us by the use of the superlative *above all*, Fr. Founder, with unerring instinct, was sending us back to that which historically made Mary an original human type. We are justified in thinking that here lies the secret of the vividness and power with which Fr. Founder worked out the idea of imitating Mary.

For there can be no doubt that Fr. Colin’s first concern was to go back to the Gospel text. Admittedly, his personal devotion to Mary bore the strong imprint of Mary of Agreda’s “Mystical City”, but nevertheless, at the time when he was in the care of souls, he did not want, says Fr. Mayet, “to go on reading this work, lest, in the pulpit, he should mingle what he had been reading with what we know from the Gospel and from Tradition.”⁸ Later on, he even forbade Marists to read it. He would recommend, on the contrary, P. de Rouville’s “Imitation de la T. S. Vierge,” which is generally based on the Gospel text. But his wish was that “someone from the Society should produce a work on the virtues and deeds of Mary which would be like a Marist handbook and

⁸ Mayet, MÉMOIRES T. I, p.509

where the entire life of the Mother of God would be set out in meditation form.”⁹ “I would like to see done for us, he added, what others have done on the life of Our Lord.” Here, Fr. Mayet notes down, “he became somewhat confused: I believe he meant the Exercises of St. Ignatius, but he did not mention them by name.”

This last remark is of capital importance. We understand readily that Fr. Colin, out of modesty, declined to compare to the Exercises of St. Ignatius, the work which he wished to see realised. But there can be no doubt that this is what he meant. A series of meditations on Mary’s life would have been a natural complement to the basic meditation on the Reign of Mary which Fr. Founder gives us in Article One, just as the meditations on Christ’s life which make up the body of the Exercises: later completed the original meditation on the Reign of Christ.

Such a comparison is very natural in view of what we know of the influence of St. Ignatius on Fr. Founder, and it brings out to the full what the latter was contemplating for us when recommending that we imitate Mary’s virtues: not a strictly drawn up set of virtues to be copied, but rather a continuous pondering of the life of the B.V. Virgin, whereby little by little her way of thinking and judging would become our own, and which would make us genuine soldiers of Mary, ever ready to react as would the leader whose spirit they have utterly made their own.

In the various works they undertake for the greater service of God, keeping before their eyes this lovable Queen of angels and of men, fired by the example of so great a leader

Fr. Founder now comes to the second part of Article One, where he will bring out the help and support bestowed on us by Mary in our pursuit of the ends of the Society. Again we shall find ourselves before military metaphors which he introduces by recalling the universal Queenship of Mary. The phrase *for the greater service of God*, in a context so deeply concerned with Mary, stands as a timely reminder that our action is God-centered, which of course was understood throughout the whole article.

Effectively, in Fr. Founder’s mind, Mary’s title of Queen was closely linked up with the idea of an apostolic mission of Mary for our time. After he had resigned, Fr. Colin gave the members of the General Chapter of 1854 what was already in a way his first spiritual testament, wherein he stated spiritedly:

“You have a fine career, a magnificent horizon lies before you. You have at your head the Queen of Heaven who, at the end of time, wishes to honour you with her blessed name. Who is there but would not see a special protection of Mary in the growth of our Society?”

Thus, rather than having in mind the Mother of God in her heavenly triumph, Fr. Colin is here thinking of the war-leader who wishes to spread her rule over the world and who picks out choice troops for this purpose. Fr. Colin does not intend to flatter our ambitions or our dreams of success. On the contrary, what matters is to follow and imitate our Leader in those aspects of her life which are most exacting and show forth most self-denial. We shall not be surprised, therefore, to see Fr. Colin bringing us back to the idea of a hidden and disinterested apostolate:

“Let there be among us no love of brilliancy, no seeking after fame. Let us imitate her who is our Queen; what a model Mary is. She bears the title of *Regina Apostolorum*, and rightly so; yet she is more hidden than any one of the apostles”.

Fr. Founder’s line of thought is on keeping Mary before one’s eyes in order to nourish one’s contemplation. Fr. Colin was certainly thinking in terms of a battle when he was urging us to look up to Mary. As one Marist Father told Fr. Mayet:

“He has urged us to fight generously against nature, to remember that we are the soldiers of Jesus and Mary, *to keep our eyes ever on our divine leaders* who stand at our side in person during the battle.”¹⁰

There again the idea of assistance stands out distinctly and we can thus see better the level where Fr. Colin was placing himself. He is thinking of discursive prayer as an unceasing prayer to be carried on in the very midst of action and of difficulties. Let it be enough here to recall the passage just quoted: “Let our union with them through prayer be such that *we never lose sight of them*,” and also the well known sentence put forth as a general resolution to be taken by Marists at the retreat of 1844:

“To do nothing, to say nothing, to undertake nothing, were only two words to be said, without first *looking up to Mary*.”

⁹ Mayet, MÉMOIRES T. I, p.509

¹⁰ Mayet MÉMOIRES, T. III, p. 278

The word *example* takes on a moral and active meaning (an action which stirs up emulation) and not a static one (a model to be copied.) Fr. Founder is thinking more in terms of the spiritual support which we gain from Mary's example than in terms of our being under some obligation to copy a model. Fr. Colin's mind is focused on a living person, Mary herself, at whose service we stand and who carries us along by the strength of her examples.

Renewed by her merits and prayers, with greater resolution and with a more lively confidence

Now that he has finished enumerating the various ways in which the B.I. Virgin activates and upholds the activity of Marists, Fr. Founder sums up the psychological profits of the second section of the article, namely that our awareness of belonging to Mary's army must warm up our courage and confidence in our pursuit of the ends of the Society. Here then is the second happy result of the Society bearing a Providence-given name. Fr. Founder himself provides us with an excellent commentary of this very idea in an exhortation given at the retreat of 1849:

“Ah! Gentlemen, what have we to fear? The Blessed Virgin leads us. She says to us: I walk before you. With the thought of the Blessed Virgin walking with him, who would not feel himself filled with courage and confidence to overcome all things? And then, if I think of the name I bear, what a source of hope and of assurance I have.”

Through her prayers, Mary is ever acting on our behalf, and her charity, united to her Son's, has merited for us the graces which we need for our life as Christians and as religious. Fr. Colin would stress readily the part thus played in our sanctification by the merits of Mary. To quote, among others, a passage from an exhortation given in 1841. After he had urged the Marists to honour the most minute actions of the Virgin, Fr. Founder went on:

“Her every action is full of grace. Her every action, even the smallest, has brought about infinite merits; these merits are ours. Let us put them on to approach her divine Son. Let us never appear before Jesus Christ without being covered with His Mother's merits.”

Spend themselves for their own perfection and the salvation of their neighbour

Fr. Founder's two-fold distinction of the chief ends of the Society is traditional in the Religious State since St. Ignatius. Historically, as is well known, the Founder of the Jesuits was original in that he put forth apostolic activity as an *end* of his Society, whereas no Order before him had ever dared elevate it to such a rank.

In writing the famous formula, St. Ignatius aimed less at distinguishing two separate ends one from the other, than at elevating the idea of the apostolate to the rank of an end, thereby setting it on a level with personal sanctification and thus paving the way for the radical reformation of monastic discipline. In reality, history shows that the apostolate grew out of the interior life of the Orders, and theology on the other hand makes Charity the key-stone of religious perfection, and this should make us wary of any too clear-cut distinction between two ends which are intimately interwoven and which cannot be pursued separately.

Hold more loyally to the Roman Catholic faith until death, defending it with all their strength

Recall the general structure of this article: bearing Mary's name and given heart by the Virgin, Marists will cling to Catholic Faith *more faithfully* than they would have done, had they not been granted that support. In a way, therefore, the Society's third end is linked up with its “Marian character.”

When Fr. Colin speaks of the Church, Rome is ever before his mind. The phrase that describes the Society's third end stresses directly, not attachment to the Holy See, but a more basic motion, namely the defence of Catholic Faith. Like all apostolic mottoes, explicit stressing of the defence of the Faith bears the imprint of a period, namely in our case, the beginning of the 19th century. In the midst of a general Catholic concern, Fr. Colin's way of seeing “the defence of the Faith” is, in our estimation, marked by a two-fold peculiarity which is worth pointing out.

First to be noted is the eschatological aspect in Fr. Founder's mind, of this violent battle in which Catholic Faith is at stake. Strongly impressed by the Gospel sentence: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?” (Lk. 18:8) Fr. Colin used to apply it currently to his own time, as he saw in the apostasy of his contemporaries a sign that this was the final phase of the Church's struggles. In the midst of this last struggle for the Faith, Fr. Founder (and here is the second characteristic of his conception) used to see Mary intervene with her might and, now ready, after she had triumphed over every heresy, to shatter forever the enemy of mankind. Many basic texts where we may find this two-fold aspect of Fr. Founder's thought, have been published by Fr. Jeantin, in Tome IV of his work. We shall here reproduce one:

“These are evil days, but Mary, who has soothed, shielded and saved the Church at birth will also save her in the end of time. I cannot say for sure that the end of time has come (in any case, it will soon come for us), but when one has read and pondered these words: *Do you think that when the Son of Man comes, he will still find a little Faith on earth?* and when, on the other hand, one sees so little Faith these days, one cannot help being afraid. Mary will use us, her children; let us make ourselves worthy of that mission. Through us, she will struggle against the devil and the world; through us, she will shatter them if, by the purity of our lives and the innocence of our hearts, we merit her graces and her favours.”

In seeing the struggles of his time for the defence of the Faith under an eschatological and Marian light, Fr. Founder was not exercising a monopoly. In making, however, the defense of Catholic Faith an end of his Institute, and above all by giving it, in the Society, the concrete shape of a never-failing attachment to the Holy See, Fr. Colin was being a very realistic innovator and was setting on our Congregation a very distinctive seal.

In this way be able to attain more fruitfully the purpose of the Society.

This peroration, which reveals the preacher holding the writer’s pen, brings a perilous sentence to an end by linking the *scope* of the Society with the *name* given it from the very beginning. We find thus, by way of conclusion, firmly stated anew the peculiar nature of the Society’s mission, insofar as it flows entirely from the Name graciously given it by Mary and taken up by us as a program and as a token of strength in our activity.

Conclusion

Our first article bears the character of a “fundamental meditation,” a literary form that explains largely the terms and comparisons used in it giving us a precious orientation for our reflection. First of all the general theme is indicated: the Name of the Society of Mary. Then come the spiritual consequences of this simple name: under whose banner we serve and what our spirit should be. Then come the two corresponding points (in reverse order: the family of Mary living in the spirit of its Mother; the army of Mary fighting under the inspirational leadership of its Chief). We pass then to the practical part: the objectives we hope to reach; the three ends of the Society. A spiritual bouquet then sums up the thought: *in this way be able to attain more fruitfully the purpose of the Society.*

The name Society of Mary establishes between Mary and the Marists a very strong link which the remainder of the article tries to evolve in its twofold and complementary aspect: *On our part*, the grateful memory of the choice which has brought us into Mary’s family, and the effort to reproduce Mary’s life by looking up to the basic features of her spiritual personality as they appear in the New Testament. *On Mary’s part*, constant help and support in the battles of the Lord afforded those who, under her leadership, strive to fulfill the Society’s threefold mission.

This pregnant text is thus profoundly pedagogical in that, through the images of the family and of the army of Mary, it leads the Society’s members to a realization of the place which the BI. Virgin must hold in their Marist life. Its main value lies in thus relating us to Mary and in linking us to her even before specifying the nature of the spirit proper to the Congregation. Nothing is more apt to make us realize how, before taking form in an ascetical or apostolic ideal, our Marist life must carry with it that personal union with Mary which alone can provide us with the drive required to carry out this program.

An acknowledgement of Mary’s initiative which maintains our religious life in humble and fruitful thanksgiving; the joy of belonging to her family which gives our communities such a cohesiveness as could not be secured by any common program; the will to work under her impulse which safeguards the personal touch and the supernatural orientation of our apostolate: such are the realities which we are called upon to live out, the very ones in which the first Marist generation found the secret of its wonderfully fruitful action.

By putting before us from the very first lines of the Constitutions this urgent call to commit ourselves generously in the service of Mary, Fr. Founder places us in the conditions required to attain fully the end of the Society. While listening to him, let us strive to reestablish that manly contact with Mary which can give our Marist life renewed vigor and can reopen before it the immense vistas which Fr. Colin had before his eyes.

Source: Jean Coste, (Abridged) ACTA n.19 pp. 23-47; n. 20 pp. 119-149; n. 21 pp. 229-237.