

INSIDE THE HOUSE IN NAZARETH AND FROM THERE

[A member of the organization committee said: “In July 1987, the council of the province, by the sweat of its brow, composed the following text: ‘Jean-Claude Colin’s intuition is in danger of losing its vitality if the Marist community does not reread the themes of Nazareth, Pentecost, and ‘unknown and hidden’ in a contemporary light. When Marists draw inspiration for their apostolate from these sources, they apply themselves to being in the Church an active reminder of what Mary was among the apostles, so that the Church itself might be present in this world as an unobtrusive seed of life.’ That is why we have organized this retreat on this theme.]¹

“A contemporary rereading of foundational Marist images.” I had no part in the wording of this title, and this allows me to say that I think it is excellent.

The first thing to be said is that we are going to reread, to engage in a rereading, or we might even better say, two rereadings. The first rereading consists in saying: “With the sheer repetition, do we repeat it as we should? Haven’t we conceived of these themes in a simplified, schematized, and impoverished fashion. Mustn’t we first rediscover what lay beneath this image in the founder’s mind? This is the way an historian rereads something.

Then there is another rereading, which is more our concern today, namely, what happens when, with regard to a theme, that of Nazareth for example, you say to yourselves: “After looking again at what Father Colin meant by that theme, does it tell us nothing at all or, on the contrary, do we feel how much it stimulates us today, how much it can still mean something to us? This rereading is the more important one. It would be regrettable if the image of Father Colin –not what I might have said, which is unimportant- but if the image of Father Colin were not, in the course of the day, taken up again and reread specifically from your very own perspective, our very own, that is, from a contemporary perspective.

1. *Returning to the early ideas and what this means*

From his resignation as superior general in 1854 until his death on 15 November 1875, the foundational image which dominated, expressed and summarized this period in Father Colin’s life, was the image of Nazareth. The following words were spoken just before his resignation, but they express well what he would say later:

When I see any tendency to make ourselves known, when I hear people talking about taking on colleges on a grandiose scale, when I see and hear that they would like to make a greater impression, see them set store only by their own abilities, making comparisons with others, nothing so cuts me to the heart. Are those the kind of attitudes that the sons of Mary should have? Did not our Lord choose poor men to be his apostles? (FS. 188, § 12).

Where does one find the link between a certain mode of conduct, on the one hand, and Mary and the apostles, on the other? In the myth of the primitive Church? But Colin had just said, immediately before the words cited above:

Our spirit, the spirit of the Society ... do you know where it is to be found? I personally find it in all its fullness at the house of Nazareth. Did Jesus seek to make himself known before the time fixed by his Father? (FS, 188, § 12).

Hanging together with the theme of the primitive Church (“let’s do like the apostles”) we now have Nazareth, the image which will not replace it but will prolong it and go more deeply into it. Before getting there, however, let’s stay for a while on the level of history, and let’s attempt more directly to understand Colin’s mindset.

a. A sign of senility?

What Colin says about Nazareth must of necessity be expressed in words, but each person’s life gives these words their import. What then could have been the meaning and the worth of Father Colin’s

¹ The following is one of four retreat talks given in Valpré, France

returning to his early ideas? First of all, wasn't it simply a sign of senility? When Father Colin drafts the constitutions, he is almost eighty years old. He is ill, unable to write himself and can read only with great difficulty. By extending this line of thought, couldn't it be said that he is cut off from reality, that he is just barely capable of nostalgically reliving the exciting Cerdon years when a Society was being constructed in a dream? Isn't he closed up in the ideal world of his youth which he is trying to live over? Isn't he repudiating the breadth of view he held in his adult life when he would say that in the Society's rule everything had to be expressed in general terms, that it should not include details which would hinder action?

I am asking the question as honestly as I can. I am not a psychoanalyst and there certainly is room for deeper studies. But I am giving you my testimony, and my answer is: no. After attempting to experience life with Colin through all the letters and bits of testimony we have on him from that period, I can say that Colin is not a man who lives enclosed in his own little world. At this point in his life, Colin is essentially a fighter, a realistic fighter. He wants to know which rule will finally be accepted and what will be left of the Society of Mary. He has a sense of his responsibility, and he is going to fight so that the ideas which he thinks are good will be incorporated into the rule. As a realistic fighter, he knows how to listen and discuss matters; he is going to acquiesce to the rule's including many things which he would have refused at first, because he realizes, through discussion, that this may be preferable. Jeantin and David ended up playing a very positive role as aides to Colin. Both were very faithful to Colin and had a better feel for the Society in the 1860's than he did. When Jeantin and David would say to him: "No, that point won't go; you are right, but..." Colin would answer: "Okay, from you, I'll accept that, because I know you are true Marists, full of the Marist tradition, but if it were Vitte saying that, no, never."²

Colin is able to discuss things, then. He can accept compromise solutions and can even sacrifice what were for him extremely important clauses. Thus, to come back to the superior in his council, you recall that he had set down the rule that, in the case in which the councillors were divided two against two, the superior should, through humility, give up his own position to vote with the position that was contrary to his own. Jeantin and David argue against this, saying that it would sanction the supremacy of the minority; a Society cannot be built on that. Colin, thus submitting to the advice of his counselors, agrees to suppress the words *aut etiam media* ["or even half"]. Another typical case of returning to an early idea is that of the subject's kneeling before the superior. Father Colin had written in his rule that, for the monthly visit by the religious to his superior, he would begin by bowing down on his knees before the superior and would get up when the superior told him: "Get up." Some Marists reacted violently and said: "That is unthinkable; such a thing cannot be asked these days." I wanted to understand what was behind this idea. Let's not think too quickly of the feudal vassal kneeling before his suzerain. It is much more complex than that. That is why I wanted to do a study on the topic.³ Here, let us pause only on the words Colin spoke when he agreed to suppress the words "he will kneel down": "Do not cancel these words with a pen, but only with a pencil, so that one can still see through." This is quite characteristic of what we have to do when faced with this rule, that is, we have to read through it, we have to try to see through his words, whether these are still there or whether he has ended up by suppressing them, what he wanted to tell us.

b. Struggle for the rule or for power?

Colin, as a realistic fighter who is not living in any world of illusion, was thus able to sacrifice important clauses in order to save what was essential. But the objection can be raised: "What is he fighting for? In the final analysis, isn't this a personal conflict; the triumph of his rule over Favre's, a struggle for power?" We have to acknowledge that there is a personal dimension in Father Colin's reaction at this time. His false friends, not people like Jeantin and David, but those like Mayet, who were already leaning toward illuminism and did not miss a chance to wrest from Colin certain short phrases in order to write them down immediately, phrases like the following: "They wanted to get rid of me, they don't want any of my ideas, they don't want me at their meetings." Since Colin felt he was being excluded, he certainly spoke bitter, harsh phrases one day or another. He has surely suffered, not from having lost executive power, because he had freely given up his task as superior general and never asked

² This fictional dialogue reflects Fr. Colin's attitude toward his secretaries as described in OM. Doc. 819, §170-171

³ This study appeared in STUDIES ON THE EARLY IDEAS, Maristica 2, chapter III

to have his resignation rescinded, but from having lost informal power (the kind of power we now know is more important than political power), namely, the authority of a founder. Superiors come one after another, but there is never more than one founder, and his authority should not be subject to discussion. The Marists in 1860 are not as convinced of this as he is, and he certainly suffers because of it.

While this personal aspect cannot be denied, it must be recognized nonetheless that the major issue of the rules was resolved with neither victor nor vanquished. Favre did not get his constitutions approved, but he got exactly what he wanted from the beginning, namely, that the congregation should be endowed with constitutions which were clear, defined, and approved by a chapter and by the Holy See. At no time during the chapters, even when the founder was being applauded, did anyone find fault with Favre for what he had done. He emerged completely exonerated. Colin, for his part, got his text accepted, but accepted by the sovereign chapter by virtue of its own authority. We shall return to this point in a moment. The chapter made the amendments it wanted. Thus, Colin is far from being in a position of triumph over an adversary made to bite the dust. With good reason, I believe, both considered themselves satisfied with the accord reached by the 1872 chapter. What they held most dear was that the Society should finally have a code or rules and they reached that goal. Of course, anyone can cover his motivation under the varnish of piety, but when I look carefully at the declaration which recognizes Mary as foundress and superior and in which the statement, "There is only one foundress, there is only one superior," meant that Colin was doing the equivalent of resigning his position as founder, and Favre, his position as superior, then I am personally convinced that this declaration is not an empty gesture. This common declaration, of which the parchment original is in the museum of La Neylière, bears the signatures of both Colin and Favre because both, while they had their different ideas, wanted the Society of Mary and they felt that the constitutions approved by the chapter were Colin's and, in a sense, also those that Favre wanted. It is evident that each of them was seeking something other than a personal victory.

c. Illuminism?

What Colin really wanted, then, was not a personal triumph but the triumph of ideas which he thought were essential and which he could not give up. But the objection can again be raised: "Which ideas, and why should we believe so strongly that he could not give them up? Isn't there something fanatical about this, isn't it a position typical of the illuminati?" Indeed, the word illuminism was often uttered at that time against the Colin party by those who were in the Favre party. Let's look at the problem closely. As we now rediscover the vision Colin wanted to bequeath to us, with its great ideas and also its very austere practices, we do not experience that much difficulty. First of all, we have the intellectual instruments which allow us to analyze and to understand the imaginary and utopia. Next, we may well approve of Colin as he imposes so many blows of the discipline whip per week, but we are not the ones who are going to apply them to our own backs. That is no concern of ours. It was not the same for the 1869 Marist. If the constitutions contained the clause that one was to give oneself three strokes of the discipline whip on so many days a week, then he would have to give them to himself. If it were said that one had to kneel before the superior when one went to see him, then he would have to do so. Again, if the same linen was to be used by everyone, then he would have to wear other people's shirts and use their handkerchiefs.

The reaction could be foreseen: "Why is Colin asking us to do these things which are not in the constitutions of such and such another congregation? Is it because of inspirations, because Mary told him so one day in Cerdon? I would like to be sure about that. Who can tell us? What can prove for us that this is so?" The fact that this came from Mary of Agreda would scarcely have reassured them, because their reaction was not simply a lack of generosity or an aversion to more poverty and more mortification. It could be that, too. But the critical requirements of a new generation were particularly at stake. Certain things do not go down. Yet Colin wants to impose them on us. By what authority? Because of an inspiration he received? Why, that's illuminism! So, Colin gives tit for tat: "You are the ones who are rationalists; you want to reduce everything to your reason and to your taste; you do not want to accept the word of God." Everything is bound around one major problem: how will the rule be accepted? Colin would like for it to be accepted as coming from Mary, as coming from on high, while the capitulants thought the rule should be accepted by the chapter delegated by the Society for the specific purpose of discussing and examining this acceptance. The solution proposed by the committee and adopted by the chapter consisted, first, in taking into account the founder's conviction:

our much venerated father has always assured us that basically [*the rule*] had not come to him *humano modo* ["in a human fashion"]; ... while it is not within the scope of the chapter to make a pronouncement on the more or less supernatural nature of this fact, the Very Rev. Father's conviction and affirmation deserve the highest respect.

But the report continues:

all the preceding does not set aside anything of the chapter's right to examine the details seriously before accepting them. (OM, doc. 845§ 92-93)

What happened was that, when the chapter proposed an amendment, it was submitted to Colin, who then expressed his opinion on the matter. If the chapter did not agree, it let Colin know, but the deciding power remained with the chapter, as Colin had moreover requested. In other words, Colin was true to his convictions. He did not hesitate to reaffirm these convictions and remained faithful to them all the way, but he was not locked up in them. To be sure, there was illuminism in the Colin party at that time, but this was true of Mayet and not of Colin. Mayet was typical of the illuminati, someone who mixed everything up. Three problems were under discussion at the time: that of the count of Chambord, Henri V, who was beginning to surface again with his white flag; that of the pope's infallibility, which was in the fore at the Vatican council; and then the question of Colin's rules. For Mayet, it was all quite simple, there could be no compromise in any case: Henri V could be king only with his flag; he could not agree to be king with the revolution's tricolor; he should rather die fighting; Pius IX could be pope only if he affirmed his infallibility to the very end; and it was the same in Colin's case: he received his rule from Mary and so the rule had to be accepted as Mary's rule; otherwise, it would be better to give up everything. This was the final battle, Armageddon. Colin did not fall into the trap of this illuminism.

What really mattered for Colin in the end? What was the great idea for which he fought? It was the idea of a Society of Mary cast in the image of the primitive Church as enlivened by Mary, who, from within the Church, listened to the apostles, obeyed them, and acted like a disciple who listened and learned. This is what Colin himself did. He was able to put this into practice. He listened to his counselors Jeantin and David, and he relinquished everything which could not be accepted by the true Society of Mary, the one which he had founded and which was alive in the Marists of 1860. By thus following the logical consequences of his grand vision of Mary hidden in the Church, Colin saved the Society of Mary.

2. Nazareth

We have gone back to the psychological atmosphere in Colin and this era; let us turn directly to the great image of this third period, Nazareth. Now that we have seen the attitude adopted by Colin concerning the substance of the problem of the rule, we shall be better prepared to accept it and to understand it.

First, we should briefly recall a bit of history. The word Nazareth never occurs in Father Colin's writings before 1836. Maybe it just happened that way, but we should see here an elementary caution not to be overly ready to see this as one of the early ideas. The word begins to surface during the period of the generalate. Before 1850, it appears as a symbol of the simplicity of the beginning: a house starts in poverty, with improvisation, like the little house in Nazareth. Or else, religious life starts in the novitiate or in the scholasticate; formation must first take place, the time has not yet come to throw oneself into the apostolate; one still lives in silence, obedience, and the spirit of poverty; one lives in Nazareth as Jesus did for thirty years. It is also the symbol of a start on which we have to build, as it is stated at the beginning of chapter twelve in the constitutions: the Society will be able to grow and last only if it is based on the virtues of humility, obedience, charity, and poverty, the virtues which could be seen in the house in Nazareth. But that is all. Nazareth is in no way at all a major idea or central image expressive of the Society's spirit.

A considerable distance has been crossed when, between 1850 and 1860, we enter the ambience of the Eucharistic foundations. Marie-Thérèse Dubouché has seen in the image of Nazareth the idea of her Eucharistic congregation of Adoration of Reparation. Through his contacts with Marie-Thérèse Dubouché, Colin begins at that time to speak a great deal about Nazareth, specifically in line with this Eucharistic foundation. There, a completely hidden style of life will be put into practice; no one will go

out into the world. In that life, which will be hidden around the Eucharist, hidden virtues will be practiced, virtues known to God alone. From that moment on, Nazareth begins to take on the status of a symbol for the whole Society. When Colin speaks to the 1852 general chapter of the Marist brothers, he declares: “Also, I did not want to take those congregations which preceded us as models in order to form our congregation; I left concern for that with God and I believed I recognized that his will was that our congregation should be based on the primitive Church.” Until this point, we have only what was already well known, but then Colin adds immediately: “The house in Nazareth, that is the model I took.”⁴ We find the same juxtaposition in Colin’s words at the general retreat in September 1854: “Let us look to Mary in everything, imitate her life at Nazareth. She did more than the apostles for the newborn Church.”⁵ We begin to see, as in an overprint of the primitive Church, one of its significant moments, namely, Nazareth as the first cell of the Church before the Church really began. It is as though one had to go back to Nazareth to find the true characteristics of the primitive Church. The two themes are linked: we can revive the early days of the Church by creating a house on the model of Nazareth. This is a completely new stage in Colin’s thinking.

We now move on to the last stage in Colin’s life, between the years 1860 and 1875. The Eucharistic foundation as such is no longer on the horizon. Colin has become the guardian of the spirit of the beginnings, reacting against the invading spirit of the world. At that moment, Nazareth becomes the symbol for everything: for a rejection of the spirit of the world and for a refocussing on the hidden virtues. It crystallizes everything and becomes the specific expression of the Society’s spirit. In September 1866, standing before the general chapter, Colin “insisted on the simplicity, the modesty, and the poverty which should make our houses a reflection of that of Nazareth” (T30). The minutes continue:

In a tone of deep conviction he recommended us to shun the spirit of the world, *of which yours should be at the very opposite pole*, he said; he recommended us to keep far away from all that shines and to take for ourselves whatever breathes forth Bethlehem and Nazareth, to prefer always humility to learning. “I do not want,” he said forcefully, “I do not want scholars who are not humble. I need learned men, yes, but learned men who in a sense are not aware of their learning and who love to be thought little of rather than seek to put themselves forward.” (T31)

Nazareth also becomes the symbol of respect for the brothers:

The Brothers are not domestic servants.... Look at St. Joseph in the home of Nazareth; it was his business to look after externals as the Brothers do in our houses; did he not mix with the Child Jesus and the Blessed Virgin? (T39)

Colin would go even further when he made Nazareth the symbol for the spirit of the early days in general, and then made it the primary idea. On 18 July 1867, he declared: “The Society’s first intention was to imitate the life of Nazareth, the life of the apostles” (T32). Here, the historian has to say: no. It is out of the question that Nazareth was an explicit model at the beginning. Too many texts give us information about Colin’s early ideas for us to give any weight to an isolated declaration, made at such a late date.

But this declaration of Colin’s was reinforced by Jeantin’s well-known text from which, I believe it can be said, the Society has suffered so much, namely the following sentence which is falsely attributed to Colin:

When I am in difficulty, I place myself in the home of Nazareth, and there I see all I have to do... unknown and hidden in the world; the whole Society and its Constitutions appeared to me in those words. (Jeantin 5, 315)

I am repeating myself, I admit, but I can see nothing that should be changed in what I wrote twenty seven years ago in the *Acta S. M.* on this topic. In that sentence, supposedly uttered by Colin, the whole beginning, “When I am at a loss,” is a literary setting by Jeantin, and the ending, “the whole Society and its Constitutions appeared to me in those words,” cannot be found in any text directly quoted from Colin. The link between Nazareth and “unknown and hidden” is something which Jeantin set up. The latter had

⁴ Archives of the Marist Brothers, *Proceedings of the 1852 Chapter*, p. 124

⁵ T21. The letter T followed by a number refers to the dossier of texts on Nazareth printed in *Acta SM* 6, pp.385-98

indeed placed suspension points between the two, but they were to disappear immediately afterwards, and, in any event, this gave the impression that Nazareth and “unknown and hidden” were the same thing. In particular, there is a terrible omission, because what Colin really said was: “I place myself in the home of Nazareth and from there I see all that I have to do” (T37). Jeantin simply suppressed the word “from.” Now, if I put myself in the middle of the home of Nazareth and I look about, what do I see? I see Joseph who is planing some planks, Mary who is spinning thread on the distaff, and the child Jesus who is either holding the wool or picking up the wood shavings. It’s always about the same thing, a life of manual work obviously penetrated with prayer, because one must not think that they forgot their exercises of piety. Prayer and manual work, that is exactly the kind of life Trappists lead. If I place myself inside the house in Nazareth and there see what I have to do, I must then be a Trappist, someone who divides his time between prayer and not necessarily manual work but let’s say little insignificant jobs in a domestic setting. That is the spirituality which for fifty years was offered to men whose ministries included being in charge of a secondary school, being missionaries in Oceania, preachers, men entrusted with responsibilities, active men; such men were being told: “Place yourselves in that little house, you see what was being done there, and that is what you have to do.” I believe that this was a distortion of Colin’s perspective and that it weighed heavily on the spiritual development of the Society. Even though the atmosphere of life in the Society, its spirit, its simplicity, its family spirit, and its basic virtues were cherished, many Marists felt that, from the moment when they took on some apostolic responsibility and had to learn how to deal with people, this spirituality had nothing to offer them. What a shame that they were not told about what instead were Colin’s initial perspectives. He would have shown them what it means to go out to people in the spirit of Mary and with a consciousness of having a certain mission.

Let’s get back to Colin’s text and try to understand it. This is possible because two other texts furnish us with an exegesis which can be considered authentic. Colin’s sentence, “I place myself in the home of Nazareth and from there I see all that I have to do,” describes a point from which I see what I have to do. Now David was less literary than Jeantin but perhaps had a better memory for retaining what was originally said; one day from memory, to be sure, he elaborated upon the Colin sentence from a point of view which seems to me much closer to Colin’s. David wrote:

One of his favorite recommendations was to apply oneself in all things to thinking, speaking, judging as Jesus and Mary did, and to ask oneself: What would these divine models do if they were in my place? He affirmed, in particular, that a religious, and especially a Marist religious, had only to meditate upon the life of the Holy Family in Nazareth to understand the spirit by which he should live. “As for me,” he added, “when I deliberate upon what to do, I place myself in spirit in the house of Nazareth. It seems to me that I see coming from there a light which clarifies my path; I immediately understand what I have to do.”⁶

The image is that of a path: I have to leave Nazareth and do what I have to do by going out to the world, to other people. But to see what I have to do, I had to enter the house in Nazareth and find myself alone there, before God, and then from there I feel in truth what I have to do.

Our second text is from Colin himself. While addressing the members of the 1866 chapter, he speaks a sentence in which Nazareth does not appear, but which reproduces exactly the same spiritual movement:

As for me, I place myself alone before God. When I feel that I am at peace and happy and that I am at rest in the step I want to take, then I can walk forward. If I am not at peace and if I see reasons for and against without being sure, then I stop.⁷

I don’t know what to do, I hesitate. At that point, I place myself alone before God and I wait for my spirit to be at rest, for a kind of certitude to become clear, for a light to fill me and clarify my path, so that I can see what I have to do. At this moment, I can heave again and go forward. That, I believe, is Colin’s true message on Nazareth; it is not that one should place oneself there and see what people are doing there, but that one should place oneself there and from there look at one’s path and to see it because one has truly been able to place oneself alone before God. Colin asks us to come back to that point from which we can see everything in the light of faith because we are alone before God, and from that point we

⁶ Notes by David 1 (APM 921.41), § 24

⁷ Acts of the 1866 chapter, p. 72

set out again. Because it is not a matter of going to sleep there. It is not a matter of staying closed up in Nazareth, but of going there in order to set out again.

There you have Colin's third great image. The first image offers the dream of the whole world as Marist: the Society of Mary will disappear one day by blending into the Church of the last days. The second image gives life to an apostolic society which is going to step aside the way Mary was able to do in the Church. They will thus discover a way of going out to people with respect, modesty, and patience, and this will allow for a proclamation of the word of God in a way adapted to our times. The third image calls for a profound stripping which has the effect that, when we place ourselves alone before God, before what counts, then we become capable of truly judging what we are doing and turning it in the direction of what is essential. It is only then that Colin's message becomes a spirituality. Until that point, it might have been feared that his message would remain a grand utopian vision or a finely tuned pastoral strategy. That was not what happened; it was already a spirituality, because Marists were living what Father Colin expresses more profoundly in this third image.

The broad lines of this spirituality are quite simple. The first is outlined in our article on the spirit of the Society. It consists in an energetic and pitiless stripping of all that is artificial. Father Maîtrepierre, after reading this article, counted thirty-two virtues in it and exclaimed:

What an ideal for the Marist! What a phenomenal religious! And yet all of that is needed if the Society is to remain in existence; this spirit of 32 points is the bulwark against the Society's enemies; it is the pivot without which the Society cannot move or even turn: *Societatis cardinem et firmamentum*. Thus the Marist worthy of the name would indeed be a superlative religious.⁸

Maîtrepierre had not understood anything. It is not a matter of virtues piled up in a pyramid to produce a super religious. Those thirty-two notations of Colin's are chisel cuts made in granite to remove the superficial layers until a shape is formed, still very rough perhaps, but able to withstand wind, frost, and snow. The article on the spirit of the Society aims at stripping and eliminating whatever is superficial, fragile, and false, in order to get to what is solid. It aims at forming the kind of religious who can be changed from one house to another, who can be brought down from one position to another, and who remains what he is, because he is not dependent upon the setting in which he lives nor upon the costume which has been put on him. It is like the scouring of an old Romanesque church, covered with paintings, fake decorations, hangings, plaster, and phony statues, which one fine day a scout troop comes to clear of all those additions until the point is reached when the bare stone and the purity of the Romanesque lines should reappear.

This is the way we have to read our *De Societatis spiritu*: Colin asks us to strip ourselves. Let's think, for example, about the importance we perceive in the echo which our activity sends back to us; let's think about the satisfaction we get from what we do, about our hypersensitivity, about our being easily offended, about the cumbersome awareness we have of who we are and of what is our due, about the fear of criticism, about the need to preserve the image we give of ourselves, about our need to wear a mask. There we find the beautiful text by Jean Sullivan which was read to us during the first evening's prayer: "Sooner or later, one has to remove one's mask, at least before oneself. That's what praying is. Being no longer anything else than what one is before death, before God."⁹

At the end of this stripping, we begin to pray, to taste God. And there we find the second great line in the Marist spirituality taught by Colin. Obviously, in Colin, the theme of "tasting God" has absolutely nothing to do with the candy-like flavor of God as beautiful and good. It is the result of a struggle, of an energetic stripping. Let's listen to Colin speaking to Mayet:

Your life must go through a great process of purification so that you can put on a new life. The will must be purified by the test of contradictions, the understanding must be purified. The good Lord lets us see nothing any more, he leaves us as it were in a dark night, so that the will no longer knows what to do and the understanding is at a loss. Then, when you emerge from that night, you no longer see God in the same way – that is faith. You taste the truths of God in a completely new way: you have a completely new idea of the holiness of God, and so on. (FS, doc. 26, § 1)

⁸ Cited in Coste, *Spirit*, in *Acta SM* 6, p. 487

⁹ Jean Sullivan, *Bloc-notes*

Let us listen further to what Colin had to say about Father Frémont, who moved abruptly from parish ministry to the novitiate where he had to listen to bells all day long:

Father Frémont, Messieurs, (and you cannot repeat this to him since he is fifteen thousand miles away), is a man of God. When he was first sent to La Favorite, he suffered a great deal at the change of circumstances, but he did not let his human nature get the better of him, he braced himself against his own nature. Then he tasted God, he made his novitiate as a man of God. (FS, doc. 121, § 1)

That is what tasting God is. You taste God, you find him in his truth only at the end of this process of stripping, of this profound effort. It is the fundamental initial experience to which you will later be brought back, as to your center. We are all familiar with the well-known text in which Colin says:

When the good Lord dwells in the heart, it is he who sets everything in motion. Without that, everything that you do is completely useless; no matter how you plant the seed and tire yourself out, the life-giving principle is still lacking. But having once tasted God, a novice will turn to him again and again. It is a treasure in his soul, something to which he is constantly brought back as to his own centre. (FS, doc. 63, § 2)

This returning to the center is exactly the same as what returning to Nazareth is. It occurs, after we forget all the rest, after we have already forgotten everything that has filled our mind, our interior motion picture, when we try to face ourselves and God and try to come back to that fundamental experience. If we have not had this experience, it's all useless, and there is no religious life. That is why the objective of the novitiate is always to allow for this encounter with God. Returning to Nazareth means returning to that original experience, the starting point from which we go forth to our jobs, but we shall be a little more enlightened than before.

That is why Nazareth always includes a contemplative dimension. At first, in Colin's mind, this was expressed in the form of a house, in the Eucharistic foundation of La Neylière. It is interesting to see that Favre was the first to speak, in his rule, about Eucharistic houses, probably to please Colin. Colin himself spoke about this again in his 1867 rule, but, from the following year on, just as he was getting back to his early ideas (in stages which I am now analyzing), Colin seemed to be thinking: "No, no more contemplative houses; that is not what Cerdon was, that was not one of the early ideas; away with the idea of having Marists praying with their hands raised to heaven while others are fighting on the plain." At the same time, however, Colin inserted words on solitude and silence (C, 50) into the article on the spirit of the Society, but these were no longer for those who would have the joy of going to La Neylière to end their days, but for all Marists. A component part of the Marist spirit is the contemplative dimension, integrated into the very heart of the life and responsibility of Marists. Not loving solitude and silence means still being afraid of self, afraid of standing before self and before God, afraid of being no more than who one is. The day one accepts this confrontation with solitude and silence, then one can enter Nazareth and become identified with the third great foundational image of our congregation.

Source: Jean Coste, A MARIAN VISION OF THE CHURCH: JEAN-CLAUDE COLIN Maristica 8, pp. 296 – 98; 390; 408 – 438.