

N. 50: IMPLICATIONS OF A MARIAN LIFE IN THE SCHOOL OF FR. COLIN

Therefore, following in the footsteps of their Mother

Fr. David at the beginning of his second paragraph (N.50) clearly indicates that it was to contain the consequences of principles enunciated in the first (N.49). From the general principles we proceed to the practical applications. In reality, while fully recognizing the transition in the two paragraphs from the general to the particular, we should avoid over-emphasizing the logical sequence connecting them. Though it is easy to show how well certain features of this paragraph are connected, for example, with the virtue of abnegation recommended in the first one, while others are connected with humility, it is hard to see how the paragraph as a whole follows necessarily from the obligation to imitate Mary or from the four virtues in terms of which Mary's spirit is described.

The features enumerated in n. 50, therefore, are not sufficiently explained by the author's concern to draw out the logical consequences of the principles laid down in n. 49. Moreover, this second paragraph is a combination of the quotations from the Bible and the *Imitation of Christ* dictated by Fr. Colin, some concrete elements taken from the Marist Sisters' article on *The Spirit of the Institute*, and a text from 1842 which enshrines them all. Through this last element, the oldest of all, we are brought back to some of Fr. Colin's intuitions, and it is these that constitute the binding force uniting all the various elements contained in n. 50. If some implications of Marian life are singled out in this paragraph and others passed over, it is because Fr. Colin saw their urgency from the beginnings of the Society in spiritual experiences he never ceased to refer to during the rest of his life. These were then gradually enriched by what he learned from circumstances. Between the imitation of Mary spoken of in n. 49, therefore, and the features of conduct indicated in n. 50, there is a middle term which cannot be forgotten, namely the person of Fr. Colin and the experiences which made him a founder. The full force connecting the two paragraphs is felt only when we recognise in Fr. Founder the authoritative interpreter of the implications of the Marian spirit for the Society and consequently admit, at least in principle, the validity of his original inspirations.

This formula, by which Fr. Colin in previous drafts of the Constitutions was fond of describing imitation of Mary, gives a pre-eminently active and personal idea of this imitation. It is not so much a question of copying a static model as of following a person, following a person's footsteps. In this sense the words sum up n. 49 very well and form an excellent transition. Children of Mary by a special title, Marists should follow in the footsteps of their mother, and Fr. Colin goes on to indicate by a series of practical features all that this implies for them.

Let them above all be entirely removed from the spirit of the world

The first "consequence" of a life of following Mary from the viewpoint of Fr. Colin's inspirations is rejection of the spirit of the world. The expression *spirit of the world* mainly implied, for Fr. Founder, the general standards and methods of judgment in use in the world, that is to say outside of religious life. The background of the expression was the completely classical conception which presents the religious life precisely as renouncement of the world, a separation from the world. What the religious state attempts to bring about is fundamentally a demand of the New Testament: the passage from the world of sin to that of grace and salvation, the abandoning of the kingdom of Satan to enter that of the Lord. Religious give this requirement of their baptism a concrete form in an institute which in a way anticipates the future world.

The degree of material separation from the Christian laity and the non-Christian world required by the bearing of this eschatological witness has varied from one period to another and may change still further. On the spiritual plane it does not seem that the maintenance of this spiritual demand calls for a pessimistic judgment with regard to all that comes into being and develops outside the boundaries of religious life, nor a systematic suspicion of the living forces of a civilization which certainly lacks the Christian spirit, but has nevertheless elements of undeniable value.

On the other hand, what the Society cannot afford to lose without being unfaithful to Fr. Colin's intuition, is the concern to bring into being a form of life which will bear witness to the Gospel ideal not only on the level of individual members, but on the level of the institute. Such a form of life must be different from that of diocesan priests or the laity, who are still bound to live the Gospel spirit but have not the responsibility as such to give it a social form as a community. In other words, their Founder tells Marists to forgo types of conduct which, while in no way sinful, are not in keeping with the manner of life of a community vowed to show what a world would be like in which the example of Christ is the supreme guiding principle. It is obvious that our following in the footsteps of Mary, whose only criterion of values was the kingdom of her Son, implies as its first essential that disposition of spirit, of which the following features will indicate the detailed consequences more clearly.

From all greed for earthly goods

Fr. Colin's original and very personal opposition to the spirit of cupidity, rather than a conclusion drawn from particular Gospel texts, is an intuition intimately bound up with a man's experience, but nonetheless connected with an inspiration which he felt came from a power higher than himself. Though in no way obliged to admit the supernatural character of this inspiration, nevertheless we cannot refuse to recognise its binding force, since, after half a century, it was judged worthy to be included in the *De Societatis spiritu* and thus figures among the effective elements of the Marist spirit as far as the members of the Society are concerned. Thus being especially warned by Fr. Colin against the desire to possess anything as our own, or to attach ourselves to it and to acquire still more, we can be grateful to him for setting us so effectively in the footsteps of the Lady of the poor in the spirit of her Magnificat: *The rich he has sent empty away* (Lk.1:53).

And to be totally emptied of all self-concern

Not to think of oneself, to be content with being overlooked, to kill at the root all over-sensitiveness by realizing that the interests of the Kingdom are worth more than the honours due to us and the esteem which we might otherwise expect – these are some of the great basic principles of a life in the footsteps of Mary. She who did not resent hearing her Son ask publicly: “Who is my mother?” (Mt. 12:48), must not have been easily annoyed, and no doubt Jesus knew that he had no need to tone down his teaching, on this occasion or on others, so as not to offend a hypersensitive nature. We must be freed from such touchiness and self-esteem before the love of God and interest in His Kingdom can take possession of our heart. In this connection we cannot do better than quote Fr. Colin's admirable circular of the 1st April 1842:

“What God has done for us so far in spite of our imperfections and the dryness of our hearts, gives us an assurance of what he will continue to do if we unite ourselves to Him in the fervour of continual prayer, and if, stripped of the spirit of the world and of all human consideration, we seek only His glory and the honour of the Queen of heaven, and open our hearts fully to the loving effusion of His charity for us.”

Let them strive to deny themselves completely in all things, seeking not their own interests, but only those of Christ and Mary

This phrase dictated by Fr. Founder contains a fairly direct echo of *Let him renounce himself* of the Gospel (Mt.16:24) and in this case Fr. David showed good sense in using it to introduce a series of biblical quotations. With this phrase we have the beginning of the comparison between Fr. Colin's intuitions and the message of the New Testament, the attempt to bring the Marist spirit into line with Scripture. Rejection of the spirit of the world, of cupidity, of self-preoccupation, is here brought back to its source, namely to that denial of self which the Christian undertakes that he may follow Christ by taking up his cross. This is an attitude of mind which is not acquired once and for all, but must persevere in all circumstances; it is not something superficial, but penetrating deeply, if need be cutting to the quick, in order to break the bonds of flesh and blood and self-love.

Telling the Philippians that he is going to send Timothy to them, St. Paul says that he has no one who will concern himself so unaffectedly with their affairs: “One and all have their own interest at heart, not Christ's” (Phil. 2:21). This bitter acknowledgment was to be made by more than one religious authority after him, and it was made in particular by Fr. Colin, who saw so many of the first aspirants abandon the project they had undertaken. The true Marist is one who will put the interests of Our Saviour and of “the Blessed Virgin's work” before his own and will set his heart so high as to leave no room for self-seeking in a life completely given over to the service of God.

Considering themselves as exiles and pilgrims on earth, indeed as worthless servants and as the refuse of the world

In the magnificent eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, the author speaks of Abraham and the great figures of the Old Testament looking forward in faith to a future they could not see: “It was faith they lived by, all of them, and in faith they died; for them the promises were not fulfilled, but they looked forward to them and welcomed them at a distance, owning themselves no better than strangers and exiles on earth” (Hb.11:13). The author continues by explaining that, if the patriarchs thought of themselves as strangers, it was not because it was no longer possible to return to their place of origin, but because they looked forward to a better homeland. Worthy successors of these witnesses, Christians endure their present persecutions as they march, with their eyes fixed on Christ, towards the heavenly Jerusalem.

It is the urgency and actuality of this Christian attitude that Marists are reminded of here, and it is presented to them as a natural consequence of a life lived in imitation of Mary. There is nothing arbitrary in this, if we think of the parallel between Mary's faith and that of Abraham. As early as 1823 the Foundress of the Marist Sisters, speaking of her own vocation and that of her friend, spontaneously saw their setting out

from Coutouvre for a work which was then only a promise, in the light of Abraham's call: "We have left our country and our family to begin the society of the Blessed Virgin." Concretely, then, this reminder to Marists of their condition as travellers, exiles, –and even banished, since their true homeland was originally lost– aims at making them fight against the temptation to install themselves complacently in this earthly life.

"When you have done all that was commanded you, you are to say, "We are poor servants, it was our duty to do what we have done" (Lk 17:10). This conclusion to a short Gospel parable has caused much ink to flow, since the Greek adjective qualifying servants is normally translated as useless, which hardly fits in with the general sense of the parable. It seems that, in keeping with modern translations, we should rather insist on the fact that the servants, even after carrying out their task properly, should continue to feel that they have done nothing special and that they have no right to any special honour or reward. This again is one of the Christian attitudes which Marists are particularly urged to make their own, and in recalling this verse, it was Fr. Colin's intention, as we have seen, not to plunge them into the depressing feeling of their incapacity but rather to emphasize the fact that work for God, even when well done, cannot be turned to the glory or advantage of the one doing it, since its only value is that it is done for the Master.

"We are still the world's refuse; everybody thinks himself well rid of us" (1Cor. 4:13). With this realistic feature St. Paul concludes a passage of vehement irony in which the too human wisdom of the Corinthians is contrasted with the dramatic position of the apostles. Obviously it was Paul's enemies who treated him as refuse, off-scourings, but since the apostle uses this word as a title of honour, the Christian in his turn may apply it to himself. For him it is not so much a question of persuading himself that he is the world's refuse, as being spiritually prepared to be called such, and it is the whole problem of the spirituality of self-contempt which is involved here.

We know that Fr. Founder had penetrated himself with the teaching of Franchi, whose book is certainly the most systematic work on this subject. In the light of the findings of contemporary psychology one might be tempted to consider as unhealthy and dangerous the insistence with which this author urges men to depreciate themselves. In fact, it seems that the book can no longer be recommended indiscriminately. But it is extremely significant to point out that for Jean-Claude Colin and no doubt for readers in general in the 18th and 19th centuries, on the contrary, this exaggerated teaching acted as a tonic:

Everything has been said about me, that I was stubborn, obstinate... Well, it didn't affect me in the slightest; on the contrary, I felt better for it. The good Lord gave me the grace of reading Frauchi and I found a great peace in him. In the major seminary I suffered; well, I found peace there. (OM2, doc.726)

Perhaps it has been too much forgotten in reading the exaggerations of Franchi that the author belonged to the spiritual family of St. Philip Neri, for whom humour always had its place. What the author intended was an energetic treatment of the silly ailments caused by vanity. It was a question of radically purging the patient by having him imagine in turn the worst situations in which he could find himself, repeating for himself each time that he had no reason for surprise since he was only getting what he deserved. This is a form of pedagogy the effects of which on certain temperaments might rightly be feared, but from which a well-balanced individual could emerge freed from a thousand little fears and ailments of mind, and ready in deep peace of soul to face life and the humiliations it cannot fail to bring.

This it seems should be our approach to some extent to the phrase Consider themselves as the refuse of the world. There is no question of forming a repulsive picture of oneself, but rather of being sufficiently well balanced spiritually not to succumb, should we have to undergo trials some day in our apostolic life as St. Paul experienced and described. Since it is not at all impossible that a priest or Religious today should be treated as "refuse," we may be allowed to hold that these words of our Constitutions have lost nothing of their actuality.

Using the things of this world as if not using them, sedulously avoiding, in their buildings and living quarters, in their life style and in all their dealings with others, anything that might suggest display, ostentation, or a desire for attention

Again it is from the first epistle to the Corinthians –the section of the Bible most often quoted by Fr. Colin–that this fifth and last quotation from the New Testament is taken. In the famous and difficult passage on marriage and virginity St. Paul has a few lines of a definitely eschatological flavour: "I tell you, brethren, the time is drawing to an end; nothing remains but for those who have wives to behave as though they had none; those who weep must forget their tears, and those who rejoice their rejoicing, and those who buy must renounce possession; and those who take advantage of what the world offers must not take full advantage of it; the fashion of this world is soon to pass away" (1Cor. 7: 29-30).

This eschatological tension of the first generation of Christian's, religious strive to maintain in the Church by their vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, which put them in that attitude of sovereign freedom with regard to the world which St. Paul preached. Here poverty is particularly stressed for Marists. It is always a question of not settling down to a comfortable life in the world, of keeping earthly goods subordinated to a greater service of the Lord, preserving, even while we use these goods, as complete a spiritual detachment as possible. The practical applications of this disposition of soul will be given shortly.

But first let us point out simply how all the biblical text's quoted here harmonize. Fr. Founder really chose from the New Testament those texts which emphasized the detachment involved in the service of Christ, in concern for his interests alone, and tense expectancy of a future world. Christian hope is not once mentioned here, but it is this virtue which lends support to that courageous refusal to settle down in the world which at first sight might seem merely negative. All the rest of the New Testament and of the Christian message must obviously be a vital element in the spirituality of Marists, but it would be difficult to regard ourselves as sons of Fr. Colin if we did not respond with a special sensitiveness to the texts which he has chosen to express the inevitable tension between the present world and the world to come, and the sovereign detachment which this tension demands from those who wish to follow Christ as Mary did.

These few lines form a unified whole reproducing the essentials of the third paragraph of the Marist Sisters article Spirit of the Institute, as translated and adapted for the Fathers in 1868. This long sentence gives us the serious misgivings aroused in Fr. Colin after his resignation by the new direction taken by the two congregations he had founded, misgivings which he voiced to his confreres both at the General Chapter of 1866 and in the following years. This fact alone gives rise to a problem which we must face frankly. Have we not here the warnings of an old man terrified by the evolution of a world which he no longer understood and seeking to perpetuate a way of life respectable in itself, but which of necessity will seem more and more of an anachronism as time goes on? The question can all the less be evaded in that it contains a profound internal truth. Fr. Colin certainly suffered very much from the thousand and one changes introduced into the Society's way of life after his resignation, and the protestations he made about them were certainly mingled with personal regrets and that difficulty to adapt which is characteristic of so many elderly people. But it cannot be too much emphasized that the phrases inserted in the *De Societatis spiritu* are completely free from any statements which would connect them with the manner of life of any particular period and of too concrete details which would limit their import.

The application of Fr. Colin's recommendation is purposely expressed in terms as wide as possible, that is to say, referring to the original French text of the Sisters' article: furniture, manner of building, style of life, social relations of all kinds. Marists are faced with these same problems in the 20th century as in the 19th; there is nothing to limit them to one particular period. As for the warning itself, it is not aimed at any particular manner of building, or of furnishings etc. What it stigmatizes is a psychological and moral disposition which may manifest itself in these fields. It is better summarized in the three original French words: pretence, luxury, the desire to appear. Does such and such a type of building and furnishing, such a standard of life or such a type of social relations show these undesirable features, and does it on that account deserve to be avoided? It will always be extremely difficult to say from outward appearances, because here we are on the moral level of intention, involving judgment of the person responsible for such initiatives. It would be vain to set objective standards for the whole Society at any one period, given the differences between countries and continents, and even within the boundaries of the same country a particular undertaking may or may not, according to circumstances, reveal a useless concession to luxury or display. In other words, the only way to apply this pressing invitation of the Constitutions is for those responsible to examine carefully the motives governing their choice and decisions. In no case can a mere appeal to the profound economic and social changes which have taken place since Fr. Colin's time suffice to set a Superior's conscience at ease and dispense him from asking himself the further question, valid for all times and all countries. "While certain motives influencing me in favour of this type of building, furniture, or food, are fully justifiable, are there not others which have no relation whatever to God's service, but really provide for my vanity, love of display, and exaggerated desire to make an impression?" If it is so, should not the clear command of the Constitutions force me to reconsider the question and see how I can preserve, even in the necessary improvements, that witness to detachment, to the refusal to settle down complacently in the world, which Fr. Colin, and before him the New Testament, expect of me?

When understood on this level, these few lines of the Constitutions do not act as a brake upon all changes in our manner of life, nor do they authorize us to look with suspicion on those who would make such changes. But they are opposed to a too easily satisfied conscience and to that betrayal of the Marist spirit "in practical applications and in the thousand little details of interior and exterior conduct" which Fr. Founder dreaded more than anything else. Refusal to bear witness in this field may perhaps be compatible with a personal Marian devotion, but certainly not with the sincere desire to live the Marian values in the

world of our day according to Fr. Colin's teaching. Besides, it is clear that Chapter statutes and the directives of major Superiors can provide us with norms of judgment which help to correct too subjective a view and help to guide the conscience of those responsible, though they can never take its place.

Loving to be unknown and subject to all

These two quotations from the *Imitation* joined together bring Fr. Colin's intuitions into line, no longer with New Testament texts but with one of the strongest currents of spiritual tradition, namely that of the *devotio moderna*, the echo of which has come down to our own day in the work of Thomas a Kempis. The five words reproduced here are a good expression of one of the fundamental characteristics of this spiritual movement which began in the 14th century in the Low Countries as a reaction against a too speculative and esoteric mysticism. It gives pride of place not to knowledge, but to the perfection of charity through the imitation of the humanity of Christ, spiritual stripping and the effective practice of the virtues, especially of humility and detachment. The spiritual life became once more accessible to all, centred as it was on certain simple and realistic demands of imitation of Christ, poor, humble obedient. Very many souls were afterwards to taste this consolation of an affective and effective conformity with their Lord, and Fr. Colin wished to recognise in it one of the features of Marist life. After interior detachment in our manner of life, here we go still deeper towards a general disposition involving a kind of spiritual burial.

Is this longing to disappear completely healthy? This is a problem in religious psychology which goes far beyond the case of Fr. Colin, who for that matter is only echoing a tradition. Certainly pusillanimity, pettiness, and natural fear of action can develop dangerously under cover of such formulas, and we have clear proof of this in the very strong way in which Fr. Mayet, even during the Founder's lifetime, had to denounce the wrong interpretation of the *Ignoti et occulti*. For Fr. Colin, the love to be unknown is not separated from the desire to accomplish great things for God, and it is only against the background of the For the greater glory of God and the honour of the Mother of God of the Society's only motto, that it can be truly lived by Marists. Mary's example here enables us to strike the right note and to realize promptly our own littleness while exulting at the great things God has done within us and proposes to do through us.

Without deceit or cunning;

A reminder of the humility and the simplicity of the apostles, this other free quotation from the *Imitation* gives us the same context of deprivation to be accepted for the service of Christ. Here again we do not reject the valid human means enabling us to work for the glory of God, but rather the illusion of thinking that we can accomplish God's work by our own petty calculations and shrewdness. All through, Fr. Colin keeps us in the perspective of authentic, honest service, living in hope of the Kingdom which is to be established by means worthy of it.

In a word, acting always with such great poverty, humility and modesty, simplicity of heart and unconcern for vanity and worldly ambition

Here begins the long conclusion of the article which expresses the two great qualities of soul which naturally lead to our seeming hidden and unknown in the world.

The first of these two participial clauses, (the above), is taken from a sentence in n. 224 of the 1842 text. It describes in the form of a list of virtues, the qualities a Marist must have if he is to remain truly hidden and unknown in the midst of the apostolate to which he must devote himself. Given the manner in which the *De Societatis spiritu* was composed, it will be no surprise to discover here at least one virtue already explicitly mentioned before, namely humility, and other features similar to those described at the beginning of the number. Thus: poverty and the whole passage on the style of life; modesty, which for Fr. Colin means the general disposition not to draw attention to oneself and cause oneself to be spoken about. Also simplicity of heart, having only God in view, and indifference to vanity and human ambition. We do not think there is any point in searching for subtle shades of meaning in these different expressions used by Fr. Colin. Had the article *De Societatis spiritu* been written all of a piece, one would take it for granted that the author would not repeat himself and that therefore these different expressions introduced new ideas. But when it is a question of a text made up by the superimposition of successive layers it is more correct to bring out the points of continuity. In other words, this enumeration of virtues here is practically a summary of the beginning of n. 50. It is insofar as he lives the sovereign detachment already described in so many ways and seeks only the interests of Christ and his Mother that the Marist, even in the midst of his apostolic activity, will remain hidden and unknown in the world.

And moreover so combining a love of solitude and silence & the practice of hidden virtues with works of zeal

This second participial clause, a condensed translation of the second paragraph of the Sisters' article, introduces a new element into the 1842 sentence and by that very fact modifies the import of the *Ignoti et occulti*. The latter is no longer merely the consequence of an attitude based on poverty, humility, modesty, etc.; it is equally the fruit of a union between apostolic work and love of solitude, between works of zeal and practice of the hidden virtues. In other words, here we have brought in as part of the Marist spirit, over and above the original apostolic manner described by Fr. Founder during his generalate, the ideal more clearly glimpsed by him after his resignation. Marists should be noted not only for the generous renunciation of the apostle, but also for the taste for solitude with God, the taste for silence and for an interior growth in perfection, which preserves its full value even apart from any apostolic perspective.

In other words, to recall here the two great biblical mysteries to which Fr. Colin so often referred, the mystery of Nazareth must be added to the mystery of Mary present in the newborn Church, since it is these two pages from the New Testament, taken together, which express the Marist vocation. It cannot be denied that there is a certain contemplative touch introduced here which had always formed part of Fr. Founder's personal ideal and which henceforth was proposed to his sons as one of the characteristic features of a Marian life. Once more we feel how closely the spirit of the Society is linked to the spiritual experience of a man who, in virtue of his privileged position as founder and of the graces that go with it, underlined certain particular demands of the Christian mystery. While they are in no way obliged to limit their spiritual world to that of Fr. Colin, Marists learn from him how to feel and make their own these particular demands. In the present case, the demand put before us is a most opportune expression of that aspect of Mary's soul which the Gospel brings out most clearly, namely that she meditated in her heart all that God had done before her eyes: Stored up... and pondered all these things in her heart (Lk, 2:19, 51).

That, even though they must undertake the various ministries helpful to the salvation of souls, they seem to be unknown and indeed even hidden in this world

Living generously that apostolic detachment which impels them to forget themselves, their tastes, their prestige, in the service of God alone; penetrated at the same time by a deep longing for a life in the presence of God where only interior hidden riches count and where mere appearances are dissolved, Marists, obviously, will hardly be noticed in the world. The natural consequence of this general attitude, this Marian spirit lived according to the teaching of Fr. Colin, will be that they will seem hidden and unknown in the world. This is not an ideal to be followed for its own sake, a motto to direct and focus activity, but a previous touchstone to test the degree in which they have assimilated the spirit previously described, the sign of the authenticity of their Marist life. However, this will not really be so unless the *Ignoti* accompanies a life otherwise in conformity with the ends of the Society, that is to say living up to the apostolic responsibilities of a society vowed to the most varied ministries. If each one in his own sphere loyally takes his share of this responsibility and does not use the *Ignoti* to camouflage his laziness or limit his objectives, then, certainly, the fact that in the very midst of his apostolic activity he goes unnoticed will be a sign that he has deeply assimilated the implications of the Marian life such as they have been described for him in this n. 50 by Fr. Colin.

Let them all cling fast to this spirit in the knowledge that it is the very pivot and foundation of their whole Society.

This warning seems to come straight from a text which Fr. Colin had dictated in 1867, very likely in his own tongue. The French words which he must have used to define the part played by the spirit in the Society were very probably the equivalents of *pivot* and *foundation*. The word *pivot* he had already used in the Sisters' Constitutions (a, 168). As for the words *basis* or *foundation*, they figure prominently in Fr. Colin's vocabulary. It matters little that the images suggested by the two words are not easy to reconcile. Both are very expressive of the vital importance of the spirit for the Society, the first of the two even suggesting the idea of a vital part in a whole which could not function without it and whose dimensions are out of proportion with its real importance. The pivot, the hinges are very tiny compared to the portals which move on them. It is the same with the spirit of the Society: it is a tenuous reality which the size of the Society, of its structure, of its works could easily make us forget and yet it enables this gigantic body to move. That is why we must hold on to it with a certain tenacity lest some day we be crushed by the weight of a Society which has become immobilized and inert simply because we have forgotten to safeguard the spirit, which was its pivot.

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This brings us to the end of n. 50, which developed at length, in the light of Fr. Colin's intuitions, all that is demanded of Marists by their "following in Mary's footsteps." Texts from the New Testament and from the *Imitation*, pressing recommendations of the Founder in the light of his experience since his resignation – all these gave new depth and breadth to the great inspirations which guided him in the composition of the rule in Cerdon and during his generalate. Whenever, under the guidance of Fr. Colin, Marists get a deeper insight into the high demands of apostolic detachment and of a life lived in truth before God, they are using the second approach to their spirit, which converges towards that which n. 49 delineated starting from Mary's person and the bonds that unite her to her sons.

There were indeed two sources for the Marist spirit, two lines of approach to it, and it is to Fr. David's credit that he understood this, and with profound truth re-united in the two paragraphs of our *De Societatis spiritu* these two lines 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 at their corporate consecrations and recognizing 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, in so far will the members of the Society be really penetrated and animated by her spirit.

To this first line of approach –the many-sided wealth of Mary's personality– a second must be added, a second road which those must travel who would make their own the spirit of the Society. It begins with the inspirations received by Jean Claude Colin, in which he found the secret of the Society's manner of life and action in the world. We are still dealing with Mary here, but this time through the spiritual experience of a particular man, a limited experience but nevertheless one that must be accepted, since half a century of trials developed and enriched it, and showed it to be in keeping with Scripture and spiritual tradition. Taught by Fr. Colin, Marists are made aware of the terrible obstacles to the religious life constituted by self-seeking, by any apostolate which is not directed towards the Kingdom of Heaven but is rooted in this passing world, by empty show, artificiality, guile, by action divorced from prayer. In meditating on the texts of Fr. Colin and especially on the second paragraph of the *De Societatis spiritu*, his sons are urged to strive for religious truth, to cut away appearances, to refuse to lower their ideal, all of which has a direct influence upon their personal, community and apostolic life.

In these rigorous intuitions of Fr. Colin we find the second source of the Marist spirit, the second line of approach which every Marist must follow in his life when he consents to allow himself to be guided and enlightened by his Founder. In principle it is the task of the whole Marist formation to make new members of the Society share in this experience of the Founder, through the historical and objective knowledge it should give of the subject, through meditation on his teaching, through the explanation and practice of a rule which, in so many pages, transmits and interprets the intuitions of the *De Societatis spiritu*, and finally through the environment of communities still rich in the spiritual values inherited from Fr. Colin. From the moment a confrere begins to share personally in the Founder's outlook on the world and feel where it comes into his own life, the Marist spirit is at work in him and unless he puts an obstacle in its way it will soon affect his whole conduct.

It is in the person of Mary and the experience of Fr. Colin, therefore, that Marists find their points of reference, and it is along the line joining these two points that the Marist spirit is to be found. Everything has not been said, however, when we have discovered these two principal points. There is a third element which the history of the *De Societatis spiritu* brought out very strongly and without which the Marist spirit would lack one of its essential coordinates, namely the fact that this spirit cannot be separated from the body it animates, from the living tradition of the Society of Mary.

As a matter of fact, *De Societatis spiritu*, far from being the creation of one man, is on the contrary the result of a work in which the Society of Mary as such played a large part. Not only did the two congregations of Fathers and Sisters, by their internal development, influence Fr. Colin's thought, but when the latter felt the necessity of drawing up a *De Societatis spiritu*, he asked a confrere to make the first draft, confident that our Blessed Lady would inspire him. Although that preliminary draft of 1867 and the one in the spring of 1868 which followed it were not adopted as they stood, nevertheless they influenced the structure of the final draft and provided certain elements for it. As for the final draft, Fr. Founder, having

drawn attention to certain points he felt essential, left final responsibility for it to Fr. David, and did not wish to change anything that had been written. Fr. Jeantin too played no insignificant part in the final arrangement of the article by restoring its full stature to the *Ignoti et quasi occidti* formula. Finally, the Chapter of 1872 showed, by the tiny but significant change it introduced, that the Society itself had its word to say in defining its spirit.

In other words, our *De Societatis spiritu* cannot be considered as expressing the intuitions of one man, even though inspired from on high. It represents rather an awareness, on the part of the whole body represented by those of its members in the best position for the task, of the principles animating its life and activity. In order to get an accurate, complete and balanced idea of the Marist spirit, we must always have recourse not only to the person of Mary, and the intuitions of Fr. Colin, but also to Marist tradition, to the life of the Society. It is there, in fact, that it finds its natural environment, the conditions necessary for its preservation.

Finally, to live the Marist spirit is to listen to the Holy Spirit who speaks to us through our position in the Society of Mary. This 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, realized 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 he takes all these elements of his vocation together that a Marist is 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.

Source: Jean Coste, Commentary on Article X N.50 1872 Constitutions, ACTA N32-T.VI pp.444-509; N 33 – T. VI pp.581-677 (Adapted).

HOW THE 1872 VERSION OF *DE SOCIETATIS SPIRITU* CAME TO BE WRITTEN

- Article X of the 1872 Constitutions was drawn up in August of 1868 by Fr. George David, secretary to Fr. Colin. He did so on the basis of elements supplied by Fr. Founder, and received Fr. Founder's full approval.
- At the last meeting of the second session of the General Chapter of 1866, in the afternoon of 5th September, the capitulants unanimously declared that they were leaving it to Fr. Colin to finish the rule. To help him in this task they elected a committee composed of Frs. Vitte and Chapel, Assistants General living in Lyon, and Frs. Morcel and Jeantin, both living in the scholasticate of Belley, the former as superior and the latter as professor of moral.
- Also residing in the same scholasticate as professor of dogma at the time was Fr. Georges David, with whom Fr. Colin had already had occasion to have several private talks since his resignation and who seems to have enjoyed the Founder's confidence. In February 1867, Fr. Founder succeeded in having this confrere attached to the Belley committee for preparatory work for the revision of the rules. At the same time, however, Fr. Favre found himself obliged to transfer Fr. David to the major seminary of Nevers. Before going to his new post, Fr. David called at La Neylière, where Fr. Founder entrusted him with the task of preparing a preliminary draft to be submitted to the committee which would contain all the changes which he, Fr. Colin, wished to see made in Fr. Favre's rule, which had to serve as basis for the work, since the 1842 rule at that time was thought to have been destroyed.
- At the ninth meeting of the 1866 General Chapter, Fr. Colin had expressed an idea to which he was to return many times during the following years, namely, in order to avoid difficulties, it would be sufficient to make the minimum of necessary changes in Fr. Favre's rule, "but that an explanatory directory should be written which would cover all those details necessary to convey clearly the spirit of the Society. This insistence of Fr. Colin on the details characteristic of the spirit of the Society give hardly any hint as to whether he intended then to include a special article on the spirit in his rule or directory.
- In a letter written to Fr. David in Nevers on 27th April 1867, Fr. Colin makes the first direct reference to drawing up a text on the spirit of the Society:
You would give me the greatest pleasure if you yourself would kindly put in writing your ideas on the spirit of the Society. I feel sure that the Blessed Virgin will inspire you in the matter.

- Fr. David wrote a text in response to this request. Fr. Colin suggested that only a few alterations and some additions be made to this. A copy of this text was printed in French and translated into Latin. (Text w).

- From November 1867, over the winter, Fr. Colin tried to go over the preparatory work of the two committees of Lyon and of Belley and their attempt to draw up Constitutions fundamentally based on Fr. Favre's text. In fact, however, at a loss when faced with a text in which he found neither his ideas nor his style, Fr. Colin could not get down to work seriously.

- Then in April 1868 Fr. Colin his notes and went to Belley to get something done with Frs. David and Jeantin. There he discovered that these two fathers were in possession of a copy of the 1842 Constitutions which he himself thought had been lost. This discovery was providential in Fr. Colin's eyes, and psychologically seems to have stirred both himself and his collaborators very deeply. Fr. Colin there and then decided to take his text of 1842 at the basis of the work, contenting himself merely with completing it and touching it up. That put an end to the groping of the previous months, and the texts painfully drawn up in the course of 1867 henceforth had merely the value of souvenirs.

- By the end of June 1868 the Belley committee had finished a complete draft of the Constitutions based on the 1842 text, of which only a summary has survived – text *d*. On 20th July at a full session of the committee appointed by the 1866 Chapter this text was submitted. The meetings that followed were not completely peaceful. Convinced that the mandate given to Fr. Colin by the Chapter was for a revision of Fr. Favre's text and did not authorise him to leave aside this text in favour of a previous draft, the Lyons committee members, particularly Fr. Vitte, raised serious objections against Fr. Founder's project, and the latter did not always succeed in controlling his impatience and dissatisfaction. The meetings came to an end about the 9th August and Fr. Founder immediately left for La Neyliere, accompanied by Fr. David.

- More intent than ever on giving the Society those first ideas which he felt had been entrusted to him for safe-keeping, Fr. Colin hastened to put the finishing touches to the final draft, aided first by Fr. David only, then shortly afterwards by Fr. Jeantin. It was in the month of August 1868, during the first weeks of Fr. David's sojourn at La Neyliere, in Fr. Jeantin's absence, that our *De Societatis spiritu* was written.

- Fr. Colin, was still feeling the effects of the opposition he had encountered at the committee meetings. For him, it was clear that the short composite article drawn up by the committee in the spring would not be sufficient to express all that he intended to leave to the Society on this important subject. Fr. David recounts in a letter the events that followed.

- After several days of prayer Fr. Colin then seventy-eight years old, walking with difficulty and "suffering much" went to Fr. David's room. The two men knelt down, and turning his eyes to a statue of the Blessed Virgin on Fr. David's table, Fr. Colin improvised a short prayer of invocation. The essential words which struck Fr. David very much were: "O most Blessed Virgin ... you yourself ... must dictate somehow each of the words we are going to write." Then the two confreres got up and the real work began. "With great difficulty he dictated to me some disconnected sentences and a few fragments of sentences."

- Three months before Fr. Colin's blindness had occasion his being dispensed from the breviary and brought him permission to say the Mass *de Beata* owing to his rapidly failing eyesight. All of this would seem to exclude the possibility of his having a paper in his hands. It would seem more correct to picture him trying to recall some sentences he had been turning over in his mind during the previous days.

It seems that this work on the Constitutions was practically finished as early as the 1st September.