

**Think as Mary, Judge as Mary, Feel and Act as Mary.**  
**Father Colin's Perspective on Marist Novitiate Formation<sup>1</sup>**  
*Fernando Ingente sm*

**1. Marist Formation in general: a challenge to Marist identity**

A well grounded formation will help to keep the Society faithful. In 1994 there were 1490 members in the Society of Mary. As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 there are only 929 members.<sup>2</sup> There has been a continuous decrease until today. But the real question behind are not only the figures. It is the identity of the Marist. Is our identity today what Mary and our Founder wanted? Are we Marist only by name? A certain unease and awkwardness accompanies anyone's search for identity since identity is at the same time a constant as well as an evolving reality.<sup>3</sup> Solid Marist formation, both initial and on-going, will help not only to keep our identity but to maintain it in a solid way. Formation to Marist life has a specific purpose, namely to help those who have received a call from the Lord to discern that call, to respond to it and to prepare themselves for the mission of the Society of Mary.<sup>4</sup>

To educate a candidate, what a great task! But to form a candidate in a Marist way, what a long lasting task! Forming students is not an easy task in today's situation not only because of the smaller number of formators but also because of the smaller numbers of young men in formation. In spite of these difficulties, the Society of Mary has a great responsibility to train every candidate well. The goals of the continuous preparation are shaped by the ends and the spirit of the Society.<sup>5</sup> The influence of the Founder, Jean-Claude Colin, is a vital element in ensuring loyalty to the Society. It is tremendously important always to consider the wisdom of the Founder in terms of training candidates while they are still in formation because it will help the candidates to build a solid ground in all aspects of life or else like a life built on sand, it will have no real and solid foundation. Faithfulness in the Society means faithfulness to the Founder and his values.

Fr. Colin was always keen on Marist formation. His perspective on formation can certainly help us to know how to train the candidates not only because he is the Founder but also because through his wisdom and knowledge, we can be faithful to the long tradition that we have been following. Certainly we can use other materials to help train candidates, yet the abundant material that we have received from Fr. Colin would be a very useful and effective instrument to use in forming the candidates especially in the Novitiate.

By "*Fr. Founder's perspective of formation*" we refer to the ideas and understanding of Jean-Claude Colin on formation at the time of the foundation of the Society of Mary and at the time of his Generalate. The Founder has left us a legacy of treasures. In a unique way, his point of view on how to train the candidates would be a good guide not only for Marists nowadays but in the future as well.

---

<sup>1</sup> Edited version of Chapter II of the licentiate thesis, Rome, Gregorian University, Institute of Spirituality, March 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Curia Generalis, *Index Societatis Mariae-2012, Status Personarum*, 115.

<sup>3</sup> D. Cozzen, *The changing face of the priesthood*, The Liturgical Press, 2000, 9.

<sup>4</sup> *General Directory of initial formation for the Society of Mary*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *1988 Constitutions of the Society of Mary*, 72. This number presents formation as part of the preparation for mission. It is the duty of the formation team to plan, implement, and evaluate formation policies.

Fidelity to our Founder is one of the best criteria of being a faithful Marist. I believe that today's Marist world is longing precisely for those human, intellectual, apostolic and spiritual attitudes that Fr. Colin lived so faithfully. The rich Marist tradition and spirituality will continue if we pursue excellence in the work of formation. Let us do what he wanted for the betterment and growth of the Society. Hopefully there is life and excitement in rediscovering it in today's world, seeing the joy and spark in novices' eye when they hear of Colin.

## **2. Novitiate Formation: a challenge of solid foundation**

Formation must last for a lifetime<sup>6</sup> but it should start from a well-founded beginning. Like the wise builders, those who shape the Novitiate program must understand how essential it is to build on solid foundations. In the context of religious life, Novitiate is considered to be the formal and legal beginning of religious life.<sup>7</sup> The novitiate is a time of integral initiation into the form of life chosen by the Son of God and proposed in the charism of the institute.<sup>8</sup> In general, the purpose of the Novitiate or the beginning of life in a religious institute is to test one's personal vocation with the communal vocation of a particular institute and to incorporate oneself gradually into the life and mission of the religious community.<sup>9</sup> The Novitiate is a crucial stage of formation in every religious congregation. In general, the Novitiate constitutes a formative phase which is fundamental and delicate.<sup>10</sup> It is delicate because in many ways it is a crucial formative period. The Novitiate has always held a place of extreme importance in religious life.<sup>11</sup>

A Marist Novitiate is a special spiritual place, a special year and experience in which a novice is being formed in a particular process of formation. It can be fruitful not only on the side of the individual candidate and the formators but also on the side of the Society of Mary.

What was the picture of the Marist Novitiate formation Colin had in mind? Colin would have formed the novices in the context of his phrase famous in the Marist world: "*they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary*". Mary's way of life with the help of Colin's experience as Founder will help the novices to follow Christ in living the Gospel. In Mary's human example of being consecrated, the novices are called to live the life of Mary who is mature in the spiritual life, in intellect, in mission, and mature as a person. Through her spirit and life Mary should be considered as an agent of formation. A Marist novice must understand the role of Mary in his life so that his life may accord with the Spirit of the Gospel; and at the same time he needs to immerse himself in the spirituality and mission of the Society of Mary according to the wisdom and values of the Founder.

In Acts of the Apostles 2:17 it says: "*Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions*". In the Marist context, the

---

<sup>6</sup> C. Pardilla, *The Christ of Formation: Biblical and Theological Manual of Formation to Religious Life*, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010, 17.

<sup>7</sup> J. Hite, "Admission of Candidates and Formation of Members", in *A Handbook on Canons 573-746*, Canon Law Society of America, 1985, 132.

<sup>8</sup> A. Cencini, *The sentiments of the Son: a formative journey in the consecrated life*, India, Pauline Publications, 1998, 87.

<sup>9</sup> R. McDermott, "Purpose and place of the Novitiate: Canons 646-647", in *Selected Issues in Religious Law*, Canon Law Society of America, 1997, 150.

<sup>10</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, *Inter-Institute Collaboration for Formation*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> R. McDermott, "Purpose and place of the Novitiate: Canons 646-647", 150.

old man here could be considered the Founder, the young man could refer to the Marist candidate. How does Colin play a role in training the candidates? How can he contribute to our Marist formation, both today and in the future? His interest was not only in formation itself but also on how could the “*formed Marist*” live out the identity and spirituality which he had founded. Helping candidates who joined the Society was indeed part of his interest in the growth of the congregation. For the Founder, novices needed to be carefully looked after, and well formed. Is the Marist Novitiate formation “*built on sand or built on rock*” (Mt 7:26)? For him a good Novitiate formation means having a good solid foundation in any aspects of life so that after the Novitiate year the students will be able to live it until the end of their Marist life. The underlying preoccupation in the Novitiate program is what they are at the end of the Novitiate; they will be that way for all their life. Bad formation in the beginning of religious life could possibly result in wrong understanding of the spirituality and mission of the Society of Mary. In order to form them well we have to consider the values and ideas of Colin on Marist Novitiate.

Fr. Founder had never been a director of novices yet he had a good understanding of how to run the Novitiate and of how to form novices. He knew what did not work and what would work well. He was aware of what was lacking in the Novitiate program. He was conscious of how the master of the novices should run the Novitiate. He was never a novice either yet he had great ideas on what the Novitiate should be like. It was not easy for the young Jean-Claude to think of a Novitiate especially when the Society was just beginning. It is an obvious fact that he had a great interest in and love for the novices. He often supported the novices but at the same time pushed them if they were complaisant. In the mind of Colin the Novitiate is a house of testing and discernment, therefore novices should also be tested in their Marist Novitiate formation in various areas and aspects of their life. The source of such discernment and testing is in the institute’s understanding of its own vocation and presenting it clearly to the novices. A vocation in the institute should be described as clearly as possible so that a novice is able to identify himself within the institute.<sup>12</sup> In *A Founder Speaks* that on November 25, 1844, Colin summed it up clearly when he commented on the good use of formation year especially in the Novitiate, he said “later on you will be what you have become in the Novitiate” (FS, doc. 79, 1).

### **3. The challenge of a Marian foundation**

Does our Marist Novitiate have a Marian element in it? If there is no Marian dimension it cannot easily be called a Marist Novitiate. Maybe we can say that not all Marist Novitiate formation has a Marian emphasis. What is a Marist Novitiate formation corresponds not only to the life of Jesus Christ, but to the life of Mary as well.

At one time Colin said “people have a wrong idea of the Novitiate: they imagine that to make a Novitiate is to be at prayer. That is not it all”.<sup>13</sup> It was not that he was critical. It was not because of the incapability of the novice director either. It was not that he wanted to

<sup>12</sup> J. Hite, “Admission of Candidates”, 148.

<sup>13</sup> J. Coste (ed.) *A Founder Speaks* [= FS], doc. 16, 1. This was the comment of Colin on an apostolic Novitiate. It was at the College of Belley in November 1838. This remark of Colin was probably made to Fr. Claude Mayet, in private. Mayet was the faithful recorder of the words of Fr. Colin.

have a perfect Novitiate formation. It had a lot to do to with forming the novices well, in a balanced and integrated way. Colin was very happy to hear about good formation in the Marist Novitiate. He would have been content to hear that some Marists did a well-balanced Novitiate. The experience of Michel Borjon, SM is a case in point. In 1840 Michel Borjon left for the mission for Oceania. He once sent a letter from New Zealand to his former novice director in France, saying, “At least I seem to understand how important the Novitiate was and how useful it would be in the future. Here I am at the end of the world and yes, the same lively consolation that made me love the Novitiate is with me still, and hope to take it with me to the grave”.<sup>14</sup>

By living in Mary as a babe in her womb, Jesus teaches the novices “to have the same dependence on Mary for everything, and to entrust themselves—their desires, needs, lives—totally to her”.<sup>15</sup> The Novitiate too is like the womb of Mary where the novices are formed into Mary’s mind, Mary’s heart, Mary’s hand and Mary’s soul. Colin was convinced that in the Novitiate, the Blessed Virgin calls them (the novices) to follow her (FS, doc. 107, 2). We see how Father Colin urged the novices to follow Mary in their lives in different dimensions: mind: intellectual (*to think as Mary*), soul: spiritual (*judge as Mary*), hands: pastoral (*act as Mary*), heart: emotional and human (*feel as Mary*). These dimensions are related to one another. Very closely linked to these themes are the convictions of Fr. Colin that, in the Novitiate through Mary the novices can “*taste God*”. It was the desire of Fr. Colin that the Marist novices should look at Mary as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Holy Spirit, in the knowledge that acceptance of the virginal and humble life of Christ also means imitation of Mary’s way of life.<sup>16</sup>

What sort of Novitiate did Colin intend? It was his desire to form the novices seriously and to “make men of them”, which means mature men in different aspects of life. Novitiate formation must always be integral, balanced and holistic. During the Novitiate, the novice will try to make his own the Marist values, so that his personal vocation will be in harmony with the mission entrusted to the Society. The novice must grow in responsibility for the historical project of the Society of Mary.<sup>17</sup> For candidates to grow in responsible fidelity to the spirituality and mission of the Society, they must be thoroughly equipped<sup>18</sup> in all aspects of their lives. At times we did not give enough attention to the importance of Mary in terms of training future Marists. Let us preserve Colin’s legacy by being faithful to it. It is of great importance to consider seriously not only what he had said but also his desired values in forming the novices. To continue the values and ideas of the Novitiate will help to preserve the spirituality and mission of the Society of Mary.

Is the Novitiate we have today still the same Novitiate that Colin intended to have? It is one of the important goals of Novitiate training to help the novices to be equipped in all dimensions of their lives

---

<sup>14</sup> C. Larkin, *Bearings*, Rome, Marist Fathers, 2011, 93. The book “*Bearings*” is a reflection on the Marist Constitutions based on the experiences of Marists, who in many ways, were able to live the spirit and charism of the Society of Mary.

<sup>15</sup> D. Campbell, “The union of their two hearts”, in *Homiletics and Pastoral Review*, San Francisco, Ignatian Press, 2010, 16-17.

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 1996, 28.

<sup>17</sup> *Formation Directory*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> *1988 Constitutions*, 26.

through the help and wisdom of Colin in the area of formation. Through this the novices are to experience the manner of life of the congregation and form their minds and hearts in its spirit.<sup>19</sup>

#### **4. Prerequisite: Basic qualities that Colin was looking for in the Novices**

The qualities that Colin was searching for in novices are too many to enumerate because he was considering not only those who were Marists already, but also people who were interested in joining the Society. If there is no well-founded hope that the applicants possess the prerequisite qualities Colin had asked, then they should not be admitted. To keep the high standard of the Novitiate, fundamental elements are indeed relevant. To maintain the Novitiate as a Marist one, the founder left some unified qualifications. On the part of the Society, some important aspects of the candidates that Colin laid down and handed down from one generation to another generation will help to keep and continue the long tradition of the Congregation which he founded. It is of great significance to know and examine the basic qualities that Colin was looking for in the novices. Or else if they won't fit, they will not be suitable to the nature and purpose of the Society of Mary. He wanted men who were useful to the Society.

##### 4.1 Who would be useful in the Society of Mary?

There were basic required qualities that the Founder was quite insistent on and consistently looked for. The criterion of usefulness was very important to Colin in recruiting and training candidates. It was very important that they would be able to serve the genuine aim of the Society. In the 1872 Constitutions (nn. 136, 161, 299, 305, 361, 386 and 411) usefulness was mentioned many times in the context of suitability of candidates. The main question in this area is: does the Society of Mary want novices who can help the Society or those who would create problems? This basic question underlines the relevance of a candidate's usefulness to the Congregation. To be useful is more than being a candidate who can be put to use. What an immense privilege it is to be able to help the least of this world, in a way to be useful. Hopefully the Society will be able not only to expect happiness in the life of the candidate, but genuine usefulness; happiness will come later.

What Colin wanted for the novices was for them to be available for the mission of the Society, which is the work of Mary. What Colin was looking for in each novice was also for them to be useful in keeping the living tradition which he founded. It is very clear in his 1872 Constitutions, and in his personal oral statements, that for the Society to keep true to its nature and purpose it needed men who were useful. Fr. Colin had a famous phrase "whoever is useless to the Society of Mary has no vocation to the Society". This simply meant that Colin did not want to accept everyone who knocked on the Marist door to join the formation. For the Founder the time of Novitiate formation is a period for reflecting, choosing, testing and forming candidates so that they will become useful to the Society and to its mission.

What kind of candidate was considered to be useful? The character of the candidate that Colin was looking for was a man who was completely emptied of self and humble of heart.<sup>20</sup> The Founder

---

<sup>19</sup> CIC, canon 646.

<sup>20</sup> *1872 Constitutions*, 59.

strengthened his emphasis on humility by stating: “let them be humble of heart towards all, anticipating others’ needs with charity and Christian politeness, convinced that preferred things should go to others rather than to themselves”.<sup>21</sup> Because of their natural humility they can help and cooperate in the work of Mary. Like Mary who is a humble servant, a Marist candidate who is suitable will be humble in relating with people and also in accepting their limitations and weaknesses.

#### 4.2 Who would be useless in the Society of Mary?

In the 1872 Constitutions Fr. Colin wrote: “for rich and poor may be accepted with the same ease if they are judged equally useful to the Society”.<sup>22</sup> In the same Constitution the Founder emphasizes not to accept those who cannot help in the work of Mary, who in many ways can be a burden. He stated “those who are physically deformed or who suffer from an incurable disease, those who because of some ailment or delicacy of Constitution would be of no use to the Society should not be admitted to the Society”.<sup>23</sup> In number 54 of the 1872 Constitutions, Colin had asked a very accurate question with regard to the health of the candidate: “is he free from those ailments which repel others or prevent him from being of service to them; does he have sufficient strength for the works undertaken by the Society?”.<sup>24</sup> Health problems can be a big stumbling block to being an effective minister to the people of God.

In his personal oral statement Fr. Colin was very careful about candidates who were vain, boastful, affected in their manner and habits<sup>25</sup> because they would bear little fruit or no fruit at all, and would be a hindrance to the mission of the Society. If the arena for Marists is the world as it is, how will they be able to become useful instruments of the mercy of God<sup>26</sup> if they accept candidates who are so proud of themselves? The Founder also gave some warning to the Society not to accept those who are of a proud and arrogant nature, those who are stubborn or unsociable; those who are fond of their own comfort or too delicate.<sup>27</sup> Characters showing these behaviors, according to Colin, could be a block to the mission of the Society because they would be incapable of doing great things for God and his people. They could be a source of problems both in the community and the mission. The personal background of the candidate is also a factor in what the Founder was looking for. The main concern of Colin in the past life of the candidate was if the candidate did show signs of piety in the world.<sup>28</sup> Over-concern for worldly things can be an obstacle in continuing the mission of the Society. Why was Colin worried about those candidates who had some signs of worldly interest? Because for Colin it is against the spirit of Mary. Part of the integral Spirit of the Society, is, as Colin’s Constitutions put it: “let them above all be far removed from any worldly spirit and from all greed for earthly goods,

---

<sup>21</sup> 1872 Constitutions, 82.

<sup>22</sup> 1872 Constitutions, 56.

<sup>23</sup> 1872 Constitutions, 58.

<sup>24</sup> 1872 Constitutions, 54.

<sup>25</sup> J. Coste (ed.), *A Founder Acts, Reminiscences of Jean Claude Colin* by Gabriel-Claude Mayet, doc. 198, 1 (FA). FA deals with the actions and decisions during Colin’s time as general, 1836-1854.

<sup>26</sup> C. Larkin, *A Certain Way: an exploration of Marist Spirituality*, Rome, 1995, 52.

<sup>27</sup> 1872 Constitutions, 59.

<sup>28</sup> 1872 Constitutions, 55.

and completely emptied of self-interest”.<sup>29</sup> Let us be careful not to accept novices who are seeking their own interests and security.

#### 4.3 Special cases of usefulness

While he was clearly strong on choosing useful candidates, the Founder was also careful not to send away without valid reason and proper procedure those who could be useful to the mission. In the 1872 Constitutions he emphasized: “let the superior therefore dismiss no religious, especially if he has been a credit to the Society or may be of use to it because of the exceptional God-given gifts, without kindly forewarning him and also entreating him to change his way for the better”.<sup>30</sup> In addition Fr. Colin also mentioned and gave some practical advice to those who had left the Society and wanted to rejoin again. It should be dealt like this: “Should anyone leave of his own accord, let him not be readmitted. Should he repent after a short time, however, and wish to return, the superior shall consider the reason why he left, and whether he can be of use to the Society”.<sup>31</sup> Otherwise those who have left the Society may not be readmitted.<sup>32</sup>

### 5. He wanted integrated men

#### 5.1 *He wanted mature men*

*Make men of them.*<sup>33</sup> This statement of Fr. Founder for the novices gives us an indication of what kind of perspective he had in forming the novices. Colin was not looking for boys but for men to be members of the Society. He was not looking for extraordinary men, but certainly he was looking for ordinary men who were ready and willing to become a mature Marists. The understanding of Colin on maturity was that being a mature man does not mean running away from human nature (thinking, feeling, judging and acting) but ordering human nature to acquire maturity. It is very interesting to look at the understanding of our Founder on how the Marists should form the novices in way that will give some guidance towards a Novitiate program. His focus was more on how to form novices in their various components of life without neglecting the importance of the calling of God and the gracious choice of Mary.<sup>34</sup> The role of Mary and Colin in helping the novices in the Novitiate is undeniably important, and so is the attempt to make connections between the phrase of the Founder “*to think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary*”<sup>35</sup> and its relevance in forming novices to become mature Marists.

#### 5.2 *He wanted men of learning*

---

<sup>29</sup> 1988 *Constitutions*, 228. This phrase is under the fidelity to the spirit of the Society. To be faithful to the Society means to be faithful to the Spirit of the Society.

<sup>30</sup> 1872 *Constitutions*, 174

<sup>31</sup> 1872 *Constitutions*, 178.

<sup>32</sup> 1872 *Constitutions*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> FS, doc. 105, 1, during the general retreat in September 1845. Fr. Colin was talking about the novice director, Fr. Maître-pierre, who only focused on the details but forget the broader perspective of forming novices into mature person.

<sup>34</sup> 1872 *Constitutions*, 49. This important phrase is right at the beginning of the article on the Spirit of the Society. The Founder used it many times in his life as a superior and as a founder to give great emphasis that it was through Mary’s gracious choice that we belong to the Society of Mary.

<sup>35</sup> 1872 *Constitutions*, 49. Important to note here is that Fr. Colin himself wrote the 1872 *Constitutions*, expressing his desired values and spirituality.

### 5.2.1 Importance of learning

On one occasion Colin said “My sons, you must apply yourselves to two things: becoming men of learning but above all becoming saints”.<sup>36</sup> On another he also said “without knowledge I would have no faith in the Society, without knowledge it will be ruined”.<sup>37</sup> Another time he told the confreres “learning there must be, Messieurs, and a great deal of it. We must study, but not for our sake, but for the glory of God and the salvation of souls”.<sup>38</sup> In the 1872 Constitutions of the Society of Mary written by Colin, it is said: “let no one be admitted to these vows unless he is well known and sufficiently educated”.<sup>39</sup> Colin gave some guiding points for the novice master to follow in order to ensure the intelligence of every novice. In number 91 of the same Constitutions, it says “with fatherly concern let him first of all see whether the newly admitted novices are knowledgeable in spiritual matters”. In number 47 the Founder said “let them train themselves especially to crush intellectual pride and indeed even to consecrate their intelligence to God by the homage of spontaneous and simple faith”.

His words give us a strong sense and feeling about giving vital importance to knowledge and learning. Fr. Colin’s words were sure ways of helping and discovering just what he wanted for the novices. The five examples above reveal that Colin valued the intellectual aspect in the Novitiate. The Marist Novitiate values and requires intelligence. Understanding is a good base. Knowledgeable candidates are those who do not want to stop learning. Without right understanding wrong directions may be taken. And the worst is that misunderstanding can lead to a worse path.

### 5.2.2 To learn for the sake of the work of Mary

Colin was very strong in encouraging novices to give emphasis to learning. But learning in his mind was not just for the sake of acquiring more knowledge. It is more a question of using it for the mission of the Society which is the work of Mary. The oral statement of the Founder gave some warning to those who are too pious in the Novitiate when he said “be men of God and be learned too. If you are men of God alone, I tell you, you will achieve nothing”.<sup>40</sup> The intellectual component in the novice, as perceived by Fr. Colin, is necessary in the Novitiate formation. Acquiring more learning in the Novitiate is vital not only in the context of Marist tradition but also in the long tradition of the Church. Even though there are no examinations, the Marist Novitiate should provide solid intellectual formation so that the novice understands the Catholic and the Marist intellectual tradition especially in the context of religious life, prayer life and the life of the saints.

Before admitting the novices to vows, Colin gave important advice: “let no one be admitted to the vows unless he is well known and sufficiently educated”.<sup>41</sup> His simple and profound advice clearly presents the importance of knowledge in the Marist Novitiate. The idea of Colin that novices must be men of learning was summed up in his personal oral statement when he narrated: “but the Society, Messieurs, must apply itself to leaning, otherwise it would never attain its

---

<sup>36</sup> FS, doc. 79, 5.

<sup>37</sup> FS, doc. 109, 1.

<sup>38</sup> FS, doc. 106, 5.

<sup>39</sup> *1872 Constitutions*, 112.

<sup>40</sup> FS, doc. 109, 7.

<sup>41</sup> *1872 Constitutions*, 112.

goal”.<sup>42</sup> And he continued to say “we must have learning and we must take all the means to acquire it”.<sup>43</sup> The Society cannot be true to its mission, a mission given by God through Mary, if it lacks of wisdom. With more knowledge and wisdom, more souls will be saved.

### 5.3 *He wanted men of God*

#### 5.3.1 A desire to experience God

Dominican Friar Guy Lespinay expresses it well when he says “what elements indicate that the candidate has a real desire for God? We should look for a thirst for the transcendent, a quest for the ineffable, something not easy to discern but which is there, elusive, but ardently desired. These are without a doubt some of the early signs pointing to a vocation”.<sup>44</sup> A Marist candidate’s heart should show that his deepest desire is to experience God in his life. This was exactly what Colin wanted to see in the life of the candidates. Colin put it in his own expression as a desire to taste God. “The yearning to encounter God and set out on such a search is the first sign to look for. The willingness to set out is often the fundamental attitude to get a journeying process towards God underway”.<sup>45</sup> In his own personal words Colin said: “Warm yourself at the fire of God’s love. Have courage!”<sup>46</sup>

#### 5.3.2 Abandonment to God

Mary is a woman of God. Mary of Agreda said “Mary abased herself profoundly before the divine majesty and adored Our Lord in his infinite being [...] she most humbly offered herself to nurse him, to serve him and to accompany Him and to cooperate”.<sup>47</sup>

What Colin wanted for the novices was to be men of God, like Mary who abandoned herself completely to God. The Founder wanted novices to be men of God which means to have deep knowledge of God, awareness of God’s presence in life and close relationship with God. They must desire to surrender their life to God by having an intimate relationship with him. A candidate should strive to live day by day with joy and to abandon himself to be with God.

#### 5.3.3 To be devoted to God

St. Francis de Sales wrote that “genuine, living devotion presupposes love of God and hence it is simply true love of God”.<sup>48</sup> Colin would like to see this living devotion in novices, which simply means that they are to be devoted and committed to love God. To be truly men of God, the novices must be aware of the inner movements of their hearts. The clear

---

<sup>42</sup> FS, doc. 141, 18.

<sup>43</sup> FS, doc. 141, 19.

<sup>44</sup> G. Lespinay, *Vocations and their Formation Today: Formation in the religious life, call, discernment, adaptation*, New York, Society of St. Paul, 2009, 22.

<sup>45</sup> G. Lespinay, *Vocations and their Formation Today*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> FS, doc. 140, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Mary of Agreda, *The Divine Life of the Most Holy Virgin*, Tan books and Publishers Inc, Illinois 1997. 55. This Spanish Franciscan nun of the 16<sup>th</sup> century presented a detailed history of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the basis of private revelations. Her book was very influential in the life of Colin. During the time of Colin, the general understanding of Mary was a person high above, yet the idea of Mary of Agreda contributed to the idea of Colin that Mary is close to people.

<sup>48</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the devout life*, New York, Image Books Doubleday, 2003, 28. This saint was greatly admired by Colin. He is considered the secondary Patron Saint of the Society of Mary because he had great influence. Francis died in Lyon and Colin died in La Neylière, near Lyon.

indication for a novice who has a close relationship with God is to have time in prayer. Colin uses the symbol of a tree to indicate the great importance of prayer life. “Prayer is the sap which feeds the tree and makes it bear fruit”, Colin said, “the oil which keeps the lamp alight. He who has no liking for prayer, is like a dead tree, or at least one that is drooping. It has not, if you like, lost the life of grace, but it will not last long. It is a tree which produces some leaves perhaps, or even a few flowers, but no fruit”.<sup>49</sup> In a secularized modern world, Colin is looking for men who want to commit themselves to Marist religious life and who are willing and ready to make a daily crucial decision to make God real in their lives. The more the novices desire to be united with God, the more they can save souls in the future.

#### 5.4 *He wanted missionaries*

##### 5.4.1 Missionaries in general

The Marist founder had a special place in his heart for missionaries, especially the first Marists who for Oceania. He had a special place in his heart for those candidates who showed interest in being a missionary. Colin often insisted that those who want to join the Society should have an interest in Mission. In short, the Founder wanted missionaries to work in the name of the Church and in the name of the Society of Mary. He put it firmly in the 1872 Constitutions that in admitting candidates let them have in mind the service of God and the common good of the Society.<sup>50</sup> In the understanding of Colin, candidates who are not interested in working in the missions, either in their own country or outside, have no vocation to the Society of Mary. Why? Because such an attitude does not support the second end of the Society. Colin was always mindful of the second aim of the institute which is to work for the salvation of souls, whether among the faithful, especially country people, or the heathens. Indeed their vocation is to go from place to place for the greater service of God and to spend themselves working for the salvation of their neighbor by preaching God’s word, hearing confessions, catechizing the uneducated and the young, exhorting and welcoming the faithful to pious exercises, visiting the prisoners and the sick in the hospitals and doing other good works.<sup>51</sup>

##### 5.4.2 Like missionary Apostles

Colin wanted novices to have a capacity to be missionaries like the apostles. He said “Come, let us take courage! Look upon yourselves as the apostles, gathered together with the blessed Virgin in the cenacle”.<sup>52</sup> The Founder hoped that Marist candidates would follow in the footsteps of the apostles in spite of their human weakness, and he presents Marists with the example of the apostles who worked hard in the early life of the Church, uniting people through their presence. Colin believed that Mary called men so that she could send them to any parts of the world similar to the world in which the apostles lived; these men have to act like the apostles.<sup>53</sup> Just as in the time of the apostles after the resurrection of Christ, the lives of Marist candidates must show some signs of interest in working for ecclesial communion. A principal goal of the mission of the Society, according to Colin, is to further the

<sup>49</sup> FS, doc. 132.

<sup>50</sup> *1872 Constitutions*, 56.

<sup>51</sup> *1872 Constitutions*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> FS, doc. 140, 13.

<sup>53</sup> J. Coste, *Lectures on Society of Mary History*, Rome, 1965, 154.

ecclesial communion: to gather all in one heart and one soul in the bosom of the Church.<sup>54</sup> Just as Jesus spent three years training his apostles to preach and spread the Kingdom of God, so Jesus with Mary spends one year training candidates to be missionaries, like the apostles. On 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1847, Colin once again reminded his confreres of his vision of missionary apostles spreading the Gospel of salvation. He said “whether we go to evangelize the pagans or whether we stay in France, we must be dead to ourselves, dead to our desires, dead to our own comfort. An apostle must hold on to nothing”.<sup>55</sup> Colin wanted candidates to be competent missionary apostles.

#### 5.4.3 Marian missionaries

What is basic in the understanding of being a Marist is that Marist spirituality has been characterized by the relationship existing between the Marian aspect of the Society and the apostolic demands of the time.<sup>56</sup> There should be a Marian touch in the apostolic activity of the Society. The Founder was convinced of the direct role of Mary in receiving candidates to the Society. Those who have no devotion to Mary have no vocation to the Society of Mary. Those who have no special bond with Mary have no call to bear her name. How can one become a missionary bearing the spirit of Mary without first having a devotion to and a special relationship with Mary? Let us simply recall how important in the founder’s vision was the conviction that Marists, who bear the name of Mary, have a special mission to do. A solid candidate who aspires to be a Marist apostle cannot do the work of Mary unless he has a personal and loving reference to Mary, who will place in his heart her concern for the salvation of all. For Colin the whole idea of receiving interested candidates is dominated by the notion of mission as doing the work of Mary. This particular aspect of mission is to cooperate in the mission of the Society of Mary.

---

<sup>54</sup> E. Keel (ed.), *A book of text: for the study of the Marist Spirituality*, Rome, 301. This is part of an introduction to the theme of communion for mission.

<sup>55</sup> FS, doc. 140, 6.

<sup>56</sup> Coste, *Lectures on Society of Mary*, 155.