

**The One-Page Rule.**  
**Colinian Inspiration for Independent Thinking in Marist Education Today**  
*Alois Greiler sm*

We cannot say how our founders would comment our modern topic and we should not re-project our thoughts into their culture. At the same time, there is continuity between them and us: name, symbols, key phrases, institutions, and so on.<sup>1</sup> I am looking for authentic continuity between Colin and us in view of our topic. My key is Colin's distinction between a Marist in formation and a Marist challenged to apply what he learned in varying circumstances in ministry. This distinction I parallel with a pupil in school to learn essential values and independent thinking to be able to apply this later in life.

### **1 Toulon: a spiritual topography**

Marist origins in Toulon can be read as historical information on events.<sup>2</sup> As spiritual topography I re-read them as an innovative process leading us to our topic. A standard postcard shows the two main features of the topography of Toulon: the town and the bay. For a spiritual topography I highlight the town as the settled and structured form of life, with an inward curve. And I mark the bay with an open curve, open towards the sea, towards life. The symbol for the inward curve is the house, here Montbel, Marist formation house close to Toulon, and for the outward curve it is the ship, here one of the ships the Marist missionaries travelled on. During the generalate of Father Colin four of the 15 groups of missionaries for Oceania left from Toulon:<sup>3</sup> 1842, 1843 (two times), and 1848, all together 25 men, one bishop, priests, and brothers. This establishes a specific dynamism of Marist life: from the formation house to the mission, from school to personal career.

The standard role as religious was the starting point. A delay of departure gave Marists time which they used to respond to local needs. This made them known. People were impressed and asked Colin to send Marists on a permanent basis. These projects became the new standard – hopefully open to further innovative initiatives. What was seen as an unnecessary delay developed into a new vice-province for the young Society! On 23 February 1854, Colin appointed Eymard as vice-provincial for the Var-Department: La Seyne, Toulon, and Montbel.<sup>4</sup> The argument was to allow independent action because of the distance to the provincial house in Lyon. Toulon therefore exemplifies an innovative process allowing independent thinking that bore good fruits.

However, Toulon is also the place where Colin supported 'understanding and firmness', and warned against 'anarchy'. His circular letter of 28 June 1852 has a postscript for Eymard, who obviously found it difficult to be in charge. Colin encourages him in his role:<sup>5</sup>

« ... Continuez à user d'indulgence et de fermeté ; chacun de vos inférieurs n'a qu'à s'occuper de son emploi sous votre direction et doit s'interdire tout raisonnement sur votre ligne de conduite, autrement c'est anarchie. »

### **2 Marist formation then – Marist education today**

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Coste sm, *Causerie au Chapitre Général des Sœurs Maristes. Points de Continuité entre nos fondateurs et nous*, Rome, 1994; Id., *Talk to the Marist Sisters' 1994 General Chapter. Points of Continuity between our Founders and Us*, Rome, 1994. I like to recall that it is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the great Marist historian Jean Coste who died on 20 August 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Bourtot sm, *Marist Presence in County Var*; Id., *Les Pères Maristes à Montbel (1852-1903)*, in *Forum Novum [FN]* vol. 12 (2010) 114-123. Further documentation on Toulon is now available with the volumes of *Colin sup*.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Girard sm (ed.), *Lettres reçues d'Océanie par l'administration générale des pères maristes pendant le généralat de Jean-Claude Colin. Textes revus, corrigés et ajoutés, 1836 – 1854*, 10 vols, Paris, Éditions Karthala – Société de Marie, 2009-2010 [= LRO], vol. 10, p. 34-49, departures during the generalate of Colin (1836-1854).

<sup>4</sup> *Colin sup* [= CS] 4, doc. 558, Colin to the priests and brothers of the Society in la Seyne, Toulon and Maubelle. The vice-province belonged to the province of Lyon, established, like the province of Paris, in 1852.

<sup>5</sup> CS 4, doc. 351, quote from the postscript, paragraph 11 of this edition.

We seek continuity between these innovative origins in Toulon and Marist presence in education and in other ministries in our generation, albeit in different circumstances.

Numbers 49 and 50 of the Marist Constitutions speak of the constant challenge to renew our charism in each new generation – an important hermeneutical principle:

“49. In accepting new members the Society renews itself in two ways. It transmits and reformulates its tradition and gives a new generation the opportunity to enrich Marist tradition by expressing it anew. 50. Marist tradition can continue to be a living reality only if it offers an experience of the Gospel similar to that of Jean-Claude Colin and his companions. Successive generations make the tradition their own by praying and reflecting on the events crucial to the foundation of the Society.”

I need to state clearly: Colin insisted on tradition, Church teaching, solid formation, clear authorities, and clear rules – definitely for the initial stages of becoming a Marist. He wanted to form religious and pupils as good Christians. However, he also allowed for personal decisions according to changing circumstances in apostolic ministries. We can discern a two step approach: solid initial formation – enabling people to apply it in life. Both poles need respect, Marist tradition in its original setting, and questions Marists ask today.

My thesis is the following: Inspiration from Colin’s teaching on formation for the mission in France or in Oceania can be paralleled to the preparation of young people in school today for their life after school. In the symbols of our spiritual topography: in the house you learn to build the ship with which you cross the vast and challenging seas of life. Marist ethos in school needs to prepare for life after school and therefore build up independent thinking.

One of Colin’s key roles was to write the rules for Marist life. At the same time he always knew not everything can be fixed in written regulations. He often talked about keeping the essentials of the Marist spirit. And he liked to recall the one rule that impressed him most. When he was a pupil at the minor seminary of Saint-Jodard, 1804-1809, the director, Father Philibert Gardette (1765-1848), put up one page on the notice board. This one page contained all the necessary rules to pass this school successfully. When Colin became director at Belley College he asked for a copy of that rule. Sadly, the seminary and this one page were destroyed by a fire in 1827 and we will never know its content.<sup>6</sup>

We do not have a copy of Gardette’s one page rule. Still, it is my model to name inspirations from Colin which favour independent thinking in a Marist school today.

### **3 Colin’s thinking on formation of young religious as inspiration for Marist schools today**

As if limited to one page, I name aspects in Colin’s teaching which encourage initiative – based on firm roots in a Marist commitment, the Christian message, and Church teaching.

Colin himself was of course innovative: He was the founder and first superior general of a new religious congregation.

He discerned that we live in different times and these new times need a new approach for which he found inspiration in the way Mary acted. He wrote a rule of life for the new congregation. Although using elements from tradition, the Colinian constitutions are a new text unlike with other congregations who often copied existing constitutions.

Colin worked best with good assistants. The foundation was greatly helped by his brother Pierre and by Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn. He had committed vice-principals such as Pierre Chanel and Benoît Lagniet to direct Belley College. The missions in Oceania got stability with the appointment of Victor Poupinel. In novitiate formation, Denis Maîtreperrière did the day to day work. What Colin did was to inspire courage and to highlight the essentials.

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<sup>6</sup> *Origines Maristes*, Rome, doc. 491, 1838-1839, Le règlement de Saint-Jodard, excerpt Mayet, *Mémoires*: « Je n’ai jamais vu dans mes études qu’un règlement bien fait, celui de St Jodard, par M. Gardette : il étoit affiché et tenoit sur une feuille de papier. Quand je fus nommé supérieur à Belley, je les fis demander ; on me dit qu’il avoit été brûlé dans l’incendie. »

In his earliest rule, the inspirations from Cerdon in 1822, he recommended that the superior follows the opinion of the majority of his council rather than his own opinion:<sup>7</sup>

“In council, the superior shall always express his opinion last, that is, after all the others, and the opinion which has more votes shall prevail. The superior himself, however, shall propose subjects for the various offices or works of the Society; he may even say what he has it in him to say so that the councillors shall go along with these nominations. If the votes are equally divided among both sides, it is lawful for the superior to choose the side he wants, but he is invited and even beseeched, for the sake of humility, to choose the side which is contrary to his own. Mary always followed the will of others, rather than her own.”

To allow independent thinking in others requires the attitude of humility Colin inscribed in the Marist constitutions, especially for those in a leadership role.

In 1829, Colin became director of Belley College. He started with ‘Instructions’ for the staff.<sup>8</sup> Three sections are relevant for us. Paragraph 68 of the modern edition reads: “They will make a special study of the character of each individual pupil so as to know how to deal with him; they will endeavour to gain their confidence the better to win them over to Jesus Christ and to prevail upon them more easily to work.” In other words, recognize individual skills and promote them. Paragraph 62 warns: “A whole lifetime does not suffice to eradicate bad impressions gained in childhood.” In consequence, positive impressions will also last a whole lifetime. Then, in six paragraphs Colin speaks about the good example of the teachers as key (§§ 1, 8, 30, 84, 108, 111). Do we teachers go ahead with innovative thinking?

Speaking about formation in the novitiate, Colin made his famous statement: Taste God! Once that is achieved, a person will be able to go on mission and make the right choices:<sup>9</sup>

“I would try simply to unite them to God, to bring them to a spirit of prayer. Once they were united to God, everything else would take care of itself. 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; not 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.”

To depend on God alone makes you independent of the human need to depend on others for praise and affirmation.<sup>10</sup>

“If you wish to serve God, you must see him alone, you must be independent, independent of creatures, independent of superiors, not looking for their esteem. Otherwise, as long as you cling to something, you cannot go to God. Take a bird. If you tie it down with a cord, it will flutter about quite a lot, but it will never be able to fly off very high.”

For spiritual reading, Colin recommended a set programme for beginners and only for those advanced in the spiritual life he foresaw mystical authors. He was aware of different stages in personal development:<sup>11</sup>

“Nevertheless, he said one day that because of the misuse that young people might make of the writings of Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross, Surin and other similar writers, he intended at one of our retreats to forbid anyone under the age of thirty to read any ascetical work except Saint Francis de Sales.”

<sup>7</sup> Jean Coste sm, *Etudes sur les premières idées de J. Cl. Colin - I - Studies on the Early Ideas of Jean Claude Colin - I* (Maristica, 2), Rome, 1989; summary in Id., *A Marian Vision*, 376-382, quote on p. 378;

<sup>8</sup> François Drouilly sm, *Les avis de Jean-Claude Colin au personnel du petit séminaire de Belley – Jean-Claude Colin’s Instructions to the Staff of the Minor Seminary of Belley* (Maristica, 3), Rom, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Coste sm (ed.), *A Founder Speaks. Spiritual Talks of Jean-Claude Colin*, English translation by Anthony Ward, Rome, 1975; <sup>2</sup>1988 [= FS], doc. 63 (1842), for the quote, and FS, doc. 26, 1 and doc. 121, the example of Father Frémont; see *Une vision mariale de l’Église: Jean-Claude Colin - A Marian Vision of the Church: Jean-Claude Colin* (Maristica, 8), edited by Gaston Lessard sm, Rome, 1998, 434-436.

<sup>10</sup> FS, doc 9, 3 (1838). See the quotes from Bossuet, read by Colin, in Jan Snijders sm, *A Mission Too Far... Pacific Commitment*, Adelaide, ATF, 2012, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> FS, doc 35, 6 (1838-1839); the broader context: Alois Greiler sm, ‘Colins Bibliothek’, in Id., *Inspiriertes Leben. Sechs Hinführungen zu Jean-Claude Colin*, Dessau, 2002, 27-47.

The departing missionaries received a copy of an early version of the Constitutions and a letter of spiritual advice and encouragement. The important clause in Colin's letter of 13 October 1836 is the following:<sup>12</sup>

"I understand you can follow no other rule than circumstances will permit. Nevertheless, you may feel better with a summary of the Constitutions of the Society. I send you one. But remember it is still far from perfect."

Going through a thorough formation, especially inhaling the Marist spirit and tasting God, prepares for ministry and mission, or in Colin's words, 'to do great things for God'.<sup>13</sup> This phrase often recurs when Colin talks to young Marists about their future.

The aim of a Marist school was academic excellence enabling pupils to pass even the non-Catholic *université*-system at the time. The other aim was to form young Christians who would be capable of leading a Christian life in various roles in a de-Christianized society.

The underlying principle is: a clear guidance in the first stage, formation, in a way that enables to act according to varying circumstances in the second stage, ministry and life.

This clear guidance rests on principles of faith and a subsequent ethos. But, is our Marist ethos in our schools perceived as based on faith or based on certain human values only?

#### 4 The wider Marist family in Oceania: Multiple intelligence

From Marist tradition I can address another aspect of our topic: multiple intelligence as inspiration for schools today. The multi-branch structure of the early Marists, including priests, brothers, sisters, and lay people, could inspire a broader view on education.

A person enters the Marist family by making profession, by taking the three evangelical vows as guidance for life. These vows address the whole person: mind, body, and heart.

The Marist seminary in Belley offered the standard programme for philosophy and theology along approved manuals. Colin allowed also for some new elements: art classes, English, Scripture, and Church history. For ongoing formation he organized further course work during the yearly retreat and occasionally an extra week, so for education and preaching.<sup>14</sup>

In his initiation to Marist spirituality Colin used many images, symbols, and metaphors.<sup>15</sup> Without going into detail, this approach is broader than a rational approach only.

A Marist was to live in community, not to work only and lonely. 'Jammais seul' is his fighting phrase for Oceania.<sup>16</sup> A group produces better results than a single person, a group shares and offers different talents.

There were priorities like the Oceania mission, education, home missions, and tertiary education. However, as long as a man could exercise a ministry living in community, he could develop personal skills in other apostolates, free to respond to varying local needs of people and Church. That is why the Society of Mary has no one single characteristic ministry.

In Oceania, Bataillon and Chanel set out to translate Christian hymns into local language and to convey the Christian message via music. Chanel also played the organ.<sup>17</sup> Verguet is famous for his colour sketches, drawings, and art objects from Oceania.<sup>18</sup> The missionaries sent back to Europe letters, detailed reports, scientific studies, and cultural and natural objects from the Pacific. These functioned as information and for fund raising. The objects also raised interest in the mission, gave a 'sense' of a different world.

<sup>12</sup> CS 1, doc. 4, Colin to the departing missionaries, postscriptum.

<sup>13</sup> Alois Greiler sm, *Do Great Things for God like Mary*, in FN 12 (2010) 100 - 105.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Coste sm, *Lectures on Society of Mary History*, Rome, 1965, passim.

<sup>15</sup> Coste, *Marian Vision*, 198 - 224.296-302.

<sup>16</sup> Claude Otto, *Plutôt trois que deux, seuls jamais! Le Père Colin et l'isolement des missionnaires*, in FN 1, 3 (1989) 274 - 294.

<sup>17</sup> Examples for translation of Christian hymns: LRO, vol. 1, p. 198 (Wallisian), and p. 274-276 (Futunian).

<sup>18</sup> Mervyn Duffy sm - Alois Greiler sm, *Verguet's Sketchbook. A Marist Missionary Artist in 1840s Oceania*, Adelaide, ATF, 2014. Today we have an important discussion on cultural objects sent by missionaries: did they preserve what would have been lost or was it theft?

The missionaries leaving from Toulon included priests and brothers. Christian teaching addressed the intellect of people. The practical skills of brothers, sisters, and lay people, the experience of Marists in community addressed other dimensions of the person, highly important for Pacific people. The bishop of Southern Africa at the time asked for Marist missionaries – because of the brothers. He said brothers will more easily win the local people for Christianity. Indigenous people were fascinated by Catholic liturgy (Pompallier in New Zealand!). Missionaries provided medical assistance and holy pictures. Maybe the brothers contributed more to the conversion of Wallis and Futuna than the fathers!<sup>19</sup>

Colin was involved in the foundation of the wider Marist family, extending to women and lay people. I think of the Marist Sisters and of Marie-Françoise Perroton and the pioneers of the Third Order who later became the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary. Those offered yet other skills to reach out to all people because Mary is welcoming all. To do this, you need missionaries with different talents. François Yvert, a lay man, left France with the mission band from London on 8 December 1840. He practically started Catholic printing and teacher training in New Zealand.<sup>20</sup>

### 5 *Non scholae, sed vitae discimus*:<sup>21</sup> Preparing for life

My parallel between tradition and today looks very simple and in a way it is: formation – ministry, school – life after school. Naturally, life is not that simple and Colin did not prepare a full set of rules but limited himself to basic elements as guidance and criteria. We forget a lot once we are out of school. The one page of Marist inspiration – does it stay with us?

*Non scholae sed vitae*. Marist education has its day-to-day focus on life inside the school. At the same time, we should not forget that we prepare pupils not only for exams, but for life, with the Marist ethos as a compass to sail out onto the open sea. How present is the dimension ‘after school’?

Innovative and independent thinking firmly rooted in the Christian and Marist ethos is our topic. Could you draft a ‘one-page-rule’ how your school encourages ‘independent thinking based on the Marist ethos, an ethos based itself on faith’? We run the house, the institution. Do we also help the young people to build the ship?

Colin conveyed his conviction to confreres: you will do great things, great things for God! This way he drew out talents in people with little self-esteem. To encourage self-confidence will encourage independent thinking and will produce great things.

<sup>19</sup> Snijders, *A Mission Too Far*, 194 – 195: Bataillon on the importance of these skills. Importance of brothers in the missions: Yvan Carré sm, *Le projet de mission mariste en Cafrerie*, in FN 8-9 (2007) 20 - 36; Edward Clibbsby fms, *The Contribution of the Marist Teaching brothers and the Marist Coadjutor Brothers to the Foundation of the Catholic Church in Western Oceania*, in A. Greiler sm (ed.), *Catholic Beginnings in Oceania. Marist Missionary Perspectives*, Adelaide, atf, 2009, 105 – 121; Id., *Upstairs / Downstairs. The Marist Brothers in the Life of the French Catholic Mission*, in Kate Martin – Brad Mercer (eds.), *The French Place in the Bay of Islands. Te Urunga Mai o Te Iwi Wiwi. Essays from Pompallier Printery*, New Zealand, 2011, 150 – 165.

<sup>20</sup> Yvan Carré sm, *Jean-François Yvert, missionnaire laïc en Nouvelle-Zélande*, in *Rendre l'univers Mariste. Exposées présentées lors des journées d'étude des 8 – 10 août 2005 pour les laïcs maristes*, Saint-Augustin, 2006, 86 – 97; Ken Scadden, *Jean François Yvert. Quick apprentice and pioneer printer (1796-1867)*, in Kate Martin – Brad Mercer (eds.), *The French Place in the Bay of Islands. Te Urunga Mai o Te Iwi Wiwi. Essays from Pompallier Printery*, New Zealand, 2011, 198 – 203. See Mary Catherine Goulter, *Sons of France. A Forgotten Influence on New Zealand History*, Wellington, Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, <sup>2</sup>1958 (1957), for Marist priests starting Catholic schools and even first school in Auckland (Frs. Petitjean and Garin) in New Zealand. For Wallis writes Bishop Bataillon to Colin, 15.12.1841 (LRO, vol. 1, doc. 119): “une presse est indispensable”.

<sup>21</sup> *Non scholae, sed vitae discimus* is a Latin phrase: ‘We do not learn for the school, but for life’, meaning that one should not gain knowledge and skill simply to pass exams, but because of the benefits they will gain in their life. The motto is the inversion of the original, *Non vitae, sed scholae discimus*, a lamentation by the Roman philosopher and playwright Seneca, in reproaching armchair philosophers: *Non vitae sed scholae discimus*. The former is the motto of many schools all over the world, also in the abbreviated form *Non scholae, sed vitae*. Reference: Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, Epistula CVI / Wikipedia, 4 February 2014.

Mary, the model of discipleship, inspires an education of the whole person, mind, body, and soul. Academic work needs to be excellent and Colin always strove for this. Marist religious life also highlights other skills, other intelligence, other dimensions of a person.

The underlying concept is that of Christian freedom. Independent thinking and innovative action happens within a frame of my commitment, in dialogue with those to whom I am accountable, and in response to local needs. It is mature and responsible thinking.

Many pupils will have frowned reading the motto 'Non scholae sed vitae discimus' above the entrance of their school in times of a strict traditional academic learning. They would not frown at this sound principle in a modern teaching system which does more justice to this matter-of-fact aim of every school. Independent thinking, decision-making and courage are required. Colin tried to form young Marist religious solidly to prepare them for the open sea. Marist schools want to do the same today.

The solution cannot be to introduce more and more subjects to form subjects, to burden formation with more and more material. The present school and university systems (Bologna-model!) suffer from this and the effect is counterproductive. "*Bien formé* is not the same as *cultivé*".<sup>22</sup> School is to give more than formation, is to allow personal growth to be capable to face the open seas of life.

For this, the essentials should fit onto one page, the one page we give to those who depart from our school in town onto the open sea of life.

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Philipp, *Theologische Bildung im 21. Jahrhundert*, in *Stimmen der Zeit* 139, 2 (2014) 97-107, quote on p. 97: „*Bien formé* ist noch nicht *cultivé*. Der Mensch kann ausgebildet werden. Bilden kann er sich nur selbst. Ausbildung befähigt zum Umgang mit einem Stück objektiver Wirklichkeit.“