

Communion as Mission. Where Ministry, Community and Spirituality Intersect

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Colin: toward one heart and one mind in the Church

In November, 1833, while in Rome for the first time seeking approbation for the Society of Mary, Father Jean-Claude Colin wrote the *Summarium* or Summary of the Rules of the Society. In that document, in the section on the lay branch of the Society, he gave clear expression to what he considered the aim or mission of the Society:¹

“The general aim of the Society is to contribute in the best possible way, both by its prayers and its efforts, to the conversion of sinners and the perseverance of the just, and to gather, so to speak, all the members of Christ, whatever their age, sex or standing, under the protection of the Blessed Mary Immaculate, Mother of God; and to revive their faith and piety and nourish them with the doctrine of the Roman Church, so that at the end of time as at the beginning, all the faithful may with God’s help be *cor unum et anima una* (one heart and one soul/mind) in the bosom of the Roman Church, and that all, walking worthily before God and under Mary’s guidance, may attain eternal life. For this reason entry into the Society is open even to lay persons living in the world in the confraternity or third order of the Virgin Mary”.

Extracting what I perceive as the essence of the mission as expressed in this paragraph, we have:

The aim of the Society is to gather all the members of Christ so that at the end of time as at the beginning all the faithful may be one heart and one mind in the Church.

The mission of the Society is to reproduce among all the faithful the ideal of communion, *cor unum et anima una*, one mind and one heart, that was found, according to the Acts of the Apostles, among the earliest believers:

“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life (Greek: *κοινωνία*), to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”²

The community of believers was of one heart and mind (in the Latin: *cor unum et anima una*), and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need”.³

Most founders of religious communities cite these passages in Acts to describe the sort of communion they want to prevail within their religious communities. Often they despaired of ever seeing such a state of affairs prevail in the church at large. Religious life became for them a flight from a world and a church full of vice, political scheming, and self-aggrandizement; religious life

¹ *A Book of Texts for the Study of Marist Spirituality*, compiled by Edwin L. Keel (hereafter BT), doc. 93 (= *Summarium Regularum S.M.* § 109).

² Acts 2:42-47.

³ Acts 4:32-35.

for them became a refuge, a place where the “real” Christianity could be lived. Father Colin is at least unusual, if not unique, in that he takes *cor unum et anima una* as the ideal not only for Marists to strive for within their own communities, but also as the aim of their ministry within the church as a whole. True, it is an ideal, only to be achieved in its perfection at the end of time, not before; nevertheless, it is the defining aim of our mission, the goal toward which all of our efforts are to be directed.⁴

Koinonía

In the texts of Acts quoted above, the Greek word *κοινωνία* is used to name the being-together of the early Church. “Community” is a rather static term, naming the simple fact that people are together in some grouping. The being-together of this earliest Christian community was a more dynamic reality, something that they devoted themselves to, something that they worked at. The New American Bible translates it as “communal life.” The Revised Standard Version uses “fellowship.” In this paper I will translate it “communion,” which captures both the dynamism of the relationship as well as the fact that it is something that must be worked at and built up. The *cor unum et anima una* of Acts 4 describes the ideal or perfection of the Christian *κοινωνία*/communion. In taking *cor unum et anima una* as the aim of Marist mission, Fr. Colin was defining our mission as the building (or re-building through reconciliation) of ecclesial communion.

In the first letter of John the word *κοινωνία* is used in a way that indicates the depth of communion to which it refers:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have *κοινωνία* with us; and our *κοινωνία* is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ”.⁵

Here *κοινωνία* or “communion,” the dynamic relationship among believers, is said to be rooted in, indeed to participate in, the very *κοινωνία* of the Trinity, the communion of Father and Son in the Spirit. And according to Acts, this *κοινωνία* is the first fruit of the resurrection and the practical consequence of resurrection faith. The believers grounded their communion in the apostolic teaching, in Eucharist, and in prayer. And their communion was extended to all, even the poor and lowly, and eventually even to Gentile as well as Jew, to slaves as well as free men and women, and included not only a welcome to fellowship, but the very sharing of material possessions as needed, a depth of solidarity that lifted people out of their condition of neediness, and has led Christians in our day to solidarity with the poor and oppressed in their search for justice. As time went on, there arose the need for reconciliation and conflict-resolution, and this, too, was not merely a pragmatic activity required in any instance of human communality; reconciliation for Christians is itself rooted in the fact that God’s extending *κοινωνία* to human beings is itself an act of reconciliation.

Rooted as it is in the Trinitarian life, Christian *κοινωνία* is not an impersonal collectivity of anonymous individuals, but is a living and life-giving relationship of mutuality among free and equal persons. All are indeed equal in dignity, yet there is diversity of gifts, of ministries, and of roles. The Baptismal initiation to life in the Church is a call to the initiate to participate, according to one’s gifts, in building communion among all the members. It is a call to a radical

⁴ In his book, *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* (New York, Burns & Oates, 2005) p. 174-178, Timothy Radcliffe OP, former Master General of the Dominicans, suggests that much of the current tension within the Catholic Church is played out between those who emphasize communion, the Church as the people of faith gathered into unity around the altar and around Christ, and those who emphasize that the Church is to be in service to the Kingdom by reaching out to all of humanity to bring them into unity. Radcliffe shows how full Catholic integrity must include both. That is also the position of this paper, as its very title might indicate.

⁵ 1 John 1:1-3.

hospitality in which every other person is welcomed into one's life, and is respected, indeed honored, as part of one's very self. But if we welcome others, we welcome them as human beings, as people with ideas and opinions, with feelings and values. If we accept them as human beings, we allow them to give voice to their thoughts and emotions. Only thus do we welcome them into true communion (One can wonder if the church has ever found or will ever find an effective way to give the laity a voice, to take their opinions, feelings, and judgments seriously).

As a dynamic relationship, communion is always in process of becoming, always needing to be worked at and built up, always in need of reconciliation (we always need to say we are sorry!). True communion, as rooted in the divine *κοινωνία*, cannot coexist with selfish strivings for domination, for celebrity, or for accumulation of wealth, the very things Father Colin rejected. These, of course are the very things Jesus rejected when tempted in the desert. Jesus knew, and Father Colin perceived it anew in his day, that communion cannot be built among human beings by means of domination, celebrity, or wealth. Was it not true that the Church's wealth, her dominative politics, and her parading of her costly artistic prowess contributed to the fracturing of Church communion in the falling out between the Eastern and Western Churches and in the Protestant Reformation? Father Colin's rejection of precisely these three approaches to ministry is a further indication that his primary concern was to work toward reestablishing the *κοινωνία* that had characterized the Church in the beginning, the Church that had known the supportive presence of Mary among the apostles.

Salvation of a Fractured World

When we say that Christ is the Savior of the world, we often mean that he came to earth to save the souls of its human inhabitants so that they might, after life in this vale of tears, move on to a better life in heaven. Eternal salvation is the ultimate aim, but the salvation of individual souls is only part of the picture. We are saved as members of a body, the church: our relationships with others within that body is a crucial dimension of salvation.⁶ Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God into this world, and the book Revelation speaks of a new heaven and a new earth: reconciliation and communion in this life is an aspect of the saving mystery. In our highly individualistic culture we have perhaps lost sight of the impact of Christ's Incarnation and Paschal Mystery on the human community as a whole and indeed on our relationship with all of creation. We human beings need to be reconciled not only with God, but with one another and with the very earth we inhabit. Indeed Jesus tells us that reconciliation with God is impossible if we are not reconciled with our brothers and sisters.

And what a fractured world we live in today! How in need of reconciliation we are! Everywhere we look, the world seems hell-bent on fracture and division: the hatreds in the Middle East; the incivility of discourse in both politics and the church (some years ago Bishop Pilla, head of the US Bishops' Conference at the time, did not hesitate to use the word "hatred" in reference to the attitudes of the various factions in the American church toward one another); conservatives against liberals; science against religion; secularists against religionists; people wanting to send immigrants packing; rejection of homosexuals. In the Church, there are those who are quick about flinging the epithet "heretic" about; and others who want to emphasize separateness and distinction between clergy and laity. And global warming seems to be a sign of how our relationship with the earth has been ruptured and is on a destructive course.

And while it is true that our western culture is hyper-individualistic, and people prize their autonomy above all else, nevertheless at the same time people are hungering for connection, for communion, for healing for the human family. It was for such healing and furthering of communion that the Church was founded. It was to help heal the world's brokenness and minister to this communion that the Society of Mary was called into being. And given the way Father Colin wanted us to cooperate with the bishops, to collaborate with diocesan clergy and other

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *On Christian Hope (Spe salvi)*, treats the questions of whether the Christian understanding of salvation is individualistic or communal, and whether it is exclusively heaven-oriented or also has import for the building up of this world. See §§ 13-15, 28.

religious, and to include the laity in the Society as partners in mission, I believe he really intended the Society of Mary to be a new experiment in ecclesial communion.

Some years ago, John L. Allen, Jr., senior correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter* and a Vatican analyst for *Cable News Network* and for *National Public Radio*, spoke at the convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference. He suggested that “the key to recovery [of religious life] is not primarily new vocations, but a renewed sense of purpose.” Then, after discussing several “mega-trends” in the church today, each of which causes tension and division within the church, he presents what I take to be his suggestion of a new purpose for religious life:⁷

“Your communities already straddle each of the divides we have outlined. Within religious communities, one finds women and men from the developed North and from the growing South; members thoroughly immersed in the hustle and bustle of secular life, as well as those more attuned to the ancient language and rhythms of the church; members who are more liberal in their political and theological instincts, living alongside those who are more conservative. Your tendency, I suspect, is to take this unity-in-diversity almost for granted, because it has always been thus. What I am proposing is that the polychrome communities in which you live are not merely a precondition for apostolate—they *are* your apostolate in this era, in the sense that your mode of life, and the values which underlie it, are like balm for an ever more broken church. Your call is to become steadily more intentional about promoting the value of community in the broader Catholic discussion”.

Our Only Model

Father Colin said that the Society of Mary was to be modeled on no other religious congregation, but only on the early Church. One of the characteristics of the early Church was that there were no religious orders living as separate enclaves within the Church or vying among themselves for turf. Father Colin wanted to structure the Society of Mary in such a way that it could serve the unity of the Church. He wanted the whole world to be Marist because he wanted the spirit of Mary to imbue the whole Church. But he also envisaged the whole world Marist, and all members of the Church potentially Marists, because his vision was of Mary uniting all in her family, and the Society of Mary being a kind of catalyst for this work by itself becoming the all-inclusive embrace of Mary that gathers all into one. Yes, in one sense the Society of Mary is one religious congregation among others, with a juridical structure and clear limitations of membership. But in another sense, through its lay branch, the Society’s boundaries are permeable, and potentially co-extensive with the entire Church. It is interesting to note that in the *Summarium*, in the section on the Superior General and his role in uniting the entire Society in all its branches, it is suddenly the pope, not the superior general, who is the center of that unity:⁸

“The whole Society of Mary is governed by the Superior General on whom all the various branches of the Society depend, just as the various branches of a tree draw life and activity from their trunk. In this way let unity be preserved in the Society and the children of Blessed Mary be united by mutual bonds of charity as members of the same family. Let them encourage one another to virtue by their advice, their prayers and their efforts; let them stand firm in the faith, adhering with all their heart to the Supreme Pontiff, the head of the Roman Church, whom they are to obey in all things as they would Christ”.

Father Colin wanted the Pope to be a member of the Society, indeed our head, because the unity of the Society is not an end in itself, but is in service to the unity of the Church as a whole. There is ultimately to be no distinction between the Society and the Church. Is this a dream impossible of practical realization? Yes, surely. But is it a vision that guided the work of the early Marists and can guide ours as well? Yes, very much so.

Inclusion, Hospitality, Voice

⁷ John L. Allen, Jr., “The role of religious in the church and the world”, in *Horizon*, Winter 2007, p. 37.

⁸ BT doc. 104 § 114 (= *Summarium Regularum S.M.* § 114).

The focus on communion as the essence of Marist mission is reinforced when we consider the mercy which is to be at the heart of everything that we do in ministry as Marists. We know how Father Colin emphasized mercy in Marist pastoral practice. Marists are to emulate Mary as Mother of Mercy; by their ascetical practice they are to become instruments of the divine mercies; mercy is to be emphasized in the pastoral formation of Marists, and in their preaching and confessional ministry. But what is mercy? For Father Colin, the qualities of compassion and kindness were indeed part of what he meant by “mercy.” But for him, inclusiveness was key to his understanding of mercy:⁹

“Someone reminded him that he had said the whole world must be Marist. He said, “Yes, God the Father has appointed our Lord as judge of the living and the dead. The body of Jesus is a simple body. With the Jesuits you must have talents and many other things.

“In the congregation of the blessed Virgin, it is not so. She is the mother of mercy. Her body will have several branches. She will be open to all kinds of people”.

Doing the work of Mary in the Church means working to include all: “[Her] motherly heart is forever open to all and [her] boundless charity embraces all the ages of the new covenant, all nations and all peoples.”¹⁰ “I was the support of the newborn Church; I shall be so as well at the end of time. My bosom will be open to all who would enter there.”¹¹ “Jesus left his mother with his newborn church to form it in its cradle. She reappears at the end of time to call in those who have not yet entered its bosom and to lead back to it those who have left.”¹²

Inclusiveness, and therefore mercy, is a form of hospitality; it is ultimately an act whereby we welcome others into our lives, whether simply as members of the human family, or as members of our civic community, or as members of the church, or as members of our religious community. The whole world is to be Marist because no one is excluded from Mary’s care or from ours. But true hospitality welcomes them with all their thoughts and values, all their concerns and energy. True hospitality finds a way to take people seriously, to give them a voice, within the living communion of the church. It is this sort of inclusiveness, this sort of hospitality, building this sort of communion, that is the mission of the Society of Mary.

Mission, Ministry, Communion

During the past forty years and more since Vatican II, as we Marists have striven to respond to the conciliar call for renewal, we have sought to rediscover the mission of the Society¹³, to name and re-appropriate the purpose for which we were founded. Often we have identified this quest with the question about which ministries are more appropriate for Marists. And while home mission preaching was the first and paradigmatic Marist ministry, and foreign missions were always a possibility, and Father Colin strongly opposed taking on ordinary parochial ministry in France, and he asserted that the Society’s “first aim is teaching,”¹⁴ and he was concerned for the poor, he also said that Marists can take on any mission, with, however, a preference for less attractive, more hidden works.

I would like to separate the quest for mission from the question about ministries. I believe that for Father Colin, the mission of the Society is a goal that can be worked at through practically any ministry. Specific ministries are simply possible vehicles for pursuing our mission of (re)building ecclesial communion. What is important is not so much the choice of ministries as that we attend to the need for reconciliation and communion and the possibilities for working at these goals in whatever ministry we are engaged. On the other hand, perhaps Fr. Colin preferred the more hidden, unknown, neglected works, the things others were unwilling or unable to do, because they are often precisely the works where there is the greatest need for reconciliation and inclusion.

⁹ BT doc. 109 (=A *Founder Speaks*, doc. 2).

¹⁰ BT doc. 453.

¹¹ BT doc. 2.

¹² BT doc. 7.

¹³ Cf. John Thornhill sm, “The ‘Refounding’ of the Society of Mary through the Rediscovery of Our Mission”, *Forum Novum* 2, 1 (1992) 98-104.

¹⁴ BT doc. 531.

Hidden, forgotten ministries are to be preferred because they usually mean working to include and reconcile people who have been left out of communion with the wider social body. Perhaps he opposed taking on parishes because in his day they ministered mainly to people already reconciled and included in the Church. Perhaps he favored the education of youth, especially the bourgeoisie or middle class, because they were the population in greatest risk of becoming distanced from the Church by a secularizing culture.

Regarding ministry to the poor, Father Colin was elated when Marists ministered to those in prisons and workhouses. But though he lived through the beginnings of the industrial revolution and its catalogue of injustices to workers, and saw the beginnings of socialism as a reaction against these injustices, he never seems to have developed any clear idea of trying to better the lot of the poor. We may well regret that he has not left us with any clearer teaching or example for us in our concerns to join with the poor and oppressed in their struggle for justice. Nevertheless, perhaps he has left us with an important insight. It has been suggested that the most significant factor in the condition of the poor is not simply their lack of wealth, but their powerlessness and their marginalization.¹⁵ If so, then perhaps the first factor in addressing their plight is not what we can do for them; rather it is to be in solidarity with them. At least that is where ministry to the poor must begin. There are too many examples in the world today of people wanting to help others and ending up harming them because they were doing things for them rather than with them.

There is also the story of how during the 1848 revolution, the Marists were sometimes the only effective ministers because, while they undoubtedly were partisan in their preferences of one side over another in the conflict, they did not publicize their preferences and felt called to minister to people on all sides of the conflict. Again, concerns about reconciliation and communion seem to have outweighed concerns about which side was in the right, or with furthering the position that may have favored more the status of the Church in society.

Community and Communion

Our current Constitutions tell us that “service of our brothers in community is a primary apostolate.” Undoubtedly this dictum was placed in the constitutions because as active religious we tend to see our lives in terms of apostolate. Apostolate becomes the primary analogue with which we compare all else. The constitutions, in trying to highlight the importance of the attention to be given to community life, want to place community within the horizon of our focus on apostolate. I would like to go one step further. Attention and energy spent on communion among Marist religious is attention and energy spent on mission. If the Society’s mission is to build ecclesial communion, this cannot be accomplished in the Church at large if it is not being attended to among us within the Society. Building communion among ourselves is the proving ground for our work of building communion in the Church and world. Marist communion is not a help to mission, it is mission; indeed it is the pre-requisite to all other missionary activity.

There is no section on community life in Father Colin’s constitutions. In fact, the word “community” is only used as a synonym for the Society as a whole, never in reference to the fact that we normally live in groups. What he does talk about are the relationships that ought to obtain among us as members of Mary’s family. This is a much more dynamic concept than that of “community.” Community is simply the condition of being with other people. Communion is the dynamic of relationships within communities of faith. Father Colin was concerned about the quality of our relationships and about the ongoing process of living up to the condition of communion that ought to prevail if the Society of Mary is to be true to its name and capable of carrying out its mission.

Spirituality and Communion

If our mission is to build ecclesial communion, and if therefore reconciliation and the building of communion among us Marists are central to our missionary endeavors, spirituality, namely our communion with God through prayer and contemplation, is at the heart of it all. Recall the words

¹⁵ Cf. Thomas E. Clark, “Option for the Poor: a Reflection”, in *America* (January 30, 1988) 95-99.

already quoted from the first letter of John: "...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have *κοινωνία* with us; and our *κοινωνία* is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

True communion among human beings, the *κοινωνία* that is the fruit of resurrection faith, is rooted in the divine *κοινωνία* and is not achievable outside the context of that faith. We simply cannot build true communion among ourselves within the Marist community, or in the church and world at large, if our lives are not rooted in communion with the Father and with Jesus in the Spirit.

This does not mean that prayer is all that is necessary to build communion. Communion is indeed a faith reality, but grace builds on nature. We need therefore, to use natural helps as well: processes for dialogue; reconciliation processes; community building processes; conflict-resolution processes; even simple socializing and celebrations can help. But without the faith context and the grounding in the divine communion, what we produce may be political or social harmony, but it is not true communion.

Communion and Vocation Recruitment

I believe that many young believers today are searching for genuine communion rooted in God. Prospective recruits to religious life often speak of community life as one of the things they are seeking in religious life. It may be true that some of them are simply seeking refuge from a frighteningly fractured world. But I do not believe they are seeking the kind of "warm and fuzzy" intimacy that many in my generation were craving back in the 1960's. The young today are looking for community rooted in faith. Perhaps they sense that only a genuinely believing and praying community, be it a religious community or the church itself, can possibly have any healing effect on the broken world we live in. Perhaps only a religious community that demonstrates awareness of the brokenness of our world as the critical issue for mission, and that believes that what it has to offer is a communion rooted in God, will attract vocations from the current generation.

The American Catholic Church is a Church of immigrants and of ethnic minorities. True, many of the white European Catholic immigrants have become mainstreamed into American cultural, economic and political life. But new waves of immigrants, many of them Catholic, continue to arrive from Latin American and from southern Asia. If our Marist mission is indeed to build ecclesial communion, the immigrant presence challenges our approach to vocation recruitment in three ways:

- 1) The very integrity of our mission for communion requires that we include cultural minorities, especially those still on the margins of society, within our pastoral concern, but also in our efforts to invite worthy candidates into Marist life.

- 2) Recruitment of minorities must be a function of our mission to promote communion, not merely a function of our desire for survival. It is not for our own survival, but for the good of the immigrant groups themselves that we should welcome worthy candidates from them into Marist life. For many immigrant groups, America has indeed been the land of opportunity. Immigrants have moved into the mainstream by pursuing careers in positions of public service and leadership: as policemen and firemen; as business entrepreneurs, often beginning on a very small local scale; by running for political office; and also by pursuing a religious or clerical vocation. A religious or clerical vocation is a response to a perceived call from God mediated through a community of faith. But the acceptance of such a vocation has important collateral effects that the individual probably seldom thinks about. A religious or clerical vocation can give the individual a particular status, especially within his religio/ethnic group, but also in the wider culture. It is also an important aspect of the immigrant group's "coming-of-age" that they can produce vocations from within their own group and no longer need to depend on religious leadership either from the country of their cultural origins or from outside the group.

- 3) If we are going to welcome candidates from among cultural and linguistic minorities, recruitment and formation personnel, indeed perhaps our whole membership to

some extent, would need to seek the training necessary to be able to relate appropriately to candidates whose culture and ways of thinking, acting, and valuing may be very different from ours. True communion does not mean assimilation into a dominant culture. True communion entails mutual enrichment and respect.

Communion and Marist Laity

We began this paper with a quotation from the section of the *Summarium* on the lay branch of the Marist project. As Father Jean Coste pointed out in his address to the 1977 General Chapter¹⁶, whenever Father Colin gave voice to his ultimate understanding of the Society and its mission, what Coste calls Colin's "utopian vision," the lay branch is central to the vision. Somehow the mission of the Society of Mary begins with the lay branch—it was part of the original plan—and it ends with the lay branch in that the achievement of the *cor unum et anima una* can only, in Father Colin's mind, be truly accomplished through the collaboration of the lay branch in our mission.

We know that the lay branch was realized at its origin as a third order, and for a century and a half, the Third Order of Mary kept alive that aspect of the Marist project. For all those years the Third Order of Mary has made a great contribution to the Church, and has numbered among its members outstanding men and women of faith. Perhaps it is true that there have been more saints in the Third Order than in the religious branches of the Marist family. Nevertheless, I think we have also become aware, with the help of Father Coste, especially in his address to the 1977 General Chapter and in the talks he gave to the 1979 meeting of Provincial Promoters of the Third Order, that the Third Order has never fully realized the vision of Father Colin. We made of the Third Order a sort of small appendage to the Society. Seldom if ever have we dared to urge the fledgling from the nest so that it might try its wings and soar to greater heights and farther horizons than the religious branches can ever do on their own. I do not think we have yet found the way to make them true partners with us in mission. We have not found a way of inviting them into full communion with us such that they speak with their own voice in matters that affect our common mission, and that we take them seriously.

My point is not to be critical of the past. Our forebears did what they could, appropriate to their time and place, with the lights they had, and with their understanding of Marist religious and clerical life. But Father Colin's vision for the Society and for its lay branch is always bigger than any one way of implementation. If the Society appropriates in a more conscious way the mission of (re)building ecclesial communion, this will call for developing new ways of involving lay Marists as partners in mission:

In our parishes, schools, and other ministries, we Marists should develop and model new ways of partnership between clergy/religious and laity. The promise of Vatican II in this regard has never been fully realized. And there probably is no one way of incarnating the spiritual power inherent in Baptism and the "priesthood of all believers" in structures, procedures, and relationships. But given Marists' concern for ecclesial communion, and given our rejection of status as the basis for relationship, we Marists ought to be in the forefront of exploration for new models of partnership between clergy/religious and laity.

Our lay partners should be not only fellow-workers in the vineyard, but fellow-tasters of the wine of our charism and spirituality. We should invite the laity not merely to share in the ministerial tasks of parish or school, but to share our vision, our passion, and our sense of mission. The point of all this is not to get lay people to love us, but to get them to love what we love, to share our passion for the work of Mary.

Whatever form the partnership may take, whatever models we may explore, if we invite lay people to share our vision, or passion, and our mission, we must listen to them. We must help them to develop their own voice as Marists, and we must expect that they will have much to tell us and to teach us. If they are to be partners with us in the work of Mary, we must include them in the processes of decision making regarding what that work is and how it is to be carried out.

¹⁶ SM Document 3.

Communion as Mission and as Missionary

We saw how in the early years of the Society of Mary, prior to 1836, Father Colin articulated the mission of the Society in terms of gathering into the Church and into unity. At that time the thrust of the Society's ministry was reconciliation of those alienated by the French Revolution and re-building a broken church. The emphasis was on internal cohesion and communion within the Church in France.

Yet even then, the Marist aspirants dreamt of the time when they might engage in missions to unbelievers far beyond the borders of their native land. They expressed this hope already in 1822 in their letter to the Pope seeking approbation for the Society. The dream became reality in 1836 when they were granted papal approbation precisely because of their readiness to take on the mission fields of the western Pacific. From then on the gaze of the Society took in the whole world, and the energies of the Society exploded outward to bring the light of the Gospel to "the farthest shores of the earth" as Pope Gregory XVI stated it in *Omnium Gentium*, the decree of approbation for the Society of Mary.¹⁷ Indeed the Society of Mary was being sent on mission to the area of the globe most distant from the Church's center in Rome.¹⁸

Perhaps it was the world-wide reach of the Society's mission that led Fr. Colin to image the mission of the Society as a world-wide embrace: "Our aim is nothing less than to make the whole world Marist."¹⁹ "I have a great ambition: to seize hold of the whole universe, under the wings of Mary by means of the Third Order."²⁰

Always it was the lay branch that was essential to fulfilment of the Society's mission. Marist religious could indeed be scattered extensively, even to the farthest ends of the earth. But the work of Mary needed to penetrate intensively into every dimension of human society, and only the laity is capable of that aspect of the universal mission.

It is no wonder, then, that when we find a new expression of the mission of the Society, articulated by the young Marist, Alphonse Cozon, to whom Father Colin had entrusted his vision during his last months in this world, the lay branch is once again the focus:²¹

"In the mind of the founder, the third order ought not to be confined within the limits of the society. It ought to be, in a sense, a work outside the Society, to which the Society ought to communicate its own spirit, which is the spirit of the Blessed Virgin. Its development, therefore, ought not to be restricted to the proportions of the Society; we are not to retain it in our hands, but only let it pass through them. Thus, it is not a piece of the mechanism in the Society's clockwork, it should not revolve around us, so to speak, like a planet around its constellation, but it should shine out into the Church. Thus, it is no longer a precious way to help the Society by drawing the interest of pious faithful to the Society, but rather it is a way to extend the Society's action over the world, in such a way that the same thrust, going forth from Mary, passing through the Fathers and the members of the Third Order, might go forth and lose itself in the Church without any personal consideration".

Note again that just as in the case of the *Summarium* text which we quoted at the beginning of this paper, while the focus of Cozon's text is the lay branch, the mission envisaged is that of the whole Society, Marist religious and laity working together. And while the *Summarium* text emphasized the internal cohesion aspect of communion, this statement by Cozon has captured the outward thrust and inclusiveness of the universal communion that is our goal.

¹⁷ BT doc. 107.

¹⁸ The modern diocese of Dunedin in New Zealand, which encompasses part of the mission territory assigned to the Society in 1836, is the farthest geographically from Rome.

¹⁹ BT doc. 108.

²⁰ BT doc. 124.

²¹ BT doc. 133.