

IV – Marist Spirituality

Decision Making and Marist Spirituality. A reading of three passages from Mayet's Memoirs: The 1845 deliberations on purchasing a house in Paris¹

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Discernment and decision making: one is probably seen as a spiritual activity, the other as a psychological phenomenon. Both the spiritual activity and the psychological phenomenon are at the heart of not only the moral and spiritual life of an individual but also of the government of a group. In this present paper, we wish to start reflecting on this theme in the context of the Society of Mary; and from a decision specifically made during Father Colin's Generalate concerning the purchase of a house in Paris.

After some historic facts which position the situation, we will attempt first of all to enter into the process of decision making as done by Father Colin by reading together three articles extracted from Mayet's Memoirs. These articles are reproduced in the appendices following the same editing principles as used in *Origines Maristes*.² Finally in the third section, we will examine in the light of a contemporary psychological analysis the process that was put into action regarding the purchase of the house in Paris.

I Some historical facts

From the beginning of 1846 until 1863, the Marists owned a house in Paris in which 30 or so religious could live. Built in 1774 for the Duke of Montmorency Laval, the Laval mansion was demolished to make way for the church, Notre-Dame-des-Champs. When the Marists purchased it (for 100 000 francs), the building was numbered 5, rue de Montparnasse, but after 1849 had been renumbered 31.³

The Marists had been in Paris for more than two years when the purchase was made. In the summer of 1843, Father Ozanam had rented a much smaller house, fitting a dozen people at a tight squeeze, 3bis rue de Fleurus, at the end of the street which adjoins the Luxemburg Gardens. The house rented in 1843 was a 10-minute walk from the one purchased in 1846. Not very far from the Sorbonne, the neighbourhood was then what it is now, a student one. Frédéric Ozanam, the brother of the Marist, lived and worked there. There is little doubt that his presence and his apostolate projects with students accounted for much of the pressure which Father Ozanam put on Father Colin so that the latter would decide to purchase a house in Paris that would allow the Marists to give free rein to their zeal.⁴

¹ Originally a talk at the 1984 colloquium on Marist Spirituality in Rome, it was published as Gaston Lessard sm, *Prise de décision et spiritualité mariste. Lecture de trois passages des mémoires Mayet: Délibérations en 1845 sur l'achat d'une maison à Paris*, in *The Study of Marist Spirituality*, Edited by Gaston Lessard, Rome, 1984, 239-260. Translated by Elizabeth Charlton, Wellington, November 2017.

² Parts of these texts have already been published: part of the first article (3, 408-409) forms doc. 275 of *A Founder Acts*; another part of the same article (3, 409-411) forms doc. 85 in *A Founder Speaks*. In the latter compendium, doc. 89 reproduces a passage from Mayet which also covers deliberations about the Parisian purchase but does not contain any new elements when compared with the three articles that we reproduce here. Introductions to these documents and *A Founder Speaks*, p.227 give much information on the events that we are studying here from a specific point of view. See also OM2, pp. 56-57, a study Mayet's summary of a letter from Bishop Affre (6, 650s).

The editing principles of extracts from Mayet are presented in OM2, pp. 108-111. Here we firstly present the text of the article by Father Mayet, then the marginalia or annotations that this latter added on different occasions. Instead of a "critical apparatus", parentheses are used to show the corrections made either during transcription, pr. (=prius), or later, rev. (=revision).

Also included in parentheses are page numbers referencing Mayet by indicating the volume and page number (6, 621 = Mayet, volume 6, p.621).

³ Ph. Gobillot, *Vie du vénérable Jean-Claude Colin [Life of the Venerable Jean-Claude Colin]*, 2nd part, typed copy, p. 176.

⁴ Mayet 3, 206sm; 5, 250.

Yet Father Colin had accepted only reluctantly to open a house in Paris and was pushed by the necessity to have a base in the capital for the missionaries departing for Oceania.⁵ As much as Lyon appeared to him as the natural centre of the Society, where it had planted its roots and from where it could spread to the antipodes, Paris initially appeared to him as a mere place to pass through and not as a mission ground where the Society could play a significant part.

At the end of 1844, 18 months after the arrival in Paris of Father Ozanam and the three or four fathers who settled with him at 3bis rue de Fleurus, it had become urgent to leave a house where they had been cramped since the start and which showed itself more clearly every day to be insufficient for their needs. These needs were indeed far from being perceived in the same way by Father Ozanam, Superior of the house and by the Society's general administration in Lyons. Admittedly the house fulfilled its first function, which was to avoid the departing missionaries from having to stay at the seminary for foreign missions during the weeks and months they spent preparing their departure.⁶ Whether it accommodated or not at any given moment missionaries passing through, from the simple fact of the length [of its existence] the house tended nevertheless to inevitably acquire its own personality. On the one hand, one had to live and in order to do so had to work. On the other hand having a base for the departing missionaries was not the same as undertaking an apostolate conceived in response to the needs of the Church there. Father Ozanam, sensitive to the material needs of the house of which he was superior and interested in his brother's, Frederic, projects does not appear to have perceived the difference, which was crucial in the eyes of Father Colin. For the Superior General, the decision to purchase a house in Paris instead of continuing to rent called into play the Society's fidelity to its special mission and spirit.

The life of the Marists in Paris during the early years has been interestingly documented in a report by Father Bourdin⁷ and by three letters from Bishop Epalle⁸, but our attention is going to focus here on the manner in which Father Colin arrived at the decision to purchase the house in rue de Montparnasse, using the three passages from Father Mayet's memoirs reproduced in the appendix. Our approach will be quite simple: we will read these texts while asking ourselves whether we can learn something about the manner in which Father Colin arrived at a decision and how this manner is linked to what we call Marist spirituality. What factors come into play when the Superior General makes a decision concerning the whole Society?

II The decision to purchase

1. The first one present is God. Mayet first introduces us to the members of Council, kneeling (3, 408). Neither Father Colin nor any of the Marists present doubt not only that God is there but that He will have his idea about the presence of the Marists in Paris. That is Father Colin's idea on specific providence (3, 413s). Here is admittedly a theory that we would not accept without examination or without resistance. But it is perhaps already here that it is interesting to see how Father Colin refers to what he calls the will of God.

In effect, if we forget for the moment Father Colin's abstract theological presentation on providence and we look at what concretely the will of God means for him, we are quickly brought to a narrative. Prayer does not so much concern asking God about His intentions as to unite with Him that means to engage with the world that His name raises. To join in prayer is to enter into the "other world". Moreover, once kneeling, what Father Colin invites, is to shed one's own spirit, one's own way of seeing, one's own thoughts (3, 408). Yet the reverse of that exhortation is the exhortation to follow the spirit of the Society. It is there that the will of God manifests itself: "It pleased the Lord to bring the Society to birth in the wilderness of the Hermitage and in the wilderness of Belley" (3, 410).

It is perhaps a little too steep to speak of a town as a wilderness; Father Colin realised that and managed a bit of humour, "I call it a wilderness because grass grows in the streets of the town", thereby introducing another contradiction (the desert being the place where grass does not grow),

⁵ Mayet 4, 584s; 4. 638.

⁶ Mayet 5, 639s.

⁷ APM P62 220.

⁸ APM OMM 411.

but takes us where he wants to lead us, that is to the Marist spirit, defined by the name that the Society carries, a name which refers to Mary, Queen of Apostles, and to her history, which gives full meaning to the history of the Society of Mary, “What great good she did for souls. Yet in this world she was hidden and as it were unknown” (3, 411). Thus we can say that, for Father Colin, to seek the will of God equates to seeking to live according to the spirit of the society of the Blessed Virgin, the link between the two being the events which constitute the foundation of the Society.

2. The second important factor that we see at work in the decision concerning Paris is the analysis of the situation itself; analysis done of course in the light of the spirit of the Society, thus from a well determined perspective.

The first element of this analysis can surprise: Father Colin calls upon “a deep and intimate feeling... that Paris deserves punishment and that soon a storm will burst there” (6,619). It is the apocalyptic interpretation of a political situation. Father Colin applies to a certain case an interpretation of his time which is part of the manner in which he understands the mission of the Society of Mary. It is interesting to see how the Archbishop of Paris describes the same situation from his own viewpoint, “These times are not good. A high-ranking figure told me that upon Louis-Philippe’s death churches could well be closed” (6, 622s).

That is not all: Paris is a large city and the Marists are from the countryside (6, 619). It is reasonable to ask whether they possess the necessary competence for the tasks they will have to do. Father Colin is simultaneously conscious of the specific needs of an urban environment (and, in terms of Paris, a particularly demanding urban environment) and the specific abilities of the Marists of that time. Essentially, Father Colin does an analysis of the local situation in the light of the characteristics specific to the Marists as a result of their origin and their education. It is not a very advanced anthropological analysis, but we can see there the embryo of an awareness of cultural differences.

Finally, the type of ministry which appears to be offered to the Marists in Paris does not fit with the missionary vocation of the Society, “Our Rule tells us that we will leave for others the souls that are well. We came for the sinners” (6, 620). Thus the actual situation about the house in Paris is pitted against the vocation of the Society in a detailed way. Despite the appearances, Father Colin is not diminishing ministry to female religious communities. Rather he is examining the needs of the diocesan Church in Paris and whether the vocation of the Society is well able to cater for the needs that appear to be arising.

3. Up to now, we have seen Father Colin preparing his decision by referring to two main orders of reality: the will of God expressed in the goals and spirit of the Society; the local reality: the world that Paris represents, the specific men who will be called to work there, the ministries offered to them. It is always Father Colin who reflects, who examines. The Superior General is going to involve an external factor: the opinion of the Archbishop of Paris. Admittedly, the Marists would not have been able to settle in Paris without his authorisation, but what Father Colin wants to obtain is more than just an authorisation, which the Archbishop could hardly have refused. Father Colin wants the Archbishop’s opinion (6, 621). The former leads the latter to give his opinion on the advisability to purchase, on the price to pay, on the choice of neighbourhood (6, 622). This is more than an authorisation, in this sense the Archbishop is not asked to approve an already-made decision, but he is invited to participate in the decision making, which commits him more deeply to the Society. Father Colin thereby illustrates what he means when he asks the Marists to act in such a way that the Bishop can consider the Society as his own, *tanquam suam*.

Let us take note that Father Colin kills two birds with one stone, for not only does he bring the Archbishop to commit to the Society, but the manner in which he obtains the Archbishop’s opinion serves at the same time as an apprenticeship for the Marists to whom he gave the instruction to consult with the latter. Father Colin does not indeed deal directly with the Archbishop, but he entrusts this mission to the Marists in Paris (6, 621). Not only did the Marists in Paris receive in this way from Father Colin a lesson on the manner in which the Society deals with Bishops, but they were also included in the decision making process. A new factor is thereby introduced into the process: the participation of members of the Society.

4. In fact, we have been in council since we started reading Mayet. All that Mayet recounts, he heard in council. Consequently we have to remember that all that we have just noted in Father

Colin's course of action occurred in the presence of the Superior General's council. Kneeling, referring to the history of the start of the Society, examining the position of the Fathers in Paris, asking for and receiving the Archbishop's opinion, are all approaches taken in council and which take on a dimension which exceeds the person of Jean-Claude Colin. In the person of the Superior General in council, it is the Society of Mary which learns to become aware of itself about making a real decision.

Unfortunately, Father Mayet's attention is precisely centred on the person of Father Colin and not on the running of council. For the intention of generations of future Marists, the annalist records in his *Memoirs* the words and actions of the founder that he judges exemplary. As for the comments of other council members, they are cavalierly summarised in expressions such as, "we discussed", or, each one "gave voice and feeling" (3, 409). But as the last phrase indicates, it is clear that the council did not just listen to Father Colin. As Mayet notes, "As the opinions of council were divided..." (3, 412); "... often there was disagreement..." (6, 620).

The opposite would have been surprising. What is less expected is the frequency with which they vote on the same question. At a meeting of December 1844 Mayet tells us that each one "gave their vote and opinion" (3, 409). Yet on 27 January 1845, one month later, Father Colin again calls the vote and, Mayet adds, "That day nearly all were for renting" (3, 417). But it was far from finished. On 6 April 1845 Mayet writes, "I cannot repeat here all the deliberations which took place, all the reflections that were made on this topic. Often a vote was called, often there was disagreement; when a side had been taken, Father Colin often came back to what had been decided and could not move on" (6, 620s). Was it a case of a war of attrition with Father Colin having the vote repeated until there was a positive endorsement of his own opinion? Nothing indicates this.

This way of proceeding, inconsistent with parliamentary procedure, appears rather to indicate that the council does not function as a parliament, i.e. it is not a confrontation of several forces, each seeking to impose itself on the others. What appears to be occurring is that the council is an extension of the Superior General and that it goes with him through the same process to come to a decision. If one looks at the matter from the Superior General's viewpoint, one appears to have the following phenomenon: on the one hand, the Superior General embodies in his person the whole Society, or rather the Society as a whole; that is to say the good of the whole Society, the general good (as distinct from specific assets that are the property of a province, of a house or of an individual) is what defines the duty and responsibility of a Superior General. Father Colin was acutely aware of this role of the Superior General. On the other hand, his manner of carrying out this responsibility consists of having the largest possible number of Society members participate as closely as possible. What then happens in council is not that several divergent interests arrive at a compromise based on the balance of power between one another, but that many Marists, at the limit all Marists, dedicate part of their energy (as they have their own work to do) to the furtherance of the general good of the Society.

The council is only one aspect of this participation of members in the general interest of the Society. The third passage from Mayet *Memoirs*, which we now read starts, "Father Colin once again brought this matter to the general congregation of 9 September 1845. It was discussed with utmost care, utmost maturity and the congregation voiced its feelings (see the minutes)" (6, 649s). We are fortunate to have not only the minutes, but also the report of the commission tasked with the study of this question.⁹ The report contains interesting considerations (e.g. a fact which leans towards having a house for the departing missionaries is that "soon the journey from Paris to Le Havre will take five hours by train"), but what interests us here is that in a chapter, the participation of members in the general business of the Society reaches its highest point. It is not democracy, in the sense that the decision was not made by a majority of votes. But it is the participation of the greatest number possible of Marists in the affairs concerning the Society as a whole, that is to say in what is the specific responsibility of the Superior General.

III A psychological analysis of the decision

⁹ APM 321.2.

To help us pose more questions about the texts we have just read together, we should keep in mind contemporary literature on decision making. For example, let us take the psychological analysis of decision making proposed by two researchers, the American Irving Janis and the Australian Leon Mann.¹⁰ For illustrative purposes, it would be interesting to see to which degree does Father Colin's procedure include the seven steps which, according to Janis and Mann, measure the quality of a decision:

1. Explore a large number of alternatives;
2. Set all the objectives to meet and the values brought into play by the choice;
3. Carefully weigh up everything known about the cost and the risk of negative as well as positive consequences attached to each alternative;
4. Go in search of new information in order to assess again the different alternatives;
5. Digest and take into consideration all new information or expert opinion, even when it goes against the alternative to which one was initially leaning;
6. Examine again the positive and negative consequences of each alternative, even those initially discarded, before making a final decision;
7. Provide in detail the implementation of the selected action plan, while providing for contingency plans in case known dangers were confirmed.¹¹

1. The first step is to make an inventory as complete as possible from an analysis of the situation. If one takes into consideration all the aspects of the situation, what are the alternatives for action? What matters here is not to omit any alternative; it is to have the greatest number possible of options. The greater the number of options, the greater the freedom of choice. Laziness, lack of imagination, insufficient knowledge about the problem's data limits the number of available options; the quality of the decision is reduced by as much. What about the attention with which Father Colin explores the alternatives regarding the house in Paris?

Theoretically what is the range of options? Leave Paris or stay. If we stay, rent (as we have done until now) or buy. If we buy, in which neighbourhood and what type of building? Father Colin is attentive to keeping the range of alternatives open, "I am against buying a house in Paris, and all the same I neither refuse it nor desire it" (3, 411). The refusal to yield to the pressure from Father Ozanam ("such or such a house won't still be on the market in a few days": 3, 413) comes also from the desire not to prematurely finalise the inventory of options. At the council meeting of 27 January 1845, all was still possible; it was a question of "knowing whether we would buy or rent as we have done until now or leave this city" (3, 416s). In the scenario of buying, the Archbishop of Paris has some ideas about in which neighbourhood to buy (6, 622) and the Marists have an idea of the price about which they fluctuate – fifty or sixty thousand Francs (6, 621).

In fact, the options were not numerous, and Father Colin has only a modest credit in having envisaged them all. His refusal to be pushed into a hasty decision indicates nevertheless that he understands the importance of having several options before him.

2. The second step also consists of making an inventory as complete as possible, no longer about the situation which is the object of the decision but from the side of the subject who makes the decision. This time the inventory is about the values brought into play and the objectives targeted by the decision. The different options clearly can be judged in the light of these values and of these objectives only if the subject has clear awareness of them.

Father Colin's considerations on general providence and specific providence (3, 413s) introduce us into the world of the values that he keeps in mind in the decision about Paris. It matters that the decision about Paris belongs to the same universe of spiritual values as does the whole of the Marist project. In Father Colin's eyes, the Marist project in its origins is the work of God (it is willed by God), in its fruition (it is the result of God's action) and in its goal (it fills an intention of God). That is what the whole speech about the spirit of the Society (3, 410s) means.

¹⁰ Janis, I. and L. Mann. *Decision Making. A Psychological Analysis of Conflict, Choice, and Commitment*. New York: The Free Press, 1977.

¹¹ *Op. cit.* p.11.

These values already affect the actual process of decision making (hence the importance of prayer and the divestiture of one's own views: 3, 408s and 417), but they also determine the more specific objectives that must be assured by the decision on the purchase in Paris.

The Archbishop of Paris had forbidden the Marists to collect for their oeuvres (6, 621). This ban assumes that several religious congregations, especially missionary ones undoubtedly, were using their presence in Paris as a means of income for their apostolates outside of Paris. Father Colin has no difficulty in removing that objective for the house in Paris (6, 621), but the need for income for the house itself had already led Father Ozanam to accept ministries, which according to Father Colin, did not correspond with the objectives of the Society (6, 620).

From the point of view of the awareness of the values to protect and the objectives to be assured, the main difference between the local superior and the Superior General appears to precisely be that the latter has a wider and clearer view of the values and objectives that must come into play in the decision about Paris. It is moreover the reflection that Father Colin makes in the council meeting of 27 January 1845, "Ah! That an individual superior never takes his will for that of God. Let him put down the arguments for and against, but not what he wants. Surely, the Mother House has far more at heart the general good of the Society than he does and can better promote it!"¹²

3. The third step looks to the future and consists of weighing up the consequences of each option. While the quality of the preceding two steps depends on the care with which already existing data is inventoried, here it is a matter of foreseeing what can happen as per the chosen option and to weigh the possible gains and losses that go with each option. We are on less solid ground. The step is not any the less necessary. Did Father Colin bother to weigh up the consequences of each action – leave Paris, continue to rent, proceed to purchase?

Leaving Paris presented only disadvantages; it was to give up the advantages that we had looked for in setting up there. To rent had the advantage of costing less immediately, but this advantage disappeared over time. A renter has also clearly less freedom than the owner when it is a question of adapting the rental property to his own needs. As long as we stick to the concept of a base for the departing missionaries, with a small staff and few local commitments, this works. But the inconvenience becomes serious if we consider a somewhat stable presence in Paris.

The purchase represents an investment and provides for the most flexibility and adaptation for the needs of an established community. Once stability has been ensured, nevertheless a new danger surfaces, the political instability in France at the period of time. Father Colin has an inkling at least that a storm will soon burst (6, 619). The Archbishop of Paris has more precise fears – closing of churches upon the death of Louis-Philippe (6, 622s). But it is clear in the decision about Paris that the advantages and risks inherent in each option have been weighed carefully.

4.-6. We undoubtedly would not have taught anything new to Father Colin in telling him that the three preceding steps were necessary to arrive at clear decisions. Was he also conscious of the necessity then of starting the probe again from the beginning, taking care not to exclude information unfavourable to the solution which we are inclined to favour and by re-examining the solutions eliminated from the outset? The texts do not contain enough detail to make it worth our while to question them on the following three steps. Furthermore, we are not to be surprised that the Marists of last century had not systematically applied a method of decision making which is the product of recent research. Let us note all the same the insistence with which Father Mayet indicates that the question was often started again from the beginning, "When we had taken one side, Father Colin often came back to what had been decided, and could not move on" (6, 621).

7. Finally, the implementation and the preparation of contingency plans in case the selected plan proves to be too expensive. There again, we do not have enough information, and it does not

¹² Mayet 3, 215m.

appear that the texts will provide us with many clues that allow us to appreciate the care with which Father Colin would have carried out this seventh step.

We are far from having exhausted the questions that Janis and Mann's book would allow us to ask about the texts we have just read together. We would be satisfied if our exercise indicated that there was an interesting avenue for research in that direction.

Conclusion

Even if it were only a matter of thoroughly examining the decision to purchase in Paris, there would still be more research to do, particularly beyond Marist archives. But a more in-depth study of the theme "Decision making and Marist spirituality" would also involve broader research. Admittedly, Mayet's Memoirs would provide copious material for such a study, but Father Colin's letters, and all that we could find in council meeting minutes or chapter minutes, would necessarily be included in the project. This shows the relevance in having a compilation of these sources as soon as possible for studies of Marist Spirituality.

The study of the theme itself would, it seems, benefit from being set in a context with two main parts: first, spiritual discernment, and more specifically Ignatian discernment as it relates to Marist spirituality; secondly, decision making as a psychological and sociological phenomenon. A study of the way Father Colin and the early Marists thought and behaved in this domain would probably enable us to identify in Marist tradition a number of traits that would favour a deeper spiritual life and a manner of governing that would help the Society better fulfil its mission.

Appendix

Translator's note: The abbreviations used in the transcripts follow those found in Origines Maristes.

pr – first hand / pr+ – crossed out / rev – subsequent revision

THE THREE ARTICLES FROM MAYET ABOUT THE 1845 PURCHASE IN PARIS

I Father's way of preceding and spirit of prayer in undertakings¹³¹⁴

Mayet 3, 408-417 (Mayet's handwriting)

Translation for (1)-(3) - 408-409 – A Founder Acts, Doc. 275; (4)- 409-411 – A Founder Speaks, Doc. 85; (5)-(14) - 412-417 – Elizabeth Charlton

(1) In a council meeting in December of 1844, it came to deliberations on what should be done regarding (*rev* + a foundation of the Society in) Paris. With all the members on their knees, Father Colin said, "Messieurs, let us divest ourselves of all personal opinions, of our own natural viewpoints and our own ideas. This work of ours is not a human work. We shall only succeed in so far as we are united with God and so do His holy will..." And he put before us several other thoughts of this kind.¹⁵ Then he said prayers (*pr* + *for*) in honour of the Holy Spirit, of the Blessed Virgin, and of the Guardian Angels, for the souls in Purgatory, and in honour of St. Joseph, and then the discussion opened.

(2) On the same occasion, he prescribed for the Council and the Society a novena in honour of the Blessed Virgin consisting of a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and the recitation of the litanies of the most Blessed Virgin.

(3) In a council meeting on the same subject and at the same period, after the *Veni Sancte* there was discussion, then Father made us all go down on our knees again, and each one prayed separately during a few moments of silence before casting his vote and voicing his opinion.

(4) In a council meeting on the same subject on December 29th 1844, Father Colin said, "There are some who would rather take to the wing anywhere than within the will of God. Messieurs, let us strip off our own selves; let us not be influenced by the spirit of the

¹³ Vol 1, 436; 4, 592; 3, 408; Vol 1, 473; Vol 4, 627; Vol 5, 686

¹⁴ Also see all the article on the spirit of prayer, Vol 1, 684 and above; Vol 4, 631; Vol 5, 686 &&&.

¹⁵ See Vol 6, p. 618-701; Vol 5, 687; Vol 6 p.62-64, 413. Finally, a lot of articles refer to that one.

world, not even by the way of acting of other religious congregations.¹⁶ To be frank, Messieurs, I know of only one congregation which may, in some way serve, so to speak, as a model for us: the Vincentians.¹⁷ To make ourselves known, to impose ourselves on others, is alien to our spirit. It pleased the Lord to bring the Society to birth in the wilderness at the Hermitage,^{18,19} and in the wilderness of Belley – I call it a wilderness because grass grows in the streets of the town.²⁰ Let us always remember that we are to do good in such a way that we appear *in hoc mundo ignoti et quasi occulti*. Before I die, I want to see to it that this is well rooted in the Society. Someone said once, “The Marist Fathers... there is no need to ask what their spirit is. Their name is a sufficient indication, if they understand it properly. Indeed Messieurs, the Blessed Virgin (as the Church tells us) is the channel of graces, the Queen of Apostles, and what great good she did for souls. Yet in this world she was hidden and as it were unknown”.

(5) On the same day he said to us, “I am against buying a house in Paris, and all the same I neither (*pr* + fear, nor ? it) refuse it nor desire it. I am trying to find out what is the will of God. If God expresses His will to me, I will wholeheartedly commit myself to His will. I like to progress only when driven by the circumstances. This is how I have always proceeded as it were in all our establishments. When I know the will of God, I go boldly and say, ‘He who wills the end, wills the means’.²¹ But I implore Him to stop everything if this is not His will. For the approval in Rome of the Marist Brothers²² as one body with us, I always feared that it was not the will of God. I took some actions in Rome, all while praying to God to show me His will; today I know it: I am satisfied”.

(6) “Take heed not to go too fast. It is not all about establishing houses, they must prosper”.

(7) ²³“As the opinions of council were divided, he told us, “I never take action when I see that things are in doubt. My brother could tell you that when there were just the two of us to conduct the Society’s business, when we weren’t in agreement, I waited.”

(8) Father Ozanam writing from Paris to pressure him into a decision, saying that such or such a house won’t still be on the market in a few days, “He’s pressuring me”, Father Colin told us, “He says that we have to hurry. In a way, that is all I would need to make me decide to do nothing. I don’t like to be backed into a corner and do things at speed”.

(9) ²⁴On these occasions, he said to us, “There are two sorts of providence, one general, which wants generally all that is good, and to recognise it, you need only ordinary prudence. In this regard there is no sin in starting or in not starting what one has in sight; good is done. Only it is a short-lived good and which does not have great significance. The other is a specific providence, which absolutely wants this particular good work and it is precisely that one that I am seeking for our establishments by prayer, by reflection, by council meetings. In this latter case, good works have an altogether other significance; God has a goal He wishes to reach and His will is done.”

(10) For this matter in Paris, he held a large number of council meetings. We were constantly gathered around him and we spent 2 to 3 hours deliberating on this subject.

(11) When it was question of an important matter of this type, he dwelled on it all day, in the refectory, while chatting during breaks, and everywhere.

(12) ²⁵How the Society always found delays of our holy and wise Fabius [*translator’s note - Cunctator, known for his delaying tactics*]. And it is hoped that this way of operation is

¹⁶ See tact in relations Vol 6, 628; way of proceedings in the establishments, Vol 6, p.630.

¹⁷ See Vol 1, p.237; Vol 4, p. 7, 94-96.

¹⁸ Near Lavalla.

¹⁹ (*In text*) near St Châmond (crossed out *rev*)

²⁰ See Vol 1, p.9 and articles indicated there.

²¹ See Vol 7, p.601, an extremely remarkable saying of Father Colin regarding his spirit of prayer.

²² During his first trips.

²³ See Vol 5, 493bis.

²⁴ (413m-415m: Father Mayet’s reflections)

²⁵ See Vol 6, p.618. Paris & all the articles.

maintained in the Society, in the Council, in the superiors! Often a proposed undertaking appeared at first sight to be highly suitable, and the majority of the council leaned towards an affirmative decision. We pray, we wait, we reflect, we discuss for a long time, we research, and we see after a few weeks, a few months, so clearly what we have to do that we are surprised, totally surprised not to have seen it first off. The thing is, mankind is limited, the light comes from on high, it is that God wants mankind to feel its weakness, its incapacity and the need it has of Him, in supernatural things we must not be led by the natural spirit. Hence so many imprudent doings throughout the world, because there are so few who pray and who reflect, even among the righteous and the zealous men. We see an apparent good, a real good; we jump right on it, and it is not always the highest good, the most fruitful; then we have to take backwards steps. In things of God, we have to act through the spirit of God.

(13) At the same time, just as Father Colin was slow to decide, so he was quick to take action once the thing had been decided before God.²⁶²⁷²⁸ “When something has been decided”, he would say, “You have to take action straight away and go forward. I do not like dawdling”. He was quite upset in 1845 when Bishop Epalle, Bishop of Sion delayed his departure day by day. But Father Colin did not dare make any comment out of respect for the Bishop’s suffering health and Father Colin attributed his slowness to his ill-health. But to us Father Colin said, “From now on I will not let anyone make his own arrangements, not even the (*rev our*) bishops²⁹³⁰; I see that I will have to be at the helm for the (*rev our*) bishops as for others.”

(14) On January 27th 1845, Father Colin held a meeting to work out if we would buy or if we would rent in Paris as we had been doing until then, or if we would leave that city.³¹ In the middle of the meeting he fell to his knees, we recited *Salve Regina*. Then he said aloud word for word, “O immaculate heart of Mary, give us the grace and light that we need at this time. O Saint Joseph, you who were witness of the actions of Jesus and Mary, give us the same grace. Holy Guardian Angels...” He did not finish, then got up, advised the greatest purity of intention, the complete removal of one’s own judgement to not be swayed by it and to put oneself into the hands of God... Then he called the vote. (On that day nearly all were for renting).

II Caution. House in Paris in 1845.³²

Mayet 6, 618-625 (Mayet’s handwriting)

(1) We cannot think how many hours we spent with Father Superior (the members of Council) in 1844 or 1845 with him on the subject of the house in Paris.

(2) It was a matter of knowing whether we would continue to rent, whether we would buy, whether we would leave Paris.

(3) The council so to speak was constantly meeting.

(4) For several months, Father Colin felt the strongest opposition to buying in Paris. “When we went to set up in that city”, he would say to us, “my consent was surprised rather than obtained. I could never rest *pleno cordo* on that consent”. (p.619)

²⁶ On January 27th 1845, he said to us, “

²⁷ In 1844, at the theological house in Belley there was construction. Some days before the commencement of the academic year, nothing was ready, nothing was finished. He left, he set all in motion, bricklayers, carpenters, he filled the house with workers. Everything started when it should. Without him, it would not have been possible.

²⁸ (I must add for veracity that often (*rev sometimes*) what made things late was that Father Colin hampered the local superiors by his way of doing things, and then they did not dare take action.

²⁹ It’s about Marist bishops.

³⁰ We see them clearly.

³¹ See Vol 6, p.618 and all the articles indicated there.

³² Same matter, Vol 5, 250; Vol 3, 408; Vol 5, 639, 644; Vol 5, 493bis; Vol 5, 720; Vol 5, 401; Vol 5, 687; Vol 3, 416; Vol 3, 215 to the margin at the button of the page; Vol 3, 220, 221, 222, 223 (*rev 222. 223 crossed out*); Vol 6, 663, 627 (*rev 627 crossed out*) 625. We can also consult, though with discretion and reservation, the report of Father (p.619m) Bourdin, Vol 7, p.789.

(5) He told us again, “I cannot protect myself from a deep and intimate feeling that I have in my soul, that Paris deserves punishment and that soon a storm will burst there”.³³

(6) “Also”, he said, “We must not put ourselves forward ahead of time. Cardinal de Bonald complained to me a while ago that the Society was not doing enough outside the house for the oeuvres of the city. I replied to him, ‘Your Eminence, we do, but we do in secret’.” Then (*rev + we/us*) he added, “We are nearly all from the countryside;³⁴ providence wanted it so. In large cities, you need a certain style, certain manners that the spirit of God does not condemn. (*rev + In Paris*) talking about of one ours, someone told Monseigneur de Sion, ‘Monseigneur, beware of an education conducted so close to Savoy.’³⁵

(7) What Father Colin disliked most about Paris was the type of ministry that our confreres were doing in that city, the ministry of chaplaincy to convents.³⁶ “Our Rule tells us that we will leave for others the souls that are well. We came for the sinners.”

(8) “The direction of these communities of women,” he would say, “is a waste of time³⁷. It is dangerous for our younger men, it softens; they find they like it and then they forget everything”. He spoke vehemently on this topic.

(9) “Monseigneur de Sion wrote to me that that this type of ministry contributed greatly to devalue the Society in Paris”.

(10) I cannot repeat here all the deliberations which took place, all the reflections that were made on this topic.

(11) Often a vote was called, often there was disagreement; when a side had been taken, Father Colin often came back to what had been decided and could not move on.

(12) Finally we thought we could buy a house for 50 or 60 thousand Francs.

(13) Father Colin wrote to our confreres in Paris telling them to see Monseigneur Affre, Archbishop of that city, and to tell him that they came on behalf of the Superior General to ask for his opinion about purchasing a house. As the Archbishop, at the time of the Marists setting up in Paris, had set the condition that there would be no Marist collections in the capital, Father Colin said to them, “If Monseigneur speaks to you about collections, you will reply, ‘Monseigneur, we ask only the permission to collect in one sole house, that of your Lordship’.

(14) The Marists complied with Father Colin’s advice.

(15) When they told Mgr Affre that they came to consult with him on behalf of the Superior General, the archbishop smiled and appeared satisfied. He said to them, “But you first wanted only a base in Paris, and now you want to buy”. They replied, “Monseigneur, we want to allocate for this purchase only sixty thousand Francs”. “Sixty thousand Francs,” said the archbishop, “that is quite modest”. Then he told them he would be pleased to see them settle in, showed them a real interest, and was so kind as to suggest several houses to buy. He added that he would like them to establish themselves in a neighbourhood that he indicated to them, where there is no community.

(16) These Marists having asked him whether he advised them to buy, he replied, “I do not know what to tell you. These times are not good. A high-ranking figure told me that upon Louis-Philippe’s death churches could well be closed”.

(17) When our confreres told him what Father Colin had suggested they should say about collections, he smiled, and this response appeared to satisfy him greatly.

(18) He even gave them a small amount of money (100 Francs I believe).

(19) Then he advised them to be careful.

³³ See Vol 10, 221, Paris in 1854.

³⁴ See Vol 5, p.443.

³⁵ It is Father Ozanam who was told in Paris as a result of his lack of prudence in a community that he was leading, “You have to distrust a little your education; you received it near Savoy. (Father Maîtrepiere). The same thing was repeated to Mgr de Sion about Father Ozanam.

³⁶ (communities of women)

³⁷ See Vol 5, p.633.

(20) The following day, the Marists returned to see him and said, “Monseigneur, yesterday you advised us to be careful; we would like to know if we have done something that caused displeasure to Your Eminence. We would like to know your thoughts so that we can comply with them”.

(21) The Archbishop indicated his satisfaction and told them that he had wanted to say by that not to publish anything without the Bishop’s consent, that one could embarrass him (we understood to what he was referring; this concerns other religious). He also told them, “There was a time when religious dominated; today it is no longer like that; parish priests want to be masters of their own houses, be very careful”.

(22) Our confreres thanked the Archbishop and left. Father Colin was very satisfied with this action and he said, “At least now we know where we stand with this administration and with the Archbishop”.

(23) Nonetheless his uncertainty, indecisiveness and concerns were not stopped and he wrote to those in Paris not to rush into looking for this house to buy, if it did not so to speak offer up itself.

(24) He told us, “I have a deep feeling that prevents me from deciding whether to buy. We shouldn’t ignore these inklings. This foreboding has never misled me in the matters of the Society and I have seen several examples (Vol 1, p.503).

(25) This is where things have been standing for several months at the time of writing (6 April 1845). God makes use of all sorts of these doubts to make His will known, without doubt. But also where could we find such a great desire and such a great quest for this holy will than in our good father?³⁸

III Continuation of p.625 above. Caution. House in Paris Mayet 6, 649-652 (Mayet’s handwriting)

(1) Father Colin brought this matter to the general congregation of 9 September 1845. We discussed it most carefully, with great maturity and the congregation gave its opinion (see the meeting minutes).

(2) ³⁹⁴⁰Father Morcel, having been appointed Superior in Paris, set about with the gravitas and that noble maturity which were standard for him. He consulted with the Nuncio, the superiors of religious orders, the Archbishop.

(3) Finally in the latter days of 1845, Father Colin received a letter from Monseigneur Affre, Archbishop of Paris, written by his own hand;

(4) “Superior General, Father Morcel has just outlined his doubts about a purchase in Paris”.

(5) “The first, which is the fear of attracting attention to you at this time, does not appear to me to be a reason to stop you. The nature of your oeuvres, the spirit of your Society

³⁸ Continued 649.

³⁹ About Father Morcel, see Vol 1, p.761; Vol 2, 189. 183. When Father Morcel was named Superior of Paris (*rev* + he was dismayed), his humility was extremely alarmed, obedience alone made him consent. “Oh!” he said, “As soon as I arrive, I will mount a statue of St Joseph by the door, I will make him superior and I will say to him, ‘Govern’. It is there that I hope in you (It is – you *erased rev*). This appointment was a sacrifice for him. He had been so happy to leave the position of Superior of the little seminary at Belley, in order to re-enter into obedience and to go like one of us (*pr* + to give) to evangelise the countryside.

Father Colin was very pleased with Father Morcel’s conduct in Paris. The latter in May 1846, reporting to a confrere what he was doing, told him thus,

“We go softly. The good God blesses us, protects us, defends us; he spares us, in pushing aside from us the ordeals and the unpleasantness that abound everywhere. He compensates for our weakness; He holds us in the shadow and nourishes us there. What do we need more? We do not shade anyone; we do not know any enemies; we have a few friends. The small turn to us with confidence; the big do not despise us too much. These are the conditions in which, slowly and imperceptibly, this house that Mary leads and which calls for your prayers, develops.”

These few words give, it seems to me, the measure of Father Morcel’s modesty.

⁴⁰ “You want then for the house in Paris to fall down”, said Father Morcel to Father Colin.

gives me the assurance that you will be no more worried than the religious of St Lazare and of St Sulpice. If then the Marists of Paris urge you to purchase, I invite you to agree. This will please me all the more in that you will thus find yourselves next to the house that I have just bought for my seminary".⁴¹

(6) Father Colin was in Belley when he received this letter; great delight appeared on his face. He praised his slowness. He murmured very quietly, "People were pressuring me, they appeared to say that I didn't know what I wanted with all my doubts; I well had my reasons. Here is this Bishop accused of not appreciating religious bodies, who has adjudged; it appears that our spirit does not displease him. He even encourages us to buy. Now I see much more clearly in the will of God, and he was very joyful". He left a little bit later for Lyons without telling us what he had decided and probably he didn't even know yet himself; for certainly he had not yet prayed enough.

(7) Sometime after we learnt that a house had been purchased in Paris for one hundred thousand Francs (February 1846).

(8) Then the adjoining garden was purchased for twenty thousand francs.⁴²

⁴¹ (*In the text*) See the note in the margin, Vol 7, 795.

⁴² What was even more providential, was that the garden, which we could not do without, had hardly been purchased when the owner, very sorry about this transaction, came to offer to cancel it, offering a large indemnity, as if to show that, even though he had acted freely, God had pushed him almost unknowingly.