

Book presentation: Justin Taylor sm, *Jean-Claude Colin. Reluctant Founder*, Adelaide, ATF, 2018.

The book is out only three months and it is too early for an analysis. Here I try to present the book in the context of other Colin-biographies as an invitation to read.

Justin Taylor, born in 1943, is a Marist from New Zealand. His original qualification is in the field of history and especially textual history of the New Testament with respective publications. In the Marist world he is widely known for conferences, preached retreats, and publications.¹ With the Colin-biography now out he will be in demand even more. His diligent work with historical texts echoes in the presentation of themes within his biography of the Marist founder. The impressive result is a tome of about 1100 pages. Those present at the different book launches had already have an introduction and hopefully a first read.

This biography he could base on the archival material and in particular on the excellent editions of works like *Origines Maristes*, *Colin sup*, *Colin fondateur*, and others. Again, this is a moment to thank the editors of resources, in particular Jean Coste (1926-1994), Gaston Lessard, Bernard Bourtot, and Charles Girard (1935-2017). One may note that it took a long time to continue the work begun with *Origines Maristes*. This is also a moment to thank the often hidden work of our archivists, especially Carlo-Maria Schianchi, general archivist and postulator in Rome. Going through the footnotes, I noticed that Taylor bases his work primarily on original sources – a true historical biography.

We find few references to secondary literature and little discussion of other authors. Taylor follows strictly two principles: He presents his reading of the sources. And, let the readers form their own opinion. The book has no conclusion or epilogue as Donal Kerr had in his Colin-book.²

Kerr had published his first chapters in *Forum Novum* to stimulate discussion.³ Taylor has done something similar with placing earlier drafts online (website of the general house and the Jean-Claude Colin website by Ron Nissen sm, Sydney). This made the enterprise known to a wider Marist audience and raised the expectation for the published book which we now have available.

Besides its character as historical biography it has a semi-official status as it was commissioned by the general administration under John Hannan as superior general who also wrote the preface.

They paid for a respectable format for the work i.e. colour illustrations, hard cover, and solid binding. The publisher, with Mr Hilary Regan as representative, produced a fine book. Instead of going for an in-house publication, this and other biographies are placed on the public market.

Justin, I think, had the necessary freedom – his mandate was not to write hagiography or an apology. The Society of Mary has re-started the cause of its founder. One element of the necessary documentation was a biography or at least a chronological outline. As the biography was not ready then a chronology was included in the dossier.⁴ Now we have a substantial biography which will be the point of reference for a long time.

To this mandate Justin dedicated a good number of years of focused work in reading, research, discussion, and finally writing. The credit for the book goes to its author. As members of the

¹ Articles by Justin Taylor in this journal: *The Portrait of the Jerusalem Church In the Acts of the Apostles 2: 42-47 and 4, 32-35*, in FN 1, 1 (1989) 12-25; = Id., *Le portrait de l'église de Jerusalem dans les actes des apôtres 2, 42-47 et 4, 32-35*, in FN 1, 4 (1991) 472-485; Id., *"Mary in the Newborn Church and at the End of Time": Biblical Approaches - "Marie dans l'Église naissante et à la fin des temps". Aproches bibliques*, in FN 3, 4 (1996) 521-545; Id., *A Neglected Source of Colinian Spirituality : The Mystical Tradition in the Society of Jesus in France in the 17th Century*, in FN 5, 4 (2001) 405-442. French summary in FN 6, 1 (2003) 83-84; Id., *Reading the Bible in the Time of the Curé of Ars*, in FN 13 (2011) 133-146; Id., *The Context of the Work of Mary*, in FN 19, 1 (2017) 9-13.

² Alois Greiler, *Book Presentation: Donal Kerr, Jean-Claude Colin, Marist*, in FN 5, 3 (2000) 342-344.

³ See the contributions by Kerr in the volumes from 1989 to 1997.

⁴ Alois Greiler, *Jean-Claude Colin (1790-1875). Founder of the Society of Mary – Fondateur de la Société de Marie. Descriptive Chronology of his life – Chronologie descriptive de sa vie*, Rome, Marist Fathers, 2014; also online as *Forum Novum* Vol. 15 (2013) (www.maristsm.org).

wider Marist family, of the churches in the Pacific, and for all those interested in Colin and related topics touched upon in the book we congratulate and thank him wholeheartedly!

This is not the first biography but it holds a special place among the Colin-biographies. Let us leave aside for now publications on the life and work of Colin (1790-1875) to popularize the founder. The first substantial full-life biography was written by one of the secretaries of the founder, Jean Jeantin (1824-1895), his six volume work from the years 1895 to 1898.⁵ He had a personal knowledge of the man whom he wrote about, albeit, as Jean Coste often underlined, of Colin as the old man – not the dynamic Colin of the early years. Jeantin included much material from Fr Mayet's *Memoirs* to outline Colin's spiritual teaching.⁶ This was later published separately as *Doctrine spirituelle*.⁷ Taylor's book does not move into so much interpretation and so much on Colin as spiritual teacher. Philippe Gobillot (1871-1942) had left behind an unfinished extensive life still useful today as a resource work as he opened access to French literature not easily available today.⁸ It is a pity that the work was never published as there was no substantial full-life biography until now. In 1967, Stanley Hosie (1922-2013), Australian Province, published *Anonymous Apostle*.⁹ He could draw on the *Origines Maristes* and this shows in more substantial sections on the first and the last years of Colin, less on the generalate. For the latter the sources were not edited yet. Personally, I find his work still inspiring and that was its purpose. With Donal Kerr (1927-2001) we are back in the realm of a historical work.¹⁰ Again, he limited his book to the period covered by *Origines Maristes*. His emphasis was his forte – the history of the 19th century in Europe. He placed Colin in this context. The carefully chosen subtitle makes it clear. His book was well written, became very popular, and was the resource book for a long time. Translations were made. Taylor followed the other path, to focus much more on the life of Colin himself rather than the broader historical epoch.

Where to go from Kerr's book was the question? He had not left a manuscript behind as some thought for the remaining years. When Taylor was asked about a biography, different options were feasible. One, Take Kerr's work for the early years and work on the remaining years either alone or with two authors (generalate, third age). Or, and this is what Taylor finally decided, and rightly, although it made his work load much bigger – begin at the beginning. This gives us a coherent work covering the full life for which he refers to his predecessors as well.

Before we say a word about the text let us highlight the illustrations, colour, black and white, and maps. The decision was to invest in an attractive book. Carefully chosen images say much in relation to the story. Ron Nissen provided most of the material. He could draw on resources he gathered for promoting the *fama* of Father Colin.¹¹ Our modern world works a lot with images. This aspect of the book also deserves our full attention.

The main attention of course goes to the text. As this is only a presentation and not an analysis let me limit myself to a descriptive mode. Timewise, chapters 1 + 2 cover childhood and school days, chapters 3 to 13 his time as diocesan priest and Marist aspirant, chapters 14 to 24, his time

⁵ [Jean Jeantin], *Le Très Révérend Père Colin, fondateur et premier supérieur général de la Société de Marie: Sa vie, ses œuvres, ses instructions, ses vertus, son esprit*, 6 volumes; Lyon, Emmanuel Vitte, 1895-1898; on its influence and other Colin-biographies published: Alois Greiler, *From Jeantin to Coste. A Survey on Marist Studies in the 20th Century*, in FN 7, 1 (2005) 38-71; = Id., *De Jeantin à Coste. Les études maristes au 20^{ème} siècle, un tour d'horizon*, ibid. 72-111.

⁶ Marists always did and still do regard Colin as spiritual teacher: Kevin Duffy, Alois Greiler, Declan Marmion, Felise Tavo, *The Spiritual Teaching of Father Colin: A Survey of Attitudes in the Society of Mary - L'enseignement spirituel du père Colin dans la Société de Marie; rapport sur un sondage*, in FN 4, 3 (1997-1999) 313-339.

⁷ *Doctrine spirituelle, vertus et esprit du V.J.Cl.M. Colin, fondateur de la Société de Marie*, Lyon-Paris, 1917; English equivalent: *Principles of the Spiritual Life according to the Venerable John Claude Colin, Founder of the Society of Mary*, Harrow, The Paschal Press, ²1954 (1953).

⁸ Philippe Gobillot, *Vie du Vénérable Jean-Claude Colin*, 6 vols., before 1942, typed manuscript; A copy is held in the general archives in Rome.

⁹ Stanley Hosie, *Anonymous Apostle. The Life of Jean-Claude Colin, Marist*, With a Preface by Morris West, New York, William Morrow and Co. Inc., 1967.

¹⁰ Donal A. Kerr, *Jean-Claude Colin, Marist. A Founder in an Era of Revolution and Restoration: The Early Years 1790 – 1836*, Dublin, The Columba Press, 2000.

¹¹ See his website www.jeanclaudecolin.org and his annual reports to the ARC meetings.

as superior general, and chapters 25 to 29 his long old age, from 1854 to 1875. A biography is about the life of a person. A life ends with the death of the person – and so does Taylor's biography. It is worthwhile to notice the growing space and horizon over those years: from the hamlet of Barbery to Belley, centre of the Bugey region, to Lyon – second city to Paris at the time, to Rome, headquarters of the world wide Catholic Church, all across France, into England with the foundation in Colin's time of St Anne's in London, and in particular the immense world of the Pacific, Australia, New Zealand, and the different Island groups. The geography broadens - looking at the correspondence Colin or his assistants had with requests for foundations they could not accept, Southern Africa being a particularly strong example.¹² With the expansion of space comes the broadening of people Colin dealt with: popes, kings, governments, ministers, cardinals and bishops, business people, other clergy and religious... And all along those years with ordinary people in his pastoral ministry which he basically kept going until the end of his life. The book gives due importance to Colin's many roles: founder and first superior of the Marist Fathers, co-founder of the Marist Sisters, assistant leader of the Marist Teaching Brothers, promoter of the Marist Laity, spiritual guide and organizer for many local churches in the Pacific started by men trained by him, inspiration for a 'school of saints' with Pierre Chanel, Marcellin Champagnat, Julien-Pierre Eymard, and other, non-canonized holy men and women in contact with him.

Simply to list the times, places, and names illustrates the broad range of events associated with all those, including many a difficult issue around them. We know that there are issues raised in the context of the first effort to launch the cause of Colin.¹³ This biography will help to understand these issues. A broader reception of the content will cover this task and others.

Such a reception will hopefully follow in different forms. The book offers tools – an extensive table of content and an index of the most important names and places. Not the least important tool is the many long quotes of original texts with detailed presentation of the context. All the material is referenced. As a full-length biography, it allows the follow-up of important themes or to relate it to special periods in Colin's life. Some issues will become clearer, other issues may arise.

My hope is that this biography will help us Marists to move beyond Colin before 1836. The main contribution to the Society, to the life of the Church, and to religious and cultural life belongs to his time as superior general. Then he made a lasting contribution as a global player. Sources and different studies are available.¹⁴ Colin, active superior general, will emerge as a more encouraging figure than the image many still have of the young Colin only.

What does such an impressive book deserve? Committed readers as well as a broad reception.

Alois Greiler sm

¹² Yvan Carré, *Le projet de mission mariste en Cafreterie*, in FN 8-9 (2007) 20-36; Albert Kabala, *Colin, l'Océanie et l'Afrique*, in FN 8-9 (2007) 101-108.

¹³ Jean Coste, *Brève histoire de la cause du père Colin*, in FN 5, 3 (2000) 300-307; = Id., *Brief History of the Cause of Father Colin*, *ibid.* 308-314; Carlo-Maria Schianchi, *Causa Colin ieri e oggi*, in FN 14 (2012) 60-65; = Id., *La causa Colin ayer y hoy*, *ibid.* 66-71; = Id., *Causa Colin – yesterday and today*, *ibid.* 72-77.

¹⁴ Alois Greiler, *The Present Study of the Generalate of Colin*, in FN 10, 2 (2008) 453-458; = Id., *Lo studio del generalato di padre Colin*, in FN 10, 2 (2008) 459-461.