

**Reluctant Saint?**  
**The Cause for Beatification of Marist Founder, Fr. Jean-Claude Colin<sup>1</sup>**  
*Ron Nissen sm*

When Jean-Claude Colin died on November 15, 1875, few people were concerned about his beatification. Perhaps none. The Marists were mourning the passing of their founder and father. After his burial in the gardens of La Neylière, they began plans to build a chapel in which his remains could be given due honour.

Within two years Fr. Colin's successor, Fr. Julien Favre, had begun to collect the letters and other writings of the Founder. Nothing should be lost that one day could be used in writing his life story.

Amongst those close to Fr. Colin were Fr. Benoît Lagniet, who had worked with him in later years, Fr. Eugène Ducretet, superior of the Belley scholasticate and, predictably, Fr. Gabriel-Claude Mayet, faithful friend and chronicler. They willingly offered their correspondence and other material. The work of transcribing their texts finished in 1892, fifteen years after the Fr. Colin's death.

### **Introducing the Cause**

The Cause for Beatification of Jean-Claude Colin was proposed at the General Chapter of 1893, and with strong support. Recording the vote, the secretary first wrote 'unanimously', but corrected it to 'by a majority', an indicator that from the beginning there were Marists who believed that it was not opportune to introduce the Cause.

The first postulator general was Fr. Claude Nicolet. He had succeeded with Peter Chanel's cause in 1887 and who was probably the likely author of the postulatam. He would draw on the work of Fr Jean Jeantin who had worked closely with Fr. Colin on the constitutions and during the latter years of the Founder's life, and the important testimony of Fr. Georges David.

On December 9, 1908, Pope Pius X signed a decree elevating the Cause of Fr. Colin from the diocesan to the apostolic level and so under the eye of the Holy See. Fr. Colin now had the title of *Venerable*.

### **Chequered path**

For the next half-century Fr. Colin's Cause was to follow a chequered path, running the gauntlet of two world wars and with a succession of postulators, working with limited resources and diminishing numbers of those who had personally known the Founder. As well, the slow-moving procedures of the Congregation of Rites and the Society of Mary's lack of interest over the years did little to advance the process.

All witnesses to Colin's life had now themselves died. It became clear that much more historical work was needed.

### **Monumental work**

In the mid-1950s Frs. Jean Coste and Gaston Lessard began the monumental work of producing the four volumes of source documents, '*Origines Maristes*', giving the historical section of the Congregation of Rites a critical edition of documents relating to the life of Fr. Colin, including difficulties with the Cause.

In subsequent years there was a revival of interest in Colinian studies and a wealth of new research undertaken. Vatican II, also, was to influence the Church's attitudes to examination of Causes.

The General Chapter of 2009 again considered the Cause and in 2010, at the Annual Review Consultation of major superiors in Rome, the decision was made to reintroduce the process which, by this time, had well and truly lapsed. The Cause of Fr. Colin was given new life.

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**Recent years**

The appointment in 2010 of Italian Marist, Fr. Carlo-Maria Schianchi, as postulator and his subsequent work, along with the unanimous support of the Catholic bishops of France, have led Lyon's archbishop, Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, to officially reintroduce the Cause.

In the meantime, Fr. Justin Taylor has completed a definitive biography of Fr. Colin.

On its closing day, the General Chapter of 2017 voted unanimously in support of the Beatification Cause of Fr. Colin.

**More on the Cause...**

A summary of other steps taken in recent years, as well as the further work Marist scholars, can be found in the brief, but comprehensive *Chronology of the Cause* prepared for the General Chapter of 2017, along with selected comments from Fr. Jean Coste SM. The latter includes a succinct commentary on the classic 'objections' to the Cause.

Drawing from the extensive research of Frs. Coste, Gaston Lessard, Alois Greiler and Justin Taylor, both resources are easily downloadable from the Colin web site: [www.jeanclaudecolin.org](http://www.jeanclaudecolin.org) on the 'Cause' page.