Prophetic Personality of Jean-Claude Colin and its 
Moral Impact on Marist Missionaries Today 
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1. Preliminary approach

The figure¹ of Jean Claude Colin, founder of the Society of Mary, has been the subject of several studies. Recently, the Marist Father and historian Justin Taylor, at the request of the General Administration, published a "titanesque" type biography treating the person of Jean Claude Colin, his historical milieu, his way of thinking and his influences etc.² The amplitude of this biographical work could give the impression that nothing more can be said about the person of Jean Claude Colin and his legacy in the Society of Mary. But this is only an impression that even the author of the biography would undoubtedly refute. It is for this reason that, far from satisfying all curiosity, the person of Jean Claude Colin continues to arouse in us various questions and an even deeper desire to know him. In fact, knowing the person is an asset in order to embrace in a deeper way the legacy he has left us through the Society of Mary.

The title and the components of the title of this paper reveal the direction we want to follow. To speak of Jean Claude Colin as a prophet is not an aspect, or even an obvious characteristic of the person in himself. Moreover, neither he nor his entourage qualified him as such; only recent studies have captured this prophetic intuition in Jean Claude Colin. We will exploit these researches to give a new reading of the question. The direction to be followed is therefore an interpretative reading with the concern to keep the memory of the person but also to underline the topicality or, at least, the relevance of his message, which is nothing other than the mission of the Society of Mary in today's world.

We are approaching a person who is not at all isolated, but rather a personality marked by the events of his time and well connected with his surroundings. This mark of history on Jean Claude Colin and vice-versa gives us a hermeneutical position allowing us to interpret the attitude of our founder as prophetic.

Taking the direction or the interpretative method with regard to the figure of the venerable founder of the Society of Mary as prophetic also requires of us a position and an attitude of receptivity to the message conveyed and to his own person. It is in this perspective that the second part of our title takes on meaning: the moral impact on Marist missionaries today. It is necessary to underline the scope of this title which requires from the outset a thematic restriction in order not to fall into scientific inconsistency. We then propose to focus on the missionary of hope (General Chapter 2017, no. 19) engaged in the pastoral care of migration which is for us a current and actualizing choice of our ministries with the poor. One necessity here would be that of clearing up any ambiguity about the term migrant, which, depending on the case, is either restricted (simple movement of people for their own reasons) or all encompassing, including for this purpose refugees of all kinds. In this way we would like to broaden the field of action to all these groups, especially those who move because of the risk of an apparent danger.

a. Foundational Texts

But why direct the reflection towards an impact of a type of moral responsibility? The question is certainly obvious, but the answer seems to us to be of a preferential nature and we take care to base it on two numbers of our Constitutions (1988). Number 49³, taken from Chapter II entitled the admission and incorporation of new members, underlines the importance of the transmission of the heritage received from the Society of Mary to the new generations on the one hand - a transmission that is also an act of moral responsibility - and on the other hand, the opportunity to

¹ Note that we do not want to enter into the complexity of psychological considerations with regard to personality. This work wants to be a reflection that is in line with the deepening of our relationship with the founder of the Society of Mary.


³ Constitutions of the Society of Mary, no. 49.
enrich this heritage, which also reveals an act of moral responsibility because it requires creative fidelity, as Gabriel Marcel said.

Number 111⁴ is the second number on which we base our method of interpretative reading. It is an urgent call to listen to the signs of the times. Let us emphasize in passing that listening (עמש) is that biblical attitude that founds the interpersonal relationship with God.⁵ This listening to which this number of the Constitutions invites us is based on an attitude of attentiveness to the poor, to the suffering of this world, to those excluded because of established social systems, privileging a minority to the detriment of the mass of the poor. It is, therefore, a listening that propels us to work for justice and peace. Taking these two numbers into consideration - without any desire to exclude the rest - seems to us sufficient to apply a moral component to the reflection on Jean Claude Colin as a prophet of our time.

It is to this attitude of conserving, reinterpreting and communicating our Marist heritage in a changing context that Felise Tavo invited us.⁶ In his article, he emphasized the need for Marist studies to adapt reflection to the present context in order to avoid finding ourselves in the extremes of either blissful optimism or dark pessimism.⁷ This adaptation is necessary because the context demands it of us. It is then that we affirm, with the French philosopher Roland Schaer⁸, that the current context is not only that of the crisis of Progress⁹, but also that of a loss of reference points and value, and even more a context of the dictatorship of relativism and a globalization of indifference.¹⁰ Faced with this situation, Marists today, as in the time of Jean Claude Colin, are invited to reorient their "preferential ministries" by keeping an attentive eye and ear to the cry of the poor. This is the conclusion of Felise Tavo¹¹; it is also our goal in interpreting the prophetic aspect of Colin's personality.

b. Clarifying Language

At this point, it would be wise to clarify the understanding of the terminologies we are going to face. Regarding the definition of personality, I borrow Timothy Costello's analysis, quoting Theodore Millon and Randall Davis. He comments on these authors by saying that personality is the relatively stable pattern of perception, reflection and relationship to the environment and to oneself that manifests itself in a wide range of social and personal contexts.¹² From this remark it appears that defining personality is a complex task. This complexity may lie in the changing aspect of social and interpersonal contexts; but the positive side consists in the more or less stable aspect of the person.

The second term - prophetic - derives its more singular meaning from its etymology. Prophetic is the adjective taken from the term prophet, from its Greek root προφήτης (prophês) which refers to the one who speaks before (on behalf of): he is like a spokesman in the sense that he is the guarantor of the divine word.¹³

By requirement and/or moral responsibility we understand the entirety of our values and, moreover, our virtues as Marists; virtues that we must consider on the level of a "religious ethic."

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⁴ Constitutions of the Society of Mary, no. 111.
⁵ Cf. Ecoute (thème biblique) in Wikipedia.
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ Roland Schaer was born in 1947. He received his agrégation in philosophy in 1971 and is a philosopher of the living. He has been a philosophy teacher, professor at the École du Louvre and has given courses in science ethics at the Espace Éthique de l'Assistance Publique.
⁹ R. Schaer, Réponse du vivant, 5 mai 2014; google search.
¹¹ Tavo, Conserver, p. 159.
¹³ This concept of prophet will be discussed in the section on Prophecy in the Bible.
with the idea of having been beneficiaries of a spiritual heritage that we are invited to integrate and transmit to future generations.

At the end of these general considerations, we will enter into the core of our problematic by beginning to support the question of prophecy in Israel, for Sacred Scripture is the soul of theology (Dei Verbum 24, 1) and of all biblical reflection. Let us note here that this will be a general approach in view of the extent of literary production on this subject. Having said this, we will be able to apply the prophetic qualities to Jean Claude Colin by adopting a comparative method on the one hand and on the other hand an analytical one through a deciphering of certain writings on the prophetic aspect of Colin. The phase that will logically follow will be to make an analysis of the moral impact especially in the attitude of the missionary and in his pastoral work with the poor (the migratory pastoral for needs of preferential delimitation). As with all research work, we will conclude with concluding perspectives that are subject to the evaluation of every reader.

Through this contribution, we hope to develop a deep and personal love for Jean Claude Colin, a love that will undoubtedly lead us to a devotion to his person and a deeper dedication to the mission of the Church through the Society of Mary.

c. Different aspects of a prophet in Israel

Drawing inspiration from Nuria Calduch-Benages\(^\text{14}\), we can identify some aspects common to all prophets. The prophet is an inspired person in the strict sense of the word, for there was no one in Israel who had a more rigorous conscience. It is a personal experience with God, therefore, when the prophet speaks or writes, he is always based on personal experience. His constant and unrelenting concern is the word that the Lord reveals. In the prophetic phenomenon, everything revolves around this experience of the revealed word, and he who calls to turn away from it is not a true prophet.

Thus, the prophet appears as a public figure who must transmit the word of God: he must meet the people in this way, he cannot be reduced to activity only in the temple. The place of prophecy is the street, the public square: today, following Pope Francis, we will say the peripheries of life. He is a person who turns to reality; he is not on the margins of society because he is concerned about the problems and concerns of his people. Therefore, he also has the freedom to point out corruption, abuse of power, lack of interest, injustice, etc. Nothing human is indifferent to the prophet.

Another characteristic aspect of the prophet is that he is a threatened person. On many occasions the prophet faces the danger of death. Failure seems to be inherent in the prophetic vocation. The prophet also faces physical persecution from kings, priests, and the population. His interest is not, therefore, purely human or material, but he desires only to fulfill the divine will by communicating the word of God: this is what brings him all adversity.

Finally, let us emphasize that he is a charismatic person: prophetism is a charisma, a gift from God. This charisma gives him the grace to go against the culture by denouncing the exasperations of society. Prophecy breaks down the barriers of closed and self-sufficient cultures, the barriers of narcissistic social classes, religious barriers (you don't have to be a priest to be a prophet), and the age barrier.

From these characteristics, it seems easy to deduce and distinguish false prophets. Indeed, many biblical passages trace these figures who seek to lead Israel away from the path established by the Lord. Other prophets who also oppose the understanding established by the God of Israel are those of non-Jewish deities; therefore, they appear as false prophets in the eyes of Israel. This is evidenced by Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal.\(^\text{15}\)

However, today there is a difference in understanding between Jews and Christians. Prophecy according to the Jews is linked to the Scriptures, to the Torah. They are characters charged with


\(^{15}\) 1 Kings 18: 16-46.
interpreting, on an ethical basis, the injunctions of the legal system of society.\textsuperscript{16} Their function is thus comparable to that of the rabbis because of their interpretative approach to the sacred texts. This understanding of the prophet according to the Jews is thus an ethical reading of their character. Moreover, Christians have an eschatological approach to the question. The prophets are the ones who predicted the events of salvation. This definitive salvation is brought about by the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{17}

However, we are in favor of a hermeneutics that will not dissociate the two aspects, ethical and eschatological. How, then, can we establish a link between the understanding of the true prophet and Jean Claude Colin as a prophet of our time?

2. Jean Claude Colin a prophet of our time

Who is Jean Claude Colin? This question is undoubtedly the most banal question to ask a Marist religious. The answer would be automatic, and a biography of the person would be established in a fraction of the time to answer it. Let us say that many high-quality documents have been published on his person. We want to focus on two of them in order to give an idea of the person; an idea that will allow us to conjugate the person with his prophetic character.

\textbf{a. Jean Coste}

The first author who has had an extraordinary familiarity with Colin regarding the study of his personality is the Marist historian Jean Coste. In his book \textit{Lectures on Society of Mary History},\textsuperscript{18} he gives us a rigorous scientific and psychological argumentation of who Jean Claude Colin is. He thus analyzed his character, his emotions, his activity, his receptivity in relation to his time. He concludes, according to Le Senne\textsuperscript{19}, that Colin has a type of passionate personality\textsuperscript{20}; a person who identifies with his work, with his mission. Jean Claude Colin and the mission of the Society of Mary seem to be one and the same. He was passionate about his work and gave himself to it body and soul, to the point of neglecting his physical appearance in order to achieve Mary's work.

There is much that can be said about Jean Coste's analysis given the complexity of Jean Claude Colin's person. But we are not going to dwell on these details. What we do want to retain, however, is his conclusion that defines the founder of the Society of Mary as a man with a mission.\textsuperscript{21} Indeed the person Colin was endowed with a charisma of leadership that is a divine gift. On closer inspection, his leadership went against the temper of his personality. Colin was a shy type. However, he had the extraordinary strength, clear mind and unparalleled determination to carry out his mission. It is an aspect of his self-transcendence, an effort to go beyond limits (\textit{ad majorem Dei gloriam}) that is also a mark of holiness. He was a divine instrument, a man of God (\textit{'īš (hā)' ĕlōhîm}).

\textbf{b. Timothy Costello}

The second author we want to consider here with regard to studies on the person of Jean Claude Colin is Timothy Costello.\textsuperscript{22} We want to focus on him because he gives us an overview of all those who have argued about Colin. Thus, after having established premises and defined what personality is, Timothy Costello retraces the psychological studies and literature around the person of Jean Claude Colin while inviting us at the end to a much broader vision.\textsuperscript{23} He also applies the question on a behavioral level and furthermore invites us to an interdisciplinary study that would take into consideration of Catholic anthropopy. His approach gives us a rather broad

\textsuperscript{17} Coggins-Houliden (eds.), \textit{Dictionary}, p. 556.
\textsuperscript{19} Ernest René Le Senne, is a French philosopher, metaphysician and psychologist, he belongs to the spiritualist current and the philosophy of values. He remained famous for having founded the French characterology.
\textsuperscript{20} Coste, \textit{Lectures}, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{21} Coste, \textit{Lectures}, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{22} Costello, \textit{Colin}, p. 183-200.
vision of Jean Claude Colin and we come to an understanding of two crucial aspects: on the one hand, the importance of becoming familiar with and even developing a certain devotion for Colin, and on the other hand, the desire to get to know him better. Costello conclusion is much the same as Coste: holiness being marked by self-transcendence despite limitations.

To this end, the initial question of knowing who Jean Claude Colin is would not be so obvious, let us say anodyne if we ask ourselves who Jean Claude Colin is for me? To personalize the question, to make it one's own and to construct a personal idea of the founder of the Society of Mary is a task of establishing an intimate relationship with the person of Colin and by ricochet with his spiritual heritage. This is how we want to respond to the question by applying the prophetic category.

c. Edwin Keel

To consider Jean Claude Colin as a prophet is not a new approach. In 1984, Edwin Keel wrote an article entitled Jean Claude Colin: Poet and Prophet. A Study of the Symbolic and Mythic Elements in His Language, in which he analyzed some fundamental texts of Jean Claude Colin's thought by applying them to symbolic language. Keel conceived of Colin as a poet because of the use of this symbolic language to convey the message entrusted to him. God - the Virgin Mary - spoke to Colin through symbols: "When God speaks to the soul he says more in a few words". To this end, phrases such as "unknown and as if hidden in the world", "tamquam suam", the idea of Nazareth, the article "De Societatis Spiritus" are examples used by the author to demonstrate and support his idea of the prophetic power of the symbol in Colin. It is this symbol and this poetic language which thus determine the prophetic aspect.

It is important to emphasize here that Jean Coste is not entirely in agreement with Keel because he thinks that Colin is a poet. Coste accepts Keel's idea but has difficulties with the word poet. In other words, Jean Claude Colin has a symbolic way of conceiving things, but it is always in the perspective of an action. Colin is therefore the bearer of a charisma that has allowed him to receive and articulate the spirit of the Society, to live it and to carry it forward until its approval.

Keel's consideration thus maintains that Jean Claude Colin's Marian vision coincides with contemporary theology. In his time, Jean Claude Colin's approach was not theological at all and is thus qualified as prophetic intuition. His inspiration from the reading of Maria d'Agreda opened up an unparalleled imagination that gives him a vision of Mary that is different from the theological teaching of his time. The Marian image of the Church to which Colin invited us is this image that Vatican II portrays in Lumen Gentium. Mary is not only in the Church as a member, but she is the first, the mother, the perfect image: unknown and as if hidden but with unconditional support, from the origin of the Church to its final end. One can thus conclude with Keel that the Virgin Mary is the perfect prophetic symbol that became incarnate in Jean Claude Colin making him the bearer of a new, different and contradictory message for his time. However, Edwin Keel's originality is limited only to the analysis of certain founding texts of the Society of Mary. This gives a limited yet consistent and convincing vision.

d. Friedrich Arnold

Let us now analyze another author who studied the prophetic question in Jean Claude Colin, before returning to our main reference. We choose this procedure because not only he is shorter in

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25 Keel, Poet and Prophet, p. 144.
27 Keel, Poet and Prophet, p. 178.
28 Coste, Une Vision mariale, p. 313.
29 Coste, Une Vision mariale, p. 335-341.
31 Keel, Poet and Prophet, p. 186.
his analysis, but also the next author will be much more useful to us in the approach we will propose.

In 2018, Friedrich (Fritz) Arnold reflected on the mystical and prophetic aspect in Jean Claude Colin. His main thesis was that Colin was a man of the future. He thus draws together different interpretations such as Justin Taylor's article "A neglected source of Colin's spirituality", Jean Coste's retreat in Canada on the theme "Man of the future" and Michael Fitzgerald's study - which we will have to analyze in the last analysis - to give a mystical and prophetic position. Arnold demonstrates, through the analysis of the three NOs (no to power, no to greed, no to pride), how Colin was ahead of his time. Indeed, through these categorical rejections, Colin rejects the existing structures of his time to propose an alternative idea anchored in the Gospel, the return to God, the conversion of hearts through a humble attitude of prayer and abandonment. In that sense he offers a set of attitudes and dispositions centered on justice and an implied criticism of society. One could say that Colin was, to that extent, both prophetic and subversive in his three ‘NO’ and in proposing a motherly and compassionate face of the Church. This intuition seems to be realized even today with Pope Francis who advocates a Church close to the people, a Church like a field hospital after the battle.

Arnold's reflection is filled with hope because he looks to the future with great positivity. The exhortation to return to the origins just as the prophets exhorted the people of Israel to return to God is a decisive and optimistic call. He thus underlines that Colin's thought seems difficult to grasp with an acute rationalist spirit and thus invited abandonment to a certain (eschatological) future but also a future still to be reinvented: we must find a new church. It is therefore a vision of hope that raises the present man fallen by an overwhelming negativity, a dictatorial relativism. The author concludes that Colin knew the sensibility of his time, which is why he proposed a pastoral care that not only responds to the demands of his own times but also reaches us today. We can meet God, Jesus and Mary in the signs of the times, in the present moment and in our Marist mission by living prophetically like Colin.

e. Michael Fitzgerald

The approach that has convinced us the most and on which we will build our point of view is that of Michael Fitzgerald. The main objective of the author in his essay was to find a model that could integrate all the richness and quintessence of Marist spirituality and charisma. It is to this end, while not excluding the "apostolic" and "contemplative" models, because these seem to restrict the spirituality, that he proposes the prophetic model. The latter is encompassing and energizing and thus allows each Marist to be able to easily identify all the key elements of the Society; elements that the author has taken care to analyze. In this prophetic model, which coincides with the experience of Jean Claude Colin, Mary is the most suitable symbol of the times (ours too) to express the face of the merciful Christ in the face of the sufferings of this world. We can thus say that Colin appeared as a revolutionary of his time with a deep desire for change and reform of the social, political, and ecclesial structures of the time. His revolution was not one that criticized the Church in its foundations or its hierarchy, but rather its way of doing and being Church. It is in this way that he remains faithful to the Church while working for its renewal. Mary (the image of the woman) is thus presented as the prophetic criticism favoring the opening of the heart that acts rather than the reason that justifies. He recognized that times are bad, but kept a deep hope of a better future just as the prophet not only criticizes but also remains a great source of energy for the people. 

33 Youm, Qui est mon prochain ?, p. 60.
34 Arnold, God Comes from the Future, p. 127.
36 Fitzgerald, Marian Consciousness, p. 87.
37 Fitzgerald, Marian Consciousness, p. 93.
38 Ibid. p. 17.
Let us summarize Fitzgerald's approach according to which the prophetic model is the most suitable for Marist spirituality because it integrates Mary's gracious choice and her desire for a congregation that bears her name. It is also a model that preserves the memories of the divine origin of the congregation (God is the source of prophecy), advocates a new way of doing and being which is this Marian consciousness, encourages total abandonment in divine Providence, and promotes an effective work, in the unity of hearts while being humble and simple. It is therefore a coherent and complete approach that takes into consideration the person of Jean Claude Colin and his experience of the spirit of Mary.

f. Reflections on Texts from Jean-Claude Colin

In this context, we want to continue the prophetic reflection on Jean Claude Colin, not like our predecessors who had the merit of laying the foundations by examining texts and statements by the founder, but by taking a special interest in the person himself. In this way, we want a more personalized approach that will parallel the person of the prophet in Israel and the person of Jean Claude Colin. It is here that all the reflection we have undertaken on the prophet and propheticism in Israel takes on meaning. Let us then return to the fundamental question: who is Jean Claude Colin for me? One answer that we propose and for which we have endeavored to establish the proofs is that of the prophet: his whole life is comparable to that of the men of God in the Old Testament, chosen to bring a message to the chosen people.

Let us begin by saying that already in his early childhood, Jean Claude Colin carried within him the seeds of a prophetic life. Certainly, this is a current reading of his life; but it is important to underline how he already appeared as a child (man) of God: 'īš (hā)' ēlōhîm. His love for prayer and solitude, his desire to detach himself from the turbulence of this world show in Jean Claude Colin the desire for an intimacy with God. He was already thinking of wanting to consecrate himself as a hermit. It is said that he used to hide in the woods to read, meditate and even preach the Word to the trees. This attitude of solitude and of a certain mystical relationship with God that appears in the person of Jean Claude Colin from his childhood is thus read as a prophetic attitude because "an authentic prophecy comes from a mystical experience; the mystical experience is empty without its proclamation in prophecy". This is therefore a first approach which proves to us in many respects how, without knowing it, Jean Claude Colin was destined to be the bearer of a contradictory message in relation to the culture of France at the time and of the Church.

To say that he is the bearer of a contradictory message is also a characteristic that can be seen in the prophets in Israel. Indeed, in Israel, the prophet always appeared in times of trouble, at times when God's people turned away from their ways and followed contrary paths. Colin's time is thus comparable to that of the people of Israel in the time of the prophets. Jean Claude Colin not only had a rather troubled childhood, but the post-revolutionary period was a time of exaltation of human reason against a humble attitude before the divine. The Church, too, in an effort to restore its privileges lost during the revolution, seemed to sink into "clericalism," a search for power that distanced it from the path of service to the poor. Colin's intimacy with God and the Virgin Mary not only gave him a different vision but also gave him a new consciousness. Colin was thus convinced that times were bad and that it was necessary to founding a new Church, a Marian Church, humble and poor, at the service of the poor and needy. This message, which he carried thanks to the charisma received from the Virgin Mary, made him a prophetic figure. Every prophet is, in fact, a charismatic figure and the gift of charisma is granted to a person for the service of the Church and in union with the Church. The vocation of a charismatic leader is therefore a vocation that is inscribed in a rather crucial moment of history and that gives him a vision well beyond his contemporaries, a vision that anticipates events while being well anchored in the present.

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39 For more details Fitzgerald, Marian Consciousness, p. 115-117.
40 Taylor, Colin, p. 17.
42 Ibid. p. 58-62.
Colin's conception of the times was thus different. Cardinal Castracane would say of Colin that he was a man who understood his time (OM doc 544 §18). To understand his time does not mean to have a simple knowledge of the events of the moment, but rather to be wanting the Spirit of the Lord who gives him a deep knowledge that allows him to read the signs of the times. Colin had therefore understood the sensitivity and needs of the times and this understanding allowed him to bring Mary's work to the forefront. It was not a personal effort but a gracious choice that brought him to this point in his life. His constant invitation to return to the primitive Church, just as the prophet Isaiah invited a return to God, his desire for a new Church just as the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel advocated a new consciousness for Israel, are all features of Father Colin's charismatic gift.

Colin's person was thus ahead of his time. His new view of things and of the Virgin Mary gave him his mode of action. His prophetic fecundity is not only true for his time but also for the generations of Marists who will follow the Spirit of the Society of Mary. The work of Mary, and the missions in Oceania that followed, are thus the fruit of a prophetic mission carried forward by Father Colin. He never went on a mission to Oceania, but he had that charisma that made him the leader of men and women ready to carry the torch of the Virgin Mary in order to convert the peoples of Oceania. These missions were not at all easy in Colin's life. Indeed, he carried within him the burden of failures, of loss of life, and of opposition to his way of doing things and proceeding. He was thus a person threatened (because of his austere and ascetic life, his contradictory relationship with ecclesiastical authorities, the responsibility for the missions in Oceania), misunderstood but sensitive to the life of his confreres in mission and the divine work of which they were instruments.

We will therefore retain that the person of Colin had the enthusiasm of a unique character; a prophetic life and of holiness because he was the bearer of a message that turned out to be an antidote for his time. Being aware of the depth and charismatic gift of his person is thus an encouragement for the Church in general and for Marists in particular. The question that then arises is that of knowing what link we establish between the prophetic personality of Jean Claude Colin and a moral consideration of each Marist missionary. What interest do we have for our time?

3. Prophetic missionaries of hope and the migration ministry

Prophecy in Israel had a particular message about hospitality, welcoming the stranger and openness to the other. The prophets denounced the social systems of closure in the face of the poorest and most destitute in society (especially the poor, the widow and the orphan). In this same perspective, the approach to Jean Claude Colin as a prophet encourages us and reminds us that we also have a prophetic mission today. The link that we want to establish between the prophetic person of Jean Claude Colin and his moral impact for Marists today is an interpretative work of the past. In fact, there is an intersection (chiasmus) between the person of Jean Claude Colin, the message he transmitted to us and our duty as heirs to preserve it, bear fruit and transmit it to others. Let us emphasize that we do not mean by moral impact an establishment of what to do or avoid, but rather a reminder of our mission to defend the needy, to work each according to his mission in the Society of Mary, to make the Reign of God appear. This is concretized by a call to a certain spirituality of responsibility.

a. Spirituality of responsibility

In a previous article "Pour une réponse mariste de la crise migratoire" (For a Marist response to the migratory crisis), we stressed a certain responsibility that we have in the face of this phenomenon of migration. In this sense, we are convinced that the spirit of the Society of Mary, in a prophetic vision, has a moral impact. It is certainly not a question of saying that spirituality and morality are synonymous, but rather of underlining the fact that living a certain

43 Coste, Une Vision mariale, p. 339.
spirituality in the Church also implies a certain responsibility. Bearing Mary's name thus provokes our responsibility: that of maternal tenderness towards the needs of her children in distress. The reference to responsibility here constitutes the moral aspect of our pastoral work in general and in particular of pastoral work for/with migrants. Thus, this aspect could contribute to extending the action not only to pastoral agents, but also to any person of good will who has this awareness of humanitarian responsibility.

The responsibility to which we refer in our context is understood in a relational and philosophical sense. It consists of what happens when one individual responds to another. This understanding differs from the classical understanding where the emphasis is more on actions while forgetting the relational dimension. One understands then that it is not only in the free choice of actions where the subject is a moral being, but it is in a situation of face to face: it is a question of going towards a person. Roland Schaer, basing also on Levinas, emphasized that this moral responsibility is part of the history of the inventiveness of the living. His reflection on responsibility convinced us that we are not only biologically but also spiritually equipped (in our Marist life) to respond to the other, especially the poorest.

This understanding of responsibility that puts two people in contact and in inter-subjectivity is expressed, according to him, through parental care, medical assistance, political vocation, culture and concern for social and environmental issues. Reading this philosophical approach of a relational aspect brings us directly back to the virtue of solidarity:

Solidarity is also an authentic moral virtue, not a “feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. That is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”. Solidarity rises to the rank of fundamental social virtue since it places itself in the sphere of justice. It is a virtue directed par excellence to the common good, and is found in “a commitment to the good of one's neighbor with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to ‘lose oneself' for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to 'serve him' instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage (cf. Mt10:40-42, 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27)”.

b. Prophetic call

We can also read that responsibility in the call to all religious to be a prophetic presence in the world. This prophetic life of every religious, as Michael H. Crosby points out, includes a certain critical approach to social, ecclesial, and political structures; allowing oneself to be converted by the marginalized of society, and living Gospel values/virtues in a troubled and confused world.

These aspects include the phenomenon of the current migration crisis. Thus, the link established between spirituality and responsibility cannot leave us indifferent to the misery of the world. Our present life as Marist religious cannot flourish without an attitude of welcoming the cry of the poor and without the constant concern of the Church for the care of migrants and refugees. It is for this reason that we had to emphasize the capital importance that the Magisterium of the Catholic Church gives to the pastoral management of the migratory crisis. Our vocation is to reach out to those in need, just as the Virgin Mary - our first and perpetual superior - reached out to her cousin Elizabeth who was in need. We must be in constant movement towards the poor, and always be challenged by those who risk their lives on the dangerous routes of migration.

With this understanding, we therefore felt it appropriate to reaffirm our conviction to promote a commitment to prevention, care and support to try to address this rather complex situation. It is

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45 Youm, Qui est mon prochain ?, p. 61-64.
46 R. Schaer, Essai de généalogie de la responsabilité – intervention – Espace éthique – Île-de-France [consulté: 23.7.2020], https://www.espace-ethique.org/ressources/intervention/essai-de-genealogie-de-la-responsabilite
47 Schaer, Essai de généalogie.
48 Compendium de la doctrine sociale de l’Église, § 193.
50 Youm, Qui est mon prochain ?, p. 64-65.
51 Constitutions of the Society of Mary, no. 12.
a duty of conscience of a person freely engaged on a spiritual path, in a religious congregation and with a determined charisma. The responsibility intervenes in the spiritual realm in order to open and lead the other towards more light. This is undoubtedly the most important but also the most neglected aspect of responsibility. To embark on a spiritual path must lead us to be witnesses (μαρτύς / mártus), with simplicity, humility and freedom; it is a way of integrating our interior life (spirituality) with concrete acts (charity): a faith and a vocation that is always inventive even in fidelity to the spirit of the founder (Letter of St. James, 2, 14-18). We must therefore give reason to the hope that animates us (1Peter 3:15), not only in the eschatological sense of waiting for the parousia, but also in the sense of a life that tends towards perfection because of this waiting. This is only possible through communion with all.

Thus, what we are dealing with here is a certain application of prophetic life as Marist religious. This life is a witness for the Church and for the vocation of the Society of Mary to be an unconditional support until the end of time. In the end we understand the times in which we live, the times in which Father Colin lived and the times to come. It is therefore an eschatological approach. This approach pushes us to carry forward Mary's work and to share it with other generations. It is this same idea that Friedrich Arnold expresses when he emphasizes the importance of the "sacrament of the present moment". He emphasizes that we encounter God, Jesus, Mary, in what the signs of the times are announcing to us now, but also in what is to come. This awareness is that of a need to transmit and make the world Marist.

4. Concluding Considerations

"So we have confirmation of the words of the prophets; and you will be right to pay attention to it as to a lamp for lighting a way through the dark, until the dawn comes and the morning star rises in your minds. At the same time, we must recognize that the interpretation of scriptural prophecy is never a matter for the individual. For no prophecy ever came from human initiative. When people spoke for God it was the Holy Spirit that moved them." (2 Peter, 1: 19-21)

This passage from the Second Letter of St. Peter is for us synthetic and allows us to evaluate our reflection on the prophetic aspects of the person of Jean Claude Colin. Indeed, we have endeavored to make an interpretative, analytical and up-to-date approach to the chosen theme. At this level it would no doubt be important to ask ourselves what to retain from this (rather pompous) analysis.

We note with St. Peter a profound invitation to let ourselves be guided by the voice of the prophets because their message does not derive from their own initiative. The prophetic message is a divine message that requires a deep contemplation of the divine Word and an attitude of openness to the movements of the Holy Spirit in the life of each one. This prophetic word is a lamp that guides our steps, that enlightens us and leads us to the perfect fulfillment: eternal life. Convinced of this message, we want to share here a personal experience; an experience which, moved by divine grace, has given us the opportunity to share this enthusiasm for the life of Jean Claude Colin and his spiritual heritage. This is meant to be an encouragement for every missionary (in the Church since our charisma is a charisma of the Church) and for Marist missionaries in particular.

Indeed, we are living in difficult times comparable to those of Father Colin - the end of times - with crises of all kinds within the Church. These crises are also of a social, cultural, political, and even ontological nature: man is at a dead end where he loses the reference points of his dignity created in the image of God. However, in the midst of this turbulence, God raises men and women to carry high the flame of hope, for it is under the impulse of the Holy Spirit that men of God have spoken. It is from this same impulse that every Marist missionary, in contact with the prophetic experience of Jean Claude Colin, is called to stand firm in trials, to pray for the perseverance of the just and the conversion of sinners. We are not alone. The legacy of Jean Claude Colin (the spirit of the Society of Mary) gives an eschatological vocation: we are thus called to work for the

52 Arnold, God Comes from the Future, p. 129.
coming of the Reign of God; and it will be possible for us to do so only by keeping our eyes fixed on the word and the prophetic experience of our venerable founder. A first thing to remember, therefore, would be to know that although the status quo does not work (cf.: General Chapter 2017 n°8), we are comforted by this prophetic voice that tells us that I (Mary) was the support of the Church in its beginnings, I will be so at the end of time. We are missionaries of hope, prophets of modern times and heirs of the spiritual patrimony that makes us actors and collaborators of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Here we want to report some ideas that we wrote in 2015 in the journal of the Marist house of formation in Yaoundé. Our life as Marist religious, under the prophetic example of Jean Claude Colin, is thus a path of sanctification. A walk during which we dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God, to listen to ourselves, and thus allow the Holy Spirit to act, to make us better disciples of Christ. This means that our vows are not an end in themselves. Our Constitutions in number 71 say it quite eloquently: "From the beginning of his novitiate and throughout his life, the Marist consecrates all his energies and talents to becoming ever more effective in the mission given to the Society". One can clearly see in this issue that to commit oneself to the Project of the Society of Mary is to accept a process, a process of renewal of oneself to be in at level with the need of the Gospel, the need of the Society of Mary and the need of the world. To enter in the Marist project means constantly tasting God and being free of everything that cannot help the mission. Living the vows is not only a question of personal discipline, it is a spiritual exercise of prayer and commitment and also a way of surrendering oneself to the grace of God: it is a prophetic and sanctifying attitude that we can retain as a second message.

A more personalized conclusion would certainly not be too much. Indeed, after my first profession on January 25, 2015, I sometimes had the concern to be practical in my commitment. How can I really express my identity as religious? But I have come to the conclusion that religious life in general and Marist life in particular is not a matter of "exhibition". It is about witness (marturos - μαρτυρος). I can put every human effort to be on the right track, but I am nothing without God's assistance and grace. It is certainly important to have self-discipline and a way of life that shows the importance and seriousness of one's choice. But what is more important than all these human qualities is the surrender to God's grace that guides us as He guided the prophets and Jean Claude Colin.

We also sometimes use all our human energies and get tired, and we turn to God and ask him why we do. At this point, by asking this question, we come to a deep reflection on the meaning of living the religious vows. It is a daily exercise of beginning anew and a spiritual journey. And we believe that when God calls, he also gives the graces to respond (Rom 8:30). We pray that, whatever the challenges, God's will is done in each missionary for his greater glory and the honor of Mary, the mother of God.