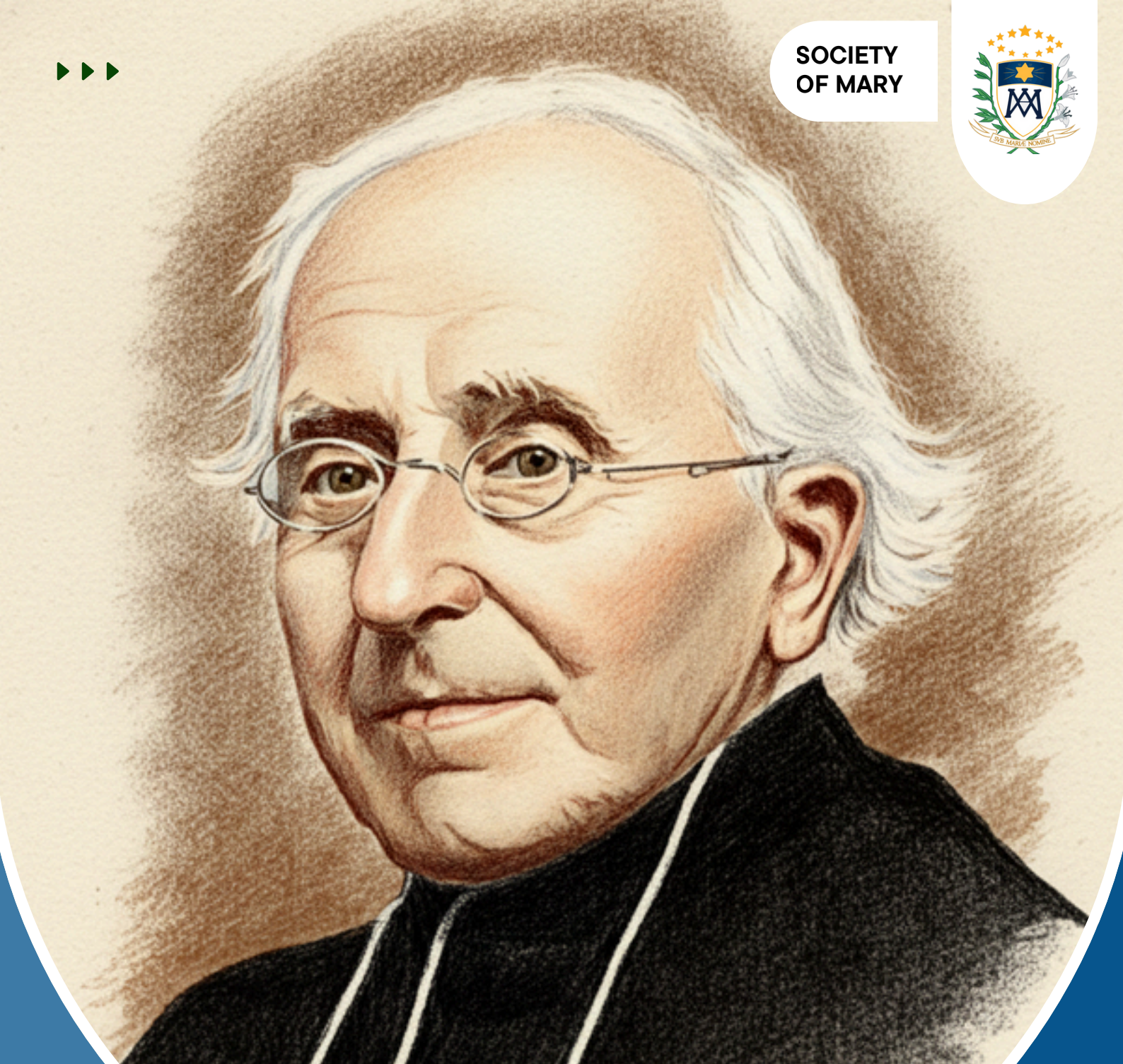




SOCIETY  
OF MARY



**“THAT WORKS FOR ME”**

(OM doc 819, §9)



**Yesterday and today, serving Christ,  
in the way of Mary...**

**THE FOUNDER’S JOURNEY • PILGRIM BOOKLET 2025**





## ST BONNET LE TRONCY, BARBERY >>

Tuesday 11 November 2025

**“Mary is the haven of salvation, safe and forever open, wherein the soul, tossed about in waves of tribulation, recovers calm...”**  
*APM 241.42*

### LES BARBERY

Jean-Claude Colin was born on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1790 at Les Barberty, a hamlet which is about 2 kms from St Bonnet-le-Troncy. The house where he was born no longer exists, but a cross was erected in 1936 to mark the site of the house.

The population of the Barberty in 1804 was 60. From the register of the parish we learn that the marriage between Jacques Colin and Marie Gonnet, Jean-Claude's parents, took place on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1771. Jacques was 24 years old; Marie was not yet fourteen.

“Marie Gonnet was thirty-two years old when she gave birth to Jean-Claude. He was the eighth child she brought into the world. Claudine was the eldest; at fourteen she was

chosen to be the godmother to Jean-Claude; Jean, the twelve-year-old, was to be the godfather. Hence the name Jean-Claude for the newborn baby. Then came Mariette, ten years old, Sebastien, eight; Jeanne-Marie, six; Pierre, not quite four. A seventh, baptised Anne-Marie, died at birth, two years before Jean-Claude was born. The mother was to give birth to Joseph in 1793, before she died two years later. The household also included the paternal grandfather, seventy-seven, a widower for nine years. There is no reason to think that the home in which Jean-Claude was born in 1790 was any different from the ordinary homes of Saint-Bonnet: hard-working parents, children growing up normally.”

*(G. Lessard sm: “7<sup>th</sup> August 1970, in Saint-Bonnet”, Forum Novum Dec.1989, p10)*



And so, Jean-Claude was the second youngest in a family of eight surviving children. His parents owned and cultivated a piece of land, and during the winter turned to weaving to supplement their income. We recall how Jean-Claude was orphaned at the age of four, possibly due to the rigours suffered by his parents for having harboured priests who refused to support the Revolutionary Constitution. Both his mother and father died within 20 days of each other. Jean-Claude was put under the care of a paternal uncle, Sebastian, and a housekeeper, Marie Echallier. At 10 years of age, Jean-Claude lived in the town of St Bonnet, where he began schooling under the care of a kindly Soeur Marthe.

The surroundings of Les Barberies would have a formative influence on Jean-Claude. Above the site of the house is the mountain of Le Crest, where he loved to walk. It is easy to suppose that this countryside helped to develop his deep longing to be “alone with God alone”.

*“Father Colin said one day that when he was very young before he began his classical studies, he had a burning desire to withdraw alone in a forest, to live far from this world. Since he could not do this, he went to the minor seminary of Saint Jodard” (OM III, doc 819:7)*

Jean-Claude's uncle was a bachelor, and the children came to live in his house at St Bonnet. This is a large square house to the right of the church. Until recently this house served as a presbytery, but in Jean-Claude's time the presbytery was the house directly opposite the door of the church.

Being a bachelor, Sebastian Colin employed a house-keeper to look after the domestic arrangements. This lady was a deeply religious woman, but one of those who seemed to suffer tensions and become irritable every time she went to confession. This all seems to have had an effect of creating in Jean-Claude a scrupulosity which gave him much trouble, and a deep longing to hide in the woods and become a hermit. At the same time, in later life

this experience was to make him sensitive and merciful to troubled souls.

## SAINT BONNET-LE-TRONCY

In 1790 the population of St Bonnet-le Troncy was 1125. Today it is around 600. The church, in which all the colon except Auguste-Frederique were baptised, dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was rebuilt on the same spot in 1821; the bell tower being added in 1826. When the book of Complaints was drawn up to the Estates General in 1789, more than half the parish was listed as “belonging to the nobility and the privileged”. The document showed little sympathy for the possessions of the clergy, and his resentment found expression in the religious struggles of the revolutionary period.

The spiritual state of the parish was summed up by the parish priest in a response to Cardinal Fesch: “All the inhabitants are catholic. Most of them frequent the Sacraments. They are more or less fervent in attending services. Catechism held fairly often... There is no school properly speaking. A good lass does her best to teach the youngsters... Most of the parishioners have some knowledge.”







In the Autumn of 1804, Jean-Claude left St Bonnet for the minor seminary of St Jodard. He returned only for holidays, and when he was gravely ill in April 1809. It was on this occasion that he was shocked to learn of the greed of his family. When he seemed to be on his deathbed and his family thought he was going to die soon, he was horrified to hear his relatives talk only of his will and what would come to them through his death. "Everyone thought only of his own interests." The doctor prescribed medicine which he hoped would effect a cure. Someone who had a vested interest in Jean-Claude's property tried to dissuade him from taking the medicine, telling him that it had been poisoned. Only the tears of his brother made him change his mind and take the medicine. He then recovered. (Cf OM2, 508) Perhaps this episode explains something of the subsequent attitude of Jean-Claude towards his family: "Relatives? I never think of them. I don't even know if I have any."

Colin certainly returned to St Bonnet after his ordination, around 1819, but his visits thereafter were rare. During Lent 1843 Fr Maître pierre and FR Poupinel preached a mission and stayed in the house of Jean Colin, the Founder's grandfather. Pierre Colin also went back to St Bonnet on Easter Monday of that same year.

Here at St Bonnet, we are in touch with some of the most formative experiences of Jean-Claude's personality and subsequent spirituality. In particular the shock of losing both his parents during the revolution, and the experience of his family's greed were to have lasting effects on him. Coste writes:



*And if we ask ourselves how could such a boy look at the world? What could the world be for a boy like that? We can say that the world is something which is against us. The world has killed the good Christian King. It has killed God who is no longer in the Church. The God who has been hidden. It has killed my parents. It has taken everything away from me.*

We add to this the fact of his temperament, and his love for solitude, and these will explain the shyness and introversion of Jean-Claude Colin. The real values for him will be those which nobody will be able to take away from him. Nobody will take away from him what is interior – a profound sense of what we call "the interior life" in the best sense of the world.

Fr. Mayet wrote: "At first sight (Jean-Claude Colin) appeared to be one of those good, little old country priests, very simple, very withdrawn, not knowing where to curl himself up to occupy less space, and at the same time, so abounding in goodness. I must add, however, that you felt he was a saint, and as soon as I had spoken to him for the first time, I had this strong feeling in my heart: "That is the man you are looking for".

### PRAYER INTENTION

We pray for the grace to accept our origins – both personal and congregational – as they are; and to see these as "graces of foundation" for the Marist project both in the past and for the future. We pray for a spirit of trust in God's plan to do great things with humble instruments, including ourselves.





Fr Larry Duffy sm

## Les Barbery



Today's world is an ambiguous place. There has been so much progress in many way but many in fact live without clear purpose in life and even without any real hope. Here now in this very rural place we have a simple Cross to mark the birthplace Jean Claude Colin born on 7th August 1790. Now he is a man who still offers a real hope to the world even of today. He offers the gospel of Christ in a very attractive way. Yes, the world of his time was so different from ours: he had a childhood of a simple rural life with no electricity, no motor cars or trains, but more strikingly to impact the personal life of Jean-Claude Colin here in Les Barbery is that his still young mother Marie, who married when she was only 13 years old, passed away when Jean Claude was not yet 5 years old. It was said that before she died she asked her children to take the Virgin Mary as their Mother. For the young Jean this relationship with Mary was very real, personal and intimate, and led to an extraordinary future.

**So a first point** to note from his childhood and early years is the beginnings of **the profound Marian aspect of his life which was devotional and deeply felt and experienced** which led later to broaden in a variety of original ways to be a significant part of the very foundation of his life and of his mission, eventually shaping an evangelizing spirituality of which would have a great but hidden impact on the Church in so many places to this day, especially we could note in Oceania, to such an extent that the document that came from the Synod on Oceania, November and December 1998, *the Church in Oceania*, has a whole section on the particularly Marian aspect of the peoples of Oceania. As we look around there today at these green fields and hills, so remote, can't we but marvel at the mysterious decision of God in eternity choosing his servants.

**A second point** that deeply affected his Colin's mission was **his love of solitude**, to be with God often wandering behind the mountain of Le Crest into the woods. By nature Jean-Claude was a shy boy, small in height and spoke with a stammer. Nevertheless he would preach to the tress and sometimes to other children. There was a growth in the depth of his spiritual life and in the movement of the Spirit in his soul over these years occasioned by these solitary hours with God and by reading etc. This gave him a great sensitivity to the Lord and to a sense of sin, even to the point of scrupulosity. Can we see here some roots of the prophetic person he came to be. So many saints (eg Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, and nearer home, St. Jean Vianney) spent long hours in solitude at the beginning of their prophetic vocations to sink their souls deep into God. Is it too much for us to see the young Colin a bit in the same light? His tough family experiences, his introversion, and his 'tasting God' [a favourite expression of his all his life] led to him to develop a strong interior life, and to being shaped with strong evangelical values. As Craig Larkin notes: "The real values for him will be those which nobody will be able to take away from him. Nobody will be able to take from him what is interior, what he has developed". His mission was developing, even unknown to himself, as at a young age as he was learning to be in tune the Lord and what He wanted him to sing to the world. Often great missions are formed in silence, face to face with God (as Hans Urs von Balthasar points out). He sings a tune to us springing from a depths of God inside him, a song of invitation to know and serve the loving God and then to invite others gently in the way of Mary.

**Today we might ask ourselves:** What does this say to us about our own spiritual life, and our life in the world, especially with mobile phones, social media which can be addictive and make silence and solitude ever more difficult for us. It is of significance that for the Marist Fathers in the Constitutions of 1872 (No 37) there is insistence that all the members of the Society assiduously scrutinise the inner movements of the heart to direct them properly. This goes hand in hand with a prayerful and reflective life. However, in the world we live in today with so much on social media calling for our attention, and also sometimes even just the demands of modern life calling for the same attention and energy, we are posed a great challenge especially for lay people who have often so many responsibilities. To have some silence in life and space for reflection is too often very difficult – but Colin has left us an ideal to look to – to develop a rich interior life where God's Spirit speaks to us and helps us to fulfil our own particular mission. And we all have a mission, lay and religious, probably not as spectacular as that of Colin, but of importance for God's plan of salvation as we are all loved with the same Infinite Love, a love which has to be told to the world.



Fr Larry Duffy sm

## St Bonnet-le-Troncy

Jean Claude's eldest brother Jean moved the household from Les Barberty to the town of St. Bonney Le Troncy when Jean-Claude was eleven years of age. Their house, as you see, was close to the parish church which the young Jean Claude often visited and prayed at the statue of Mary. The little Jean Claude lived with the family and surely there was a good human formation going on and in rubbing shoulders with other members of the family and neighbours day in day out. The youngster however continued his more intense spiritual life. He became a very ascetical boy and used to get up sometimes night to pray; His first regular confession [he had made confession earlier when he was quite ill] was an occasion for him to show his strength of will and even stubbornness. The new priest in the parish was not to his liking Particularly in the way he was handling the preparation for Confession and first Holy Communion, so he went to a neighbouring parish for the preparation with considerable effort on his part. In this we can see something of the strength of will and persistence which carried him from 1816 to 1836 in working for the approval of the Society. Behind this particular hard work to get the Society going was the deep **conviction that the Society was of God and Mary and was worth fighting for at great personal cost.**

Giving a seminar on Marist history to an insightful group of people a year or two ago after I had outlined the history of the development of the Society the first reaction, which surprised me a little was tht they noticed how Colin and the early group had huge obstacles to face and that they observed how Colin persevered through thick and thin to see the project into the light of day. The deep conviction and perseverance were present in such a high degree in Coilin that they remarked it as very significant and inspiring. Indeed I was often struck by a phrase in Jean Coste's lectures on the Society of Mary History where he mentions the family of the Colins: "The family temperament seems to have been marked by **tenacity** and reserve." This certainly describes the youthful Colin. Despite his various illnesses and even breaks from the seminaries when he was forced to havea rest at home from these illnesses, he was not deterred in his will, even though for a long time he was hesitant about assuming the priesthood. His personal reserve which showed itself all his life was certainly matched by this family and personal tenacity, doggedness, perseverance that featured strongly in his dedicated work to bring the Society into being and to make sure it was according to the divinely-inspired character it was meant to have. These family qualities and his character formation in them helped to keep him going. This raises for us the quality of our own tenacity fostering our spiritual life and in giving energy to the growth of the branches of the Marists today and the various projects we have. Colin once again has a message and a challenge for us.

As your know Colin had a **great hatred of cupidity and of love of money.** This guess we can trace this back to St. Bonnet-le Troncy to some experiences of youth. Being born into a devout Catholic family where holding on to the faith and helping the Church was more important than holding on to material goods and property gave him an insight into spiritual values in this area. His family lost some property because of their faithfulness to the church and hiding priests. He noted himself later in his youth that when he fell seriously ill at the age of 18 and it looked as if he might die, the bedside was surrounded by money-hungry relatives talking about a will, notaries etc. He even claimed that one close relative interested in his inheritance, tried to dissuade him from takings medicine saying it was poisoned. Later on, as a priest, he saw a greedy disposition in some clergy that disgusted him. This significantly shaped what he later taught the Marists Fathers regarding the attitudes and customs they should have, and also shaped the Constitutions of the Marist Fathers. Interestingly in today's world when materialism is in the air and greed is often not even named as such, his teaching and practice have a lesson for the world, the Church and each of us. The Society of Mary would do well to pay great attention to this. We note the 1872 Constitutions: "If they were to lose the spirit of poverty, Jesus and Mary, would no longer recognize this congregation as their own". Always relevant! Also in 2025 for all of us in different ways!







## FOURVIÈRE

Wednesday 12 November 2025



**“We irrevocably dedicate ourselves and all our goods  
to the society of the blessed Virgin”**  
*(Promise of Fourvière OM 50)*

There has been a shrine on Fourvière dedicated to Our Lady since 1170. The interior of the chapel, restored in 1751, has not greatly altered since then. Fourvière has always been a popular place of pilgrimage, as can be seen from the plaques round the wall of the chapel. The Basilica on the hill was consecrated in 1896, in fulfilment of a vow by the city of Lyon, and in thanksgiving to Our Lady for protecting the city from the ravages of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1816 the twelve Marist aspirants priests and seminarians, climbed the hill to the shrine of Our Lady of Fourvière. They placed their promise to found the Society of Mary under the corporal while Jean-Claude Courveille celebrated Mass. After communion which they all received from Fr Courveille's hand they read out their declaration promising

to devote themselves and all that they had to the foundation of the Society of Mary. On the left of the chancel is a plaque commemorating this event, and on the opposite side a plaque commemorating the Marist Brothers (FMS)

In the years which follow, many Marists came to the shrine. On 29<sup>th</sup> August 1933 a mass was celebrated here before the departure of Fathers Colin, Chanel and Bourdin for Rome. In October 1836 before the departure of the first missionaries for Oceania, Bishop Pompallier had a novena of Masses said here, and on the final day Fr Chanel hung a heart containing the names of the missionaries round the neck of the infant Jesus, giving birth to the legend that Mary has given her mantle to the future martyr. Among the votive offerings are some “tableaux” recalling events in the history of the Oceanian missions.



Since then, many Marist celebrations have taken place either in this chapel or in the basilica. The first time that the four branches of the Marist Family celebrated together here was on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fourvière pledge, 24 July 1966. And so, as we come to this place where the first Marists responded to Our Lady's request with a promise to do what she wanted, it may be worth reflecting on and developing a thought of Gaston Lessard...

*When Jean-Claude Colin heard Courveille talking of his plan, he instantly leapt to the bait. Ever since his childhood he has been looking for some way of being alone with God. The seminary drew him and satisfied him, but only partly. Seminary life led to priesthood (diocesan) and that would inevitably bring him back into the world again in busy parish life, thus limiting his ability to be alone with God. But now in Courveille's plan he could see a solution – a way of being quiet and hidden even in the midst of great activity. "As soon as M. Courveille made known the project of the Society of Mary, I told myself, "That suits you" and I joined them."*

The moment at Fourvière on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1816 flows directly from this conviction that the Marist project was for him. From now on, all his energies were to be spent in making this a reality. It was this decision that unified his life from now on.

But what gave Fr Colin the power to carry this decision through was not simply the fact that it corresponded to his personal wishes. It ran much deeper than that. It flowed from his belief that Mary had said she wanted it, and that she wanted him among others to make it a reality.

When Courveille spoke about the Marist project at the major seminary, he always presented it as something that Mary had told him she wanted. And Colin tells us very clearly that Mary's words "I supported the Church as its birth, and I will do so again at the end of time" (which are probably a summary of the Le Puy experience) inspired and guided the birth of the Society (FS 152) The Fourvière moment

sealed his decision that he would work at the project.

The Fourvière Pledge became a powerful symbol for Colin, because it represented for him two realities: first that the Marist project was where his deepest desires lay; and second, that it would become real only if he made it real. The Marist project was not something "outside" of him, which he joined. It was an interior driving force which inspired him.

For Marist today, the same is true. Fourvière represents not only a commitment to do the work of Mary, but also the commitment to make "the work of Mary" (i.e. the Society of Mary in all its branches)

## **MEN OF FOURVIÈRE**

The seminarians who climbed the hill of Fourvière were caught in a dream. They were convinced that Mary wanted something. She wanted to transform the Church into a kingdom of Mercy. In God's providence she was to be the instrument to renew the Church into a servant and pilgrim people. She was to bring a new sensitivity and compassion. A compassion which saw in the scepticism of the time a desire of people to be authentic, to cast off all masks and illusions. A church which would be gentle with unbelievers because it recognised in their disbelief the possibility of a deeper and sounder foundation for the faith.

The men of Fourvière burned with a vision. They were innovators and prophets. They wanted to create something new. For the sake of their vision, they were willing to set aside all desire for personal power, for fame for possessions. The invitation to go to Oceania had not yet been made, the question has not yet been asked, and yet one knew that the answer would be "yes". They were men available. They were men of fire, the men of Fourvière. (*John Jago: Mary, Mother of our Hope*)





## FOURVIÈRE PLEDGE

*All for the greater glory of God and the  
greater honour of Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus.*

We the undersigned, striving to work together for the greater glory of God and the honour of Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus, assert and declare our sincere intention and firm will of consecrating ourselves at the first opportunity to founding the pious congregation of Mary-ists.

That is why by the present act and our signatures, in so far as we can, we irrevocably dedicate ourselves and all our goods, to the Society of the Blessed Virgin. We do this, not childishly or lightly or for some human motive or the hope of material benefit, but seriously, maturely, having taken advice, having weighed everything before God, solely for the greater glory of God and the honour of Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus.

We pledge ourselves to accept all sufferings, trials, inconveniences and, if needs be, torture, because we can do all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens us and to whom we hereby promise fidelity in the bosom of our holy mother the Roman Catholic Church, cleaving with all our strength to its supreme head the Roman pontiff and to our most reverend bishop, the ordinary, that we may be good ministers of Jesus Christ, nourished with the words of faith and of the wholesome teaching which by his grace we have received.

We trust that, under the reign of our most Christian King,  
the friend of peace and religion, this institute will shortly come to light  
and we solemnly promise that we shall spend ourselves and all we have  
in saving souls in every way under the very august  
name of the Virgin Mary and with her help.  
May the Holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary be praised.  
Amen.

## PRAYER INTENTION

Gratitude for the grace of our vocation; thanksgiving for those who have accompanied us in our journey as Marists and who have chosen other paths; and a prayer to stir up in ourselves the fervour and enthusiasm of our first Marist confreres.



## PROMISE

Our current era is not one in which to speak of promises. For our contemporary society the horizon is confined to immediate satisfaction of one's own desires. There is no sense in considering the future. Neither is there any sense in linking one's existence to a promise, an oath or a vow. That goes against the meaning of freedom. Being free becomes interpreted as not having any kind of tie. The marriage contract, for example, is replaced by cohabitation, a temporary union based solely on feelings – and love lasts as long as it lasts. If in the past there was the conviction that a certain profession would occupy a person's entire life, today absolute flexibility is called for, the capacity to modify oneself continually and to adapt oneself to a continually changing work environment. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has coined the term "liquidity" to denote this new existential situation for humanity. Within this society we want to be free, in every instant, to take up the various opportunities that life holds for us. A promise would project us beyond the possibility of availing ourselves of all the opportunities presented by the fleeting moment.



For the Christian, however, the foundation of promises is God himself. "God does not fulfil all our desires, but all his promises", the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us. While man experiences fragility within his own existence, to the point of infidelity, God reveals himself to us in his fidelity. The sinful condition – our closing within ourselves, attempting to make ourselves the centre of the world – encounters the freedom that is given by God who remains faithful to the promises despite all our fluctuations. Human promises are grounded on the experience had of God. Man feels supported in his own existence because he is experiencing the fidelity of God that never lessens. In the divine horizon the human promise opens itself to the expectation of the future that is always a gift of God. Human promises cannot count on their own powers and capacities, but they may become instruments with which we declare our availability to welcome, in our today, the future that God gives us.

Experiencing the fidelity of God allows us to find an anchor of salvation within the emptiness and fluidity that surround our existence. Recalling the promise made two centuries ago by the small group of Marist aspirants, means actualising this dynamic of faith that opens us to the future of God.

## TWELVE

The preserved copies of the text of the Promise do not record the signatures nor a list of the signatories<sup>1</sup>. The original text, possibly retained by Courveille, has been lost, like other documents concerning Marist origins<sup>2</sup>. Indirect testimonies handed down indicate that there were twelve who made the Promise on the morning of 23 July. We do not know all their names. The identification of some remains hypothetical. It is the task of the historian to search through the sources, to find the testimonials, to reconstruct the facts. From the religious and spiritual point of view this remains secondary.

The number twelve is too perfect not to arouse suspicions<sup>3</sup>. Are we not faced with an a posteriori reconstruction? Is this not, at the beginnings of the Society of Mary, a projection of the beginnings of the Church? Would one not want to connote even symbolically the event of the Promise? If this indeed effectively happened, who fashioned this reconstruction? Legitimate questions, but they remain without plausible answers. Just there, where the historian gives up, powerless before a lack of data, it is however, possible to locate additional trails that project onto the spiritual gradient of the events. Indeed, starting from the incompleteness of the historical data we can highlight certain elements. First of all, at the beginnings of the Society of Mary we can observe a repurposed topos consistent with many religious experiences: the return to the origins. The *Ecclesia semper reformanda* has a gaze dynamically and constantly turned toward her own beginnings. Through the image of the twelve we are sent back, immediately, to the primordial Church, as described in the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles and to the *cor unum et anima una* as a perennial ideal to be embodied today.

The Apostles were gathered in the Cenacle around Mary. The first aspirants of the Promise were assembled in the chapel of Fourvière and they do so not only in the name of Mary, to found a congregation that would carry her name, but above all – and here we move once again to the symbolic plane – to congregate around Mary.

[1] OM 1, introductory note doc. 50. [2] Idem. [3] Cf OM, doc. 535 § 1; doc. 748, § 2; doc. 294 § 1 (this deals with the Summarium of 1833).



Some of them remain anonymous to us. Going beyond the desire to know their names, in anonymity there is delivered to us a possibility of recognition. Who are the four unknown ones of the Promise? I am not particularly curious to know. I believe we should move towards a different perspective. The historians could also not hide their disappointment at not being able to reveal the identity of these four unknowns. We, however, can rejoice because in them we are permitted, as on that far off 23 July, to take the same street that climbs towards Fourvière to accompany the first Marists.

There were also four who participated in the fulfilment, in various forms, of the Promise. The fifth, Courville, was soon ousted from the project, on account of several troublesome situations in which he was seen as protagonist. To the initial enthusiasm and fervour, various personal paths led to different choices. There were, surely, those who would not have identified any more with the project as it took off. Were there those who considered it the fruit of a youthful fever and, therefore, spent? Maybe someone had been under the influence of Courville's personality and consequently distanced himself? We do not know what might have been the reasons, second thoughts and justifications adopted by each of them. Join up or pull back? Associate oneself or wait and see how things develop? Give life to the project or abandon it?... These are the dynamics of life. Dynamics which are not restricted to that distant historical fact, but which are a part of each of us.

## A COMMON PROJECT

The Promise is presented to us not as an individual work, but a collective one. We the undersigned...<sup>1</sup> The verbs used are in the first person plural: [We] affirm, declare, dedicate, offer ourselves, promise, undertake...Each has placed his own signature at the foot of the text. We are faced with a joint declaration. Often, however, this type of promise or vow would be drawn up on single, personalised pages and signed individually.

This is no small matter. From its earliest beginnings the Society of Mary was understood as a group, as an ensemble, as a consortium and not as a sum of single individuals. The term does not appear in the text, but is as it were a sub-plot, the watermark of the entire project. To form the family of Mary. Yes, it is a group. It is not a first. There is recognition as sons of the same Mother. If it is true, as is often noted from the outside, that one of the traits that characterise the Marist experience is a certain lived family dimension, then the seeds of this aspect are already present in the Promise.

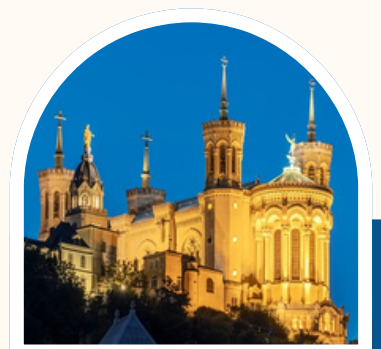
## MARISTS

These days a name has become a sort of label. Consumer society has imposed on us the power of the logo. From the Biblical point of view a name is much more than a simple appellation or a label attached to a person. The name is tightly connected, interlaced with the one who carries it. In a certain way we can say that also we are our name. It is constitutively part of us. The meaning of the name accompanies the existence of the person who carries it. What is more, if this story undergoes new developments, the name can change. As it was for Abraham, who became father of numerous peoples. As it was for Jacob who, having fought with God, became Israel. As it was for Simon, son of Jonah, who became Peter in as much as symbolising the bedrock on which the Church came to be built...

At the same time, the name transforms the person. This contributes to the formation of our personality. We become who we are thanks also to the name we carry – it is what has been given us. If history has consigned the text of the Promise to us without the names at its foot, there is one name that has been reported back – explicitly and in several variations – it is that of Mary, which appears five times. In all this we can catch a symbolic significance as well.

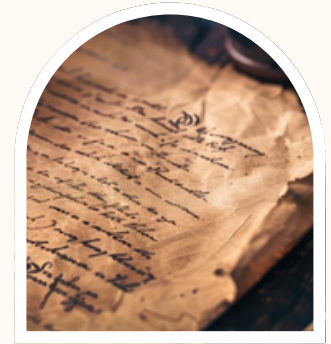
Marists do not only carry the name that means to be honoured by comparison with Mary, but want to allow themselves to be permeated by such a name. The first aspirants find themselves in the name of Mary. Why is the name so important for them? The Society of Mary is not, at that time, a name exclusive to Marists. However, we are not dealing with a label. It is something more than a sign that comes to be used for differentiating or as a reminder. It is not even a particular aspect of their Marian devotion. The name denotes a membership. It is feeling oneself part of a work – indeed a family – and recognising oneself in it.

[1] Nos infra scripti.



## WHO WROTE THE PROMISE?

We do not know. We could posit, indeed, that almost certainly it was the fruit of a communal effort. Probably, someone wrote a rough draft that was then discussed and coalesced in common accord. Regarding this, a name we could put forward: Canon Cholleton. Was he the final redactor of the text? It is possible. He offered his own protection and support to the Marist project from the beginning and later became a Marist himself. Indeed, at the time of the election of the first Superior General Fr Colin expected that it would be Cholleton to take up the task.



## FOR THE GREATER GLORY ALONE...

The Promise contains a sort of self-defence, a dialectic between youth and maturity. It shines through the lines of the text that, in the months preceding that 23 July, critiques (and also advice) would not have been lacking around the Marist project. We can imagine the comments raining down from various parties. From formators, from teachers or from fellow seminarians themselves: We shall see therefore what remains of all this enthusiasm of yours... You are young and do not yet know the difficulties of life, but when you know... When you mature a little, you will face reality with more seriousness... such is the tenor, usually, of the good advice with which preceding generations liberally furnish the younger generation. It is a consistent attitude, that is renewed in every age. The greater the youthful enthusiasm, the greater are the expressed attempts at dampening, debasing or suppressing that enthusiasm. This is constant down the centuries, as is the accusation that the new generation lack values and does not have the capacity to implement its professed dreams.

Those who climbed Fourvière claim:

(English text)	(Latin text)
not childishly	non pueriliter
not lightly	non leviter
not from any human motive	non ex aliquo humano fine
or hope of temporal gain	aut spe temporalis emolumenti

But:

(English text)	(Latin text)
seriously	serio
maturely	mature
having taken council	assumpto consilio
weighed all before God	omnibus coram Deo perpensis
for God's glory alone	propter solam maiorem
and the honour of Mary,	Dei gloriam et Mariae
the Mother of Our Lord Jesus.	Genitricis Domini Jesu honorem

Analysis of the structure of the text allows us to put some aspects into relief. There is an evident parallelism between the negative and positive segments, as we can see by comparing the passages in the following table:

not childishly	seriously
not lightly	maturely
not from any human motive	having taken council
or hope of temporal gain	weighed all before God

We could consider all that we have briefly analysed in this paragraph as a simple premise to what uniquely must be considered: *“For God's greater glory alone and the honour of Mary, Mother of the Lord Jesus”*. To us it sounds almost as a vain, redundant repetition, being already proclaimed immediately after the first invocation of the Most Holy Trinity and repeated a little later, as a refrain. But this triple witness represents the centre, the fulcrum of the entire *Promise*: to contribute to the glory of God and the honour of Mary through the establishment of a Congregation.



## THE TRIALS AND SUFFERINGS

To reinforce what we have affirmed up till now, there is another passage, prepared to confront various trials and possible sufferings to bring the Marist project to fulfillment. *Poenis, laboribus et incommodis*: There is a kind of crescendo in this list, that culminates in the following *cruciatibus*. The pains, the labours, the harmful and heavy even up to the possibility of torture and martyrdom<sup>1</sup>. Is one to suppose a certain ingenuousness in all of this? Does this treat only of a youthful ardour? In reality, these persons, although young, had behind them a tragic experience. The years of Revolution before and after the Empire were studded with a series of painful and violent events. He, therefore, who undersigned these words was not talking of something generic and abstract – of a remote and vague possibility. There is a serious, grave awareness that such as lived, in some cases also by their relatives or in their own childhood, could recur in the near future.

## FIDELITY TO THE ROMAN PONTIFF

During the Revolution and the Empire the French Church had lived a through a hard and troubled division. However, already before this there had been a long phase of gallican tendency. Gallicanism was a political and religious doctrine that accorded the Pope a primacy of honour and jurisdiction, but at the same time promoted a strongly autonomous organisation for the Catholic Church of France. Hence, there was a different ecclesiological conception at stake. To Gallicanism there was opposed Ultramontanism: signified by such expressions as “the one who resides beyond the mountains”, that is to say, the Pope. I.e. it was the doctrine that proclaimed papal primacy over individual national churches. The doctrine of Gallicanism spanned the entire political and religious history of France from the 17<sup>th</sup> till the First Vatican Council (1870).

In summary, we are faced with a text that appears a little more complex than at first sighting. Behind which there is every evidence of the discussions held by the clerics and also in the seminary. We find, from the First Letter to Timothy: “haec proponens fratribus bonus eris minister Christi Iesu enutritus verbis fidei et bonae doctrinae quam adsecutus es”. We can affirm that here the Marist aspirants opt for Ultramontanism in a decisive way. They had just agreed to act with maturity and seriousness. Now we are in a position to reiterate that their commitment will be to a Church that is Catholic and not circumscribed by the dimensions of a national church.

## THE SALVATION OF SOULS

The Promise is not explicit on the ends of the new little Congregation to be founded, apart from stating, with a rather generic formula the salvation of souls by all means. There are no hints at specific works or particular apostolic activities. Fr Colin, from his side, had never wanted that the Society of Mary would be characterised by particular works. Certainly, there are missions, foreign and apud fideles, teaching in schools and shrines... but the Work of Mary must remain open also to what is other and, likewise, show itself prudent about a few particular ministries. While the accentuated colinian opposition to parishes could be understood as diffidence when faced with a ministry that could have locked the Marist in a cage of organisation and structure.

We can affirm that Fr Colin remained, in a certain sense, always faithful to that generality expressed in the Promise. By all means (*modis omnibus*). Could we understand this as a juvenile exaggeration? In line with the high tone of the entire Promise? A cliché? It is, on the contrary, a particular specification of how one must go about the salvation of souls. We know that Fr Colin had learned over time this *modis omnibus*. We read in A Founder Speaks: regarding this, Rome proved very useful to me. It is there that I learned the maxim: “The law is made for man”. If I cannot save him with the law, I will seek to save him without the law”<sup>2</sup>. We are, therefore, placed in front of one of the seeds of the Promise, which as Marists we are invited to cultivate in every time.

## AN ACT OF DEVOTION!?

From a juridical point of view the Promise has no binding value, it is merely a declaration of intent. Sometimes one hears the assertion that it was an act of devotion on the part of a few new Priests and seminarians who made a little pilgrimage to the national shrine and together undersigned an all-in-all redundant text, a little precious, stately in places and drenched in the clichés of the devotion of the time. For others, beyond this, it is a text circumscribed by a determined historic time. It is another Ecclesiology, another vision of the world... no longer has it anything to do with our actual situation.

But what truly was the Promise of Fourvière? An act of devotion or an act of foundation? A simple text, of little value and without any claim, or containing already in nuce some spiritual germs for subsequent developments? A text like so many others of that time, or the tiny platform of heterogeneous objectives that a few of the aspirants would in time bring to light? The text of the Promise is all of this – and more besides. As hermeneutics teaches us, how we read the text depends on what spectacles we put on.

[1]Cruciatibus carries a number of meanings: 1) torment, pain, affliction, grief; 2) torture, martyrdom; 3) (in the plural) instruments of torture.

[2]FS 163 § 2. Cf also 95 § 3.

Maybe today the spectacles are a little fogged and we do not manage to see well? Perhaps we maintain that the difficulties of our time are much worse than those of 200 years ago and we console ourselves with the idea of this belief? Maybe we think that these were youths who had the whole of their lives before them to realise their projects, while we, today, are mostly full of aches and pains and of an advanced age – more than planning we think more about our death? Or do we foster a little jealousy towards these youths whom we believe a little naïve, but able to dream?

## REWRITING THE PROMISE

Many things have happened during these two hundred years. For better and for worse. In the civil world and in the ecclesial. Certainly, it has not been a time of peace. Innumerable wars have taken place and to two of these historians have given the name world wars. Modernity has seen the multiplication of advancements in science and technology. Notable developments in medicine have favoured the preservation and prolongation of human life. From a situation of precarious subsistence, our societies have advanced to the development of material wellbeing. However, these years have also known Auschwitz, the Kolyma Gulags, Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Chernobyl. They have been years marred by genocides and entire populations have been destroyed: Armenians, Ukrainians, Serbs, Cambodians, Rwandans, Bosnians...violent and bloody dictatorships have arisen. Almost everywhere kings have become fewer and republican forms of government have been established. Globalisation appears as an ambiguous phenomenon that always ensures greater riches for a very limited number of persons while the major part of the world population is left to fall into extreme poverty. Yet again we perceive ourselves living under looming incessant menaces: nuclear, ecological demographic, epidemic, terrorist, catastrophic...but, above all we feel threatened at the level of security. Meanwhile, the economy has become the sole axis to which human activity is referred.

Information Technology allows us to carry the whole world around with us on a tablet or smartphone. Information arrives in real-time. We can witness any event sitting comfortably at home. We have experienced an acceleration, unthinkable even short while ago, and we have become the users of everything and immediately – immediately, we forget what we have just experienced and are unable to discern but faint glimmers of the future. Man, the social and communitarian animal, trains himself ever more to live an exasperated individualism. Someone has defined our epoch as the era of solitude.

Our vision of the world has changed profoundly. Our conception of man, of the cosmos and of God is incredibly different from that of the young Marist aspirants. To read reality we use most diverse instruments. Moved by pragmatism, our approach is critical and dialectical. From an ecclesial point of view, these two hundred years have witnessed two Ecumenical Councils. Have commenced, amidst a thousand challenges, the ecumenical journey. The Catholic Church tries, with much reluctance and stuttering, to take even the road of inter-religious dialogue. A new chapter has opened with our elder brothers the Jews. There has been liturgical reform, with the use of local languages for celebrations. New experiences of religious life have arisen, such as secular and fraternal institutes.

No one studies the manuals of Theology of two centuries ago. Biblical, Patristic and Theological studies today are very different from times past. Ecclesiology has changed. The Church no longer sees herself as a pyramid society, but as the People of God. Mariology has moved onto a terrain marked out by Chapter VIII of the Conciliar Document *Lumen Gentium*. But at the same time our societies have become secularised. Christianity has passed from being a religion of the masses to one practiced by select persons. By now, marginal in many places. One witnesses a widespread need for spirituality that, however, finds its own answers almost exclusively in the great supermarket of New Age and do-it-yourself religions. The average age of the faithful increases – even more so that of Priests and Religious. Many Congregations are close to disappearing. The Church is found to be no longer European and Western. One talks, already, of post-Christian society.

From a Biblical, Liturgical and celebratory point of view, to remember means to actualise. How can we remember the Promise of Fourvière, today? With a celebration that recalls that long-ago event – implementing a sort of archaeological operation. Or rather, is it necessary for us to make the Promise our own? In what way? Rewriting it, with our words and our human and spiritual vision. Remember: this is an invitation that recurs frequently in the Bible, addressed by God to Israel or to individual figures. Memory is also fundamental to spiritual life. We are a history, and our history is part of God's history. As Marists, we are called to celebrate moments in our history to remember God's action and faithfulness. Our faithfulness is rooted in the ability to make what we remember relevant today. We are Marists because we have the opportunity to live a faith and spirituality embodied in the lives of those who came before us. Because we can see it lived and actualized in the experiences of so many of our brothers and sisters. Because we can share it with them.

Therefore, we do not remember something that happened in the past, but we are invited to become spiritual people who seek to live today what has been passed down by previous generations. Remembering the Promise of Fourvière means that what we received from the Marists who came before us can continue to bear fruit in our own day. Memory is not merely nostalgia or a recollection of a past event, but a constitutive element for the future. Memory and the future are closely linked. To the extent that we remember God's love for us, we remain faithful to his covenant. Remembering the Promise becomes a moment of celebration and, at the same time, demonstrates our willingness to welcome God's future as it comes to us. That future, for us Marists, is accompanied by the presence of Mary, the One who reminds us: "I was the support of the nascent Church; I will be again at the end of time."





## CERDON

Thursday 13 November 2025



### “Today the Society of Mary begins...”

In this journey, we come to one of the most profoundly spiritual “moments” in the life of Fr Colin. What Marist tradition refers to as “the graces of Cerdon” changed this man: from being wooden and “dead” he became an effective preacher; from being timid he became someone that the men in the parish turned to for advice; from being a follower of the Marist project he became someone who was to assume more and more responsibility for the leadership of the project. What were these graces? We cannot be sure. Fr Colin describes them as “extreme sweetness” and “a conviction that the Society of Mary was of God and would succeed.” We do know that it was at Cerdon, probably in 1819, that Colin made a vow to go to Rome; that it was from Cerdon that he made two visits to the Papal Nuncio in Paris; that while in Cerdon he wrote to the Pope in 1822; and that he had some “experience” at La Coria, which became a decisive moment for him.

At Cerdon we also get in touch with the foundations of the Fathers and Brothers of the Society of Mary, and the Marist Sisters, their early communities and ministries.

Cerdon is built at the meeting point of three valleys on the main Lyons-Geneva Road. In 1832 there were 1745 inhabitants in the town. Today there are between six and seven hundred. Cerdon was always used as a staging post for mail riders. The local people used to hire out extra horses at 11/2 francs to help pull carriages up the slope of La Balme. On the sunny hillsides vineyards still produce a popular wine.

On 27<sup>th</sup> July 1816 Pierre Colin was named the parish priest of Cerdon, which at that time was part of the archdiocese of Lyons. His curate was to be his newly ordained younger brother, Jean-Claude. At this stage Pierre had no idea of the Marist enterprise.



When Jean-Claude did reveal the project to Pierre later on, Pierre sent for Jeanne-Marie Chavoin, who came to Cerdon in 1817, bringing with her Marie Jotillon. Jeanne-Marie Chavoin became housekeeper at the presbytery, and we can begin to date significant developments in the Marist project from this time (1817). Marcellin Champagnat was already setting up his project of Brothers, and Jean-Claude and Pierre Colin, along with Jeanne-Marie Chavoin, were beginning to make plans for their branches in Cerdon. Jean-Claude began drafting a Rule for the Society. Working well into the early hours of the morning in his little bedroom, he began to set down on paper the main lines of the plan of a Society, which (he always claimed) had no other model but the early Church.

These years at Cerdon, 1816-1825, were crucial years for Jean-Claude Colin. It was here that he was transformed from a timid curate into someone who was strong and capable of decisive action. It was here that in 1824 the first mission team was formed. When Etienne Déclas joined the Colin brothers at Cerdon on 29 October 1824, Pierre Colin could write to the bishop: "Today the Society of Mary begins..." These were also the years of "extreme sweetness" that Fr Colin was to recall later. Although he never made a novitiate, if there was a place and a time in which he experienced an essential element of the novitiate process – "tasting God" – it would be here at Cerdon, where he began to be formed into the leader of the Society of Mary project.

We have no idea of the extent to which Jeanne-Marie Chavoin was involved in the discussions of the Marist project, but what she wrote and spoke of later indicates that she was closely involved from the beginning. She gives up a glimpse of the Colin brothers during these days:

*When the fathers Colin were at Cerdon, they were revered by all the inhabitants. Had they remained there, the whole parish would soon have been a religious community; already a fervent group of thirty men used to meet in*

*the presbytery. Their domestic arrangements were so poor and they lived in such poverty that everyone in Cerdon was astonished. During this time they used to receive very harsh letters from M. Courbon, vicar general of Lyons. Another vicar general, M. Bochard made them suffer a lot too...*

*When the fathers were almost overwhelmed by these annoying difficulties, I felt full of courage and cheered them up. At other times when they were untroubled, my turn came. Ah! Those were our finest hours. One day they received a letter which upset them very much, and the same post brought an important answer. The fathers were discouraged. I said to them, "Let's go to the Church" All three of us went. We prayed for an hour, or an hour and a half, and we came out feeling peaceful and contented. (Recorded narrative, Doc.101)*

## PLACES OF SIGNIFICANCE

### LA CORIA

This is the place where an event took place which convinced Jean-Claude Colin that he was called to carry through the work of beginning the Society of Mary as it has been conceived at the Seminary.





In July 1823 he went to see Bishop Devie at Belley. He left the presbytery at 4.00 am, but after 20 minutes, as he climbed the track up La Coria leading to Mérignat, he felt a great sense of weariness which brought him to a halt. After a prayer to Our Lady, and what Society tradition regards as some special spiritual experience, Fr Colin felt re-energised and able to carry on.



Fr Colin himself put it this way:

*On one of the journeys I made for the Society... it seemed to me that all the devils were after me to stop me from going. Yes, I believe it. I was heavy!... I could not continue. I felt an invincible repugnance. Twenty minutes along the way I fell to my knees in the moonlight in the middle of the path, and I said: "My God, if it is not your will, then I will not go. But if you will it, give me back my strength and so show me that it is your holy will." All at once, I felt invigorated, light-hearted, relaxed. I raced on like a hare. (OM 425:10)*

## THE CHURCH

The church is built on a small hill (called the "Island" because of the marshy ground of the valleys.) The chancel dates back to the fifteenth century? The nave was built in 1772. In the time of the Colin brothers, it lacked the two arches and their supporting pillars in the back part of the church. These were added when the church was extended in 1863. The clock tower, destroyed in the revolution, was rebuilt in 1844.

Here in the church, we recall the confessions heard by the Colin brothers in the Lady Chapel. (The confessional on the right-hand side came later.) We remember Pierre Colin's dramatic gesture of prostrating himself before the altar to implore God's pardon for his parishioners who worked on Sunday. And we remember the clothing ceremony of the first Marist Sisters on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1824. The altar of the Lady Chapel may well be the one on which the Colin brothers said Mass. The original statue of Mary is the one immediately on the left as one enters the Church.

## THE PRESBYTERY

The presbytery dates from 1822 and was built in the time of the Colin brothers. From the outside one can see the two windows of Jean-Claude Colin's room. It was here that he prayed and drafted the first Rule for future Marists.

## MARIST MISSIONS

From 1825 to 1829, Colin, Déclas and Jallon (joined by Humbert in 1828) preached missions in the Bugey.

The first missions (La Balme, Corlier and Izenave) were preached from Cerdon. The rest of the mission were conducted from Belley. Most of the travelling of the missionaries was done on foot through snow and mud.

*"It was after the Revolution. There were no priests; many churches had been abandoned; we went into parishes where there was no parish priest. We had never been so happy; we laughed merrily. I have always missed those times: they were so good. Gentlemen, when one endures something, naturally one suffers a little, but that is when one is happiest. We were often obliged to make our own soup. One time we arrived in a parish where there had been no priest since the Revolution. No-one lived in the presbytery. Laughing, we did our best to sweep it out. There was no glass in the windows, the ceiling was gaping, and the cracks were stuffed up with hay. We lay down, it was very cold but we laughed." Recounted by Jean-Claude Colin, 1846-47*

## PRAYER INTENTION

We pray for the grace to develop the heart of a missionary, whether we are to stay "at home" or to be on mission "abroad".



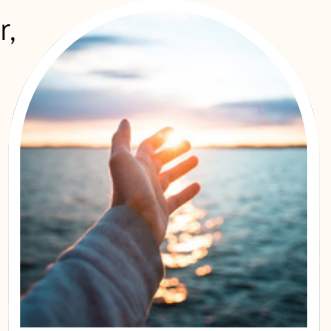
Paddy O'Hare sm

## CERDON 1816 – 1825: Jean-Claude Colin's Six Years of "Extreme Sweetness"

### BEGINNINGS

Jean-Claude Colin, young curate, just ordained, begins his ministry, older brother, Pierre, is the parish priest, supportive. Far from the protected seminary atmosphere and isolated from his classmates. Jean-Claude intelligent, somewhat introverted, shy, especially towards women.

Seminary life had been strict, theology rigorous and puritanical, with much emphasis on sin. Colin's preaching at first was dry, bombastic, reflecting the austere moral theology formation of the era, much in keeping with the clerical, hierarchical approach of the Catholic Church in France. Religious climate of the era: Church leaders too closely aligned with people in power, leaving the poor and the rural people neglected, anti-Christian values and an anti-clerical world roundabout. It might remind us of many aspects of today's world, loss of interest in religion, negative attitudes towards the Church, decline in Church practice, diminishing numbers.



### JEAN-CLAUDE COLIN BEGINS TO GROW HUMANLY AND SPIRITUALLY

A man of prayer, Jean-Claude gradually noticed that his sermons weren't really touching peoples' hearts. That realization led him to pause, to reflect, and to change his approach. He began preaching more freely, more spontaneously - relying less on notes - and he also became gentler and more understanding, both in the confessional and in the pulpit. Here we see a young man deeply aware of what was happening around him, and humble enough to recognize that he himself could sometimes be the obstacle. Yet, rather than becoming discouraged, he allowed that insight to move him forward. He was willing to let go of some of his rigid principles and to discover a new way of reaching people.

This is a wonderful example of discernment — of listening deeply and allowing grace to guide one's growth. It reminds us, even today, of how important it is to remain open to change, and to allow ourselves, always, to be surprised by God.

### SINGLEMINDED COMMITMENT

Right from the start, Jean-Claude Colin was deeply taken by the idea of launching a Marian project — an idea first shared among a group of fellow seminarians, one of whom had originally proposed it. Those young men were now scattered across the diocese in different parishes, but they kept in touch, meeting at least once a year for retreats.

Colin and his companions remained excited about founding a new congregation under Mary's name - working together for the renewal of the Church. But it was Jean-Claude who gradually began to take the lead. He was the one who started putting their shared ideas into writing. More than anyone else, he was captivated by the vision.

People would sometimes notice the light in his room late into the night — Jean-Claude writing, reflecting, praying. He would recall key phrases from the seminary discussions, blending them with ideas he had read or discerned in prayer. He began drafting the first outlines for religious life — the beginnings of what would one day become the Marist project.

Although another seminarian had first presented the inspiration, Jean-Claude Colin was emerging as the one most determined to bring it to life. As Fr. Justin Taylor, SM, later described him — he was, in a sense, our "Reluctant Founder".

### SUPPORT, COLLABORATION, AND ENCOURAGEMENT

During this time, his brother Pierre - the parish priest - began to notice the change in Jean-Claude: his growing confidence, his renewed energy, and the quiet enthusiasm that seemed to fill his whole being. Pierre sensed that something profound was happening in his brother's heart - that a deep spiritual experience was taking root.

Cerdon became the place where Jean-Claude was transformed - from a shy, hesitant young priest into a vigorous man of purpose, fully devoted to the Marist vision. Pierre's support was invaluable. As an older brother and mentor, he guided Jean-Claude's ministry and encouraged him in his spiritual journey. He was also an enthusiastic supporter of the Marist project from its beginning, recognizing his brother's remarkable gifts.





There was another important presence too – Jeanne-Marie Chavoin. Pierre had known her earlier and invited her, along with another young woman, to come to Cerdon. Both were interested in religious life and felt drawn to the same Marian spirit. Jeanne-Marie was more than a housekeeper — she was a confidante, a collaborator, and a source of encouragement. She joined in the conversations about the project and stood by the brothers when they faced challenges — when they were seeking the bishop’s approval or understanding. She brought with her two nephews, and later, a convent was built. Her steady faith and practical wisdom became a quiet but powerful influence on Jean-Claude’s development.

## LEARNINGS FOR TODAY

Today, as we remember what unfolded here at Cerdon, we join spiritually with Pierre and Jeanne-Marie, reflecting on Jean-Claude Colin’s growing conviction – that a Society bearing Mary’s name was truly God’s will, and that Mary herself desired it. In the midst of demanding parish duties, Colin was consumed by the vision of this Marist project. With deep trust in God, he prayed constantly, seeking not his own will but God’s. Of course, there were real difficulties. Some bishops wanted the group to remain simply as diocesan priests. Friends from the original Fourvière group were losing interest and drifting away. But Colin persevered. Gradually, he accepted that he was being called to give shape and direction to the Marist idea.

One incident in particular stands out. It happened on the way up that hill behind us. Colin was setting out one day for Belley to discuss his plan with the new Bishop, and after about twenty minutes on the route he suddenly became extremely weary. The whole project, all his work, seemed repugnant to him and he was tempted to give up and go back home to the presbytery. However, when he knelt down in prayer and abandoned himself to God’s will, he was overcome by some special kind of Grace, and getting up again he felt energized, with new conviction and courage to continue on his way. He knew, and shared later, that this moment was a powerful confirmation from God of everything he was doing, and that bringing the Society of Mary to birth was in accordance with God’s will.....what was taking place during those weeks and months was discernment as we know it today, albeit in slow motion, from which we can all learn.

What we notice here is a process — a very human and spiritual process: constant prayer, humble discernment, openness to God’s will, faithfulness to the original inspiration, and deep collaboration and dialogue with trusted companions. His story reminds us that every genuine call from God takes time — that it unfolds through prayer, perseverance, and community support.

## WORDS OFTEN MEDITATED & REPEATED BY FR COLIN AT CERDON

### “UNKNOWN AND HIDDEN”

A phrase that has inspired Marists, lay and religious from the beginning:

- \* **the way Mary was present and active in the early Church** (cf. Acts 1,14 and 4,32),
- \* **the way God acts** and “says something to a person interiorly”. God, who was hidden, revealed himself to Elijah as a little breath of wind. This calls for patient, active listening, to God’s Word and to each other,
- \* **the way Marists should live and carry out ministry**, a specific Marist style of ministry. Fr Jean Coste made a significant comment on this in regard to Cerdon. *“In Cerdon, something changed in Colin. He seemed to feel the vision of the Society of Mary was growing deeper within himself and he received the inspiration of “hidden and unknown in the world” which helped him use his own sensitive nature to understand and reach the delicate condition of people of his era”*. He became convinced of the value of this way of living, like Mary among the disciples in the early Church, discreetly and humbly, not drawing attention to ourselves, even though we could be engaged in very important ministries. We have to beware of false notions of humility, such as hiding our talents, which was sometimes associated with remaining hidden and unknown. It meant rather, avoiding any kind of power-seeking and adopting a simple life-style. This is also a key factor in understanding better what Jean-Claude Colin was doing and thinking in Cerdon. Both he and Jeanne-Marie Chavoin seem to have used it quite often in conversations and in writing. Justin Taylor suggests that “even though it is likely the both of them were familiar with this element which was often expressed in spiritual writings at the time, that they might even have forgotten where they got it or read it, and even forgot that they had read it at all, believing that it had come to both of them as a kind of unique, sacred inspiration”. And it certainly brought the Marists closer to the people at Cerdon.



### “INSTRUMENTS OF MERCY”

Mary's wish expressed in the original inspiration and which now has become the approach and practice that Marists try to emulate. Fr. Colin insisted on this when speaking of his own and the early Marists' ministry in the Bugey region. For example, he told some confreres to make sure they spend more time with sinners than with the people who were doing well, and never to refuse people absolution in the confessional.

### “I WAS THE MAINSTAY OF THE EARLY CHURCH AT THE BEGINNING, I SHALL BE SO AGAIN AT THE END OF TIME. MY EMBRACE WILL BE OPEN TO ALL WHO WISH TO COME TO ME”

*(the new-born Church, the Church about to be born, coming into being, cf. Acts 1,14 and 4,32)*

Words heard interiorly by Jean-Claude Courveille who received the original inspiration. Words often repeated and prayed over by Jean-Claude Colin and his companions in the seminary. Words that continued to inspire Colin at Cerdon... Mary, humbly and powerfully present at the centre of the Society of Mary, her presence like that of God himself, hidden and unknown in the hearts and lives of Marists. An apostolate unobtrusive and compassionate, open to all without exception and directed especially to those in most need.

Such was the conviction that filled the heart and mind of our founder at Cerdon, (and in spite of a certain reluctance to be seen as leader at this stage,) by which he felt compelled, to make the Marist project a reality, strongly convinced that the original inspirations came from God, that the Society of Mary was truly from God, that Mary is actively present in the Society of Mary and in the Church, in various ways, but in a special way, not exclusive, but nonetheless special, through Marists, those chosen to bear her name, breathe her spirit and faithfully try to live as she did. Our founder lived a deep and rich spiritual life during what he called those first “six years of extreme sweetness”, convinced that he was doing what God wanted.

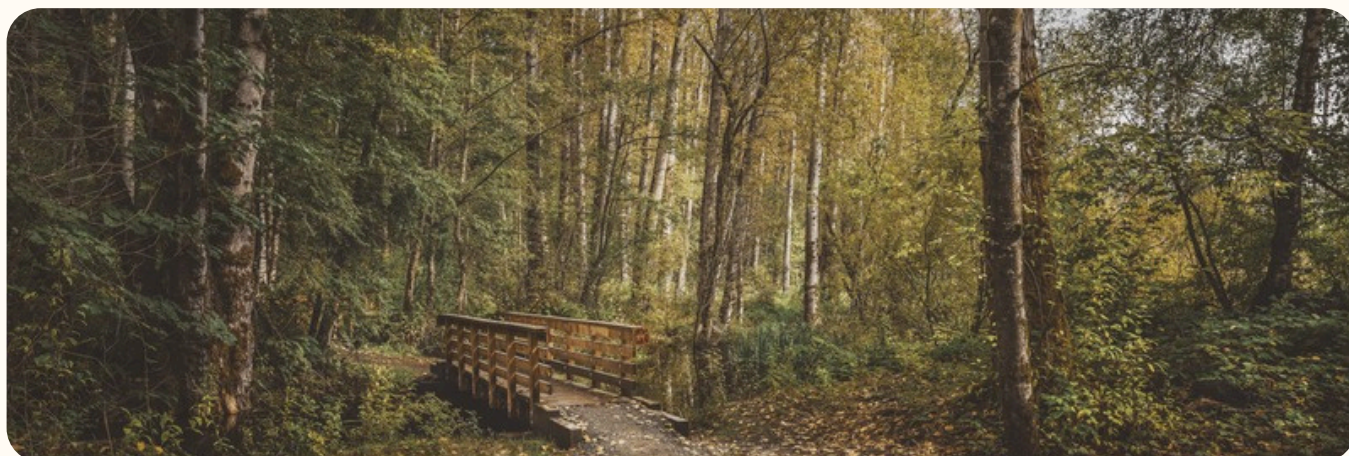
**We can say, therefore, that Cerdon encourages us as Marists, whether lay or religious, to keep pondering on and internalizing our Marist themes. It means allowing ourselves to be captured, like Colin was, by a certain idea of Mary in the world and letting ourselves become progressively transformed by it, committed to this unique style of living the Gospel and bringing Mary's spirit into the Church and the people around us.**

### QUESTIONS

- Like Jean-Claude Colin, when have I recognized the need to change my own approach in ministry, work, or relationships?
- What helps me stay open to God's invitations when things don't seem to be working as I hoped?
- Who are the “Pierres” and “Jeanne-Maries” in my life, the people who quietly encourage, challenge, or support my faith journey?
- How can I, in turn, be that kind of presence for someone else?
- What “Marist project” or call has God placed in my heart, something I feel drawn to, even if I don't yet know how it will unfold?
- What sustains me when progress feels slow or when others lose interest?
- Where in my life have I noticed how God surprises me, opening doors I didn't expect, or changing me in ways I didn't plan?
- How might I make more space to be surprised by God in the days ahead?
- “What part of Colin's story speaks to you most personally?”
- “Which moment in his journey do you most relate to, the struggle, the support, or the sense of purpose?”
- “How might we as a group or community embody this same spirit of discernment and openness?”







### REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

***A time for quiet listening, sharing, and being surprised by God.  
Discernment is not about forcing outcomes,  
but about allowing God's will to take shape in us.  
Take a moment of silence... breathe... and place yourself in God's presence.***

#### 1. OPENNESS AND GROWTH

*Jean-Claude Colin realised that his way of preaching was not reaching people's hearts. He allowed that insight to change him.*

- When have I recognised the need to change my approach or attitude?
- What helps me stay open when God invites me to grow in unexpected ways?

#### 2. COMPANIONSHIP AND SUPPORT

*Colin was sustained by those around him — his brother Pierre, and Jeanne-Marie Chavoin — who believed in him and encouraged his vision.*

- Who are the people who quietly support or challenge me on my journey?
- How might I be a source of encouragement for someone else this week?

#### 3. PERSEVERENCE AND VISION

*Colin persevered with patience and prayer even when others lost interest or opposed his ideas.*

- What dream, hope, or “Marist project” has God placed in my heart?
- What helps me remain faithful when progress is slow or uncertain?

#### 4. BEING SURPRISED BY GOD

*Colin's journey in Cerdon reminds us that God's work often unfolds in quiet, hidden ways.*

- When has God surprised me — through people, events, or inner change?
- How can I make more space for those surprises in my daily life?



## BELLEY

Friday 14 November 2025



### “The Cradle of the Society”

Belley town was the See of the diocese of Belley, restored as a diocese in 1823. In 1832 its population was 4,286. Today its population is around 9,300.

#### THE MISSIONS

The fathers were called to form part of Bishop Devie's plan for a diocesan missionary group. The first missions (La Balme and Izenave) were preached from Cerdon. The rest of the missions were conducted from Belley. They (Pierre and Jean-Claude Colin, Etienne Déclas, Etienne Jallon) arrived in Belley in June 1825. They were lodged in the minor seminary where they were already spoken of as “Marists”. The four Marists were lodged in rooms on the top floor. They were barely tolerated by the staff of the seminary (OMII, doc 465)

The **Marist Sisters** arrived in Belley on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1825 and settled at Bon Repos.

From there the Marists continued to preach missions in the **Bugey** for the next 4 years. The first missions (La Balme and Izenave) were preached from Cerdon. The rest of the missions were conducted from Belley. In 1825: Lacoux, Chaley, Chatillon de Comeille. 1826: St Jérôme, Vieux d'Izenave, Aranc, Innimont, St Germain. 1827: Contrevoz, Ordonnaz, Tenay. 1829: Ruffieu (last mission preached by Colin).

The aim of the post-revolution Missions was to rekindle the faith among the people, to bring people back to the church, or to regularize marriages entered into without the church's blessing. But in many cases the Mission had another aim: - to confirm the thinking of the restauration among the people: to unite throne and the altar throughout the country. The Marist approach to missions was different in emphasis.





The mission usually lasted three to four weeks; the first thing the missionaries did was to visit the church; then they visited the Parish priest, then they heard children's confessions. The first instruction to the people was a friendly invitation to come to the mission. The sermons in the first week were on the mercy of God, and other subjects calculated to win the confidence of the people. Later, they preached on the commandments, and when most of the confessions were over, they preached on sin. It was the goodness of the priest, Colin claimed, not the fear he created in people, which brought them to Christ. Colin insisted that the missionaries give no fiery sermons against those who were falling in their obligations, and no public reproaches for those who did not come to the mission. The motto of the missionaries was: *"We must win souls submitting to them."*

Colin's advice to missionaries came out of his experience in the missions: *"Gentlemen, show great kindness to sinners who come to you in the confessional. Do not rebuff them, or appear surprised by their crimes, however great they are; that would be a great imprudence and very harmful to souls. Instead, remember that you hold the place of Jesus Christ, and our Lord Jesus Christ knew the profound depths of the human heart, he welcomed all sinners with Gentleness."* (Mayet 6 683f, Keel, doc 492)



Scan me

DOWNLOAD  
Sr Teri O'Brien sm's  
PRESENTATION  
from Belley:  
<https://bit.ly/colin-belley>



### THE COLLEGE, MINOR SEMINARY

In 1829 Devie named Jean-Claude Colin as superior of the College. Jean-Claude Colin discovered another aspect of mission: education to young people. He appreciated the value of education in the mission of the Society. While he was teaching in the College in Belley, he wrote the document, "Advice to the Staff of the College of Belley".

Colin chose Mary as model and superior for the college. The statue which looks down on the courtyard dates from that period (1833).

### LA CAPUCINIÈRE

The Capucinière was given to the Marists in 1832. It was the first house the Marists owned. For this reason, and because it was for many years a house of formation for Marists, Father Colin considered it to be "the cradle of the society". The brief "Omnium Gentium" gave the Marists the right to elect a superior general and to take vows. It was in the chapel of the Capucinière that, on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1836, The feast of Our lady of Mercy, Fr Colin was elected superior general and where the first Marist professions took place.

### PRAYER INTENTION

For the bishops of local churches where Marists work, and for provincials and superiors of districts who are trying to find ways of supporting the local church while being faithful to the international character of the Marist vocation.





## LA NEYLIÈRE

Saturday 15 November 2025



**"I desire nothing so much as to end my days  
at the foot of its holy altars."  
(CS 4, doc. 556, p. 3).**

La Neylière was bought in 1850 by Fr Colin when he was superior general. The money (48,000 Francs) came from Fr J.F. Viennot, a former lawyer, and it was the Founder's intention that the house be a Eucharistic Retreat for the members of the Society. The s not warm to this idea, which was not pursued. Fr Colin came to La Neylière in 1854 after his resignation.

But Fr Colin was a great traveller, constantly one the move in search of a new place in which to settle. The short text above the original tomb at La Neylière: **"Here lies the body of the Venerable Jean Claude Colin, who lived in this house for 21 years."** Is not accurate. Since from 1854 to 1875, Father Colin did spend the greater part of each year at La Neylière. But it would be stretching one's pious imagination to think he was there for the

21 continuous years of solitary retreat. Apart from these various absences Fr Colin Lived here until his death in 1875. One of his tasks was to complete the writing of the rule, and this created problems.

For over 50 years, La Neylière was the novitiate of the Marist Fathers and Brothers where some hundreds made their vows. Marist fathers and brothers throughout the world regard la Neylière as the house of Fr Colin, the guardian of his tomb and the enshrinement of his spiritual message. – of a house welcome, faith, prayer and services of others "after the manner of Mary". It is now a house of retreats and spiritual gatherings. It may be worth noting that the *Curé d'Ars* was expecting to retire here. He had made many references during his life time to Fr Colin and the Society of Mary.



The Oceanian Museum recalls extraordinary interest and the maternal tenderness Father Colin felt for the area and for the men he sent to Oceania. In his time as General, Fr Colin sent nearly one quarter of his men – often the best men he had – to the mission of Oceania. The deep feeling the Founder had for these men expressed itself in the very emotional moments when they came to depart. It reached a point where steps had to be taken to shelter him from these final farewells which tore his heart. The letters he received from missionaries impressed him so much that he could no restrain his tears and sobs when reading them.

Fr Colin had called Cerdon his Bethlehem and Belley his Nazareth. But neither of these places seemed to him to compare with the solitude he loved to find at La Neylière. This was his place of contemplation and reflection. He had longed for this place to be set up. As early as 1842, he had mentioned the place to his confreres. He wanted a place where the fathers and brothers could come and pause, refresh themselves and prepare themselves for the next battle of the apostolate. Superiors, he suggested, could also send there any members of their communities who were exposed to dangers. All who came to this place could find peace, strength, and encouragement for their future.

## PRAYER INTENTION

For all those who are in formation, either initial or on-going formation. May they learn for their founder a contemplative way to prepare themselves for the Work of Mary.







### FR COLIN AND THE FOUNDATION OF LA NEYLIÈRE

On 16 July, 1850, Fr Jean-Claude Colin signed a document purchasing a country house, La Neylière, in the Monts du Lyonnais. He intended to use it as a contemplative house of the Society of Mary. Taking off a miraculous medal he was wearing, he placed it in the house “so as to take possession of it in the name of the Virgin Mary, Superior of the Society, in whose name he had bought it”. Hence the traditional name of the house, Notre Dame de La Neylière. Despite his multiple duties as superior general, he gave the house a lot of attention, even getting personally involved as the brothers set about transforming it from the residence of a country gentleman to a religious house.



### LIFE AT LA NEYLIÈRE

Four years later, in 1854, he retired as superior general. Fr Colin would spend most of the rest of his life in this house of prayer we are visiting today. Contemplation filled much of his time. We read that he habitually rose at 3 o'clock and prayed until it was time for Mass at 6.30. But he was also a man of action. It was here that he wrote the Constitutions of the Society of Mary. From here he made many journeys at the service of the Society under his successor as superior general Julien Favre.

When you read the biography we will refer to later in this talk, you see the heroic sanctity – patience, humility and self-sacrifice – that was involved in writing the Constitutions. The Constitutions of a religious congregation such as the Marists are the foundational document, the charter, so to speak. You also read in the biography how Colin sacrificed a cherished project of Eucharistic adoration centred on this house. For four years, this was perhaps his most consoling ambition or dream. One year after he retired, his successor as superior general Julien Favre ruled against it. Humbly, Fr Colin obeyed. He said in his Constitutions that obedience is the hinge on which the Society of Mary turns. He practised what he preached.

### COLIN'S CHARACTER AND DAILY LIFE

On a more mundane level, the biography paints a picture of a complex person. At times reclusive, but also energetic and intense. He read assiduously and when he was bequeathed a personal library, he had it transported here. Every day of his life, he read a chapter of the Bible. At the end of his life, when he was virtually blind, he had it read to him. He loved to breathe the pure country air of La Neylière. This must have been a relief from the air he sometimes had to breathe on his visits to Lyon. Newspapers of the time contain complaints about “black smoke” in the city and pollution from the silk industry and from coal that could make it impossible for housewives to dry white sheets outside. We read about him strolling around the property of La Neylière. He would playfully feed some of the farm animals even if, to Colin's amusement, this irritated the brother responsible for the animals. The Founder was a man of the countryside, not a city or a town-dweller. He loved being in La Neylière. But he didn't want to be couped up in his rural retreat. On one occasion, he made haste to get out of La Neylière as he didn't want to be marooned there by the heavy snow that was predicted. He was usually ensconced here in the Monts du Lyonnais but in frequent contact with the world outside by an extensive correspondence.

### ILLNESS AND THE FINAL YEARS

Another feature of his existence here is ill health. He suffered severe respiratory and digestive problems. Sometimes he would refrain from saying Mass, scrupulously apprehensive lest he had to interrupt the celebration. Over and over again he is prostrate with severe cold or flu symptoms, sometimes malaria. He contracted this on his journeys to Rome. It can flare up when a person is exhausted. As the years went by, he became very weak. The firm hand that would write “Colin Sup” when he was superior general became so feeble he could hardly hold a pen. At the end, his efforts to write his name are almost illegible. Confreres gathered round as he lived out his final days. On Monday, 15 November, 1875, at 7.45 in the morning, Fr Colin died. It was 25 years after he signed the deed of purchase for the house.



**CIRCULAR LETTER OF FR JULIEN FAVRE (1876)**

**Circular letter from Very Rev Fr Favre, Superior General of the Society of Mary, to all the religious of the said Society, on the anniversary of the death of our Very Reverend Fr Founder. 5 November 1876 Julien Favre Circular Letter No. 58.**

(1) *It will now be a year since the sad loss of our venerable founder. ... With heartfelt thanks we recall the man to whom, after God and Mary, we owe the incalculable benefit of our religious vocation. Most particularly, we will remember him at the altar. Even if we have every reason to think that he has no need of our prayers, will offer the sacrifice of the mass for him ...*

(2) *However, these prayers are only a small part of our duties regarding our beloved father. He is looking down at his beloved Society from his dwelling place in eternal bliss, his gaze focused on us as he urges us to walk in his footsteps, to follow his example, and to benefit from his teachings. He shows us his Constitutions which cost him so many late nights, so many prayers, and so much work, and which come with the approval of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. ...*

(3) *Dear confreres, these Constitutions are the code of our religious life. How beautiful they are and how full of wisdom. ... I would like to focus on our founder's key insight, the principle that gives his work its distinct quality, and which his children must never lose sight of. I have absolutely no fear of getting this wrong because Fr Colin himself said often what it is: to love and practise the hidden life under the auspices of Mary, imitating her who is our mother and model. This is the path he always trod himself, the spirit into which he sought to initiate us and in which he wanted to form us, so that he could make real Marists out of us: *Ignoti et quasi occulti in hoc mundo esse videant**

*Does that mean that we should withdraw from the world to practise solitary contemplation? That was never our founder's idea. Rather he wants members of the Society to be ready to undertake all sorts of ministries in the world for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, provided that in engaging in these activities they act with such self-denial, such forgetfulness of self, and with such humility and modesty that, while doing good, they go unnoticed: *Ignoti et quasi occulti in hoc mundo videantur*.*

(4) *Dear confreres, there you have the spirit of our Society, it is the opposite of the spirit of the world. The chapter on *de Societatis spiritu* has always seemed to me the most important and most admirable number in the Constitutions. .... Everything else in the Constitutions flows from this and leads back to it. Read and re-read this beautiful chapter. I am convinced, the more you read it the more you will be astonished by the treasure of perfection it contains. The Marist who meditates on it carefully, letting it penetrate the depths of his being, and who lets it transform his behaviour, will quickly become a saint. ...*

(5) *Dear confreres, the priceless inheritance we have received from our venerable founder, his gift to us par excellence, is of course the Constitutions ... Another precious inheritance he left us is his mortal remains now in their final resting place at Notre Dame de Neyliere. Understandably everyone in our religious family wants to know what we have been doing to honour them. The day after his death, with all the respect owed by sons to their father, we solemnly placed his body in a double coffin, one oak, and one lead. The coffin was left open till the funeral, with Fr Colin laid out in priestly vestments, to give the confreres here and those who came from the neighbouring houses the consolation of viewing for the last time a face that death had not ravaged but that exuded deep calm, gentleness, peace. ... On Saturday, 27 November the remains of our beloved departed were finally buried in this enclosure where he loved to breathe the pure country air after his hours of prayer and work. ...*

(6) *In my letter of 17 November 1875, I wrote to you:*

***"The house of La Neylière will always be dear to all Marists because during his lifetime it was the preferred residence of their founder, and because it was to this place that he entrusted the precious treasure of his mortal remains." For all these reasons the Society of Mary will always consider it a duty to keep this house making the best possible use of it. ...***

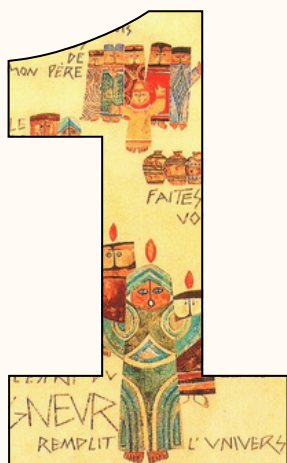
*...We would also like to honour his memory with an account of his life that presents him as a model to be imitated by his children. ... We must not forget that we are talking about a very important and difficult task for which a good period of time is absolutely necessary. To write the life of the founder properly, the necessary materials have to be gathered. Then there is patient work in depth, selecting materials, assessing their significance, seeing how they fit together. Then everything has to be moulded into a single final product, a harmonious whole crafted in such a way that it is instructive and edifying while holding the reader's attention. In order to master his subject and to treat it adequately the writer must first of all let himself be steeped in the spirit of the founder, he must study the main currents in the founder's life and the mission he received from on high. It is from these luminous heights that he will bring light on the mass of historical facts and biographical details, bringing life and coherence to the narrative. Without that the work would be superficial, irrelevant, ephemeral. We are not rushing. We pray and we wait for the providential moment. When the right time comes God will give us someone capable of writing a worthy account of the life of our father, for the edification of the Society he founded.*

## LA NEYLIÈRE'S MISSION TODAY

"We are not rushing," he said in his letter, referring to the book he wanted publishing. Society certainly didn't rush. Extensive historical research was undertaken in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Numerous scholars, especially Fr Jean Coste, contributed. The "providential moment" Favre refers to finally arrived 140 years later when in 2018 New Zealand Marist, Justin Taylor, an accomplished historian, published the definitive biography: Jean-Claude Colin: Reluctant Founder (2018).

We heard Fr Favre say: the Society of Mary will always consider it a duty to keep this house making the best possible use of it. ... So, how do we make the best possible use of it today and how will we do that in the future? The European Province of the Society has expressed the mission of La Neyliere in terms of three aims.

### FIRST, TO FACILITATE ACCESS TO THE MARIST HERITAGE TODAY AS A LIVING COMMUNITY AND TRADITION.



A Marist community lives in the house of La Neyliere and, along with two lay Marists, groups of dedicated volunteers, and a small number of employees, they assure a regular rhythm of Eucharist and daily prayer. Activities include pilgrimages, retreats, and periods of renewal for Marists from around the world.

The Espace Colin and the Oceania Museum give access to the historical heritage of the Marist family, in a vivid and original way. The small room where Fr Colin lived is particularly moving.

The periods of renewal for Marists from the Americas, Europe, Africa, Oceania and Asia are an important aspect of the mission of La Neylière. Marists spend periods of six months here in Fr Colin's house. For many confreres, to visit the tomb of the Founder, to enter the room where he lived, to breathe the air he breathed, so to speak, can help bring their vocation alive in a new way.

We in the European Province of the Society make extensive use of La Neylière, for example for our provincial retreat this year. The body of lay Marists who work in education, Maristes en education, organize an annual gathering for their members. Compared to many larger retreat houses or conference centres, La Neylière has limited accommodation. Even if it means that not everyone can attend every year, they opt for La Neylière. Why? This place has a *je ne sais quoi* that is something to do with the Marist spirit.



## SECONDLY, TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENCOUNTERS, FORMATION AND SPIRITUALITY.

These opportunities are varied – different sorts of retreats, reflection sessions, prayer groups. Young people, especially from the network of Marist schools in France, Ireland and Germany, are particularly welcome. Conviviality and the sharing of meals are important in the life of La Neylière. Meditation groups, musical ensembles, exhibitions of paintings, a group of astronomers profiting from La Neylière's lack of light pollution, all form part of the whole. From La Neylière, Fr Colin looked outwards. Today, La Neylière tries to be open to a wider spiritual and cultural world. Many people say they experience something unique in the house Fr Colin bought in 1850. Before you leave, I'd invite you to inspect the book at the entrance of La Neylière where visitors record their feelings on leaving.



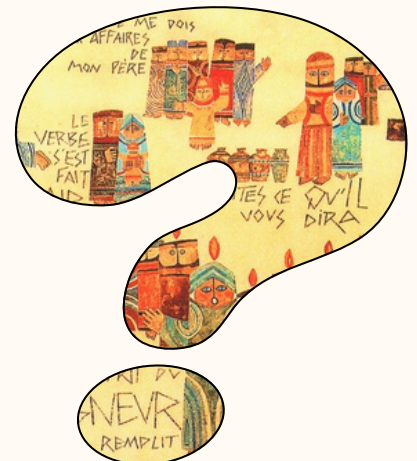
## THIRDLY, LA NEYLIÈRE SEEKS TO SERVE THE WIDER LOCAL COMMUNITY.

Again, the scope is broad. Marist confreres celebrate Mass in the surrounding parishes and entertain meetings of local diocesan priests. Families, choirs, and other local groups take advantage of the space and services of La Neylière. Others are attracted by a justified reputation for good food. When he was in residence, Jean-Claude Colin would welcome Marists to La Neylière to recharge their batteries, to breathe the fresh air of the Monts du Lyonnais, and have a good holiday. So, he would probably not disapprove.

## AND WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

The long history of La Neylière has been one of continuity and change. It continues as a place of prayer where the founder lived, died and was buried but it has seen many changes. For long periods, it served as a novitiate – the spiritual year when young men prepare to enter the Society of Mary. It has been and remains a place of renewal and retreat. When Fr Colin was still in residence, it was a place for Marists to come for holidays and refreshment. That too continues but in different circumstances.

We may presume that the future too will be one of continuity and change. The house, the tomb, the Constitutions he wrote in this house (and the famous article On the Spirit of the Society that Julien Favre talked about in his circular letter) will remain. The book Fr Favre called for has finally been written (but is as yet only in English). We may presume that, a hundred and fifty years from now, when the 300 years anniversary of the death of Jean-Claude Colin is celebrated, La Neylière will be recognizably the same place even if unimaginably different.







## ... Fr Jean-Claude Colin

Founder of the **Society of Mary**  
(7 August 1790 – 15 November 1875)



On 15 November 2025 we celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fr Colin's death. His dream was to **live the Gospel in the way of Mary**. His vision continues to inspire people around the world! Find out more: [www.jeanclaudocolin.org](http://www.jeanclaudocolin.org)



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