Marists and Education/Maristes et éducation

Colin and Colleges

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Since 1970 the number of colleges directed by the Society of Mary has declined from 49 to 38 with 296 Marists engaged in the school apostolate in 1985.[1] Today 60 confreres are working in some forty institutions connected with the Society of Mary. Sixty per cent of these institutions are directed by lay people, and forty per cent by religious. Colleges have not only been a traditional work of the Society, they were for the founder an essential part of the Society's apostolate. In 1849, when he heard that some young confrere had poured scorn on the idea of teaching, he spoke out at length and with emotion:[2]

"My greatest ambition, one of the first ideas in the founding of the Society, its prime aim, is teaching. I despair of its future, I regard it as lost, if it does not work in teaching... I think a hundred times more highly of the education of youth in our own countries, which are also pagan, than I do of the foreign missions."

There has been in recent years a rediscovery of the basic insights that formed the foundation of Father Colin's vision for the Society. Marist spirituality is an apostolic spirituality, even missionary.[3]

Perhaps it is timely to explore how the apostolate of the education of youth in schools arose in the Society and how education fits into the founder's vision of the mission that has been entrusted to Marists.

The tradition of the teaching priest

The centuries-old tradition of priests accepting responsibility for the education of youth received a new impetus with the arrival of the Society of Jesus on the scene of Europe. Initially, the first Jesuits confined themselves to more mobile ministries but in 1843 Claude Jay was asked by the Duke of Bavaria to succeed Johannes Eck in a chair of

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[1] *Adapted Renewal in the Society of Mary (1969-1985)*, B.J. Ryan, Superior General (SM Document, 5), Rome, 1983, p. 14.

[2] J. Coste SM (ed.), *A Founder Speaks* (= FS), Rome, 1975, doc. 172, 23 and 172, 19.

[3] C. Larkin SM, *Mary in the Church: The Basis of Marist Spirituality*, thesis, Rome, 1979, p. 90.

theology at the University of Ingolstadt. He declined, "in part because he feared that a professorship, demanding by its very nature a degree of stability, would be a check on what he felt was one of the hallmarks of the Society, its mobility."[4]

He accepted the post when the Papal Nuncio insisted and the experience led Jay to a sharp reversal of judgement. He became an energetic advocate of Jesuits entering the field of formal education. Francesco Borgia SJ in 1545 and Saint Francis Xavier in 1543 also took initiatives for Jesuit involvement in education.

Saint Ignatius himself moved with caution. He envisaged two problems if his companions were to move into this sphere of activity: mobility and poverty. But by 1551 he wrote a circular letter to the Society recommending the inauguration of Jesuit colleges throughout Europe.[5]

In 1749, Jesuits throughout the world were directing and staffing 696 schools and colleges. In France in 1761, one year before their suppression, Jesuits there ran 91 colleges and twenty seminaries with a combined total of 40.000 students.[6]

When the Marist project was first discussed in 1815[7] the Jesuits also began again in France.[8] Parallels, similarities and differences have often been drawn involving the Jesuits and the Marists,[9] and it is not surprising that the well-known Jesuit educational apostolate had its equivalent in the much younger Society of Mary.

However, the establishment of colleges for boys not intending to be priests was by no means the first apostolic initiative of the Society of Mary. Missions in the rural areas of France began in 1825 and on 24 December 1836 the first Marist foreign missionaries left for Oceania.

But in 1829, Colin was appointed superior of the diocesan minor seminary in Belley and two years later the seminary was entrusted to the Marists. Now many of the students at this seminary had no intention of becoming priests. Thus at Belley we see the first experience of Marists giving a secondary education.

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[4] J. W. Padberg SJ, *Colleges in Controversy: The Jesuit Schools in France from Revival to Suppression, 1815-1880*, Harvard University Press, 1969.
[5] W. V. Bangert SJ, *A History of the Society of Jesus*, St Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972, p. 23-28.
[6] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 45.
[7] J. Coste SM, *Lectures on Society of Mary History*, Rome, 1965, p. 26.
[8] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 45.
[9] FS, documents 2, 60, 41-42, 80, 98, 172.

The Marists opened a house in Belley called La Capucinière in 1832 and a boarding school developed in 1834. It grew to have a maximum roll of 40 pupils but in 1840 the house was needed for the postulants. During the years 1836-1838 the Marists, for all practical purposes, abandoned the Belley minor seminary but resumed effective control once again in 1838. It was not until 1845 that the Society finally abandoned this seminary.

It was the year that the Marists left the Belley minor seminary, 1845, that they opened a boarding school at Valbenoîte near Saint-Etienne (Archdiocese of Lyon). Valbenoîte with its 90 pupils became the first permanent school opened by Father Colin.

Thus by 1845 the Society of Mary had definitely embarked on the apostolate of teaching and it had done so before conditions for church secondary schools had been made freer by the lifting of the monopoly that the *Université* had in education.

The situation in post-revolutionary France

Freedom of worship was restored in France by a Concordat agreed between First Consul Napoleon and Pope Pius VII in 1801. The Church was rapidly reorganised with new diocesan divisions; as a result of this reorganisation, Lyon became the largest diocese in France with 937.000 inhabitants and 100.000 in the city itself.

By a decree of 1805 Napoleon set up the Imperial *Université*, giving it complete control of public teaching. However, there were ways that Church schools could operate. Minor seminaries re-opened and these accepted non-clerical as well as clerical students. Priests could be allowed to staff municipal colleges and there were also some private schools, such as that opened at La Favorite by the Tertiary Brothers of Mary associated with Pompallier.

It is difficult to get a balanced picture of the anti-clerical or anti-religious that state education system was in France. In the 1830s and 1840s, Bishop Denis de Frayssinous, for a while Grand Master of the *Université*, wrote:[10]

"It is a fact of experience that from the 36 Royal Colleges (*Lycees*) not a single student for the ecclesiastical state has come forth. It is a fact that communal colleges furnish only a few of them. The conclusion is plain. If new hindrances are added to the Ordinance of 1814 (which recognised the right of fathers of families to choose the form and direction of the

[10] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 47.

education of their children), I say with the greatest sorrow and I shall prove with the utmost conviction: this is the end of the Priesthood in France."

A more partisan view as expressed by Thureau-Dangan. He wrote that the spirit that reigned in the state schools at this time "was a hardened, corrupting atmosphere, where under the twofold action and example of the teachers... and of the tyranny of human respect among schoolboys, the student was almost assured of losing his faith and often his purity."[11]

The Church's immediate answer seemed to lie with the minor seminaries. As older seminaries re-opened or new ones began in diocesan properties, non-clerical students were enrolled. Sometimes as few as one fifth of the student body were really destined for the priesthood.[12] The conditions within these minor seminaries were not always ideal. Not only were the students sometimes quite undisciplined but the staffs were sometimes inadequate and even most unsuitable. Furthermore, problems existed for students who went on to higher studies. "Of more than 200 young men graduated from Saint-Acheuil and now in Paris, there are hardly twenty or thirty who have held out against the seduction of unbelief or dissoluteness."[13] There were few supports, in Paris in particular, for young men of sixteen to eighteen years of age who left "the overprotected atmosphere of the schools to live in a high Restoration society, which for all its external religiousness was of often deeply sceptical and equally immoral."[14]

The seminary aspect of these church schools or minor seminaries was quite in evidence. From the Jesuit-run Saint Acheuil over a period of fourteen years came 70 Jesuits, 550 priests and eight bishops.

The Marist Response - I

The first Marist response to the educational situation was Champagnat's scheme of the Marist Teaching Brothers. He had introduced the idea of Brothers to his fellow Marist aspirants in 1816. In 1817 he gathered two postulants and began a school at La Valla. In 1818 there were Brothers at Marlhes and every subsequent new foundation. These first schools of the brothers were primary schools in rural areas.

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[11] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 48.
[12] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 47.
[13] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 62.
[14] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 62.

In the first document setting out the aims of the Society of Mary, namely the letter to Pius VII of 25 January 1822, education is mentioned: "Ad scientias et virtutes omnimodo puerillem aetatem informare."[15] From then on education continues to be mentioned but after the missions. "Etc" replaces the original mention of visiting the sick and imprisoned but education remains. By 1833 the formula that mentions education begins to change.

A document of 23 August 1833 reads "aucto sociorum numero, juvenilem aetatem in collegiis ad scientias et virtutes informare possimus."[16] The *Summarium* of the Rule of December 1833 has "et collegiorum vel seminariorum regimen non recusabunt."[17] A memoir of Colin dated sometime in 1833/34 reads: "et à l'éducation de la jeunesse dans les colleges ou petits séminaires" but up until then each time that education was mentioned it was the last of the three works named.[18]

So up to 1845 education is consistently mentioned in the plan of the Society but Father Colin seemed to be "in no hurry to take on educational works."[19] Reasons for this reluctance are not hard to suggest: the Society was still few in number and had only a few members who were qualified for the ministry of education. Father Mayet who entered the novitiate in 1837 was the first Marist to have been awarded the state Baccalaureate.

The approval of the Society of Mary by Rome in 1836 and the sending of the first echelons to Oceania would have been a factor in further delaying the expansion of the educational work beyond Belley and La Capucinière. Furthermore it continued to be difficult for clerics to open a school.

Meanwhile the experience of Father Colin at Belley was to prove in itself crucial to the development of the Society in education: "He discovers also another world besides that of the missions in the countryside, the world of the middle class."[20]

At La Seyne in 1850 Colin spoke of the origins of the Society's involvement in education:[21]

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[15] *Origines Maristes*, doc. 69, 3.
[16] *Origines Maristes*, doc. 282, 4.
[17] *Origines Maristes*, doc. 294, 7.
[18] *Origines Maristes*, doc. 300, 1.
[19] Coste, *Lectures*, p. 224.
[20] F. Drouilly SM, *Jean-Claude Colin's Instructions to the Staff of the Minor Seminary of Belley* (Maristica, 3), Rome, 1990.
[21] *Origines Maristes*, doc. 698.

"From the outset, the Society has had as an aim the education of youth. There are those who think that this aim was added later to the other ends of our congregation. They are wrong. Moreover, Providence has willed that the Society be born in the very milieu of colleges, of young people. When Bishop Devie, before the approbation of the Society, appointed me superior of the minor seminary of Belley, I suffered martyrdom. Eleven times I went to his place to beg him not to ask this sacrifice of me. But on Easter Sunday 1829 he said to me: 'I forbid you to come again and I order you to take possession this evening.' What caused me the greatest repugnance was that I could not understand how the Society could be established with Bishop Devie putting me in this post. But it was a grace and God willed it so; without it, I would never have had any idea of teaching. Moreover, this was where God willed to place the birth of the little Society."

Colin proved to be very successful as superior of the minor seminary despite his inexperience in educational administration and despite the problems he had to face among the staff and students. These problems reappeared under subsequent administrators. The superiorship at Belley not only gave experience in leadership to Colin but his first hand involvement in education certainly affected the Society in the years to come.

The National Debate on Education

Meanwhile the question of Catholic education became a burning issue of the day in France. The return of the Jesuits had aroused considerable opposition. By 1826 the Jesuits had had control of eight minor seminaries and they had received requests in abundance. One count shows 87 appeals to run minor seminaries, 9 to run major seminaries, 30 for colleges and 55 for residences. By the mid1820s there were 108 Jesuit priests, 131 scholastics and 81 brothers in France.

Yet this small number received attacks and in the July 1830 Revolution crowds menaced their houses and the Jesuits dispersed into disguise or exile, where they continued to train novices and opened exile colleges. Their return in 1843 provoked further outbursts and the General ordered a reduction in the number of Jesuits in each house. He went further and ordered that the reduction itself be carried out quietly and "sans éclat."[22] It is easy to see how Father Colin's more unassuming approach so fitted the circumstances of the day.

[22] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 35.

The presence of the Jesuits in France complicated the issue of Catholic schools. A campaign began to try to break the power of the *Université*. Some of the arguments were extreme:[23]
"The persecution of the Czar Nicholas against the Catholics is infinitely less deadly than the persecution of the monopoly. The state system formed: 'prostituted intelligences who go to search at the bottom of hell for the glorification of incest, adultery and revolt." "Vicious habits, unnatural practices and loathsome morals become the dominant characteristic of the generation brought up in these colleges."

Deschamps, a Jesuit, published *Le Monopole Universitaire* and furnished quotations from textbooks to support his claim that the monopoly was responsible for anti-religious teaching.[24]

The resultant furore caused an outburst of Jesuitphobia but at the same time events opened the way for freedom of teaching. In 1848 the liberal July monarchy fell. A *Université* leader, Thiers, withdrew his firm support of the monopoly:[25]
"I have changed... not by a revolution in my convictions, but by a revolution in social conditions... the teaching of which I have not liked at all for enough reasons, seems to me better than the drink which has been brewed for us. The *Université*, fallen into the hands of phalansterians, aspires to teach our children a little mathematics, physics and natural sciences, and plenty of demagogy. I see not salvation... except in freedom of teaching. I do not direct my hate nor the ardour of my resistance except towards where the enemy is today. The enemy is demagogy and I will not hand to it the last remnants of the social order, which is, today the Catholic establishment."

The Falloux Law was passed by the assembly in March 1850 and this destroyed the monopoly of the state system. The way was clear for Catholic colleges to teach freely. The response was immediate. The Jesuit provincial of Paris refused six requests for colleges within three weeks of the passage of the Falloux Law. Within four months, 52 requests had to be refused by the French Jesuits.[26] In four years 1081 free (i.e. private) schools were established throughout France either by

[23] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 26.
[24] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 26.
[25] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 39.
[26] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 81.

the opening of new schools or by transforming the old municipal schools into free schools.[27]

The Marist Response - II

Before the Falloux Law the Society of Mary was already developing its educational apostolate. In 1848 a small school for 90 pupils was opened at Valbenoîte. The Staff of priests were young – all were less than 30 years of age. The foundation was made quite legally in the name of one priest and classes were limited to the first half of the secondary course.

In 1847 in the small village of Langogne, the Marists took over a school of 95 students which had been a municipal school run by the priests of the diocese and which had become run down.

After about a three year wait for government authorisation, Father Colin was able to open the boarding school at La Seyne. Thus when the Falloux Law became applicable, the Society was already involved in colleges. In the three years that followed the passing of the Falloux Law, Father Colin accepted two former municipal colleges (Saint-Chamond and Brioude) and founded a new college at Montluçon. So, while the Society certainly took advantage of the new state regulations, the beginnings of educational work lie in the years when legislation made the involvement of clerical religious in education quite difficult.

The question can now be asked: Why the move into Colleges? Father Colin defended the move in 1849 by saying:[28]

"To what have all the efforts of our French bishops been directed since the Revolution? Surely, the reconquest of education so as to save the faith? Is not that the significance of all these struggles of the episcopate against the *Université*? ... The little Society of Mary too comes along with its different branches, all of which devote themselves to teaching."

Some of the reasons for the growth of the school apostolate were pragmatic ones. One thinks of the gradual increase in the number of Marists and the improvement in their educational backgrounds. The decision of Father Colin not to send further missionaries to Oceania after 1849 and the lessening of the urgency to provide for the rural missions must have helped in the provision of staff. But Colin also saw the colleges providing good opportunities for young priests to continue

[27] Coste, *Lectures*, p. 226.
[28] FS, doc. 172, 19.

their studies and for a more regular religious and community life.[29] He saw the colleges also as ideal places to prepare missionaries and future superiors.[30]

All that being understood, it seems Father Colin was convinced of the value of colleges for the proper establishment of the Society and as opportunities for a worthwhile apostolate.

By 1850 Colin had been battling for years to establish the Society. The initial struggle to prevent the Society from being just a band of diocesan missionaries was over. But in the Islands of the Pacific the status of the Marists as religious was threatened.

Bishop Pompallier had proposed to Viard in 1846:[31] "Let the Society of Mary be known merely as a seminary of our Holy Father the Pope for the foreign missions, without the superior having any other ecclesiastical authority than that of a seminary rector in a diocese..." Archbishop Polding also failed to see the Marists as a distinct congregation:[32]

"Mgr Polding wants to interfere in our affairs, to keep everything in his own hands, to dispose of the Marists in Sydney for this or that duty, and to establish, with himself as centre, a material unity destructive of the free administration the Society of Mary. I am not sending Marists to Oceania for him to make Benedictines of them."

Colin had sent 74 priests, 26 FMS brothers and 17 coadjutor brothers to Oceania in 15 successive groups and of this number 21 had died by 1854. He sent no further men to the missions after 1849 because he could get no guarantee from the bishops that the spiritual and temporal welfare of the missionaries would be safeguarded. So he was struggling to ensure the firm establishment of the Society as a religious congregation; the colleges helped him do this. When he resigned as General in 1854, 73 priests were teaching in colleges, 65 in residential houses, 60 in Oceania, 25 in seminaries, 17 in Marist formation houses, 8 at Verdelais pilgrimage centre and 5 were in chaplaincies.

But Colin also saw the colleges as a valuable apostolate. His advice to the teachers at the seminary at Belley in 1829, when his experience there had been confined to living on the top floor of the house for

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[29] FS, doc. 155, 5.7; doc. 175, 6.11.
[30] FS, doc. 172; also doc. 155 and doc. 175, 6.
[31] Letter Pompallier to Viard, 2 October 1846; cited in Larkin, *Mary in the Church*, p. 59.
[32] Mayet, *Mémoires*, vol. 4, p. 668; cited in Larkin, *Mary in the Church*, p. 60.

several years, gives us an idea of the positive way he viewed the apostolate that he was embarking on despite serious misgivings about his personal involvement:[33]

"To educate a man, to form him, what a sublime task! But to educate him in a Christian way, what a heavenly work! Let us, Messieurs, be thoroughly convinced of the importance of the duties that are ours, and the excellence of this good work. Our position is a true apostolate, all the more fruitful for our having taken care to form our pupils according to the principles of the Gospel. It is God's children that are entrusted to us, and so it is towards God that we have to turn their hearts by our constant efforts to provide them with sound rules for their guidance and examples lived in a manner consonant with them."

By the end of Colin's generalate, the 73 priests in schools taught 520 boys; a ratio of one priest to 7 pupils and the teaching Fathers did practically nothing by way of outside ministry. In 1850 Colin said to the college rectors: "Our young men engaged in secondary education are overburdened with classes, essays to be corrected and a thousand and one things to attend to, and also they are young."[34] Given the ratio of staff to students that prevailed at that time, one wonders what he would say about the workload in later times.

The light shed on the Marist Spirit by the development of Marist Colleges during Father Colin's Generalate

It is reasonable to suppose that the initiatives of Colin in the educational sphere might shed some light on his vision for the Society of Mary. One sees Colin being guided by the tradition of Jesuits conducting colleges, one sees him co-operating with bishops, one sees him responding with limited personnel to needs and opportunities of the day. One can also see clearly Colin's single-minded dedication to the sound foundation of the Society as a proper religious congregation. More light can be shed also on the application of the principle 'hidden and unknown' as well as the maxim 'one in mind and heart'. The spirit of the Society was to be the spirit of the Blessed Virgin; Marists were called to be missionaries of action and missionaries of prayer.[35]

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[33] J. Cl. Colin, 'Instructions to the Professors, Prefects, Directors, and Superior of the Minor Seminary of Belley, 1829', no. 1, in Drouilly, *Instructions to the Staff*, p. 152

[34] FS, doc. 182, 40.

[35] FS, doc. 190, 3.

"Messieurs, everything the Jesuits have done, that is what the Society must do!" Thus spoke Colin in 1845.[36] At times he did explain this maxim to his confreres: "You will see the Jesuits going into decline everywhere if they lose their colleges."[37] And: "Well, I would dare to say their superiority comes from the fact that they threw themselves into teaching."[38] While the Society of Mary was to work in a distinctive manner, its range of works was to be as broad as the Jesuits' scope.

Colin would have opened more colleges and would have opened the one he did found earlier if he had had the necessary personnel. Yet he withdrew his men from some colleges when other groups wanted to run the institutions concerned and he forbade canvassing for students; for Colin the colleges were a response to a serious need in the France of his day.

Colin's colleges were small. The largest in 1854 had 140 pupils. It is interesting to compare this with the Jesuit College at Metz in 1854 with its 300 students; the Jesuit College at Vaugirard (near Paris) had 400 students in 1861. Marist colleges tended to be established in small, out of the way places, the Jesuit colleges in or near the centres of population.

If Marist schools were to be conducted in the spirit of Mary, the Mother of Mercy, then what about Colin's use of his powers of expulsion when he headed the Belley minor seminary? The problems of discipline and immorality required such measures if the schools were to achieve the purpose for which they were set up. It is interesting to note that the Jesuit school at Saint-Aucheuil had on average 30 students expelled each year of its existence.[39]

Colin took steps to ensure that the Marist schools were well staffed, that the young fathers continued their studies, that religious life in the Marist college communities was properly lived. He was free with his advice about matters of teaching and discipline but he was even freer with his advice and his encouragement about winning the hearts of the pupils, of education in virtue and the development of the life of prayer and the use of the Sacraments. For Colin, the schools were part of a wider plan, a missionary plan, to win people for Christ and his Blessed Mother.

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[36] FS, doc. 98, 2.
[37] FS, doc. 155, 8.
[38] FS, doc. 172, 23.
[39] Padberg, *Colleges in Controversy*, p. 62.