



# Today's MARISTS

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## *The End of the World?*

*By Gerard Hall, S.M.*

### **End Times in Popular Political Culture**

As a Marist writing from outside the United States, there seem to be many societal and political factors at this time that remind us of the cosmic and earthly battles reflected in the apocalyptic readings we hear at the end of Ordinary Time as we move into Advent. The good and evil rhetoric employed by the Tea Party movement, the epic collapse of the housing market in the United States and the deep woes of the US economy generally echo these heavy themes.

The Book of Daniel and other later prophets, and various reported Gospel sayings of Jesus (see Mark 13, Matt 25), small parts of Paul's letters (Corinthians, Thessalonians), and the Book of Revelation (also called "The Apocalypse") portray a final battle between good and evil in cosmic proportions. Victory over this present age – ruled by Satan – by the power of God is assured. This age is associated with a final judgment and the resurrection of the dead. Satan and the evil forces will be annihilated; the supporters of God will enter a period of peace and prosperity. In Christian apocalyptic thought, this is specifically associated with the "Second Coming" in the return of Jesus Christ marking the "end of time." But its shadow is often seen in political rhetoric.

The biblical purpose was to provide assurance to a community undergoing persecution that the current situation will come to an end because God is creator, redeemer and ruler of the world and all its people. In other words, despite all signs to the contrary –

such as first century martyrdom under the oppressive rule of Rome – God assures the final victory over evil. Even more importantly, these writings, inspired by heavenly visions, were works of exhortation in which the vision of God's heavenly reign inspires ethical behavior in this world. The image of the last judgment is an urgent message calling all people to live their personal and social lives in a spirit of faithfulness, mercy and justice. Nowhere here do we get the idea that God allows, let alone requires, violence on our part to overcome the world's ills. Instead, Christians are given the vision of Jesus who preaches the Sermon on the Mount, calls the sinner to repentance, but always offers the other cheek to those who seek to harm him.

### **End Times in Jean-Claude Colin**

The Marist founder, Fr. Jean-Claude Colin, lived in an era when church and society were under immense threat as a result of the French Revolution. He and the early Marists were well aware of the "reign of terror" in which thousands were murdered in the streets and that on a single day some 200 priests were guillotined in the cause of so-called liberty, equality and fraternity. Colin turned his mind to the apocalyptic vision of Mary in Jean Courveille's experience at the Cathedral of Le Puy, August 12, 1812. In this time of crisis – "this last age of impiety and unbelief" – it is the wish of Mary and her Son that a Society bearing her name would be raised up to fight against the forces of evil. Along with other thinkers of his time, Colin interprets "this present age" as the



Father Ted Keating, S.M.,  
Provincial

# Provincial's LETTER

*Dear Friends,*

I worked for a number of years with the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), the umbrella group for the men's religious orders of the United States. In my first position as director for justice and peace and mission, I became deeply involved in the Washington agenda of our missionary orders around the world: human rights, economic justice, and war and peace. Churches for Middle East Peace, the group that does Washington advocacy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the issues of the Holy Land in general, quickly brought me into dialogue with Muslims both in Washington and around the world. I developed a profound respect and regard for the intensity of Islamic religion and its potential for peace in Central Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

This may sound ironic in our post-9/11 world. I heard Grand Muftis of Central Europe and the Middle East unfold the tenets of Islam and the Koran about human rights, justice and living peacefully, and in those beliefs I heard the outlines of our own Catholic teachings on the same subjects. I would also hear their constant refrain: "Imagine being in our position if you only heard and listened to the most violent fundamentalist voices of Christianity and Judaism in our societies and in our media." In 1998, on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights that underpins the human rights work of the United Nations and the United States as well as others who seek to promote human dignity around the world, a working group was formed in Washington that brought just about any major religion you have ever heard of to the table to draft a joint document on the contribution of religion to human rights in the world. The quotes from the Koran were stunning on the issue as were quotes from the other foundational documents of the world's religions.

Later as executive director of CMSM, I was invited to sit on the president's council of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. The table included Islam, the Baha'i, Zoroastrians, Jewish Groups, the Catholic Bishops and the other Christian denominations, Buddhism, Hinduism in two different sects, and a host of other religions. In a totally unobtrusive way, the Islamic participants quietly noted that our full agendas would make it difficult for

them to break for their necessary five prayer times during the day, wondering in genuinely curious way how the rest of us could meet all day without significant periods of prayer. It didn't seem humanly possible for them. I could only reflect that as a Catholic religious, I too often compromised with my own Constitutional requirements for a rhythm of daily prayer during such days to "get the job done."

These meandering reflections come to me now in the midst of some recent attacks on Islam as a religion after our tragic and unforgettable national tragedy on September 11, 2001. Some radical and unhinged men abused everything that Islam stands for on behalf of a violent and ideological distortion of Islam that can often look like some of the ways that Christianity has been distorted on behalf of violent impulses and images in its long history.

I think of all of this in the context of our Marist call, especially remembering the article in the last issue on the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary and its roots in the defeat of the Ottoman Turks and their siege of Vienna and feared invasion of Europe. Fr. Tom Ellerman and I interpreted our Marist call to wage a war of dialogue, a battle for reconciliation, using the arms of the Marist Charism call to "emptying ourselves" (See Philippians 2:8) to make room for listening to others no matter how different they are from us.

It may not be possible to dialogue with disturbed people who come at you with unyielding violence using their religion to justify their savagery and rage. We need simply to defend ourselves in those situations. But our Founder lived in a time of entrenched and violent ideologies that were pitting religion, politics, and even conquest against each other. His forthright solution was to avoid ideologies like a plague which they often are. It is a matter of arming ourselves with spiritual practices that empty us of the need for power, control, personal and group agenda. It is engaging people at the level of their most basic human needs for fulfillment, meaning the quest for the holy, the search for deepening their sense of humanity in their response to God and Mary's call.

*Provincial's Letter* continued on page 8 . . .



## Fr. Henri Bellanger: Pioneer of Marist Service to America on Louisiana's River Road

By Paul Carr — Director of Development for the Society of Mary.

On a February day in 1863, two Marist priests from France set sail for America on a ship crafted originally for war duty, chartered by the Archbishop Jean-Marie Odin of New Orleans and carrying 40 European Catholic missionaries plus four Ursuline sisters. The two Marists, Fr. Henri Bellanger and Fr. Joseph Gautherin, arrived in New Orleans on Good Friday of that year, amid the turmoil of the American Civil War.

Marist ministries in the United States began a month later in a Louisiana town named Convent, where Fr. Bellanger took up the work as missionary, then pastor of St. Michael the Archangel Church, located on what is today Highway 44 – the River Road – running along the fabled Mississippi River, halfway between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. St. Michael's was erected in 1809 by Acadians from the surrounding Parish of St. James, of which Convent was the parish seat. (The political designation "parishes" is to Louisianans what "counties" are to most of the country.)

During his seven-year tenure as pastor at St. Michael's, Fr. Bellanger's spiritual leadership and dedication to creating opportunities for people in need exemplified the essential qualities of the Marist missionary priesthood.

At St. Michael's, Fr. Bellanger enlivened the spiritual awareness of the families in his charge through Lenten missions and, for the men of St. Michael's, a series of conferences intended to elevate awareness of their particular religious duties. On Holy Thursday in 1864, an unprecedented 150 men received Communion at St. Michael's. While pastor, Fr. Bellanger oversaw the establishment of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which raised as much as \$80 each month to assist the poor and needy of post-war East St. James Parish.

At Archbishop Odin's request, Fr. Bellanger was joined in 1864 by several other Marists who came from France to help staff an institution for higher learning – Jefferson College in Convent, named for Thomas Jefferson, renamed by the Marists as St. Mary's Jefferson College. The property had been occupied by the federal government and used as barracks for Yankee soldiers during the prior two years. Under Marist direction for more than 60 years, the College played a key role in spiritual development and self-sufficiency through education for the people of St. James.

In December, 1864, Fr. Bellanger traveled back to France, where he presented his superiors with a letter from Archbishop Odin, requesting that the Marists remain at St. Michael's and Jefferson College and assume additional responsibility for the Parish of Algiers, located adjacent to

New Orleans (today part of that city). He returned to New Orleans with the news that the Marist superiors had agreed, and in 1870 Fr. Bellanger moved to Holy Name of Mary Parish in Algiers as its pastor.

Marist service to the River Road region of Louisiana flourished for well over the next century, until 1996, when a lack of personnel forced the withdrawal of the Society of Mary in the birthplace of its ministry in the United States.

### *Marists and the End of the World* from page 1 . . .

foreshadowed pre-end times in which evil appears to triumph. However, for Colin, the final victory is assured because this is also the "age of Mary."

Colin's apocalyptic imagination is evident in his strong condemnation of his own times as one of pride and godlessness. However, like Mary herself in the home of Nazareth and the early church of Pentecost, Marists respond with the tender-hearted love of a mother for her children: "Mary, the Mother of Mercy; Marists, instruments of divine mercy." He joins other Marist founders in speaking of the "work of Mary;" to this he adds his own insistence that our task is to "build the new church" whose only image is Mary in the midst of the apostles – "hidden and unknown in the world." Colin's apocalyptic perspective is summarized in his oft-quoted phrase: "Mary was the support of the Church at the beginning; she will be so again at the end of time – through you."

In utopian language, Colin spoke of the "whole world Marist" since everyone is called to belong to this "kingdom of the Blessed Virgin" in the multiple-branched Marist tree. His apocalyptic imagination was focused on one thing, to do whatever was necessary to touch the hearts and souls of all people with the boundless love and mercy of God.

Colin did not turn his back on his era; he sought to touch it, heal it, convert it. He imagined a kind of presence, 'unknown & hidden,' enabling us to be there, as close as possible, at the very core of what is happening in human hearts. (Jean Coste SM)

This is a worthy Marist reflection as we move from the apocalyptic readings of the end of Ordinary Time into the fresh and new Liturgical Year of Advent.

# What Makes a School "Marist"?

By Fr. John Harhager, S.M.

A school is not "Marist" just because a Marist priest or brother is present. With education being a primary focus of its mission, the Society of Mary has worked hard to further this commitment even as it, along with other congregations, experiences a diminishment in membership.

A Marist sponsored school incorporates into its mission and character those values or principles which are typically Marist: Hidden and unknown; being instruments of mercy; discipleship; trust in God; "Tasting God;" doing "the work of Mary;" saying no to greed, pride and power; the spirit of Nazareth and Pentecost; being called by "gracious choice;" ardent love of neighbor; union with God; self-denial; humility; hospitality; inclusiveness; and service.

These qualities are part of the fabric of the school because of the attention of many people who can be called "Marist" not by religious profession but by commitment and way of life. They are faculty and staff, administration and governance bodies, parents and students who work hard to establish more than an institution but a Marist community at our schools.

In the United States, besides Marist School in Atlanta and Notre Dame Prep in Pontiac, Michigan – the two schools owned and staffed by the Society of Mary – we have three other sponsored Marist schools. Each is unique in its history and character.

**Notres Dame des Victoires** School was founded in 1926 in San Francisco as part of the parish of the same name. The Marists, along with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, were influential in forming the character of the school from its inception. Today, the dedicated faculty and staff further the Marist mission in serving students from kindergarten to eighth grade.

**Chanel High School** was founded in 1956 by the Society of Mary. The Society continued to provide Marist priests and



brothers to the staff until 1994. Today, the school is owned and operated by the Diocese of Cleveland but has never lost its close affiliation with the Society's mission in education or its values.

**Notre Dame Academy** was opened in 2005 as a Marist sponsored school for pre-K through 8th grade in Duluth, Georgia. From the very beginning, it was "inspired and guided by Gospel teachings and the principles and charisms of the Marists." Continuing to receive the support and encouragement of local Marists from nearby Marist School, the school prospers under its lay leadership and faculty and staff.

All of the Marist schools in the United States, along with those in neighboring Canada and Mexico, have facilitated the development of the lay Marists working in education through holding annual conferences. Thirty-two participants from five schools gathered most recently in October in Atlanta for the Conference of North American Marist Schools (see picture). Marist education continues to be a significant work of Mary in our present age.

*Fr. Harhager is President of  
Marist School in Atlanta.*

# Why I am a Donor

## The Marist Imprint: A Blessing and Grace

By Richard Mercier

I first came to know the Marists when their vocation director for the former Boston Province, Fr. Mead, came to speak at the school I was attending, St. John's in Plainfield, Connecticut. What he had to say about the Marist way of doing things left an enduring impression on me; so much so, in fact, that I decided to spend time at the Marist summer camp in Oakledge, Maine during the following summer. That experience led me to four years at Marist Prep in Bedford, Maine and a year at the seminary in Framingham, Massachusetts.

The education I received from the Marists was far superior to what I would have had anywhere else. The training, the thought patterns, the overarching values were such that the Marist imprint was left on me and has been a blessing and grace throughout my life. The Marist approach is one of circumspection, a reckoning with ones own strengths, shortcomings and talents, and a deep and abiding appreciation and caring for others. I learned while a student with them that the closer one tries to become a good Marist, the more one becomes a good Christian.

The lesson we can all learn from the Marists is that living a life that extends out from one's self in service is well worth living. This way of viewing myself in the world was helpful to me when I served in the Connecticut legislature and while building a service-oriented business.

I view the Society of Mary in the United States as an integral part of the future Church in this country. The Marist view is needed in our Church and world, and that is why one of the most compelling reasons I hold for supporting the Marists is the vocation and formation work they are doing. It is important that the Marists prepare to replace those who carried on the Marist tradition through to the end of the last century. The world needs new Marists to carry this work on in parishes, schools, prisons, chaplaincies and missions. This is a costly enterprise and needs financial and prayerful support to bring the Marist Way through to future generations. I remain committed financially and prayerfully to this extraordinarily humble but effective group of religious men, and hope others will as well.



Georgia Bulletin Photo by Thomas Spink

## SACRED HEART BASILICA – A PART OF MARIST HISTORY

On August 21, Sacred Heart Church in Atlanta was elevated to the status of minor basilica, the only church in Georgia to hold the title. The tintinnabulum (pictured being placed at the altar) is a bell mounted on a pole signifying the church's link with the pope. It's one of two symbols on display at a basilica. The other is the ombrellino, an elaborate umbrella always displayed halfway open to signify the church is ready to welcome the Holy Father. The ombrellino also features the symbol of the Marist community among other images.

To be named a minor basilica, a church must meet certain criteria. Among them are "the church may enjoy a certain renown throughout the diocese," and "the historical value or importance of the church and the worthiness of its art are also be considered." During his homily, Atlanta Archbishop Wilton Gregory said that Sacred Heart enjoys a place of honor "... because its history is so interwoven with the history of Catholics in the entire state of Georgia."

The parish began in 1880 at Sts. Peter and Paul. In 1897, the Society of Mary was commissioned to operate the parish. The original Marist School opened on the property in 1901. It remained until the school moved to its current location in 1962.

Fr. John Harhager, President of Marist School represented the Society of Mary at the August 21 ceremony.

# *Responding to the Call: The Obvious Choice*

By Jack Ridout

During this Advent time in the Church year, the image of our Lord coming as a thief in the night expresses the necessity of constant vigilance. “Here I stand, knocking at the door” (Rev. 3:20).

In every age, we as Christians are in danger of failing to hear Him “knocking at the door.” There are among us those who listen to that knocking and are confronted with what that means and are willing to go the next step in answering that beckoning.

Two people have heard that knock and are responding in a special way. Richard Whittington and Liam Curtin are at the beginning stages of responding to the sound of that knock by taking the first step in the process of applying to the Society of Mary.

I have asked a few questions of both Richard and Liam, and due to space, I will present Richard’s replies in this issue and Liam’s in the next issue of Today’s Marists.

**Jack:** What were your impressions when you first heard that knocking?

**Richard:** Even before becoming a Catholic ten years ago I felt called to some form of ministry...and responded to that feeling with a pinch of anxiety. The weight of that possibility frightened me, and I diverted my attention elsewhere, namely graduate school.

**Jack:** Did things change when you became a Catholic?

**Richard:** The feeling did return, but a wise priest told me to wait and see if the call returned. I then pursued a career in academia. The call did not always dominate my thoughts, but as I completed graduate school, the knock became louder once again.

**Jack:** This will be a new way of living for you, what are your feelings now, and what has changed?

**Richard:** As the time of graduation drew nearer, the knock at the door became louder once again. At times I contemplated the call with excitement; very often it simply felt like the obvious choice. As I have traveled this path the latter feeling has become more dominant. The call to the priesthood seems obvious and (in a good way) inescapable. I think of the future with excitement but also with a peace of mind that eluded me so many years ago.



Richard Whittington (left) with Fr. John Ulrich, S.M., Fr. Kevin Duggan, S.M. and Jack Ridout.

*Jack Ridout is Vocation Director for the Society of Mary*

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# Peru and Venezuela: A History of Marist Preaching and Presence among the Poor

*Fr. Alejandro Muñoz, S.M.*

*Translated by Fr. Ted Keating, S.M.*

Sixty years ago, Marist missionaries traveled to Latin America to preach the Gospel in the style of Mary. These Marists came from the Province of Spain to Peru and from the Province of Italy to Venezuela. The great success in these two countries emerged out of the generosity of many Marists from these countries over many years.

In 1990, the Marist missions in Peru and Venezuela were named a Mission District under the leadership of the General Administration. This Mission District followed the District of Brazil and the District of the Philippines in 1981, and Africa in 1989. These were new mission territories for the Marists, who had mostly been associated with missions in the South Pacific.

The establishment of the Peru-Venezuela District, along with the earlier designations as coordinated missionary work of the Society, permitted it to be fed by Marists from a number of the existing Provinces of the Society, including the United States. Today there are 13 priests of five nationalities working in five different communities, one in Venezuela and four in Peru.

The historical ministries of the District have been distinctly Marist ministries among the poor, and in situations of violence and injustice responding clearly to the option for education and social involvement. There are 2,000 students in three schools: St. Joseph in El Callao; St. Peter Chanel in Sullana with a second campus specially focused on the poorest students helping them to have experiences that prepare them for working in a rural area where cattle are raised. The John Claude Colin School in Carabobo, Venezuela has been in existence for 20 years in an area otherwise lacking in basic education. Two parishes there are alive with energy and great lay participation. A missionary parish in the north of Peru has 100 small sub-communities on the border with Ecuador where the rivers frequently flood rendering the areas inaccessible for many months of the year.

Another important work of the District is with the nine men in the process of working toward final profession and ordination, the majority of whom are already at least in temporary vows.

The Society of Mary Superior General is seeking to find ways to further invigorate and consolidate the Mission Districts for the future.

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## *Among the Poor...* from page 7



For that reason, the Peru-Venezuela District will focus more closely on the initial preparation of the young Peruvians and Venezuelans to help them take up leadership of the Society in this area of the world. To enable this, Marists will leave Venezuela and the number of ministries in the District will be reduced.

In 2012, a significant moment will occur in the history of the District as our Peruvian and Venezuelan confreres take up leadership of the District in order to continue the “work of Mary” in that corner of the world.

*Alejandro Muños, S.M., is an assistant to the Superior General and the former provincial of Mexico. He is also the major superior for the District of Peru/Venezuela.*

## *Provincial's Letter* from page 2

I also I think of the lives of some our Marist Missionary Sisters who lived out years of ministry in the midst of Muslim villages engaging women at the well and in the marketplace, and witnessing to the power of the Gospel in dialogue only by their example. I think of *Focolare*, a lay ecclesial movement that calls itself “the Work of Mary” just as we name ourselves. Their central mission is this life of dialogue with the other world religions and they excel at it. I also think of our Marist African region that had its beginnings in the Muslim area of Senegal and that has a number of Marist Muslim laity affectionately associated with them. Focolare also has Muslim members among its extensive lay movement. We all stand in a very different place from those who seek public attention by burning Korans and making Muslims scape-goats out of fear for political purposes.