

9. ONE IN MIND AND HEART

By Fr. David Kennerley, SM

A Prayer

Mary, you brought into the world God's own son. You were the first to welcome the good news of the Father's lavish love for us. You then made the proclaiming of that love, in word and deed, your life's mission. Mary, from you may we learn to serve the Church in your special way, united together in the service of our God.

Marists Together

Father Jean-Claude Colin put before Marists a number of themes, squarely based on Mary. Themes on their own can be interesting, even appealing. Colin, however, wanted these themes to be prods spurring Marists into action, to result in real concrete practices and deeds. What Colin's three No's particularly reinforced, is his stress not only on the individual, personal dimension, but also on a social, corporate witness as well.

Collectively, be that a family home, an apartment, a Marist parish or college, any Marist-focused committee or work, the task at hand is to be carried out in a genuinely Marist way, have a sensitive, inclusive Marian approach. Think first of Colin's central founding motif: Mary in the Church. What does her continuing presence mean for the task at hand? Her presence is focused on a personally quite radical, supportive relationship of the apostles. That means supporting and encouraging everyone 'in the work' but especially whoever is at the top. However, this attitude and practice will also apply, just as much, from the top down.

Colin was very aware of his own shortcomings. For him, working with a Marian-minded team, "one in mind and heart" as in the early church (Acts 4:32), was crucial. This way, his weaknesses were tempered, if not overcome. It also meant that his associates in having this focus became team-players around him, not individual's independently intent on achieving their own outcomes. Colin recognized that no one ever has all the leadership skills required, nor a full grasp of the Marist way. Hence, he appointed leaders to terms of no more than six years. Change promoted and balanced broader skills and Marist practice. For him, the chief responsibility of a leader was to unite and hold those around him/her to truly being Marist. The Church thoroughly examined Colin's understanding of what 'being Marist' was before approving his Society. Unless we seriously prioritize 'being Marist,' individually and institutionally, then in the eyes of the Church, our works, our spirituality and our very existence as Marists is without foundation and purpose. In Colin's own words, we are not worthy of the name Marist.

For all concerned in a Marist work, Colin stressed that Mary in fact was their leader, their "first, perpetual superior." Marcellin Champagnat had a very similar stress but referred quite beautifully to Mary as "our first, ordinary resource." As Marists, in the spirit of Fourviere, we take to heart that Mary is that close, that involved with us – indeed, with me!

When it came to meetings and decision-making, Colin always allowed space for God's graced action and insight. Effectively, the Marist spirit means, in a sense, pausing to consider what Mary might want, what would be the most Marist direction to take. This means that petty rivalries, plain human logic, closed-mindedness and arbitrary conclusions, never have a place.

With the image of Mary in the early Church in mind, Colin instructed leaders at meetings to voice their opinion last so that everyone would feel free to speak and the widest expression of views got heard. Colin firmly believed that God often speaks through one of the "least" members present (Founder Speaks 133:2). And, for the sake of humility, he also strongly encouraged the leader in a tied vote to take the side that was not his/her own.

These practical strategies of Colin's are not about him desiring an especially democratic, conciliar process. First and foremost, what our Jean Claude was doing was promoting certain 'typical' Mary-inspired approaches seeking to achieve genuine Gospel relationships and outcomes. Yes, Marist spirituality is meant to get really this practical and transformative!

An Insight

"Council was always with Father Colin. It was always together that they decided, after reflecting together, praying and discussing as a group. Chapters [planning meetings] were the occasions for bringing before everyone's eyes all the questions and projects [and] to build an esprit de corps, to bond each member to the social body, to help each one feel responsible for the groups progress. The works for which we are destined are not solitary works, they are everyone's works." (Francois Drouilly, *From the Logbook of a Spiritual Adventurer*, pp.107-108).

The Practice

"Father Colin often prayed that God would enlighten his confreres. This, he said, was better than praying that God would enlighten him. But he had clear instructions for members: don't come to meetings with rigid ideas or already formed conclusions; be interiorly free and indifferent; be without any desire to gain acceptance for your own opinion; and don't be in a hurry" (Craig Larkin, *Bearings*, p.135).

Possible Questions

1. "One in mind and heart" challenges us to be agents of communion, builders of community. Is this something that you are already good at, and 'what more' might this be asking of us as a Marists?
2. Mary is to be "our first and perpetual superior," "our first, ordinary resource." What are these expressions encouraging, and what practical effect might they have in your own life?