

Marist Spirituality and Education

by Gaston Lessard, S.M.

You work in a Marist school. How will knowing Marist spirituality help you in your work? I will treat the topic in three steps: What is Marist spirituality? How will this spirituality help me in my work as an educator? How will I make this spirituality my own?

1. What is Marist spirituality?

What are we talking about when we use the words Marist spirituality? Let us first look at the word spirituality. The word is linked to spiritual: spiritual life, life of the spirit, or, better, life according to the Spirit. We are dealing with baptized people, who believe in Jesus Christ, who have been immersed into his death and his resurrection and who are endeavoring to live by his Spirit, the Spirit who in them addresses God, saying: Abba, Daddy, like Jesus himself. To live as God's children means to live like Jesus, to love God with your whole heart, your whole being, your whole strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. To live according to the Spirit means to love God and neighbor as Jesus did.

The problem that Christians face is the same that faced Israel, to whom God gave his commandment: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength. To which Jesus adds: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. As with human love, the problem is not to love one day. It is to love tomorrow, and the day after. The problem is to make love last. Hence the order given Israel: The words of the commandments that I give you shall be before your heart; you shall make of them a sign tied to your hand, a mark set between your eyes. The external daily rituals help keep love alive. That is where the schools of spirituality take their origin, whether they be Benedictine, Franciscan, Jesuit, or Marist.

Marist spirituality offers means to live out, to deepen, and to express in our behavior the reality of our baptism, our having died and risen with Christ, our life in the Spirit. Our tradition is rich with the spiritual experience of the thousands of women and men who bore the name of Mary since 1816. It is rooted in the experience of the founders, but it is constantly enriched by our own experience. This tradition helped the first Marists to love God and neighbor in nineteenth-century France and Oceania. It can help us do the same here today.

One can enter the world of Marist spirituality through three gateways: Mary as the mainstay of the Church, Hidden and unknown in the world, and Nazareth,

Mary as the Mainstay of the Church

In January 1848, Jean-Claude Colin said: "Yes, Messieurs [here his tone became solemn], I do not mind repeating it here once more: the words 'I was the mainstay of the new-born Church; I shall be again at the end of time', served us, in the very earliest days of the Society, as a foundation and an encouragement. They were always before us. We worked in that direction, so to speak" (FS, doc. 152). Colin referred us here to the very first years after the 1816 promise at Fourvière. He gave us a glimpse of the image that gave birth to the Society of Mary. Through this image, a person spoke. Mary touched the hearts of young people whose whole lives lay before them. She called them by name and invited them to the exciting task of starting the Church over again.

For the words "I was the mainstay of the new-born Church; I shall be again at the end of time" are the anchor point of two basic ingredients of Marist spirituality: call and mission. The call means that as a Marist I gradually become aware that I have been favored since the beginning; Mary chose me to be a member of her family. I was the beneficiary of a gracious choice, a graceful choice, a gratuitous choice. When Mary says to me: "I was the mainstay of the new-born Church; I shall be again at the end of time", she recognizes in me her favorite child (what child does not feel his mother's favorite?). But Mary calls me in order to entrust me with a task. One enters the Society of Mary in order to do the work of Mary. What is this work? To be for the end-time Church what Mary was for the new-born Church, namely its mainstay. To start the Church anew is not a mission Marists take up on their own. It is a task that Mary entrusts to them.

What will this task consist in? What can this mean, to start the Church again today, to be the

mainstay of the Church of the end of time? We shall discover it as we see how Mary was the mainstay of the new-born Church. But then the Acts of the Apostles, which precisely tell the story of the birth of the Church, mention Mary only once. How shall we get an idea of what it means to be the mainstay of the Church? By doing just what the first Marists did. Namely, by wondering at that silence. After all, Mary was the mother of Jesus. Why are we told nothing about her? With a spiritual tradition that reaches far back, Colin replies: Because she managed not to be talked about.

Hidden and Unknown in the world

This brings us to the second gateway into Marist spirituality: Hidden and unknown in the world. To withdraw, not to be seen. Is not that a strange way of starting the Church anew? What a marvelous excuse for doing nothing! How easily these words can cover fear and laziness. Let us not think we are the first to be taken aback by such a negative Marist watchword. It was misinterpreted from the start. Let us not sidestep it for all that. Colin insists: "The whole spirit of the Society is there" (FS, doc. 152).

In a chapter of the constitutions where Colin explained to Marists how they were to fulfill the aims of the Society of Mary, namely serving God and saving souls, he wrote:

For the same reasons and so as to remove all obstacles to greater fruit in the vineyard of the Lord, let them everywhere show themselves humble of heart and let them behave in all with such prudence and especially modesty, giving no one cause for vituperation, that, following close in the footsteps of the blessed Virgin Mary, while they may, and insofar as they can they must, spend themselves in whatever ministry for the salvation of souls, still they are to seem, as it were, hidden and unknown in the world (e, 21).

Colin was speaking to priests who practiced their ministry mostly in the pulpit and in the confessional. These two pieces of furniture are not much used any more, but they then served to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Times have changed, not so the good news, and still less the need to hear it, nor the obstacles that stand in the way of greater fruit in the vineyard of the Lord. These obstacles may reside in the heart of the hearer, but Marists are concerned with those that reside in their own heart, namely a tendency to show off, looking after one's own interests, arrogance, trust in one's own abilities. Following close in the footsteps of the blessed Virgin Mary, being like her the mainstay of the church as it rises from the ground, means that Marists see to it that they are never an obstacle to the good news. Not to take too much room. Not to draw attention to oneself. Always to pay attention to the person who stands before me, to seek that person's good, to be sensitive not only to her needs, but to her allergies as well, not to provoke her to resist the word of God. This is what Colin called being humble of heart, behaving with prudence and modesty, giving no one cause for vituperation.

Yes, such attitudes suppose a lot of self-control, a lot of reticence, of attention, of silence. Does it mean that one is invited to stand there and do nothing? Just the opposite. Marists use all the available means to proclaim the good news of salvation. They work hard. They put all their talents to good use. They cannot rest in peace as long as one of these little ones is lost in the cold and in darkness. The same tenderness and compassion that moved Jesus move them also.

Marists appear unknown and hidden in the world. Like Mary, they do not draw attention to themselves because they have learned from Colin and the early Marists how to put all their talent and their energy at the service of the good news while at the same time detecting in themselves all that can prevent the good news from reaching their sisters and brothers.

Nazareth

The third gateway into Marist spirituality is the house of Nazareth. On 25 July 1870, when Colin was eighty years old, he said: "I place myself in the house of Nazareth and from there I see all I have to do" (OM, doc. 839, § 38). On the same day, his secretary, Father Jeantin, had noted down

his words in those terms. Father David, Jeantin's colleague, repeated it many years later in the following words: "As for me, when I am debating on a course of action, I place myself mentally in the house of Nazareth. I seem to see a light coming out of there which enlightens my path; I see immediately what I need to do" (quoted in OM 3, p. 531, note 1).

In October 1833, Colin spent a week in Loreto and he said mass six times in the house of the blessed Virgin. Thus, placing himself in the house of Nazareth recalled a very concrete memory. But it was a spiritual process on which these words of Colin throw some light: "For me, I place myself alone before God. When I feel happy and at peace and relaxed with regard to the course of action I intend to take, then I go ahead" (quoted in Coste, Nazareth, Acta S. M., vol. 6, p. 363). For Colin, placing oneself in the house of Nazareth and placing oneself alone before God are two different ways of saying the same thing. I place myself so that I can concentrate my attention on God and what God wants and I do not let myself be swayed by what draws me away from him, whether it be my urge to show off, my ambition, or my fear of what people will say.

Such an effort to be attentive to God is not closed in on itself. It aims at throwing light on what I am going to do. And first of all on what I am going to decide, which way I am going to go. The mindset that Nazareth symbolizes means that I place myself in such a setting that the world appears to me as it does to Mary. When I place myself where Mary stands, what does the day-to-day world look like? Colin described that same mindset in the first paragraph of the article on the spirit of the Society of Mary. After recalling the link between bearing Mary's name and imbibing her spirit, he concluded abruptly: "and so they must think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things, otherwise they will be unworthy and degenerate sons (C, 49). In other words, if you call yourselves Marist and do not behave accordingly, you are not worthy of the name.

2. How will Marist spirituality help me in my work as an educator?

After this brief incursion into the world of Marist spirituality, I wonder with you how Marist spirituality can help you in your work as Marist educators. You will not need it to be better teachers of physics, of swimming, or of dancing. If we talk about behavior and human relations, the answer is not quite so easy. But I want to limit myself to the religious field. As Marist educators, you cannot ignore it completely. One way or another, and this will vary from one country to another, your schools are Catholic schools.

Inevitably, the topics of God, Jesus Christ, the Church will come up. Will belonging to the Marist world help you broach them in a way that might more effectively reach the young people entrusted to your care?

A few months ago, I presided at the funeral of a forty-six year old mother who was the victim of a malignant brain tumor. Teresa, as I will call her, left her husband and four children aged from twenty to fourteen. The ceremony took place in a beautiful church built in the fifties, with stained glass windows and with inscriptions spelling out the tenets of the Catholic faith. Beautiful singing and organ music accompanied the movements of the priest at the altar. Of the several hundred people attending, most probably set foot in a church only on such occasions. But everything was taking place in a dignified and respectful manner. After ten minutes, the eldest daughter of the deceased stood up, said a few words to her father and marched out; six or seven of her friends followed her out. I carried on as though nothing had taken place. I knew that Monique, as I shall call her, is a self-proclaimed anarchist, and I found out later that as she rose she told her father: "All that stuff makes me puke" (I am softening her language). I saw there the clamorous expression of a feeling which may not always be as virulent, but which is widely spread, certainly here in Quebec, and probably also in your countries, with regard to religion in general and the Catholic religion in particular.

Your pupils, I know, are not twenty yet, but they are growing up in a climate where religion is not much more than folklore. In Quebec, the parents of most of your pupils are at least indifferent toward a religion that they experienced or that was presented to them as oppressive, especially in the field of sexuality. In the United States, according to a text that Father Leon had me read recently, the attitude of young Catholics toward their religion ranges from indifference to rejection.

I do not know about the situation in Mexico. In any case, while sociological data are valuable, we can ignore them when considering our question, namely how will Marist spirituality help us speak about God? Whether the children were or were not brought up in the practice of their faith, there will always come a time when they will need to answer personally the question: Who is God for me? At the time of their baptism, the priest asked their parents: Do you believe in God the Father, do you believe in Jesus Christ his Son, do you believe in the Holy Spirit and in the holy Catholic church? And their parents answered for them. Today, they alone can answer yes or no.

The following part of my talk is an attempt, a challenge I set myself: how will belonging to the Marist world help an educator talk about God, Jesus Christ, the Church?

Marist spirituality and God talk

Whenever I speak of God, I refer to the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and not, as Pascal would say, "of philosophers and scholars". We hardly know any longer what believing in the God of their ancestors could mean for the Jewish people. They lived in a world awash with gods of all kinds. They were surrounded by people for whom thunder, lightning, the wind, rain, the sun were gods. And these were difficult gods, who needed to be appeased at all cost if the crops were to grow and if the cattle were to escape epidemics. They were demanding gods, to whom one had to immolate what one held most precious, including one's children.

In affirming their belief in the God of their ancestors, the people of Israel said no to these religions. They said no to human sacrifices. For them, these gods were nothing. At least, so they said. For this is not as easy as it sounds. It is always very tempting not to make a complete break with the forces of nature. After all, if it does not rain, what are we going to eat? But God is a jealous God: "Do not follow other gods, gods of the peoples around you, for the Lord your God who dwells among you is a jealous God" (Dt 6:14-15a). The Old Testament has kept track of the long and difficult dialogue between God and his people. Faith in God the Father, creator of heaven and earth, evolved through this tortuous path.

Knowledge of Colin and of the spirit he taught Marists will facilitate in two ways, for you and for your pupils, entrance into the world of the Old Testament. In order to dare believe in the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, we must stand up to the world surrounding us. For the Jews, this meant standing up to the worshippers of Baal and Astarte. For us, it means standing up to the worshippers of money, of prestige, of fashion. The Jewish people often prostituted themselves with their neighbors' idols, but the prophets always reminded them of the covenant which made them strangers among the peoples. The opening words of the oldest profession of faith of Israel say: "My father was a wandering Aramaean" (Dt 26, 5). You have here an important link to the Marist spirit. Marists are called upon to consider themselves as "exiles and travelers upon the earth" (C, 50). An educator who is filled with the Marist spirit is already in harmony with a key aspect of faith in God: he is not dazzled by this passing world.

The Marist spirit will ease your entry into the world of the Old Testament in another way, namely through the person of Mary. She came directly out of that world. She was its finest flower. The long road her people travelled leads up to the song wherein she revealed herself. That song provides you with a model for talking about God. Learn to talk about God like Mary, learn to sing with her: "The Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name", and you will give your pupils their best chance to meet him in truth.

"But you, who do you say I am?"

It took Israel century upon century to move from the God of their tribe, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to God as creator of heaven and earth. The disciples of Jesus did not take as much time to acknowledge in him the Son of God, but the distance they had to cover was just as great. Between the moment when Jesus called Simon and Andrew beside the lake until the transfiguration, they had already travelled a long way. Who was this man with power over the evil spirits, who was the Lord of the sabbath, who gave a dead child back to its mother alive? When

Jesus asked: "But you, who do you say I am", Peter was in a position to reply: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" (Mt 16:15-16). But when a servant-girl accused the same Peter of being with Jesus the Galilean, the one condemned to death, he swore: "I do not know the man" (Mt 26:69-72). It took the full power of the Spirit of God for Peter to be able to proclaim: "God raised this man Jesus to life" (Ac 2:32). The first believers sang: "He was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names (Phil 2:8-9). This is the name three times holy, which the Jews never utter out loud and which we utter so easily: the Lord. Jesus, dead and raised from the dead, seated at the right hand of God, the Word of God made flesh.

If the apostles, and we ourselves, needed to travel such a long distance to move from Jesus of Nazareth to the Lord who is seated at the right hand of God, we must not be surprised if children and teenagers lose their way. Still, they need to be initiated into their Catholic faith, but we realize what a challenge we all face. Here I suggest something very simple: learn from Mary how to speak about Jesus. Who knows him better? And especially, who can speak of him better? But here we are faced with a paradox: Mary never spoke of him. Still, in a sense, we have something better. Thanks to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we see how she behaved with Jesus. Since the birth of her child, she pondered all these things in her heart. She too needed plenty of time and plenty of grief before she understood why Jesus had to be in the temple, busy with his Father's affairs rather than with her and Joseph. After he left the house and his brothers thought he was out of his mind, she went with them to fetch him (Mk 3:21,32). John tells us that she stood near the cross of Jesus (Jn 19:25). And after Jesus ascended to heaven, Luke lists her among those who gathered in Jerusalem, in the upper room, joined in continuous prayer (Ac 1:14). Let us learn to walk with her, like her let us try and understand who is this son she gave birth to and whom the world will put to death, but in whom the Spirit of God will lead us to acknowledge the son of God. To walk with Mary means seeking with her, praying with her while we await the coming of the Spirit. It means living in the Church.

The Church of God which is in Corinth

The Church exists in a place. It is in Mexico City, in Atlanta, in Detroit, in Quebec City. No matter where it is, it is always the Church of God, the assembly called by God so that he may address his people. In the Old Testament, the Tent of Meeting is the place where God speaks to Moses for the people. In the New Testament, the Tent of Meeting is Jesus himself. God speaks to his people through Jesus: "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him". Right after the death of Jesus, the Church starts off, and Jesus is with her. She is on the way to Emmaus, downhearted, not understanding a thing, and lo and behold, Jesus walks with her, explains to her that the will of God is revealed in his death, and he invites her to his table. Ever since then, the church goes from one place to another. Wherever she settles, the presence of God manifests itself. God makes himself present there as the death and resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed and believers are invited to the Lord's table. Of course, the faith speaks the local tongue. The Church speaks the tongue of those who make it up. Such is the great challenge: the Church one and universal proclaims the same good news to all, but in a language that suits women and men of all colors, all cultures, all mentalities.

Because she has been everywhere, because she has been around for so many centuries, the Church has accumulated innumerable treasures (the Chartres cathedral, Gregorian chant) and also much dead weight (empty churches, whole libraries in Latin). Because she welcomes people as they are, the Church is rich with all our gifts, but she also bears the weight of all our sins. All the bad things people say about the Church are true, as are all the good things. That does not prevent her from being the place where Jesus Christ makes himself present. What Jesus was on the roads of Galilee, he is also, through the Church, in Mexico City, in Atlanta, in Detroit, in Quebec City. There he lives, he teaches, he suffers, he dies, he rises from the dead. There he makes God present, there he feeds people with his flesh and blood. To speak of God means to speak of Jesus Christ; to speak of Jesus Christ means to speak of the Church. Which puts us back before our pupils, their parents, our colleagues. With their biases, their indifference, their ignorance.

How will Mary be of help to us? How will knowing her better be of use to us? How will Marist spirituality help us speak about the Church? That is a bad way to put it. Let us ask rather how Mary will help us be the Church. Now Marist spirituality is a big help. It invites us precisely to situate ourselves as Mary situates herself. But Mary is a member of the assembly. She is a believer. She prays with the others. With them she receives the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit enables her to understand how God reveals himself in Jesus. As you see, it is not so much a matter of speaking, of preaching, of trying to convince others. It is a matter of learning to read the signs of God's presence among us: the word, water, bread and wine, oil, and also the hungry to be fed, the prisoners and the sick to be visited. More concretely, in your case, you will learn from Mary how to see in your pupils the Lord Jesus himself as he is growing up.

Just in case I should feel I have just made a big discovery, I remind myself that I am simply catching up to a very ancient teaching tradition. Christian educators had long ago extended the scene of the last judgment to include children among those of whom the king declares: "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

This brings me back to my friend Monique, who clamorously refused to have anything to do with the funeral ritual in honor of her mother. When I see her before me, not at twenty, but a few years earlier, when she is only twelve or fifteen but already a rebel or in revolt, how will I behave with her? Will my status as a Marist educator enlighten and encourage me in my work? I firmly believe so. When I know that I am called by Mary to be a member of her family and to share in her work, I know that I can count on her to be my model and my support. Mary will guide me in my dealings with Monique and will remain at my side in the difficult moments.

I indicated what Marist spirituality is and how it can help you in your task as educators. It remains for me to suggest how you can enter this spirituality and make it your own.

3. Appropriating Marist Spirituality

How does one enter the world of Marist tradition? The road that our founders travelled can serve as our model. This consists of three stages, which may be linked to three place names: Fourvière as a symbol of commitment to the Society of Mary, Cerdon where one enters more deeply into the spiritual dimension of Marist tradition, and Bugey which connotes that tradition's apostolic dimension.

Fourvière: commitment

For Marists, Fourvière means a place and a date. The place is in Lyons, on a hill above the city where a chapel has been standing since the twelfth century in honor of the Virgin Mary. The date is 23 July 1816. On that day, at Fourvière, twelve young men signed a pledge whereby they committed themselves to founding "the most pious congregation of Mariists". Most of them had been ordained priests the previous day for the diocese of Lyons, but they were planning to settle as soon as possible in Le Puy, another Marian shrine where Jean-Claude Courveille had heard Mary say to him: "I want a society that will bear my name". Among those who signed the pledge were Étienne Déclas and Étienne Terrailon, as well as Marcellin Champagnat and Jean-Claude Colin. Of the twelve who signed, these were the only four who twenty years later were among the first twenty members of the Society of Mary. Meanwhile, however, Marcellin Champagnat had founded the Marist Brothers, Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn had founded the Marist Sisters, and there also existed groups of lay Marists.

The Fourvière pledge took place in one moment, but it was the fruit of a lengthy search and it was meant to last a long time, a whole lifetime as a matter of fact. The more that pledge responds to a deep attraction in us, the longer it will last. As with the first Marists, the name and the person of Mary draw us, and we can see in that a sign that Mary calls us to join her family. You would probably not be here if the name Marist held no attraction for you. This attraction might be weak at first, but it can become stronger. The first Marists made it a point to remind themselves of Mary's love for them. Take the trouble to know Mary better, such as she appears in the gospel, but also

such as she manifests herself in your lives. You don't need an apparition for that. The Marists you know are, I dare hope, eloquent reminders of her motherly presence.

However, when you agree to call yourselves Marist, your commitment is not to the past, but to the future. Mary calls you in order to entrust you with a mission. She calls you to a grandiose task, to start the Church again. It is a foolish undertaking, of course. Who are we to dare think that the Church needs to be started again and that we are perfectly suited for that task? Well, here is our excuse: it is not a task we took upon ourselves. Mary herself laid it on us. It is not our work, but hers. The Church always needs to be started over again because Mary cannot tolerate even one of her children not finding room in it. As long as the Church will not have done all that needs doing to reach and welcome those who are still outside in the cold and the dark, Mary cannot be at peace. Whoever takes on the name Marist also takes on Mary's concern and pledges to do all that is necessary to make Mary's dream come true.

Cerdon: six years of extreme sweetness

Fourvière symbolizes the moment of commitment, Cerdon the long years of maturing. Once we start walking along the Marist path, we discover little by little the world we are entering. Colin always kept in mind Mary's words: "I was the mainstay of the new-born Church; I shall be again at the end of time". These words, he said, "served us, in the very earliest days of the Society, as a foundation and an encouragement. They were always before us. We worked in that direction, so to speak" (FS, doc. 152). These words grounded Colin's certainty that the idea came from God, that it was not the passing enthusiasm of young men. For Colin, this certainty was a grace, a favor. It filled him with a joy that transformed him into a new man. Strangely enough, this sense of happiness led him to write for Marists an extremely stern rule. What is the link between the six years of extreme sweetness and the demands of the Cerdon rule? In a sense, it is very simple: his vision of a Church that would be an image of Mary is so luminous that it brings out whatever tarnishes that image. With time, Colin understood that bodily penances are far less important than being wary of all that resembles pride, greed, or ambition.

Taking the time to live in Cerdon means taking all the time necessary to work in the direction of Mary's words: "I was the mainstay of the new-born Church; I shall be again at the end of time". This means, on the one hand, allowing myself to be taken by the vision of a Church whose mainstay is Mary, letting myself be invaded by the certainty that God wants the Society of Mary and that I am called to take part in Mary's work. On the other hand, it means allowing God's light to pinpoint in me whatever would hinder that work, all that leads me to seek my own interest rather than that of the Kingdom, to put myself forward at the expense of the good of others. In Marist formation, the Cerdon stage is that of apprenticeship to prayer and asceticism. In prayer, I learn to taste God; through asceticism, under the light of God's word and with the help of his Holy Spirit, I learn to unveil in me all that prevents me from becoming a good instrument of God's mercy.

Bugey: instruments of God's mercy

Fourvière is a hill, Cerdon is a village, Bugey is the region in France to which Cerdon belongs. During the course of four winters, Jean-Claude Colin and Étienne went to small mountain villages where they would stay three or four weeks, preaching parish retreats or missions. Twenty years later, as Colin recalled that work, he said: "Ah no indeed, I know of no greater pleasure, of nothing on earth which can be compared to the happiness of a priest who sees souls coming burdened with sins to cast themselves weeping at his feet, their hearts full of contrition, and then rising again intoxicated, wild with joy to the point of waiting for their confessor in the street and even kissing his feet in the mud — as happened to me once during a mission" (FS, doc. 171, § 1).

Colin lived in a world very different from ours. We no longer call sin the weight which burdens many youngsters and adults. Still, tension and worry kill many people's joy of living. Among teachers, an excess of fatigue, money worries, conflicts at work or at home can lead to burnouts. Children and teenagers face different dangers: the fear of not being like their peers, failure at

school or in love, the plague of drugs, a botched introduction to sexuality.

A Marist educator cannot remain indifferent to this suffering. Learning to bear Mary's name means learning to make a link between the person of Mary and the people in pain whom I encounter. When I commit myself at Fourvière under Mary's name, I make mine her desire to be the mainstay of the Church. I commit myself to working at making the Church, the community of believers, respond fully to its mission of making present to all the merciful love of God revealed in Jesus. The lengthy Cerdon endeavor shapes me into a worthy instrument of God's mercy by freeing me of all that prevents me from reaching those who feel farthest from God. The apprenticeship symbolized by the missions in Bugey leads me to make mine the compassion which moved Jesus when he saw the misery of his people. Like him, I do not hesitate to leave behind the ninety nine sheep to go looking for the lost one. As for him and as for Mary and for Colin, the joy of seeing a child or a colleague find again a taste for living is greater than any other joy.

Conclusion

In making your own the riches of Marist tradition, you will make your own the spiritual wisdom of Jean-Claude Colin, of Jeanne-Marie Chavoin, of Marcellin Champagnat, and of the many Marists, religious or not, who lived out their baptism while bearing Mary's name, making Mary their model and their strength, devoting their energy to doing Mary's work, living in Mary's spirit. You will also make yours the treasure of holiness built up by these Marists throughout their life in the service of others. More specifically, you will make yours the wisdom and the holiness of Marist educators. The Marist tradition in education should be better known. You enrich it every day by your work. You will contribute even more effectively to it by entering more deeply into the Marist spirituality. By studying it, but more so by practicing it. Set up Marist groups in your schools. In the meantime, make it a habit, every morning and evening, to do what Marists have been doing since the beginning: say three Hail Mary's plus the oldest prayer to Mary: "We turn to you for protection, holy Mother of God. Listen to our prayers and help us in our needs. Save us from every danger, glorious and blessed Virgin". Keep reminding yourselves that you are bearing Mary's name and you will learn to make yours her spirit. Thanks to you, Mary's promise will come true in Marist schools: "I was the mainstay of the new-born Church; I shall be again at the end of time".

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