

Chapter 12

Reorganizing things

During the Marist retreat that took place in Belley from 21 to 28 September 1841 it was agreed that the Superior General, Jean-Claude Colin, would drop his plan to resign, take a prolonged rest in Belley and work there on the constitutions of the Society of Mary. He first returned to Lyon to take care of current business and to be present at the departure of the sixth group of missionaries to Oceania with Father Jean Forest as superior. It was not until the end of November that he actually moved to Belley. From that day work on the constitutions took up most of his time until April 1842. He then presided at the first general chapter of the Society from 18 to 25 April. On 29 May he left for Rome where he stayed until 28 August.

The constitutions had to determine the contour of the Marist order. But, at the same time and interwoven with it, Colin had to set the stage for the expansion of the missions in the Pacific. In *A Mission Too Far...Pacific Commitment*¹ it is shown that the founding of the Society and the start of the Oceania missions were closely connected and that the two stories had to be told together. To some extent the same applies to the writing of the Society's constitutions and the reconfiguration of the missions five years later. The present chapter deals with these two processes in the period November 1841 to August 1842.

As a prelude we have to become acquainted with the Founder's earlier work on the constitutions.

The Cerdon Rule 1822

When in July 1816, a few weeks before his 26th birthday, Jean-Claude Colin was preparing himself in the Major Seminary of Lyon for priestly ordination, his brother Pierre (30) six years a priest and in charge of the small parish of Salles en Beaujolais went to Lyon. Would his shy and diffident younger brother be able to stand on his own feet? He approached the Vicar General and suggested that his brother be appointed as his curate. The Archdiocese of Lyon must have shared his unease. Pierre was asked to take Jean-Claude along as his curate and move with him to a bigger parish in the same Beaujolais region. After a few weeks together in Salles they moved to Cerdon.²

A short time later Jean-Claude spoke to his brother of the Marist project started by Jean-Claude Courveille among the seminarians in Saint-Irénée and sealed by their common pledge on 23 July before the statue of Our Lady of Fourvière. Pierre was enthusiastic and joined the group. He invited Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn and Marie Jotillon, parishioners from his former parish Coutouvre whom he knew to be thinking of religious life, to join them in Cerdon for the founding of the Marist Sisters. That made Cerdon a Marist community with two priests and a few Sisters. In later years Jean-Claude claimed that the first years in Cerdon made another man of him.³ He developed into an excellent

¹ Jan Snijders, *A Mission Too Far...Pacific Commitment* (Hindmarsh SA: Australasian Theological Forum, ATF, 2012), 27-9.

² Donal Kerr, *Jean-Claude Colin, Marist*, (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2000), 143-6.

³ Kerr, *Colin*, 143-59.

speaker and warm-hearted pastor. He continued his extensive reading of the spiritual authors of the previous century and ‘experienced an extraordinary serenity of soul.’⁴

Encouraged by his brother and Jeanne-Marie Chavoin, Jean-Claude began putting on paper how he saw the Marist way to holiness, in fact the first Marist constitutions. Jean-Claude Colin had not been the initiator of the Marist project, he had not coined its name. The first orientations and ideals he had received from Courveille but he did take the initiative to write the Society’s constitutions. He later recalled working on them through the night, sometimes until four in the morning.⁵

During those same years Jean-Claude Courveille himself, the initiator of the Marist movement, had three pastoral appointments: Verrières (1816-1817), Rive de Gier (1817-1819) and Epercieux (1819-1824). He cannot have had very frequent contacts with the two Colins or the other prospective Marists dispersed over the huge Archdiocese of Lyon but all the time he saw himself as the superior. In January 1822 Courveille visited Cerdon and became acquainted with Colin’s draft constitutions. On 25 January the three felt sure enough of themselves to present their project to Pope Pius VII with the mention of constitutions ready to be submitted. Their letter presents the ‘Society of Mary’ by using some phrases of Saint Ignatius that they knew from Jesuit spiritual writers.

Courveille had always been convinced of the supernatural origin of his vision for the Society of Mary. Jean-Claude Colin had written the constitutions in a period of extraordinary serenity of soul, carried along by irresistible waves of inner joy and enlightenment. He too was convinced that the constitutions could not possibly have been just his own. Only through special graces from on high, so he believed, could he have formulated so well the heights of holiness that the Marist was called to strive for. They felt entitled, even obliged, to acknowledge the supernatural inspiration that they believed had led them, as they wrote to the Pope: ‘We have the constitutions from no book or no other constitutions. We hope to submit them to Your Holiness and we wish to make fully known to you from where we have them.’ The letter is signed by Courveille and the two Colins.⁶

We know Courveille as a strong personality, very conscious of his leadership role and inclined to seeking control over other people. It is inconceivable that Courveille would have adopted Colin’s draft so readily, had it not been faithful to his original vision, even though Colin had included elements from his own spiritual readings and burgeoning ideals.⁷ They received an encouraging letter from Pope Pius VII suggesting they go and see the papal Nuncio in Paris.⁸ Though the letter was addressed to him, Courveille did not go himself but sent Jean-Claude. Evidently, Courveille had become an admirer of Jean-Claude, who in turn looked up to Courveille as his spiritual guide.

In 1826 Courveille disgraced himself through gross misconduct and was dismissed from the Archdiocese.⁹ Jean-Claude Colin never spoke about the traumatic shock it must have been for him. Still, he never dropped the basic themes of Courveille’s original

⁴ Kerr, *Colin*, 159.

⁵ Jean Coste, SM, Gaston Lessard, SM and Séan Fagan, SM (eds), *Antiquiores Textus Constitutionum Societatis Mariae* (Rome: Marist Fathers, 1955), volume 1, 5.

⁶ Jean Coste, and Gaston Lessard (eds), *Origines Maristes* (Rome: Marist Fathers, 1960) volume 1, doc 69.

⁷ For instance the famous *ignoti et quasi occulti*, and the recommendations on how to hold councils in the Society. Coste, *Antiquiores* 1, 15. Kerr, *Colin*, 162-72.

⁸ Coste, *Origines* 1, doc 74.

⁹ Kerr, *Colin*, 216-9.

Marist vision, such as ‘Mary the Support of the New-Born Church and Again at the End of Time’¹⁰ and the Society having ‘several branches’¹¹ but he attributed them always anonymously to ‘a priest’. He never even mentioned Courveille’s name any more.

In the same perspective, Marist writings have tended to downplay the Courveille components in the Cerdon constitutions and in the Marist spiritual tradition. Also, most of the information we have on the earliest period comes from things Colin told his secretaries nearly fifty years later, around 1870, when the origins of the Society had become a contentious issue and, at eighty years of age, his memory was weakening.

In later days Colin often quoted the phrase ‘from no other book or no other constitutions’ from the letter to Pius VII but its meaning shifted to suggest that, besides the vaguely supernatural origins of the constitutions, the Cerdon text was not Courveille’s, which in fact it must have been a little more than Colin later wished to remember.¹² We shall never be sure.

Jean-Claude Colin made two visits to the Nuncio in Paris. The constitutions he presented at his second visit must have been a Latin version of the French original. The Nuncio was very impressed but as to an eventual approbation he could only refer Colin back to Rome. It took ten years before that came about.

In the same year 1822 the Archdiocese of Lyon was divided. Courveille found himself in the Archdiocese of Lyon and the two Colins in the Diocese of Belley where the new Bishop Devie was so pleased with the zealous Marists that in October 1824 he moved Étienne Déclas, another Marist from seminary days, to Cerdon from where the Marists began in the Bugey hills the parish missions they saw as their core apostolate.

We can be sure that for some time after 1826 Colin put aside the constitutions that reminded him so much of Courveille. In any case he soon became a very busy man. In 1829 the Bishop of Belley put him at the head of the Minor Seminary. In 1830 the Marist groups of the two dioceses came together and elected Jean-Claude Colin to be their ‘central superior’, a coordinator rather, to take Courveille’s place. He agreed to take it on until he would be able to submit the Marist project to the Pope.

It was not until 1833 that Colin got the opportunity to present the outlines of the Society of Mary to the new Pope, Gregory XVI. All those years he cannot have done much work on the constitutions and the text he took to Rome will therefore basically still have been the Cerdon rule or something very close to it. When, in 1833, in Rome, he came to see that it was too long and too detailed, he quickly made a Summary to put before Cardinal Castruccio Castracane, the man in charge of such matters. Fortunately this text has been preserved: it is the oldest Marist constitutions we have.

The Summary Rule 1834

The Summary opens as follows:

¹⁰ Jean Coste (ed), *Entretiens Spirituels*, translated by Anthony Ward, *A Founder Speaks* (Rome: Marist Fathers, 1975), doc 4. Mayet, *Mémoires*, Ms, APM (= Marist Fathers Archives, Rome), 5, 391-2. Cf. Jean Coste, ‘Historical Commentary on the Constitutions of the Society of Mary’, in *Acta Societatis Mariae*, volume 5, number 26, 263-81.

¹¹ Coste, *A Founder Speaks*, doc 2.

¹² Was this one of the things that made Colin burn his early papers when, in 1841, he decided to resign?

The project of founding this Society was several years ago already taken up by several clergy of the Dioceses of Belley and Lyon in France and, after consulting advisors and confessors, twelve of them came together in Lyon in the year 1816 in a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary where, after celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of Mass, they dedicated themselves in unanimous accord to pursue the plan they had formed.

Since that time, although separated from each other and involved in ministry for the salvation of souls, several of them persevered in their commitment with the firm hope that one day the Will of God would lead to fulfill their desire. They took the step to openly submit their whole plan to several Bishops and on 25 January 1822 they humbly wrote a short letter to that effect to the Supreme Pontiff Pius VII who on 9 March of the same year deigned to respond with an encouraging letter.

Having patiently overcome manifold difficulties they have already begun, with the consent of their local Bishops, the following undertakings:

1° A Society of Priests engaged in missions among rural people in the Dioceses of Belley and Lyon as well the direction of the Minor Seminary of Belley.

2° A Society of Lay-Brothers who have already two novitiates and who teach in numerous schools in parishes.

3° A community of Sisters situated mainly in the town of Belley.

4° Confraternities of lay-people living our life in the world who share in the spiritual benefits of the whole Society and are already active in the town of Belley.

The Society as conceived from the beginning and in existence as described comprises several orders (*ordines*): 1° the order of Priests; 2° the order of Lay-Brothers; 3° the order of religious Sisters; 4° the Confraternities of lay-people living in the world (*in saeculo*).¹³

After this introduction there are four chapters, one for each of the ‘orders’, describing their way of life, their apostolic works and governance. The chapter on the priests is by far the longest (94 numbers). Chapter two deals in seven numbers with the Marist Brothers (*Fratres qui Maristae nuncupantur*) and chapter three in six numbers with the Sisters. Five short numbers describe in chapter four the members, men and women, living ‘in the world’ Secular priests too can be members. A sixth chapter describes the general government of the Society as follows:

The whole Society of Mary is governed by a Superior General from whom all the various orders of the Society depend like branches from their trunk and from whom they derive life and movement so as to preserve the unity in the Society, in which they are bound together as Mary’s children by mutual

¹³ Coste, *Antiquiores* 1, pp 65-6, numbers 1-5.

charity like members of one family.

The Superior General is elected for life by the priests from among the priests and he is assisted by priest consultors. The sixth and last chapter, on the temporal goods, allows each community to own what is absolutely necessary. Surplus goods of any of the 'orders' are handed to the Superior to help another community or order in need.

The text ends with the humble request for the Pope to allow the Society to accept postulants, to elect a Superior General and to make religious vows of which the Superior General could dispense if necessary.¹⁴

A mortifying experience

Colin first gave the Summary to Pope Pius VII who passed it to the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars. There would have been several visits to the Congregation's offices but when finally Colin got to see the Prefect, Castruccio Castracane, the Cardinal rejected it with undiplomatic vigour. A religious order comprising congregations of priests, brothers, sisters and a third order for laity, all under one superior general with extraordinary powers? 'Gigantic and monstrous' he called it. He argued that such a vast order risked alerting the virulent anticlericalism of governments, an objection Colin laughed off pointing to the minute size of the actual Marist groups. The Cardinal could not argue from canon law either because orders comprising priests, lay-brothers, sisters and third orders were not unknown in the Church. Why then this rude rejection?

The real reason must have been the other-worldliness of it all. An idealistic description of what saints should be like perhaps, but barely a realistic understanding of how to keep such an unwieldy group together and govern it. Ten years later, while with Colin in Rome in 1842, the mission secretary Victor Poupinel after listening for hours to the stories of the 1833 visit, wrote: 'the Cardinal was convinced that a Society organized in this way just would not work.'¹⁵ The constitutions describe the Society as one of saints while Castracane expected constitutions to lay down how the Society could function if by chance they were not. Colin saw the ideal Superior General as described in the Summary, the fountain from which all others draw life and inspiration. Little provision for the intern governance of the Brothers and the Sisters, and of any role in running the Society as a whole. One can imagine a consultor chuckling at the idea of brothers and sisters gladly handing their little savings to a priest superior general surrounded only by priest advisors!

The rejection threw Colin into confusion but in spite of it all Castracane and Colin had long talks; they got to like and admire each other. Castracane saw a deeply spiritual man. Colin found a friend. Castracane made Colin understand that administration was the weak point of the rejected text. It explains his joy when around the same time he discovered in a Roman library a copy of the Jesuit rule of Saint Ignatius and he immediately set to borrowing parts of it, especially those concerning administration.¹⁶ Finding the Jesuit rule may have given Colin a little trust again in the feasibility of composing constitutions but the confidence with which he had begun writing a good

¹⁴ Coste, *Antiquiores* 1, p 84, number 114-5.

¹⁵ Coste, *Origines* 2, doc 544, 12.

¹⁶ Coste, *Origines* 3, doc 814, 8. Kerr, *Colin*, 268.

fifteen years earlier in Cerdon had received a blow. From then on it became a chore, always on the horizon, always put off again.

The kindness of the Cardinal deceived Colin in thinking the approbation of the Society would come in due time and he returned to France leaving his interests in the hands of Paul Trinchant, a French priest in Rome. On 31 January 1834 Castracane put the matter to the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars with a negative advice and in a sarcastic tone. He called the project a monstrosity (*un impianto mostruoso*) and no doubt thinking of the man he had been dealing with, he added: we all know how difficult superiors general find it to run one religious institute, let alone three at the time. With the mention of a few other questionable points there could be no doubt as to which way the decision would go. The Congregation followed the Prefect's recommendation and turned down the request for approbation.¹⁷

Some people in the Curia even found the Bishops of Belley and Lyon should be censured for having tolerated such a mad-hare scheme but Castracane would not have it. Fortunately Trinchant had a friend in the Curia, probably a Mgr Crociani, and heard about it. When curial officials got around to write to the Bishops of Lyon and Belley and the letters were ready for dispatch, Trinchant entered a new and slightly different request which meant new consultations and adjustments to the already signed letters: nothing more apt to throw a well ordered bureaucracy into disarray! At this point somebody buried the map in the archives of the Sacred Congregation, where they still are. Trinchant told nobody and nobody in France knew. The Marists, still hoping for a favourable decision never got an answer¹⁸ and continued blissfully with their apostolates.

The Epitome Rule 1836

Back home Colin set to rewrite the Marist constitutions along Jesuit lines but he had not get very far when the offer of the Oceania missions changed the game. Colin felt that running a mission in constant negotiation with two bishops in France was impossible: the Society had to become of pontifical right first. He was in a strong position, the Pope would not sign before Colin had formally accepted, the Curia was anxious to get the mission started and the Marists had a team and a team leader on offer. Regular procedure was that papal approbation of an institute entailed approval of its constitutions. At that point Cardinal Sala, now Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, waived protocol and agreed to grant the priests of the Society pontifical status without previous approval of the constitutions. This decision was confirmed in the official Decree of 11 March 1836 with the adjoining note that the Congregation reserved the right to approve the constitutions at a later date.¹⁹

Colin was delighted. The Society of Mary had obtained pontifical status, at least for the branch of the priests, and without having to get constitutions approved! He expressed his satisfaction to Vicar General Cholleton. He had, so he wrote, been working furiously (*avec ardeur*) to get them ready, but with the letter of Cardinal Sala the pressure was off and he could concentrate on getting the missionaries on the way. Cholleton could

¹⁷ Coste, *Origines* 1, doc 304, 16 & 8.

¹⁸ Coste, *Origines* 1, p 698-9.

¹⁹ Coste, *Origines* 1, doc 373, 7.

let Rome know that they would present constitutions as soon as possible, within a year if Rome insisted.²⁰

Colin kept working on them, not so much for presentation to Rome as in view of giving the missionaries something in hand at their departure. Part of a text from that period, called the *Epitome*, has survived. It is quite different from the Summary of 1833 and shows right from the opening phrase the influence of the Jesuit Constitutions:

This least of societies graciously approved lately by Pope Gregory XVI from the very beginning was given the name Society of Mary. This very name sufficiently indicates the banner under which it desires to serve in the Lord's battles and what its spirit should be. It is distinguished by this sweet name, SOCIETY OF MARY, so that all who are admitted to it, mindful of the family they belong to, may understand that they are to emulate the virtues of this holy Mother and indeed even to live her life, above all in humility, obedience and love of God.²¹

As it opens with referring to the approbation of the Society that Colin received on 23 March but does not mention the official document *Omnium Gentium* that he received only on 20 May we may date at least this part of the text in the two months between. The part that has survived has only fifteen pages in today's print. The first missionaries had already left for Paris and Le Havre and Colin handed it to the last ones to leave. The *Epitome* that has been preserved is probably only part of the text Colin gave to the missionaries. A complete copy has not been found, if it ever existed.

One thing we do know, this text did not lay down how the Society would be governed in Oceania and how the missionaries would live their life as religious. Those crucial points Colin settled in a few casual sentences in his letters of good-bye, namely that the ecclesiastical superior of the mission, the Bishop, even though not a professed member of the Society, was to be their religious superior!²²

The Belley Rule 1842

In the course of 1841, after five groups of altogether thirty-seven missionaries had left for Oceania, the leadership of the Society in France was receiving one alarming letter after the other. Things in Oceania had gone thoroughly wrong and for four years the Superior General had not been told the whole truth. The problem was not the missionary work itself, which was going as well as could be expected. The problem lay in the Bishop's financial mismanagement, his bullying ways and the total dependence of the missionaries on his arbitrary power. As the summer went on the Superior General came close to a break-down. He decided to resign, planned for the election of a successor, burned documents of the past and lost sight of the confidential nature of some information he had received.²³

²⁰ Coste, *Origines* 1, doc 377.

²¹ Coste, *Antiquiores* 2, p 15, 1. Compare with the Ignatian text, Coste, *Antiquiores* 6, p 11, 2:
This least of Congregations that from its very beginning was given the name Society of Jesus by the Apostolic See, was first approved (...) wishes to battle under the banner of the cross.

²² Snijders, *Mission*, 53-6.

²³ Snijders, *Mission*, 317-9.

From 21 to 28 September 1841 about eighty Marists, Fathers, coadjutor Brothers, novices and scholastics gathered in the Minor Seminary in Belley for a retreat. Behind the peaceful façade tensions mounted as Colin told senior Marists, one after the other, of his decision. All of them felt it would be disastrous to let him go ahead and they called in Bishop Devie in support. Together they convinced Colin to stay on as Superior General but take a long break in Belley to rest and to work on the constitutions, on which very little had been done in five years.²⁴ Recent events had shown the fragile nature of the Society's governance which without constitutions depended almost entirely on the charismatic personality of the Founder. Father Colin went up to Belley and stayed on the job for five months. The resulting text has been preserved.²⁵

Working from the *Epitome* the 1842 constitutions followed the Ignatian model with a few significant adjustments. After the number on reverence for the Pope Colin inserted, also from the *Epitome* and the *Summarium*,²⁶ adhortations on how to deal with the Bishops, the clergy and public authorities (9-10), a theme very dear to him and a chapter on studies and scholarship (12-14). This time he left out Ignatius' painstaking inter-rogations of candidates that he had inserted in the *Epitome*. In the very detailed description of what novice masters should impress on the novices (59-75) Colin expands on what his real concern is, the spiritual formation of Marists. For the rest we find most themes and formulas from Ignatius, shuffled around and enriched here and there with original points betraying, among other things, Colin's scrupulous attitude towards women (108-110). Other insertions not taken from Ignatius show the typically Colinian understanding of what Constitutions should be, namely not just regulations and structures but a spiritual guide to holiness (e.g., 119-120, 125, 163). Colin would rather describe spiritual ideals than set up an institution. Where it must be done, for instance on sending away a temporary professed, he inserts an admonition to make sure the superior acts with compassion and tenderness (149). As could be expected there is a new article on devotion to Our Lady (178-184) and, towards the end, we find idealistic but rather impractical ideas on material goods and their administration (187-200).

Truly remarkable is that Colin introduces regulations that make it possible for the superior general to nominate his own successor, to be confirmed afterwards by a round of voting (252, 273-295). This is not taken from the Ignatian rule and in fact to the knowledge of this author it is found in no other religious rule.

A Lacuna ?

While the *Summarium* of 1833 was composed around the description of the Society as consisting of four 'orders' namely priests, lay-brothers, sisters and a confraternity of lay-people, the Belley rule of 1842 barely mentions them at all. As a consequence it shows an unmistakable shift in the meaning of the term 'Society of Mary'. In older texts the name stood for the whole movement of priests, brothers, sisters and laity, all called by the Mother of Mercy to be a congregation open to all kinds of people to meet the current needs of a time losing the Faith.²⁷ As from 1842 'Society of Mary' seems to refer mostly

²⁴ Snijders, *Mission*, 324-6.

²⁵ The 'a' text, Coste, *Antiquiores* 2, pp 31-115. Cf Coste, *Antiquiores*, Introductory fascicle, pp 89-110.

²⁶ For comparison of excerpts of the Jesuit text, Coste, *Antiquiores*, 6, 11-101 & *Epitome*, 2, 15-29.

²⁷ See Colin's own description in 1837, Coste, *A Founder Speaks*, docs 1 & 2.

to the congregation of priests, they mark a subtle shift towards a more clerical definition of the Society of Mary.

However, the clerical pattern is broken in numbers 236-240: 'Like branches that hang on a tree, so there are collateral branches depending on the Superior General, namely of the Sisters and the Marist Brothers, all of whom are governed by him and owe him obedience and reverence.' There will be a priest appointed to be Provincial of each the branches to report directly to the Superior General. Also from the Summarium is said that the Superior General can shift surplus financial resources from one branch to the other. Another Provincial will foster the Third Order for the greater glory of God and the good of souls. These special Provincials come only back on stage as having active voice in the election of the Superior General (254).²⁸

Another Lacuna ?

Equally surprising is the total absence of the missions of Oceania. Nothing in the 1842 constitutions would advert an uninformed outsider to the fact that one third of the membership was at the time working under very different conditions on the other side of the world. The missions took up a good deal of Colin's time and especially the last half year they had been a major source of anxiety. His feelings that he was not the man to handle the problems of Oceania had nearly led to his resignation. It was not just the problematic situation of the Marists in New Zealand and their difficulties with Bishop Pompallier that weighed on Colin's mind. There was his request to open a second Vicariate in Central Oceania, perhaps a third one in Melanesia. While in Belley Colin's attention was drawn by Cardinal Fransoni, the Prefect of Propaganda to another mission, this time in southern Africa.²⁹ Answering the Cardinal on 28 December from Belley Colin asked for a period of reflection. He used the opportunity to inform the Cardinal of the recent departure of six missionaries under Jean Forest and he repeated his request for new vicariates in Central Oceania and Melanesia.³⁰ On 15 February Colin received the answer of Fransoni (dated 29 January) authorizing him to send already missionaries to new missions in New Caledonia and New Britain and neighbouring islands to the South-West (sic!) of New Zealand with a blank letter of appointment for a Prefect Apostolic whom Colin was mandated to select himself.³¹

A month later, 18 March, still in Belley and working on the constitutions, Colin acquainted Cardinal Fransoni for the first time with the whole sad story of Pompallier's treatment of the missionaries and his financial mismanagement. He copied for the

²⁸ There is something strange about these few numbers. The Belley text is a master piece. A coherent text of seventy pages written in four months, in fine Latin, carefully crafted from the Ignatian model but still original. The introduction of the branches is sudden, not organically integrated in the whole work: one could have read half the constitutions without knowing of branches! It rather looks as if they have been inserted from the Summarium when the rest of the text was about ready. As if Colin, foreseeing his confrontation with Cardinal Castracane, first planned not to mention the branches at all, and at the end changed his mind.

²⁹ Gaston Lessard (ed), « *Colin Sup* », *Documents pour l'étude du généralat de Jean-Claude Colin (1836-1854)* (Rome: Marist Fathers, 2007) 1, doc 311. Snijders, '1842: A Quiet Period in Between', in *Forum Novum* 14, December 2012, 80-2.

³⁰ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 313.

³¹ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 320.

Cardinal what Épalle had written on 21 May 1841, quoting Pompallier as saying that any missionary who wanted to remain a full member of the Society could better leave the mission and return to France.³² The Cardinal was appalled! Especially the painful but obviously sincere testimony of Épalle shook him. He took the extraordinary step of writing a severe letter that he called a page of exhortation, and that, as he wrote to Colin, ‘after reading and sealing it, you may want to forward’ to the Bishop.³³

We learn with great sadness that there is not the desired harmony between Your Highness and the members of your worthy Society working in that part of the Lord’s vineyard, a harmony that is necessary for the good of souls. We know that this situation is mostly due to your way of dealing with things. When they approach you, you do not deal with them in the humane way they have the right to expect. You move them with threats and censures away from the loyalty and the communion they should have towards the Superior of the Society. It is also clearly established and recognized by everybody that you excel in zeal for the Church of God under extremely difficult circumstances and that you shun no danger (...) but also that you are not open to well-meant and unanimous advice from the people around you. You make immoderate expenses and get both the mission and the Society into debt. (...) In this way you will get the mission in discredit and cause your co-workers to leave the mission. You have no right to stop the religious to communicate freely with their Superior (...), the more so as the same Superior remains loyal and faithful to yourself. Nor does your dignity suffer, if at times you seek counsel from those sharing your labours and your ministry, and if you act toward them as an equal and a colleague, rather than as a superior, so that all things may be accomplished in the Lord and in charity.³⁴

Still, none of these things affected the constitutions Colin was composing at the very same time! Did he avoid mentioning Oceania or foreign missions in general because they lay within the competency of Propaganda while the constitutions were to be submitted to the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars? Possibly, but it is hard to avoid the impression that there is more to it than a mere tactical move.

Perhaps we must accept that Colin simply had a different and personal understanding of the literary genre ‘constitutions’. For most administrators constitutions provide an organizational framework, defining responsibilities and competencies. For Colin they were another opportunity to lead his followers up the steep slope of holiness. If we open Colin’s constitutions we meet a spiritual director, not a manager.

Even after sending forty men to Oceania in five years, Father Colin appears not to have seen that he had thereby established a Marist presence in a different theatre, some-

³² Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 330. Charles Girard (ed), *Lettres reçues d’Océanie* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2009) volume 1, docs 91 & 92. Cf Snijders, *Mission*, 311-2.

³³ APM, 2213/9913.

³⁴ APM, 2213/9913. Translation in part from Ralph M. Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania 1825 — 1850* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1979), 234. Kevin J. Roach, *Venerable John Claude Colin and the Mission in New Zealand, 1838 — 1848* (Rome: Dissertatio ad Lauream, Pontifical Gregorian University, 1963), 156—9.

thing that would grow, had to be governed and integrated into the Society of Mary, on its own merits, and under its own unique conditions. This inadvertence would leave a large and growing number of religious entirely under the rule of different administrators (mostly Bishops) over whom the Society itself had no authority.

The Lyon chapter, 1842

At the end of March 1842 Jean-Claude Colin felt he had done all he could to ready the constitutions of the Society of Mary for submission to Rome. On 1 April he addressed a circular letter to the Society calling a meeting of the leading figures in the Society for 17 April. 'You will understand', he wrote, 'how much I need the help of your insights and your commitment.' As reasons for holding what is often considered the first General Chapter of the Society he pointed not only to the new constitutional draft and to the possible founding of a house of recollection for Marists, but also to the imminent departure of missionaries for New Caledonia and South Africa, which confirms that the foreign missions were very much in his mind all the time.³⁵

Before leaving Belley Colin learned of the martyrdom of Peter Chanel on the island of Futuna on 28 April 1841, nearly a year before. The news came through the letter that Chevron had written from Wallis, a month after the event.³⁶ On 6 April 1842 Colin addressed a second circular to the Society: 'Even if the news first hurts us deeply ... let us sing a song of praise to Mary our Mother, the Queen of Martyrs. One of her sons, and our brother, has been found worthy to shed his blood for the glory of Jesus Christ.'³⁷

On 14 April Colin went down to Lyon where the chapter convened in the evening of Sunday 17 April. Copies of the new constitutions were divided over four study groups with lists of questions for the general sessions.³⁸ Many were leading questions, fine-tuning the Marist way to holiness. The assembly unanimously agreed without much discussion to things such as introducing an additional vow not to accept dignities outside the Society or do anything to have dignities come one's way. Quite a few things however were practical questions that a good functioning executive would have solved without referral to a chapter, such as the boarding fee for novices and the arranging of libraries. They illustrate the typical Colinian trait of formulating radical ideals³⁹ and neglecting executive action so as to let the membership sort out things for themselves.

From the two sets of minutes that have been preserved⁴⁰ it seems that only the fourth study group, chaired by Maîtreperrière, asked for changes where the draft permitted the Society reluctantly to have only a minimum of sources of regular income. They wanted it specified for what reasons the Society was entitled to have stable sources of revenue and they gave as reasons, firstly that the modern world despises begging,

³⁵ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 332, 1.

³⁶ The news travelled by an odd and unexplained sequence of events. Addressed to Belley, it is postmarked in Paris on 1 April and in Belley 3 May, but quoted by Colin on 6 April! Girard, *Lettres* 1, doc 94. Snijders, *Mission*, 342.

³⁷ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 334, 1.

³⁸ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 340.

³⁹ E.g. 'they will be most faithful in observing even the smallest of rules', Coste, *Antiquiores* 2, p 51, 116. 'The superior general has all authority so that the religious will be in his hands as if Christ's himself', Coste, *Antiquiores* 2, p 73, 211.

⁴⁰ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 340, 1-26 and 27-40.

secondly that having adequate sources of income avoids embarrassing situations of dependence, thirdly that it allows the Society to accept good candidates from families who cannot pay for the studies and fourthly to allow the Society to found new houses and take on projects.⁴¹ Colin did not object to the administrative-minded Maître-pierre to correct the overtly idealistic perspective of the draft and asked him to work out an alternative version.⁴²

The Marist Brothers

Neither the Belley text nor the prepared questions invited a discussion of the relations of the priests with the Marist Brothers, the Sisters and the Marist laity. The chapter could well have passed without mentioning them. Colin invited Brother François Rivat, successor of Marcellin Champagnat to attend the chapter with his assistants but François left for Paris. On Wednesday 20 April the two Assistants, Louis-Marie Labrosse and Jean-Baptiste Furet, visited the Chapter. They carried a formal letter and were permitted to read it in a general assembly. True to the ideal of their Founder Marcellin Champagnat (and of Jean-Claude Colin himself) the Brothers asked for nothing less than a solemn and definitive confirmation that the Brothers and the Fathers would be united as members of the one and only Society of Mary in total dependence on the one Superior General as mentioned in the formula of their vows. They asked that they be recognized by the Church, not as a separate congregation but as full members of the Society and that their status be laid down in the new constitutions.⁴³

The priests may well have expected this request. They voted, seemingly without further discussion, unanimously in favour, leaving Colin with the unenviable task of taking up the matter again with the antagonistic Cardinal Castracane.

Oceania

As we have seen, there was nothing in the Belley constitutions to trigger a formal discussion of the Oceania situation and as far as we know nobody on the floor took the initiative of putting it on the agenda. It got a lot of attention all the same. The news of Peter Chanel's martyrdom had arrived just days before. Colin had prudently omitted from his circular letter Chevron's accusation that at least part of the responsibility for the murder lay with Bishop Pompallier and his failure to visit them,⁴⁴ but we can be sure it became known. Anyway, rumours about the financial mismanagement by the Bishop had been doing the rounds for so long that Pompallier himself had already heard of them.

⁴¹ Referring to chapter seven, article one of the 1842 constitutions, Coste, *Antiquiores*, 2, pp 67-8, numbers 187-92. Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 348, 7-10.

⁴² Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 340, 23. There are several copies of the Belley text made in the years 1842 to 1854. In some of them the numbers concerned (187-192) have been omitted, in one manuscript the whole article is reduced to a simple sentence but in none of them is the text corrected in the sense Maître-pierre proposed and Colin seemingly accepted during the chapter. Coste, *Antiquiores* 2, pp 111-115. As far as we can see, nothing was changed in the Belley text because of the chapter.

⁴³ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 344. Louis-Marie to F. Mazelier, 24 april 1842, Bernard Bourtot, *Frères et Pères de la Société de Marie sous le généralat de Frère François 1840-1860* (Saint Priest: Marist Fathers, 1999), 140.

⁴⁴ Girard, *Lettres*, 1, doc 94, 6 and Lessard, « *Colin Sup* », doc 334.

Father Colin gave a passionate talk on Oceania, not unlikely after receiving the above mentioned letters of Cardinal Fransoni⁴⁵ to which he did not however allude. The Society would never abandon the confreres in the Pacific, he proclaimed, or let a situation develop whereby they would no longer be under the care and the governance of the Society! It was one of the reasons why he was going to Rome, he added. He did refer to a letter he had recently received from the General of the Picpus missionaries whom he had consulted but (at least in Mayet's account) left out the Picpus General's advice to anchor the basic conditions for mission work in the constitutions.⁴⁶ In any case, nothing on Oceania was added to the Belley text.

The first general chapter of the Society of Mary ended on Sunday 24 April 1842 with a solemn Benediction and *Te Deum*.

Rome

After six months absence it took Colin a few weeks to clear his desk in Lyon and ask for letters of recommendation to the Pope from the Bishops of Valence, du Puy, Nismes and Belley, and from the Cardinals de Bonald of Lyon and Donnet of Bordeaux. Most of them made mention of the Teaching Brothers and the importance of them being approved which suggests that Colin had asked them to. All of them responded on the most laudatory tones possible.⁴⁷

As the day for departure neared Colin started on a document to present to Cardinal Fransoni the state of the Oceania missions and the issues that needed action from Rome. Poupinel worked out a draft but it seems Colin was not happy with it.⁴⁸ He had Roudaire write another one⁴⁹ with a separate note giving details on five possible jurisdictions to be founded in Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. The report recommended to furnish the missions with two or three ships for inter-island communications as well as for contact with Europe. Colin signed Roudaire's draft and Colin presented it in Rome to Cardinal Fransoni at the beginning of his visit.⁵⁰

Foreseeing that in Rome he might have to propose candidates for the new vicariate of Central Oceania, Colin called his council together. They thought of at least two candidates, Pierre Bataillon and Philippe Viard. Given his five years on Wallis, his courageous pioneering, his knowledge of the language and culture and his success in converting the island, all of which was known by now in France, Bataillon was the most obvious candidate. Colin consulted the staff of the Major Seminary of Lyon where both had done their studies. Amable Denavit, professor of dogmatic theology and Sacred Scripture warmly praised Pierre Bataillon for his piety and regularity but advised against Philippe Viard: too meticulous and 'too unclear a mind'.⁵¹

Colin also thought it useful to look for a possible coadjutor to Bataillon and it so happened that two priests (Guillaume Douarre, 32, and Gilbert Roudaire, 29) and a

⁴⁵ Dated 12 April, Colin would have received them about ten days later, i.e., during the chapter.

⁴⁶ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* », 1, doc 328.

⁴⁷ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* », 1, docs 364, 353, 352, 369, 336 & 377.

⁴⁸ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 367.

⁴⁹ At least, the copy in APM is in Roudaire's handwriting.

⁵⁰ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 371. Jeantin, *Le Très Révérend Père Colin* (Lyon: Vitte, 1896) 3, 36-47. Wiltgen, 236-7.

⁵¹ Coste, *A Founder Acts*, p 109, footnote 1.

deacon (Pierre Rougeyron 25) had entered the novitiate in August 1841 from the Diocese of Clermont in view of going to Oceania. Colin consulted Bishop Féron and the Seminary of Clermont. The Bishop declined to give a recommendation but from all advice received Colin opted for Douarre.⁵²

On Friday 27 May 1842 the priests in Puylata went to see Colin to ask for his blessing. He was open to whatever Rome would decide, he said, but he did fear that Rome would go further than he wanted. Probably he was not all that happy yet with the constitutions in their present state. The next day Colin and Victor Poupinel took the river boat to Marseille where they arrived Sunday and said Mass in the Cathedral. Monday late afternoon they embarked on the *Mongibello* for Livorno. Colin was assigned a comfortable cabin which made him think back with nostalgia of his first Roman voyage, nine years earlier, when he had slept on deck on a coiled rope: 'more like Nazareth!'

In Rome, they first stayed at the Hôtel de France but soon moved into two small rooms in the Via Dataria. It took Colin a few weeks to get used to the heat of the Roman summer and the Italian food. On 15 August he had a bout of malaria that he got under control with quinine. The first weeks he stuck to visiting sanctuaries and places of interest within walking distance⁵³ because he refused to use a carriage until everybody he met had urged him to do so and somebody told him that even Saint Philip Neri had done so. 'After a month', Poupinel told Mayet later, 'he was in better health than he had been for a long time in France'.⁵⁴

The Constitutions

In Rome Father Colin had mainly to deal with two Congregations. At the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars directed by Cardinal Castruccio Castracane he had to get the constitutions of the Society approved, as was stipulated in 1836 when the branch of the priests had been officially approved. At the same department he also had to get the branch of the Marist Teaching Brothers recognized as a part of the larger Society of Mary. At the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith directed by Cardinal Giacomo Fransoni he wanted to have a new Vicariate of Central Oceania, separated from the existing Vicariate of Western Oceania run by Bishop Pompallier. Also one, or better two, Bishops had to be appointed for the new Vicariate. And, something had to be done about the difficulties with Bishop Pompallier. There were other matters such as the project of a Marist mission to South Africa, and liturgical and minor canonical issues but they fall outside of the scope of this study.

One of the first men Colin went to see was Father Roothaan, Superior General of the Jesuits and Father Rosaven, Assistant at the Jesuit general administration and consultor of the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars. Rosaven read the constitutions that Colin had brought along and assured him they would surely be approved if Colin presented them formally. The only point that Rosaven found questionable was the possibility given to the superior general to nominate his own successor, a canonical novelty. Colin accepted the point and the whole section disappeared from later versions.

⁵² Coste, *A Founder Acts*, doc 228, 8 and footnote 1. Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 374.

⁵³ Philippe Gobillot, *Vie du Vénérable Jean-Claude Colin*, (ms. APM, c 1944), 3, 283-7.

⁵⁴ Coste, *A Founder Acts*, doc 218, 10.

Rosaven told Colin that, apart from specific points, the constitutions of the Jesuits had never been officially approved as a whole by the Holy See, but only adopted in general chapters. Colin was relieved and from that moment felt justified to put off something that he was beginning to see as less and less beneficial, if not unfeasible anyhow. He only submitted a short list of minor matters at which Castracane told him he did not need special permissions to do for what he was elected, namely to govern the Society! The Cardinal did not insist that constitutions be submitted for approval, but Father Colin left a copy with Mgr Crociani, Secretary of the Congregation.⁵⁵

The Marist Teaching Brothers

The trickiest thing of course was the desire of the Marist Brothers to be considered full members of the one Society of Mary under the same Superior General. Colin tackled it bravely with Cardinal Castracane who, this time, did not bluntly push it aside. As Poupinel relates matters, after several discussions Colin just about managed to convince the Cardinal, most likely, as he put in writing later, by pointing to the fact that the Brothers now had a Director General and Assistants and that they in fact governed the large Congregation by themselves.⁵⁶ But Castracane also knew and humbly admitted there was no chance of getting the Cardinals of the Congregation to reverse a decision that he himself had so eloquently proposed to them only nine years earlier.⁵⁷ Colin had to resign himself to the facts which he did — as usual — by acknowledging wholeheartedly God's will in the given situation.⁵⁸ Castracane relented as far as asking Colin to submit his case again in writing after his return to France,⁵⁹ and invited him for dinner.

Reconfiguration in Oceania

At an early visit to Propaganda Colin left a letter for Cardinal Fransoni, possibly the one that he had asked Roudaire to write before his departure, to explain the purpose of his visit, with the notes on the different island groups and the possible new jurisdictions.⁶⁰ There will have been other visits and talks with officials at the Piazza di Spagna.

On 21 June Colin the informal consultations had reached the point that Colin could ask formally in writing for the establishment of a new Vicariate for Central Oceania comprising the island groups of Wallis and Futuna, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji. He sought the agreement of Propaganda to send some missionaries immediately to the new jurisdiction, 'without having recourse to Bishop Pompallier.'⁶¹

Poupinel put together a note that was added to Colin's request, explaining things further and proposing the boundaries of the new circumscription. To the east this would be the meridian passing over the island of Mangia that Poupinel describes as the

⁵⁵ Coste, *Origines* 2, doc 544, 1–4.

⁵⁶ Coste, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 391, 13.

⁵⁷ Coste, *Origines* 2, doc 544, 6. Snijders, *Mission*, 15.

⁵⁸ Coste, *A Founders Speaks*, doc 60, 4-7.

⁵⁹ Cf below, p. 20.

⁶⁰ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 371. Jaspers, *Erschliessung*, 236, doubts if this was the same document, as it has not been found in the archives of Propaganda.

⁶¹ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 380, 1 - 4.

boundary separating the Vicariates of Eastern and Western Oceania.⁶² For the western boundary Poupinel takes the meridian passing through the eastern end of San Cristoval, excluding that island itself.⁶³ That would include not only the island groups already mentioned in Colin's letter but also New Caledonia, the New Hebrides (today Vanuatu) and the numerous islands further on.⁶⁴

The same note also presented candidates for the position of Vicar Apostolic of the new mission. On top of the list is Pierre Bataillon (32), already heading the mission in Wallis, followed by Jean-Baptiste Baty (32) in New Zealand and Joseph Chevron (36) who since November 1840 was with Bataillon on Wallis. All three are warmly recommended. It then proposes what had been worked out in Lyon, namely to appoint at the same time a Coadjutor Bishop for Bataillon for which position the paper proposes Guillaume Douarre (33) from the Diocese of Clermont and still a novice in Puyata. He had been highly recommended by his Bishop and by the faithful among whom he had worked. Two other candidates are mentioned without special recommendation, namely Gilbert Roudaire (29) from Clermont and Charles Dupont (32) from Bayeux.

The proposal was for the Coadjutor to be consecrated in France so that he could in turn consecrate in Oceania his own Ordinary. This rather unusual procedure is justified by pointing to the long delays and the expenses of having the new Vicar Apostolic travel for consecration elsewhere. Also, it would allow the new Vicariate to start operating immediately even if in the meantime something untoward were to happen to Bataillon. Shortly after hearing of the martyrdom of Peter Chanel everyone was aware of how dangerous and unpredictable things still were in the South Pacific!

It was nearly a year ago that Colin had written to Pompallier about a possible division of his Vicariate⁶⁵ and that Cardinal Frasoni had officially asked for Pompallier's agreement.⁶⁶ Frasoni had so far refused to take action on the proposal until he would hear from Bishop Pompallier. Understandably, both Colin and Propaganda were worried and impatient. Neither of them knew, or could know, that at that time the Bishop had not even yet received their letters!

Colin's creative solutions with concrete proposals, all presented in his usual modest and unassuming way⁶⁷ must have won all hearts in Propaganda, especially when on 2 August Colin could tell Frasoni about the letter of Bataillon of 31 May 1841 confirming the martyrdom of Peter Chanel and the near total conversion of Wallis.⁶⁸ Somebody already told Colin to gather all information that would be necessary for an eventual beatification and Colin passed the instruction to the Chanel's successor as Superior of the Minor Seminary in Belley.⁶⁹ Colin must have spread copies of his circular letter because someone took the initiative of printing Chevron's letter and distributing copies among the Cardinals.⁷⁰

⁶² Poupinel must have meant the island Mangaia in the Cook Islands. Mangaia lies in the eastern part of the Cook Islands but the intention is clearly to leave the whole group with the Picpus in Eastern Oceania.

⁶³ San Cristoval, today Makira, is the most eastern large island of the Solomon Islands.

⁶⁴ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 380, 5 - 21.

⁶⁵ 6 June 1841. Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 271.

⁶⁶ 12 June 1841. Wiltgen, *Founding*, 228. Jaspers, *Erschliessung*, 231. Snijders, *Mission*, 321 - 3.

⁶⁷ Coste, *Origines*, doc 544, 5.

⁶⁸ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 387, 2.

⁶⁹ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 381, 5.

⁷⁰ Coste, *A Founder Speaks*, doc 60, 11.

On 8 August Cardinal Frasoni put Colin's proposals and requests to an assembly of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith ('Propaganda'). The Cardinals accepted the division of the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Oceania and the establishment of a new Vicariate for Central Oceania within the boundaries proposed. In geographical terms they described it as the area between the meridian 160°W to the East, 160°E to the West, the Tropic of Capricorn to the South and the Equator to the North.⁷¹

They agreed that Father Pierre Bataillon should become the Vicar Apostolic of Central Oceania and that he be given a Coadjutor in the person of Guillaume Douarre. The same day Secretary Cadolini reported on the meeting to Pope Gregory XVI who approved the decisions reached. The formal decree 'Pastoris Aeterni' was issued on 23 August 1842.⁷² Three copies were sent to Lyon, one for Father Colin, one for Bishop Pompallier and one for Bishop-elect Bataillon.

And now the difficult matters

At Propaganda, the problems with Bishop Pompallier will have come up several times alongside of the consultations on Central Oceania. True to Roman tradition some officials wanted to brush the whole thing aside as 'an attempt [on Colin's part] too encroach upon the rights of the Vicar Apostolic.'⁷³ In the end Colin would have been invited to put into writing what he wanted, which he did, on 21 June.⁷⁴ He opened his requests with a splendid reassurance of the total and unconditional commitment of the Marists in Oceania to their missionary vocation. He knew from all the letters he had received how true this indeed was. Colin appreciated the good in people and he had the generosity to bear witness to it. The missionaries deserved this recognition at the highest levels of the Church.

Having said this, and 'to take away any cause for uneasiness among them and to reassure prospective missionaries in France', Colin specified four requests. First of all he asked for the authorization of the Holy See to appoint in New Zealand a Provincial who would represent the Superior General and who could, without prejudice to the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic, and in harmony with him, exercise regular vigilance over all and each of the missionaries. Of course, Colin knew he already had the right to do so and he knew that this was how the Picpus Fathers in Oceania were organized. But Pompallier had challenged Colin's right to do so in his letter of 17 May 1841.⁷⁵

Secondly Colin wanted the permission to withdraw a missionary from the missions and replace him with another one. He assured he would use this faculty for very serious reasons only and after notifying Propaganda. Pompallier had contested this right as well in the same letter and in speaking to the missionaries.⁷⁶

A third faculty he seeks is the authorization to insist that missionaries not be put by themselves on isolated places as had happened in recent years. The recent assurance of

⁷¹ On French maps, using the prime meridian of Paris, the 160° W meridian lies exactly on Mangaia.

⁷² Jaspers, *Erschliessung*, 238-9.

⁷³ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 2, doc 20, 6.

⁷⁴ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 379

⁷⁵ Girard, *Lettres*, 1, doc 91, 33. Colin had received this letter in November 1841 and had forwarded it to Frasoni in March 1842.

⁷⁶ Girard, *Lettres* 1, doc 91, 32.

the General of the Picpus Fathers that Rome had confirmed this in their case made Colin feel he could and should ask for this.⁷⁷

A fourth faculty Colin wanted was the right to recall a missionary every four or five years in order to get in-depth information on what was going on in the missions and how people were faring: undoubtedly the aftermath of the shock he had received when he discovered that not only things were going thoroughly wrong in the Pacific but that for five years he had not been told the whole truth.

These things, Colin concluded, were in his view necessary for the good of the mission.

Propaganda in disarray

Cardinal Fransoni had been closely connected with the start of the mission. He had read many of the letters to and fro. He had found Colin very cooperative and creative in the matter of the new Vicariate in Central Oceania. As a consequence, whatever the lower echelons felt, Cardinal Fransoni's sympathies lay entirely with Colin and the Marists in their difficulties with Bishop Pompallier. He took the matter in hand personally and had Secretary Cadolini immediately write a draft answer. Colin was shown the draft and given the chance to comment.⁷⁸ Colin made a few suggestions that the Cardinal accepted and within ten days (30 June) Colin had Fransoni's answer in an official letter called a Decree of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.⁷⁹

In order to foster unity the letter stated that the Superior General was entitled to select and appoint a Provincial over the missionaries. It granted him the right to recall a religious from the mission for serious reasons and after asking for permission from Propaganda. It allowed him to call a missionary back for an in-depth report on the mission every four or five years. Moreover, the decree agreed that no missionary should be put by himself except in case of necessity and only as a temporary measure. In other words, Colin got everything he had asked for.

On 8 August, less than six weeks after Fransoni's Decree, when the Cardinals and Bishops of the Congregation met to decide on the erection of the Vicariate of Central Oceania, the problems with Pompallier came up as well. Not unlikely Fransoni just told them by way of information. The Congregation approved and confirmed Fransoni's course of action but Secretary Cadolini, acting on instigation of Father Roothaan, whom he must have told of the affair, used the opportunity to insert a new regulation and got it passed by the Cardinals present.

From then on, instead of mailing their annual reports directly to Propaganda, missionary Bishops should send them unsealed to the Superiors General of the institutes to whom the missions were entrusted. Superiors could read the reports and make a copy before passing them on to Propaganda. Moreover Propaganda itself should normally communicate with the Bishops by sending its letters unsealed through the Superiors! The

⁷⁷ Bonamie to Colin, 14 March 1842, Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 328. Cf. Snijders, *Quiet Period*, p. 83.

⁷⁸ The draft said Colin should first ask for permission from Propaganda and wait for their answer before recalling a missionary. Colin pointed out this was impossible.

⁷⁹ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* », 1, doc 383.

new Decree is not addressed specifically to the Marists but in a general and vague way to the missions of some religious orders (*pro aliquibus missionibus regularium ordinum*).⁸⁰

What was it that moved the Jesuit generalate to intervene? It seems that Jesuit missionary Bishops were used to communicate with Propaganda through their generalate until in 1834, and again in 1836, Propaganda told some of them to change the practice and from then on bypass the Superior General in communicating with Propaganda. When he heard of the attempts of Propaganda to deal with the problems of the Marists, Roothaan must have seen an opportunity to regain lost territory.⁸¹ By the time the new Decree was issued, 31 August, Colin had left Rome. Three copies were forwarded to Lyons, one for Colin, one for Pompallier and one for Bishop-elect Bataillon. Colin was not happy at all. As he had feared, Rome had gone much further than he wanted.

Later on people in Rome and elsewhere understandably believed that these regulations had been inserted on the request of Colin. Both Colin and Poupinel denied this emphatically. In 1847 Mayet recounted that it was Cadolini who informed Roothaan of the Decree being drafted at Propaganda. 'The General of the Jesuits did not only fully agree but found it not explicit enough and advised to strengthen it further and publish it, a thing that displeased Colin at the time.'⁸² On 30 January 1848 Colin said in council: 'The Jesuits intervened in the Decree of 1842 and had things inserted that suited them'.⁸³ Years later Poupinel confirmed the intervention of Roothaan in a letter to father Jules Favre, the successor of Colin: 'In 1842, in July or August, the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda issued a Decree. People in Rome believe ever since that it was Colin who had asked for it. I was on the spot and I know for sure that it was the General of the Jesuits who got Cadolini to formulate things as in the end they were. In doing so he went further than our venerated Superior wanted.'⁸⁴

After this unfortunate experience Colin kept his distance from the Jesuits. Apart from a courtesy call he did not go to see them any more and he told other Marists to do the same.⁸⁵

The Decree of 31 August was within the own competency of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and thus did not need pontifical approval, nor does it refer to the Pope. But somebody took the matter to Pope Gregory who disapproved! In the margin of the archival copy of Propaganda an anonymous secretary noted that the Pope had not approved it.⁸⁶

On 16 September a third Decree was issued that repeated and confirmed the details almost literally, including the rule that communications between Propaganda and the missionary bishops and *vice versa* should pass through the Superiors General. However, the Pope limited its scope by restricting it to annual reports and important matters (*graviora negotia*). He also addressed it this time specifically to 'those in Oceania' and in Burma. As to the institutes concerned the Pope mentioned by name the

⁸⁰ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 2, doc 1.

⁸¹ Joseph Albert Otto, S.J., *Gründung der neuen Jesuitenmissionen durch Pater Johann Philipp Roothaan* (Freiburg: Herder, 1939), 517-8. Otto does not mention the role of Cadolini or Roothaan in changing the decree of 30 June 1842.

⁸² Mayet, *Mémoires*, 7, 168.

⁸³ Mayet, *Mémoires*, 7, 169 margin.

⁸⁴ Poupinel to Favre, 23 March 1858, APM 1500/21394.

⁸⁵ Mayet, *Mémoires*, 7, 168-9.

⁸⁶ Roach, *Colin*, 179. Roach refers to SCPF, Congressi Oc. II, 206v.

Marists of Lyons (*Lugdunensium Maristarum*), the Oblates of Our Lady of Turin, the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and missionary institutes of diocesan priests (but not the Jesuits!). For those to whom it applied he nailed it all down even firmer by adding: 'This is what the Pope approved and ordered to be followed by way of a grave obligation.'⁸⁷

Colin was not involved in the rapid changes, nor had he asked for them, but the issues he put on the Roman agenda had not failed to shake the establishment!

A last attempt

There are two documents that show how Colin at that time was still determined to use any opportunity to further the unity of the Society. One is in French, not addressed to anyone in particular and not dated: 'truthful notice (*aperçu fidèle*) on the origin, the purpose and the government of the Society of Mary, established in Lyon.'⁸⁸ It is not signed but the handwriting is of Father Poupinel. The second one is in Latin and addressed to Pope Gregory XVI. It is not dated or signed but the author (*orator*) identifies himself in the text as 'Joannes Claudius Colin, Superior Generalis'.⁸⁹ Either one could be in answer to the invitation of Cardinal Castracane to state the case for the extension of the pontifical approbation of the Marist priests to the Marist Brothers.

The French document sets the beginning of the Society in 1815 and 1816 and describes it as a Society comprising priests and brothers, either coadjutors (*coadjuteurs temporels*) or teaching (today in seventy parish schools), all under one Superior General. They work together at home and in the foreign missions. To facilitate their governance, and with the permission of the Archbishop a director general has been appointed in 1839 by the Superior General after a secret vote by the membership. He handles the day-to-day administration under the guidance and supervision of the Superior General. Material goods are owned jointly by the priests and the brothers and the Superior General can use surplus income of any house for another one, either priests or brothers. All the good done so far by the Society is due to the unity of the two groups. We ask only that both groups may remain what they, with the approval of the local Bishops, always have been: one religious body, with the same vows, under one Superior General. Separating them would gravely damage their work and indeed their very existence.

The letter to Pope Gregory: 'The Society of Mary, first established in the Diocese of Belley and then in the Dioceses of Lyon, Grenoble, Bordeaux, Moulins, Autun and if it pleases God elsewhere, has in 1836 asked pontifical approbation (...). It has pleased Your Holiness to grant apostolic confirmation (...) to the institute of the priests of the Society of Mary not including the Brothers, the Sisters and the Confraternities of men and women living in the world.' The very purpose of the Society and the success of their work among rural people as well as in the foreign missions demands however that priests and lay-brothers work together. Without the lay-brothers the ministry of the priests, especially in Oceania is very difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, leaving aside for the time being, the Sisters and the Confraternities the Superior General of the Society of

⁸⁷ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 2, doc 5.

⁸⁸ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 390.

⁸⁹ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 391. The Marist archives have only an authenticated typewritten copy made for Fr Jules Grimal in 1938 so the handwriting cannot be identified.

Mary humbly asks that the pontifical approbation of the priests be extended to the lay-brothers and the existing ways of governing them be approved. The letter mentions that similar arrangements already exist for other religious institutes. Following up on the decisions of the Chapter in Belley, the letter also asks the approval of the vow not to accept dignities.

Colin must have written both letters in Rome and deposited them at the office of the Congregation. Castracane brought up the matter in a subsequent meeting of the Cardinals but he did not ask them to come back on their earlier decision.⁹⁰

Visiting Gregory XVI

From his last visit Colin knew that a papal audience would be little more than ‘receiving compliments on what the Society was doing for the foreign missions’ without any chance of discussing business. He had come to hate the long hours in waiting rooms trying to remember names and titles of dignitaries, but his respect for the Holy Father carried him through. He braced himself for the ordeal and got the necessary recommendations. On 6 August the visit came off and the Pope received him graciously proving well briefed on the issues discussed at Propaganda. The visit ended with Colin clumsily trying to kiss the Pope’s foot while the Pope attempted to shake hands!⁹¹

Colin thought he might be given a large packet of pictures of the Pope to send to Oceania but he was referred to the Roman shops!

Home

Shortly before leaving Rome Colin received a long letter from Maître-pierre summarizing mail that had just reached Lyon,⁹² in fact the letters that Pompallier had sent mid-November from Akaroa just before leaving for Wallis and Futuna. The same packet contained the reports Pompallier had written from Tauranga and an unsealed letter for Fransoni from which Maître-pierre quoted the usual recriminations against the Society and Colin.⁹³

On 28 August 1842, at eight o’clock in the evening Colin and Poupinel took the night coach to Cività Vecchia. Colin was ill all night and all day until they boarded the *Minos*. The fresh sea air did him well so that he got through two stormy nights without too much fatigue. Unfortunately they could not stay the night in Marseille but had to leave again after five hours on a rickety coach where they were assigned uncomfortable places. He had a bad night from Thursday to Friday and made things worse by insisting on Friday fasting. He then had a second night that Poupinel described as ‘really cruel’ and reached Lyons on Saturday 3 September, totally exhausted. For once we hear Colin complaining: ‘Finally! Time we got here. I have had it!’⁹⁴ Very tired, but content with the things he had achieved.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Report from the Archives of the Congregation. Bourtot, *Frères et Pères*, p. 144-5.

⁹¹ Coste, *A Founder Acts*, doc 221, 1.

⁹² Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 386.

⁹³ Girard, *Lettres* 1, doc 115 & 116. Snijders, *Mission*, 342-8.

⁹⁴ Lessard, « *Colin Sup* » 1, doc 392, 6 (*ah, il est bien temps, je n'en puis plus*).

⁹⁵ Coste, *A Founder Speaks*, doc 59, 12.