



Why Beatify Jean-Claude Colin? A Marist Vision for the Church

Alois Greiler SM

*in Sources & Streams. Marist Symposium 2023,
Rome, FMS, July 2024, p. 125-148.*



Introduction

Let me imagine a conversation among Marists from different branches about Marist saints.

If you ask a Marist Brother, he will name Marcellin Champagnat and others. If you ask a Marist Sister, she will say, our foundress is not a saint but an inspiration for us nevertheless. And some may add: For the patience she had with Jean-Claude Colin, she should be a saint! The SMSM face the challenge of a whole group of women at their origin, the pioneers. Though it is not unknown for the Church to beatify groups of people like the seven founders of the Servites. Lay Marists could proudly claim the curé of Ars and Peter Julian Eymard, and, depending on their alliance, Champagnat or Chanel. If you ask Marist Fathers, is your founder a saint, they will either say: he is not, but that is not important, or they will say: he is not but we hope he will be! Others will say, canonized or not, for me personally he is a saint and my inspiration. Others again will say, our Marist saint is Peter Chanel. For example, I am a school chaplain and many teachers there still think Chanel is actually the Marist founder! And Marists from the northern hemisphere tend to say to canonize Colin? No, too expensive.

In this presentation I will raise the question on a higher level. Because it is not only a question for Marists among themselves to answer, whether or not to beatify Colin. It is a question the pope is free to decide after a canonical process. The real question is not what the Marists think, but what the Church thinks. The Church asks us: Why should Jean-Claude Colin be beatified? This is the question I try to discuss.

1 Marist causes – an overview

The cause of Father Colin is embedded in the broader question of Marist causes. I limit myself to a few names and an important conclusion.

Colin said that the Society will have martyrs, will have saints.¹ In April 1842 Colin heard about the death of Chanel. And immediately he set to work to launch the canonical process of

¹ Jean Coste SM (ed.), *A Founder Speaks*, Rome, 1975 (=FS), doc. 3, 3, c. 1837; FS, doc. 27, 2, 1838/39; FS, doc. 96, 12, spring 1845; FS, doc. 154, 3.

beatification.² His wish was to place busts of Chanel and Epalle in the Marist houses.³ When Brother Blaise was killed, he said: Now all three groups of members have their saint, the priests (Chanel), the bishops (Epalle), and the brothers – Blaise.⁴

Colin is a figure in a school of saints, some canonized and others regarded as saintly.⁵ His companions Pierre Chanel (1803-1841), Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840) and Pierre-Julien Eymard (1811-1868)⁶ are canonized. And so is his friend and admirer Jean-Baptist Marie Vianney (1786-1859), the curé of Ars. The process of beatification was opened for Brother Blaise Marmaiton (1812-1847) and Father Paul Marie Ducharme (1795-1874) who spent the last years with Colin in La Neylière. For the many heroic missionaries with and after Chanel we could list Bishop Guillaume Douarre (1810-1853). In spite of two failures, he re-opened the New Caledonia mission a third time. And we add other founding figures: Jeanne-Marie Chavoin (1786-1858) and Marie-Françoise Perroton (1796-1873). We could name others like the foundress of the Sisters of Adoration réparatrice, Théodelinde Dubouché (1809-1863).

We move on to the following generations. Father Emmet McHardy (1904-1933), New Zealand – Bougainville, is proposed by the bishops of New Zealand for possible beatification after the cause of Suzanne Aubert (1835-1926). The German *Martyrologium* for the 20th century, a response to an initiative by Pope John Paul II, lists German Marist Wilhelm Weber, beheaded in Bougainville in May 1945. For a Spanish *Martyrologium* we name the Marists killed during the Civil War in the 1930s.⁷ There are many more whom Marists and others may regard as saintly. Craig Larkin brought together more such stories in the beautiful little book *Bearings*.⁸

The conclusion can only be and I count it as one reason for beatification: Colin is the inspiration behind a school of saints. Of course, to varying degrees, but still, he was part of their story, and called them to holiness. A holiness he himself tried to live.

2 The cause of Father Colin

² Pierre Allard SM, *Les procès conduisant à la sainteté reconnue dans l'Église : le cas de Pierre Chanel*, in Gaston Lessard SM (ed.), *Saint Pierre Chanel. Exposés présentés lors des journées d'étude des 16-18 juin 2003 à l'occasion du bicentenaire de sa naissance*, Saint-Augustin, 2004, 159-201; Hugh Laracy, *Saint-Making. The Case of Pierre Chanel of Futuna*, in *New Zealand Journal of History* 34, 1 (2000) 145-161; = *Forum Novum* [Journal of the Society of Mary, Rome] (=FN) 5, 4 (2001) 443-463. Critical: Mikaele Paunga SM, *The Clash of Cultures. French, English, Catholic and Oceanic Cultures Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, in A. Greiler SM (ed.), *Catholic Beginnings in Oceania. Marist Missionary Perspectives*, Adelaide, ATF, 2009, 157-182.

³ FS, doc. 116, 6; September 1846.

⁴ FS, doc. 154, 1-2, January 1848.

⁵ The Marist Fathers journal *Acta SM* (1949-1969) reported regularly about the Marist causes. Recent initiative: Mervyn Duffy SM, *Antoine Garin – A Marist Saint?*, in FN 18 (2016) 114-115.

⁶ Jean Coste sm, *L'apport des archives maristes à la connaissance de saint Pierre-Julien Eymard - Contribution of the Marist Archives to a Fuller Knowledge of St. Peter Julian Eymard*, in *Acta SM* 6 (1960- 962) 560-580. = Id., in *Hommage à saint Pierre Julien Eymard, canonisé, le 9 décembre 1962*, Rome, SSS, 1963, 112-142.

⁷ Meliton Carillo Orive SM, *Nuestro tributo de Mártires en la Guerra Civil de 1936 a 1939*, in FN 10, 2 (2008) 313-318; = Id., *Our Share of Martyrs in the 1936-1939 Civil War (Summary)*, *ibid.*, 318-319; Id., *Apuntes y documentos: Relacionados con la vida, detención y muerte martirial de los religiosos de la congregación de los padres maristas de España en los primeros meses de la guerra civil*, ms, Spain, s.d. (after 2004).

⁸ Craig Larkin SM, *Bearings. The Spirit of the Constitutions of the Society of Mary reflected*, Rome, SM, 2011; = Id., *Repères. L'esprit des constitutions de la Société de Marie reflété*, Rome, 2011.

Colin himself started the process of beatification for Peter Chanel. Another tick on our list for beatification, Colin was aware of this instrument of the Church and supported it.

Looking more closely at the cause of Colin, the story is complex and much delayed.⁹ The Society basically had started the cause for Chanel and a little later for Colin. At some point the decision was made to focus on Chanel which led to his canonization in 1954. The cause of Colin was delayed because of this, of two world wars, the historical objections by the Vatican, and mainly by the Society of Mary itself. The Society at some point supported the cause – and then came phases when nothing really happened.

The cause of Father Colin was introduced in 1893. In 1907, Colin's writings were approved as orthodox and in 1908 he was declared 'Venerable'. By 1941 the official procedures had practically stopped. Because of the long break, the cause had to start all over again, and this happened in 2009.

In fact, a number of basic elements are achieved: writings, virtues, historical documentation, discussion of objections, official biography, conservation of the grave (relics!). The Society is working on the *fama*.¹⁰ The question of a miracle is still very much open. Though when you think of it, what does a trans-scientific phenomenon say about the faith of a person? Is the beyond science nature of a miracle not an echo of the scientific world view influencing church life?

3 The historical objections against the beatification of Colin

After 1908, the cause was challenged by objections, reasons not to beatify Colin. Those were summed up in a study by the Church historian Father Leturia SJ from the Gregoriana in Rome.¹¹ World War II delayed the Marist response. In the 1950s, Fathers Coste and Lessard were called to the general house to prepare a response – according to the criteria of the time.

There were four main obstacles: a falsified signature, the delay in writing the constitutions, the relationship of Colin with his successor Favre, and the relationship between Colin and the bishops in Oceania, especially Pompallier. Coste gave substantial answers.¹²

We can come up with more historical objections. For example, Colin and Chavoin, Colin and Champagnat, the withdrawal of Colin from the affairs of his congregation between 1855 and 1860, his serious thinking whether or not to join the Eucharistic branch. Personally, I think the

⁹ Alois Greiler SM – Ron Nissen SM, *Literature on the Cause of Father Colin*, in FN 21, 1 (2019) 69-71. Addition: Michael O'Meehan SM, *The Cause of Venerable Father Founder*, in Id., *An Introduction to Marist History*, Mount St. Mary's, Greenmeadows, NZ, 1964, p. 3-6; Gaston Lessard SM, *Will Father Colin be Beatified? Conference by Father Gaston Lessard*, DVD, Quebec City, March 2014; Ron Nissen SM, *Reluctant Saint? The Cause for Beatification of Marist Founder, Fr. Jean-Claude Colin*, in FN 21, 1 (2019) 74-75; Id., *Chronology of the Cause (1875-2019)*, in FN 21, 1 (2019) 62-68.

¹⁰ Ron Nissen SM et alia, Colin Cause Network; information on the respective website: jeanclaudecolin.org

¹¹ Pedro Leturia SJ, *Il problema "Courveille" nella causa di beatificazione del Servo di Dio Giovanni Claudio Colin*, 1952, copy in APM, Rome.

¹² Jean Coste sm, *Brève histoire de la cause du père Colin*, in FN 5, 3 (2000) 300-307; = Id., *Brief History of the Cause of Father Colin*, in FN 5, 3 (2000) 308-314; now Jessie Munro, *Colin and Pompallier and the Founding of the Catholic Church in New Zealand*, in Greiler (ed.), *Catholic Beginnings in Oceania*, 65-85; Critical to Colin: Yannick Essertel, *Jean-Baptiste Pompallier. Vicaire apostolique des Maoris (1838-1868)*, Paris, Cerf, 2014.

writings of Colin need to be edited first and then studied again. The documentation in 1907 was certainly not as extensive as today.

These historical objections I believe could be studied and answered to a satisfying degree also thanks to the rich documentation the Marist congregations assembled.

An even bigger and puzzling obstacle is the resistance of many Marist Fathers to have him beatified! What to make of this?

Some answer, Colin himself said, he does not want to be beatified. Well, such a saying is proven to be apocryphal.¹³ However, there is a deeper issue at stake: Does not the 'hidden and unknown' exclude him being raised to the façade of St Peter's in Rome? We will come back to this. Another argument is money.¹⁴ Well, what to say? Money may or may not be the major difficulty. But it should not be used as an excuse in discussing the question.

Again, I believe the historical issues can be answered. And for the Marist resistance – the decision about beatification is ultimately not with us but with the Church. Let us therefore look at the meaning of beatification as a path to answer our overall question.

4 The meaning of beatification

Let us look briefly at the meaning of a beatification.¹⁵ We do not think of canonization yet!

In the Catholic Church, beatification and canonization, the role of saints in liturgy and faith life are important. Fundamental opposition to it would require a completely different discussion.

The liturgical celebration of a beatification is the final result of a canonical process directed by the Holy See. Veneration privately or liturgically is focused on the local church or in our case a religious family. A canonization would extend veneration to the whole church. Conditions are: martyrdom, virtues lived in a heroic way, a miracle at the intercession of the person. The person died in the *fama sanctitatis* – believed to be a saint, or gave his life out of charity and service.

Once the heroic virtues are acknowledged, the person is called *venerabilis Dei servus*, 'Venerable'. This happened for Colin in 1908.

Beatification implies: We believe the person has reached fulfilment in God, we can pray to him and with him, at his intercession. The person has a message for the Church as a whole.

In the case of Colin, we can say the following. He was strong in his belief in saints and their intercession. He wanted the Marists to be saints. He was not a martyr. He did not die in the odour of sanctity (unlike his confrere Paul Ducharne¹⁶). We have yet no miracle following his intercession. The canonical process had been started under the conditions of the early 20th century and has been re-opened under the stricter conditions of the early 21st century.

¹³ Coste, *Brief History*.

¹⁴ Reaction to the costs Filippucci presented in 1993; Mauro Filippucci SM, *Capitulo General 1993. La causa de beatificación de Juan Claudio Colin* (Documentos SM - España, 25), Madrid, 1993.

¹⁵ 'Beatification' – Wikipedia, 11 April 2023; Winfried Schulz, 'Heiligsprechung', in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, ed. Walter Kasper et alia, Freiburg, Herder, 3rd 1995, Vol. 4, col. 1328-1331.

¹⁶ Paul Chopelin, *Le Saint Oublié. Paul Ducharne, prêtre et mystique (1795-1874)* (Sources et documents pour l'Histoire du Pays de Charlieu, N° 8), 2012.

People do not beatify themselves. Beatification is not done for a private purpose, is not something like a favour for the Marist Fathers. The subject is the Church. If the Church sees meaning in a positive decision, then it goes ahead for the sake of the whole church.

The question of beatification is the problem. I think that in the problem is the solution. If Colin has a message for the church, beatification is what is asked for!

5 Significant shift to the positive

Our postulator, Father Carlo-Maria Schianchi, had communications from the Vatican about the next steps in the cause. For the *positio*, a short presentation of the cause, the Marists are asked to present two things: a biographical note of about 6-10 pages, and a paper of about 4-5 pages, why the Church should beatify. Justin Taylor is working on the biographical note. He wrote to me: I wrote a biography of 1000 pages, another biography of 100 pages, I think I can also write one of 10 pages.¹⁷ Possibly my presentation could serve the second topic.

I see an important new angle. In many ways, earlier questions were negative: Are his writings orthodox – or not? Was his life a life of heroic virtue – or not? There are historical difficulties around Colin which could speak against him but which we possibly can explain.¹⁸ The new angle I see given with our topic is positive: Why beatify him. What does speak in his favour? Again, it is not what the person or the Marists want, it is what the Church says.

6 Colin, Castracane, Poupinel, Vianney, and Coste as witnesses

Let me in an anecdotal way call forth five witnesses in favour of a beatification.

The first witness is Colin himself. Against the widespread idea of him being against beatification, he himself promoted beatification and inspired people who were beatified. Besides, he had a great devotion for saints. The first aim of the Society of Mary according to his constitutions was personal holiness (n° 1, 2°). And so, he emphasized holiness in various ways, also in the formal way of a cause for a Marist.

In Rome, Colin had many dealings with Castruccio Cardinal Castracane deglie Antelminelli (1779-1852). He said about Colin around 1833/34:¹⁹

“Cardinal Castracane spoke about him, praising him very highly, to Mr Crociani and to Mr Duclot. He is one of those men you rarely see any more; he is the *vir simplex et rectus* spoken about in holy Scripture. Mr Colin is a saint. He has understood the age in which he lives.”

¹⁷ Justin Taylor SM, *Jean-Claude Colin. Reluctant Founder (1790-1875)*, Adelaide, ATF, 2018; Id., *A Short Life of Jean-Claude Colin. Marist Founder*, Adelaide, ATF, SM, 2021; e-mail to the author, April 2023. For earlier Colin-biographies: Alois Greiler SM, *Book presentation: Justin Taylor sm, Reluctant Founder*, in FN 20 (2018) 130-132.

¹⁸ Coste sm, *Brief History*.

¹⁹ Reported by Fr. Poupinel; Jean Coste SM – Gaston Lessard SM (eds.), *Origines Maristes*, Rome, doc. 544, 18 (1842); quoted in Donal Kerr SM, *Jean-Claude Colin Marist*, Dublin, Columba Press, 2001, p. 270-272.313.

My third witness is Father Victor Poupinel (1815-1884). Early on, some people regarded Colin as a saint, as an anecdote written down by Father Poupinel tells us:²⁰

“People were often impressed with his look of holiness and simplicity, by his modesty and humility; one, Canon Féret, clearly expected that he would be canonised one day and that his statue would occupy the then vacant niche in St Peter’s beside that of Alphonsus Liguori.”

Colin called Jean-Marie Vianney (1786-1859), his friend, a saint. And Vianney called him a saint in 1858 and later in life wanted to retire to La Neylière where Colin lived.²¹

My fifth and main witness at this point is the eminent Marist historian Jean Coste (1926-1994). Called to assist the cause of Father Founder in the 1950s, he gave up a career as an exegete to work on the life and writings and work of Jean-Claude Colin practically all his life. In fact, Coste changed the self-understanding of the Society of Mary in many ways and is still the point of reference for research today. As an answer to our question let me refer to answers Coste has given. After decades of studying Colin, he made the following statement in 1988:²²

“If ever Colin gets to be beatified and canonized, I hope that this is what they will put in Bernini’s Glory: Colin, whose holiness consisted in understanding his era and not in turning away from it, who sought the means to touch it, to heal it, to convert it. He did not turn his back on his era, but he tried to imagine a kind of presence, ‘unknown and hidden’, which enables us to be there, as close as possible, at the very core of what is in the hearts of people.”

In fact, Coste is referring back to the statement by Cardinal Castracane. For Coste, the beatification would move the whole church to try to understand better the times, the signs of the time. This would help her pastoral work immensely.

In 1990, Coste gave a beautiful talk at the occasion of the bi-centenary of the birth of Colin. In his talk Coste said as if it were to Colin:²³

“This body, which you passionately loved, we intend to bring alive. For this we will be helped by that profound vision which encouraged you: that of Mary support of the Church at the beginning and at the end of time.”

In 1993, one year before his death, Coste talked to the general chapter of the Society of Mary about the cause. Among other things he said:²⁴

“I do not know whether the Church will ever pronounce on his sanctity, but I am convinced that few men in his time served God better than he, and I do think that, whatever happens, I shall keep that

²⁰ Jean Coste SM (ed.), *A Founder Acts*, Rome, 1983 (=FA), doc. 221, 1842 /Taylor, *Reluctant Founder*, p. 605.

²¹ Jean Coste SM, *Le Curé d'Ars et la Société de Marie - The Curé d'Ars and the Society of Mary*, in *Acta SM* 5 (1958-1959) 368-417, here p. 385.

²² Jean Coste SM, *Une vision mariale de l'Église: Jean-Claude Colin - A Marian Vision of the Church: Jean-Claude Colin* (Maristica, 8), edited by Gaston Lessard SM, Rome, 1998, p. 336-338.

²³ Jean Coste SM, *Une certaine idée de la Société de Marie. Jean-Claude Colin - A Certain Idea of the Society of Mary. Jean-Claude Colin*, Rome, 1990.

²⁴ Quoted by Ron Nissen from the 1993 General Chapter, material for the *fama* of Colin, on his website.

profound conviction to my dying day.”

In summary, Coste, who knew Colin really well, and that is relevant in my mind, would have said ‘yes’ to beatify Colin.

We can here recall the other saintly people inspired at least in part by the example and teaching of Colin has historical witnesses to the cause.

7 The fama of Colin

One ambiguous element for a beatification is the question, is there a veneration for the person, did the person for example die ‘in the odour of sanctity’. At the same time, no public veneration is allowed as long as there is no official stamp by the church.

So, who would be interested in a beatified Colin? Marists of the different branches, to varying degrees, mainly in the developing countries; lay people; people connected with Marists in the ministries: schools, parishes, missions; the local churches in the Pacific, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. People interested in religious life, sainthood, history, theology. People active in the church – looking for a new way in our times!

Who would be interested in a beatified Colin? For whom Colin was, is, and will be relevant. His relevance is of a historical nature – his life and work and what became of them; his relevance is of a pastoral nature – a certain way of being Church, educator, missionary, priest.

Even Marists name Colin as their spiritual teacher and inspiration, once they think about it. At first glance, many Marists will name Mary or Chanel or someone personally inspiring. However, giving thought to it, Colin will also be named as spiritual teacher.²⁵

Church handbooks and dictionaries and literature on the Pacific and the Catholic missions include references to Jean-Claude Colin as a founding figure for a religious congregation, for missions, for apostolates, for a certain pastoral approach.²⁶

With authors like George Delbos MSC, Jan Snijders SM, and Hugh Laracy we again come to the point that Colin was the inspiration behind so many others who achieved great things for the Church.²⁷ Delbos called him the ‘man before the mission’ of which his Marists were the fathers as it were. Snijders, though critiquing the organisational skills, credited him as the one to give the missionaries ‘a piety able to cope’ with all the challenges they were to meet, challenges unknown beforehand. Laracy describes the Melanesia-project as Colin’s ‘gamble’, seemingly doomed to fail, but bearing fruit at the end. Morris West already phrased it in a

²⁵ Kevin Duffy SM, Alois Greiler SM, Declan Marmion SM, Felise Tavo SM, *The Spiritual Teaching of Father Colin: A Survey of Attitudes in the Society of Mary*, in FN 4, 3 (1999) 313-325; = Id., *L'enseignement spirituel du père Colin dans la Société de Marie; rapport sur un sondage*, in FN 4, 3 (1999) 326-339.

²⁶ Thilo Saft SM, *Jean-Claude Colin – as seen by non-Marists*, in FN 8-9 (2007) 89-100.

²⁷ Georges Delbos MSC, *L'Église catholique en Nouvelle-Calédonie. Un siècle et demi d'histoire*, With a Preface by Cardinal B. Gantin, Paris, Éditions Desclée, 1993, p. 21f; = Id., *The Catholic Church in New Caledonia. A Century and a Half of its History*, translated by Derek Finlay SM, Suva, Cepac, 2000, p. 22f; Jan Snijders SM, *A Mission Too Far... Pacific Commitment*, Adelaide, ATF, 2012; Hugh Laracy, *Le R.P. Colin, les maristes et le vicariat de Mélanésie (1845-1853)*, in *Société d'Etudes Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*. Bulletin N° 154 (2008) 65-86; Id., *Colin and Melanesia*, in Greiler (ed.), *Catholic Beginnings in Oceania*, 87-103.

touching way in his preface to Stanley Hosie's Colin-biography, the paradox of the human instrument bearing fruit because fully at God's service.²⁸

We come back to this paradoxical impression under which Colin was and is often perceived under two headings. Namely, Colin as the inspiration for others, and, the paradox of grace.

8 On a deeper level: Society of Mary or Society of Colin

Bernhard Lee once discussed the model of 'deep story' as a tool to reflect on the charism of an institution, the original gift of a founder or foundress.²⁹ The constant paradox we come across, Colin a saint yes or no, Colin a key figure yes or no, may echo an underlying deeper issue. In the case of the Marist founder, I think it is the question: Is our focus our founder or Mary?

Many congregations are named after the person who founded them or gave the main inspiration: Benedictines, Franciscans, Augustinians... Sometimes this could even be a place: Carmel, Carthusians, Citeaux...

The Marist Fathers do not call themselves Society of Colin, but Society of Mary!

Even Jean Coste admitted, when he joined, he had never heard of Colin.³⁰ Still, he himself and others joined and became good Marists.

Marist historiography saw different paradigm changes.³¹ Mary, virtues, humility, personal holiness, education and Oceania. Since Vatican II and Coste the focus is on a 'Marian church'. The major paradigms are reflected in the old and the new constitutions.

So, maybe the Marists sense this challenge of a Society of Mary or a Society of Colin. And hesitate to shift the focus onto Colin and to give prominence to him as a beatification would do.

Indeed, I see a major issue around the possible beatification not based on historical objections, lack of *fama*, money, heroic or non-heroic degree of virtuous life... A major issue is Colin himself pointing towards Mary as his inspiration and model all the time. The modern icon from the John the Baptist Studios in New Zealand places this directly in front of our eyes! The director of the institute told me, the challenge was to write an icon of a person who is not a saint. Intuitively, they gave prominence to Mary, and I believe rightly so.

An immediate response is of course, no need to discuss the possible beatification of Mary. The four Eucharistic prayers for example name her, the 'foundress and first and perpetual superior' of the Society of Mary, as the general chapter of 1872 declared.

Again, the problem contains the answer. While many call the long 19th century the 'age of Mary' and in this, Colin holds a prominent place, the Catholic Church has somewhat itself lost

²⁸ Stanley Hosie SM, *Anonymous Apostle. The Life of Jean-Claude Colin, Marist*, With a Preface by Morris West, New York, William Morrow and Co. Inc., 1967.

²⁹ Bernard Lee, *A Socio-Historical Theology of Charism* in *Review for Religious* 48 (January-February 1989) 124-135; Id., *The Beating of Great Wings*, New London, Conn., Twenty-Third Publications, 2004, 16-35.

³⁰ Coste, *Idea*.

³¹ Alois Greiler SM, *Zwischen Geschichte und geistlicher Erneuerung. Umschau zu neueren maristischen Studien*, in *Marianum* 52 (1997) 571-600; = Id., *Between History and Spiritual Renewal: A Survey of Recent Marist Studies*, in FN 5, 3 (2000) 315-341; Id., *From Jeantin to Coste. A Survey on Marist Studies in the 20th Century*, in FN 7, 1 (2005) 38-71; = Id., *De Jeantin à Coste. Les études maristes au 20^{ème} siècle, un tour d'horizon*, in FN 7, 1 (2005) 72-111.

this focus on Mary in the second half of the 20th century. With the side-effect, that Marists also shifted their focus to other themes like Church, like the inspirations of their founder. To beatify Colin would bring back Mary into the Church, respectively in line with the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, chapter VIII, recall her integral part in the life of the Church to the whole Church – as is the meaning of beatification. More than recalling a text now 70 years old, this would recall the spiritual and pastoral significance of a Marian Church. Therefore, this we discuss next.

9 A systematic answer: Colin – For a Marist Vision of the Church

After raising the issue, after looking at the present status of the Colin-cause, after a more anecdotal and historical approach to our question, and after assembling some building blocks already, let us turn to a more systematic approach.

A The criteria of the beatification process

Basically, Colin fulfils the criteria concerning his writings and his virtues.

A proven miracle is an open question.

Some historical objections may need to be studied more but do not seem unresolvable.

B Criteria from the virtue-model

In the early stage of the cause, Mariology and Christian virtues would have been the dominant framework for a saintly person. Colin would then have been beatified for Marian humility.³² His key-phrase, 'hidden and as it were unknown in the world', would have been the Colinian expression for it.

C Criteria from a mystical model

The major shift in modern theology is towards experience. Here, the 'hidden and unknown as it were in this world' gains a deeper meaning pointing towards the *kenosis* of Christ³³ and Colin's mystical experience as a founder.³⁴ The 'hidden and unknown' serve modern apostolic

³² Constitutions 1872, n° 1, 1°; See Georges Goyau, *Le rôle de l'humilité dans la fondation d'un ordre: le vénérable Colin (1790-1875)*, in *Revue Montalembert* 3, 17 (1910) 1 – 20, = Id., *The Venerable John Claude Colin (1790-1875), Founder of the Society of Mary. The Part of Humility in the Foundation of an Order*, Lyon, Vitte, 1910 (Italian 1934); Alphonse Cothenet SM, *L'humilité d'un fondateur. Le vén. Jean-Claude Colin et la Société de Marie*, Paris, Téqui, ²1937 (1918).

³³ Patrick Bearsley SM, *From Ascesis to Kenosis. The Evolution in Marist Understanding of the "Unknown and hidden"*, in FN 5, 1 (2000) 69-94; = Id., *De l'ascèse à la kénose: comment les Maristes ont évolué dans leur intelligence de l'"inconnu et cachés dans le monde"*, in FN 5, 2 (2000) 210-235.

³⁴ Justin Taylor SM, *A Neglected Source of Colinian Spirituality: The Mystical Tradition in the Society of Jesus in France in the 17th Century*, in FN 5, 4 (2001) 405-442. French summary in FN 6, 1 (2003) 83-84; Alois Greiler SM, *The Spanish Mystics as Source for Colin's Thinking*, in FN 22, 1 (2020) 65-78.

work, free from self-pretence, power, greed, ambition, and full of respect for the other. This attitude would be exemplary for the Marists and for the Church as a whole.³⁵

Then, each deeper religious experience reveals something of God's presence in the world. For Colin, we could say, God is present in this world 'as it were hidden'.

D Criteria from the founderology model

In founderology, the study of the specific nature and theology of founding persons, especially religious founders and foundresses, emphasis is given to the specific grace of a founder like Colin. For Colin we are convinced: He received a grace from God, a mandate for the church, a unique spirituality (and not only a work) expressed in new constitutions (not constitutions taken from others), and in inspirations for a religious family and for other congregations.

Colin once said, God calls different religious congregations at different times for a purpose. Once their mission is fulfilled, they may step back (FS, doc. 5 (c. 1837):

"In Rome, a religious spoke to him at length against new Orders, saying that people should join the older ones. When he had said his piece, Father Colin said, 'Forgive me, Monsieur, if I do not share your opinion. Each age has seen new Orders come to birth. God has brought them to birth to meet current needs. Each Order has its vocation, its mission, its time. When we read the history of the Church, we see that some have appeared in every age. Strictly speaking there is only one body which must always continue in existence: the Church, which has Jesus Christ as its head. The others acknowledge men as their founders, and do not have to endure, but fall when the need for which God created them has been met. If they do endure afterwards, they no longer thrive with the dash and prosperity which blessed their early days. They fall back into the common run when their mission is ended.'"

The Society of Mary believes, Colin received a call from God to make a contribution to the mission of the Church. And this call is still valid for many religious. Here, we can name the branches of the Marist family, congregations started by (former) Marists like St Peter Julian Eymard and Félix Rougier (1859-1938), and the congregations in the Pacific.³⁶ What was always said about the attitude and virtue of Mary, a single person, Colin transformed to an attitude of a social body, the whole Church. And of course, the Society of Mary itself.

E Criteria from a Mariological model or model of grace

Looking at Colin and his Society of Mary, we return to the central place Mary holds. From the virtue-model we come to the modern theology of Mary. In a Mariological model, Colin stands for the Mary of the Incarnation more than for her glories in heaven, the woman open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, for the humble woman of Nazareth close to the needs of

³⁵ Jean Coste SM, *Commentaires historiques sur les Constitutions de la S.M.: Nr. 8: La formule de l'apostolat mariste: Ignoti et quasi occulti - Historical Commentary on the Constitutions of the S. M.: Nr. 8: The Marist Way in the Apostolate: Ignoti et quasi occulti*, in *Acta SM* 5 (1958-1959) 45-91; Fritz Arnold SM, *Like Mary, Towards Christian maturity in the twenty-first century*, Dublin, The Columba Press, 2001.

³⁶ Rougier was declared Venerable in 2000. In an unpublished paper, I gathered the influence of Colin on at least 15 related congregations.

the people, the person who responds with body and soul, and who is the perfect disciple.³⁷ In Mary, Colin also gained an 'eschatology of hope' (Jean Coste). In a time, when eschatology was low, Colin intuitively proclaimed hope and not disaster: Mary, the Mother of Mercy at the beginning and at the end, and Marists being instruments of this mercy.

In his 'age of Mary', Colin and many early Marists had a great Marian devotion on a personal level. From this, Colin distinguished the Marian practice based on the charism. In liturgy, he highlighted a (traditional) Marian prayer for each central moment of the day – morning, midday, evening, not so much as devotion but as a reminder of the Marist vocation.

The link Mary – Church is so important for Colin, that we treat it as separate paragraph.

Another important inspiration Colin saw is Mary the woman of grace, of the paradox of grace. Through a Christian who allows himself or herself to be available to God's grace like Mary, God can do great things (another key-phrase of Colin!). God's strength through human weakness that bears much fruit is the paradox of grace. Bernardin Cardinal Gantin pointed this out in his preface to Delbos' book: In Colin's Oceania mission we see the validity of Saint Paul's words in 1 Cor 1: 27. "He chose the weak things of this world to put the powerful to shame".

We see it at work in Colin and the early Marists,³⁸ in his reading of St. Paul,³⁹ in his concept of Marists as instruments of mercy. Reflecting on grace echoes the theo-centric spirituality of Colin: give absolute priority to the will of God, 'dare locum Deo' (FA, doc. 307, 1; 1845).⁴⁰

As the Colinian key-phrase I take what Colin said to Father Mayet in 1837 (FS, doc. 1, 2):

"The aim of the Society is to imitate the blessed Virgin, who was at once so unassuming and so full of zeal for the salvation of the world, working for it in silence."

F Criteria from an ecclesiological model

Usually, Marists speak about a Marian vision of the Church.⁴¹ The theme of a 'Marian Church goes back to the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988).⁴² Saint John Paul II picked it up different times. And different Marists saw in the theme an echo of Marist spirituality.

To reflect on the beatification of Colin motivates me to be more specific and to speak about as it were a Marist vision for the Church.

The third aim of the Society according to Colin is fidelity to the Holy See, the teaching of the Church. This is in line with the Marist theme of Mary, support of the Church at the beginning and at the end.

³⁷ Patrick Bearsley SM, *Mary the Perfect Disciple: A Paradigm for Mariology*, in *Theological Studies* 41 (1980) 461-504.

³⁸ Hosie, *Anonymous Apostle*; Snijders, *Commitment*, Laracy, *Melanesia*; see above.

³⁹ Alois Greiler SM, 'God's grace towards me was not in vain'. *A Reflection on the Pauline Dimension of Marist Spirituality*, in FN 13 (2011) 78-101.

⁴⁰ Alois Greiler SM, *Marist Spirituality in a Trinitarian Key. An exploration of the theological basis of the different Marist charisms*, in FN 19, 1 (2017) 3-8.

⁴¹ Coste, *Une vision mariale de l'Église*. Now also a feature for the Marist Brothers!

⁴² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Klarstellungen. Zur Prüfung der Geister* (Herder-Bücherei, 393), Freiburg, Herder, ²1971 (1971), 'Das marianische Prinzip', p. 65-72.

First, the main reason is Colin's vision of the Church, a Church with an eye for the needs of the people, and a Church inspired by the example of Mary with Marists playing her role of support for the Church today.

In other words, the main argument in favour of beatification will be from ecclesiology. Let me add further features of Colin's or let me say the Marist vision of the Church.

The relevance is for the global and the local church. Colin's contribution for the Oceania mission stands for the global dimension, and his 'tamquam suam' for the local dimension. Mary supported the Church at its beginning, and this is Colin's call until today – to support the Church as Mary did and how she did it.

For Colin, it is a church at the same time hierarchical and familial. Loyalty to the Holy See and the bishops was a key in his thinking and acting. But also, the emphasis on an active laity supported by the Church and expressed in his different concepts of 'confraternities', Third Order, Marist laity.⁴³

The relevance of his charism concerns the attitude of all Church members, especially priests. The three 'no's' (to greed, pride, ambition), to be an instrument of mercy, not to be an obstacle between God and people, to submit ourselves to people in order to win them over excludes any idea of clericalism, and is more than apt for the Church as a whole to face the modern world and to respond in such a way that people will feel free to listen.⁴⁴

Colin's point is again twofold. It is about the attitude of Mary as he perceived it, and it is not only for individuals, but for the collective, the whole Church.

Conclusion

In light of the overall topic of this Marist symposium: 'Sources and Streams', I say, the founder should certainly be a source... promoted by *fama*, by beatification... God has given a founder his specific vocation and grace and charism. This may overflow in each member of the congregation today for the good of the church and the people of God.

The Marist angle is really: God takes initiatives – who responds and how? And, for some people there is at it were an obstacle between God and them and this obstacle could also be the Church and Church personnel! So, how can we proclaim the good news and respond to God's call and direct people to do the same without being an obstacle? In this, the situation in post-revolutionary France at the beginning of modernization is similar to our progressed modernity. And we Marists believe our charism can be a helpful response to those questions. God speaks to a soul in few words, for example 'hidden and unknown', is Colin's experience. In Mary he discovered the person who united both, personally being unobtrusive and at the

⁴³ Frank McKay SM, *The Marist Laity. Finding the Way Envisaged by Father Colin - Laïcât mariste. Vers une mise en œuvre des perspectives du père Colin* (Maristica, 4), Rome, 1991; Charles Girard SM, *Colinian Ideas on Marist Laity and their Relevance Today - Idées coliniennes sur le laïcât mariste et leur Application aujourd'hui*, in FN, 1, 2 (1989) 144-172.

⁴⁴ Details in Jean Coste SM, *Les Maristes ont-ils un message particulier pour le monde d'aujourd'hui?*, in 9-10-11 octobre 1964. *Congrès international mariste*, Lyon, 1965, 39-51.

same time full of zeal for the Good News. Colin's language is Marian in as much as he thinks from the angle of how the Church can respond today in a way that people can accept.

- For the Society of Mary in general, beatification was and is accepted. This was so for Colin himself and for the Society through the two centuries of its existence, though with a changing emphasis in parallel with the development in the Church in general. The Society has initiated the cause for different Marists. Some are declared saints, others are regarded as saintly.
- In his constitutions, Colin placed personal holiness as one of the aims of the Society. His devotion for saints, his expectation of saints and martyrs in the Society, and his work for the Changel cause illustrate this in a formal sense.
- The cause of Father Colin went through a long process delayed for various reasons and was re-started in 2009. Working for the cause proved extremely fruitful for Marist studies, the history and spirituality of the Society of Mary as led by Colin.
- Some steps in the process have been achieved (writings, virtues, relics) and some historical issues probably need to be looked at again.
- In some ways, the cause is struggling: the *fama*, the commitment of the Society, the question of a miracle. His *fama*? Naturally, a person who is so much the inspiration in the background does not easily have a wide-spread *fama*. Not at first sight.
- And now we discuss the question, why the Church should beatify Colin.
- To answer the latter question, I propose to start from the meaning of beatification rather than from the opinions among Marists. Beatification is a decision of the Church for the good of the whole Church, not a decision by the Marists.
- So, beatification, what difference would it make? For all who feel inspired by Colin, it would make a personal difference. In formation and presentations of the Society, it would make a difference if the founder is acknowledged by the church. Beatification would honour the church in the Pacific, its origins so much supported by Colin and started by men inspired by him. It confirms that we believe in special graces given to founding persons for the whole church.
- Every time, the process was taken seriously by the Marist Fathers, it promoted Marist research and deepened and even reshaped Marist identity. Much was communicated within and outside the Society. Thus, even with the intended result not yet achieved, many other things were achieved with the process under way somehow.
- So, beatify why and as what?
- His beatification would highlight the charism of all Marist branches. Colin played a role in the foundation story and charism of the Brothers, Sisters, SMSM, and the lay branch. They worked together in the pioneering years. Colin had a vision for lay people in the Church.
- To beatify Colin would have a historical and geographical relevance, for religious life, for the church in the Pacific, for all the places where Marists live and work.
- Because God privileged him with the special grace to be a founder with a charism intended to serve the whole Church.
- Because this charism is still relevant today: a Marist vision of the Church. His teaching of the 'hidden and unknown in this world', 'Mary support of the Church at the beginning and at the end of time', 'at the same time unobtrusive and full of zeal', the Apostles and the early Church as model, can help the Church in the crisis of today as it did in the crisis of his time. What Colin said about Mary is relevant for the Church in the sense of a corporate personality.

- In his time and ever since, Colin was and is the spiritual inspiration for many. Like Mary, servant and perfect disciple, he sought the Kingdom of God first. This bore fruit in saints and saintly people, in the founding and re-founding of Church.
- To beatify Colin would bring back Mary as he understood her, Mary who is the personalised ecclesia, who stands for a Church who cares for people in their needs.⁴⁵
- Why another saint? Yes, we already have many who are canonized and beatified. On the other hand, with Colin, we could say, God calls new saints for new times and needs. The Marist vision for the Church can contribute to a way spiritually fruitful for the Good News today. The time of saints and Mariology is at a low. This is not a reason against a Marian saint but for a new Marian saint, to bring these important dimensions of Church to new awareness: Marian, holy, service.
- Why beatify Colin? Because Colin is a Marian saint, who saw in the attitude of Mary, hidden and yet full of zeal, the inspiration for the Church as a whole, a Church Marian, instrument of God's grace, understanding the needs of its time. How can the Church face the world of today? Here is a promising approach, especially for all church workers, for the church local and global, especially in the Pacific.
- And simply maybe, because the Church would honour with Colin all those who are like Mary in the background, the inspiration and support for others to follow Christ.

Realistically, I do not expect the cause to come to a positive conclusion soon. One is the hesitating Marists, one is the difficulty of a miracle approved according to the new, more strict scientific criteria. One reason are historical objections.

Personally, I see Colin as inspiration and would welcome his beatification. Would it make a difference on a bigger scale? On the Marist scale, and that is a global scale in education networks, pastoral ministries, the local churches in the Pacific – yes, it would fulfil the idea of beatification: inspiration in a specific area of the church.

The work done, Marist research, studies and communication of the charism, ever since the cause began brought much positive fruit and this alone makes it worthwhile to continue.

And then, our founder is not beatified. Is he not? Colin and the Chapter of 1872 declared Mary as the foundress and first and perpetual superior. She certainly is counted among the saints in heaven. She is recalled in each Eucharistic prayer, in many other prayers, and in papal documents. So maybe therefore Marists have deep down an intuition our founding person is saintly. Yet Colin is the name to make this explicit, to live it today, to be today like Mary.

Abbreviations, archives, secondary literature

APM = Archivio Padri Maristi, Via Alessandro Poerio 63, Roma

FN = Forum Novum, journal of the Society of Mary, 1989ff

FA = Jean Coste (ed.), *A Founder Acts*, Rome, 1984.

FS = Jean Coste SM (ed.), *A Founder Speaks*, Rome, 1975.

OM = *Origines Maristes*, 4 volumes, Rome, 1960-1967.

Marist website about the cause of Father Colin: www.jeanclaudocolin.org

⁴⁵ Gisbert Greshake, *Maria-Ecclesia. Perspektiven einer marianisch grundierten Theologie und Kirchenpraxis*, Regensburg, Pustet, 2014, points to the potential for renewal once we bring Mary into focus again.