

**Fr Tom Ryan SM**  
introducing Fr Justin Taylor at the launch of  
***Jean-Claude Colin: Reluctant Founder 1790-1875.***

*Villa Maria Community, Hunters Hill, NSW*  
*Friday Sept 21<sup>st</sup>. 2018*



I'd like to go back 60 years to 1958 and St Patrick's College, Wellington, NZ. As in our Marist schools, we had the Third Order of Mary. It was part of a culture from our Marist teachers that was as much caught as it was taught.

In that 1958 TOM group at SPC were a number of teenagers who went on to become Marists themselves. One was Craig Larkin. We are all aware of his life-long interest and writings in things 'Marist'. His legacy lives on after his death in current issues of the *Marist Messenger*.

Another from that 1958 group was Justin Taylor.

Justin, too, has had a similar involvement in Marist studies. However, his path to this book launch followed a different course from Craig's. As a school boy, Justin was extremely, if not exceptionally, gifted, especially in languages. After ordination in 1966 and a year's intensive language studies in Europe, he had Latin, Greek, French, German (and a sprinkling of English) under his belt. These provided the needed tools to pursue studies in history, specialising in the early Church. He was awarded a doctorate by Cambridge University in 1972.

After some years teaching and involved in initial formation in NZ, Justin did further studies at the École Biblique in Jerusalem in the mid 1980's (no doubt, having brushed up basic Hebrew). That marked a significant change of direction in his life. For the next 22 years he was on the staff of the École Biblique and was Vice- Director in his final three years. Amongst the various forms of recognition he has received, the most prestigious is the Doctor of Divinity awarded him by Cambridge University in 2006. This is regarded as one of Cambridge university's highest honours. In Justin's case, it was a recognition of his scholarship as an early church historian, at the highest level and over many years. I may be wrong – but I know of no past pupil from any of our Marist schools in the world who has been recognised at such a high level.

It is this historical expertise, then, that Justin has brought to this book on Jean-Claude Colin, undertaken at the request of our General Administration. Justin builds on earlier work and expertise of so many in the Marist family, in particular, Donal Kerr's study of Colin covering the years 1790-1836. Justin's book is the culmination of a process going back to 1960 and the first volume of *Origines Maristes* compiled by Jean Coste and Gaston Lessard.

Drafts of the first 24 chapters of Justin's book were originally available on the SM website. In reading them, I was reminded how history, as has been said, is both a science and an art. It appeared to me that Justin has been able to bring the needed objectivity and critical skills to his investigation of Colin – the man and his story. But he is also able to bring to the task something else that is an art– which I can only describe as a sympathetic imagination.

Just a thought about that. Being a Marist has been central for Justin – in prayer, community, and the life

of a Marist family. Here at Hunter's Hill we have had first-hand experience of his company. We enjoy him and he enjoys being with us. I say this for this reason. Some years ago, a NZ Marist remarked to me that when Justin was on the staff at Highden (the Novitiate) he was quite at home having a cuppa with the Brothers who worked the farm and they were quite at home with him. None of us would be surprised to hear this. It says something about the man. He could mix it with dons at high table at Cambridge as easily as with men who had probably never darkened the door of a university yet were very much his family.

I wonder if it is here that we might find the underground water-course that moistens and humanizes this study of Colin – the sympathetic imagination that is, somehow, able to work from the inside out without compromising the more objective and critical tasks of the historian.

To conclude: tonight we are celebrating a timely book. It is almost indispensable for further work on the cause of Jean Claude Colin for canonisation. In some ways, it is imperative given the diminishing forms of religious life and the troubled face of today's Church. It is a needed recognition of the outcome of Colin's efforts to evangelise the Pacific region, especially New Zealand, and later, parts of Australia. This is an authoritative study that sets a benchmark for future work in the field. Again, it is most appropriate this book launch is here at Villa Maria – the Society of Mary's first foundation in Australia.

Finally, what we have is a beautifully designed and attractive publication. For that, we are grateful Hilary Regan and the ATF Press, to Ron Nissen, and, most importantly, to Justin Taylor himself. Thank you.