

SMbulletin

Wednesday, 1 April 2026

FR GASTON LESSARD SM IN MEMORIAM 1930—2026



While Marists around the world are mourning the death of Fr Gaston Lessard, and praying for the eternal repose of his soul, we wish to pay tribute to him, highlighting some of the great contributions he has made to the life and spirit of the Society, centering it around the life of our Founder whom he never stopped studying and admiring.

Gaston has been assistant archivist, archivist, editor, co-editor, and translator. He gave retreats, workshops and conferences on Marist topics in different parts of the world. His work for Marist research coincides with the renewal of Marist studies first in the context of the cause of the founder, Father Jean-Claude Colin, and subsequently in general research on Marist history and spirituality. His name will always be associated with the redaction of the new Constitutions, approved by the General Chapter in 1985 and by the Holy See in 1987. One of his main tasks was being the archivist of the Marist archives (APM) and the different subsidiary research libraries. Both owe much to him and to Fr Jean Coste for their present day quality. This included administration, inventory and assistance for researchers working in the house. As cooperator in the Centre for Marist Studies he was involved in different programmes offered for participants of the SM. Many people who have known Gaston will remember him with gratitude. May he rest in peace.

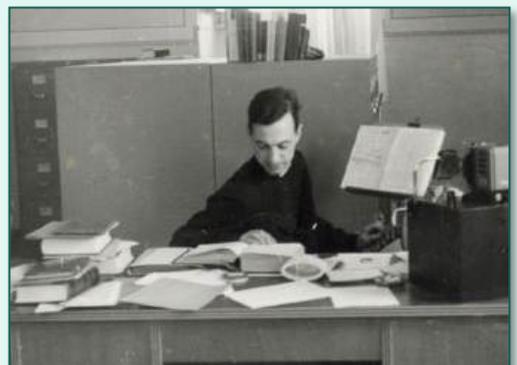
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Gaston Lessard was born in 1930 in Thedford Mines, Québec, Canada. He completed his secondary school with the Marists in Canada, and did his Marist formation in the US, where he was professed. He was ordained in Rome on Holy Saturday in 1955 and studied at the Gregorian University.

Immediately after ordination, Gaston was appointed to the General House where he started to work on “Origines Maristes”, with Fr Jean Coste, and in 1957 he became the General Archivist. From 1968 he had several appointments in the US and Canada, doing Parish and Chaplaincy work and as a Formator. In 1984 he came back to Rome where he was one of the main contributors to the redaction of the new Constitutions. He lived in the General House until 1999.

Between 1999 and 2013, while being based in Canada, he worked on “Colin Sup” and “Colin Fondateur”. In those years he was involved in Canada in Pastoral care, Lay Marists, Provincial administration and much more, while writing also the history of the Marists in the East of Canada and the history of several deceased Canadian confreres.

Gaston was present at the General Chapters of 1961, 1969-1970, 1985, 1993 and 2001, in the roles of (assistant) secretary, observer and delegate.



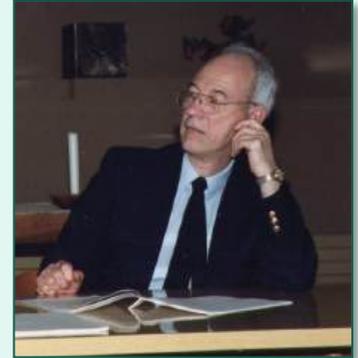
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Through the “Centre for Marist Studies” he participated in the organisation of the *Colloquia* on the studies of Marist history and spirituality in Rome in 1984, 1989, 1992 and 1997.

Gaston travelled a lot to other Marist houses: for research, retreats, workshops etc. and made important contributions in houses of formation and during renewal programmes. This was possible thanks to his ability to learn and speak many languages, and he was and is probably one of the most known Marists throughout the Society.

At the occasion of the publication of his last book, In 2017 “Who is Jean-Claude Colin for me?”, he commented: *Jean-Claude Colin has been my companion for the last sixty years. I single out three moments in this long fellowship. The first is the summer of 1956, which I spent with Jean Coste as we visited the places where Colin had lived. The second came soon after: I spent two years indexing the Mayet Memoirs. The third came much later and lasted longer: it is the time I spent editing the letters that Colin wrote until the end of his life.*



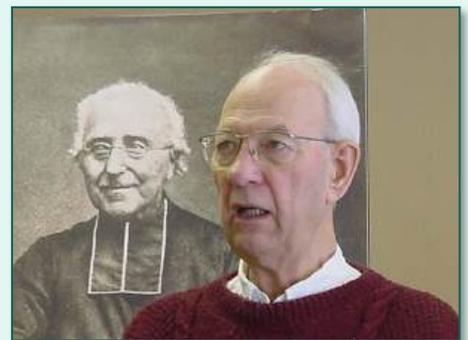
He has published a huge variety of books and articles, several were in close collaboration with other Marists such as late Fr Jean Coste. These are some of the most important texts:



- Antiquiores textus constitutionum Societatis Mariae (1955)
- Origines Maristes I-IV (1960-1967)
- Autour de la Règle (1991)
- Colin Sup I-III (2006-2009)
- Colin Fondateur (2014)
- Qui est Jean-Claude Colin Pour moi? (2017)

General archivist Fr Carlo Maria Schianchi writes:

Rather than listing the works, books, articles, conferences, retreats, and other achievements of Fr. Gaston Lessard, starting with his collaboration, when he was young, with Father Coste on the drafting of *Origines Maristes*, and moving on years later to the onomastic and toponymic indexes of the *Memoires Mayet*, a chronology of the Founder’s work, and the drafting of the new Constitutions; I believe that Fr. Gaston’s greatest contribution lies in his efforts focused on involving all Marists in the understanding and deepening of Marist history and spirituality. He was a source of inspiration, a true teacher who rejoiced in the interest and participation of his confreres.



I would like to highlight three particular works: the Marist Collection, Forum Novum and the ‘Colloquia’ – meetings where Marists and others reflected on Marist history and spirituality. Gaston once told me, “Father Colin is like a mountain you see every morning while leaving your house, and you believe that you know the mountain well. In reality, you know only the side of it you see every morning, while the other sides remain hidden from your own view. For this reason, you need the others: if you do not want to form a limited idea of Fr Colin and to think that you have said everything about him, you need the others to show you different aspects.” This is, in my view, Fr Gaston’s most important contribution; he will finally be able to meet and converse with Fr Colin.