

*The Holy Spirit and Jean-Claude Colin:
The Person, The Group and The Church*



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Anyone who writes on the Founder and Marist spirituality is indebted to so many others, most significant of all is the late Jean Coste, sm..

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I dedicate this essay to the late Gaston Lessard, sm.

Over a quarter of a century ago (January 1998), the late Gaston Lessard, sm, gave a conference at a meeting of the various Marist congregations. Central in his task was discussing the role of the Holy Spirit and Pentecost in Marist tradition and to what extent they can be viewed as ‘founding’ images in Marist spirituality.¹ Given his audience, it is understandable how Lessard’s scope was that of the four Marist congregations. Any discussion of Jean-Claude Colin and the Holy Spirit was, understandably, within the overall topic that was Lessard’s concern.

The focus of this present essay is more limited, namely, to one founder and one Marist congregation. ‘To breathe in and breathe out Mary’s spirit’ is one of the consecrated phrases of the Society of Mary. It encapsulates the attitudes and virtuous dispositions that characterize us as a specific group of religious, namely, to think, judge, feel and act, in all things, as Mary. Importantly, as Justin Taylor reminds us, ‘the spirit of Mary is the spirit of Jesus, that is the Spirit of God’.²

As Colin himself says at the 1866 general chapter:

We must there fill ourselves with her spirit, and this spirit we must draw from her heart. The Apostles did nothing without consulting her, because she had the new law written in her heart and had been taught by the Holy Spirit before the Incarnation.³

This final phrase suggests a specific focus for us here.

What about the *person* of the Holy Spirit? How much is this ‘Spirit’—a person of the triune God—part of a) Jean-Claude Colin’s experience and of b) the Marist tradition handed down to us? How can these two elements be viewed in Colin’s context and from a contemporary perspective? Attempting a response to these questions is the aim of this essay. The essay will unfold around the three aspects noted in the main heading: the person, the group, and the Church—leading to a final suggestion about Colin’s legacy.

A survey of the Indices in *A Founder Speaks* and *A Founder Acts* indicates that there are about 10-12 explicit references to the Holy Spirit. But, as will emerge in this essay, there are others where the Holy Spirit’s presence and action are implied.

¹ Gaston Lessard, S.M., ‘Marists and Pentecost’, *Forum Novum* 5:1 (May 2000), 36-68 (French and English versions), at 53.

² Justin Taylor, sm, *A Marist Reset and Other Reflections* (Rome 2018), 83.

³ *Origines Maristes*, doc. 807: 4 cited in Lessard, ‘Marists and Pentecost’, 67.

The Person: Holy Spirit as Gift and Companion

We begin our discussion by examining one text from a conference given by Fr. Colin at a retreat in Aug. 1847 in which we find explicit reference to the person (and the group). For ease of discussion, I present the text in full.

Messieurs, as the retreat goes on, let us take care to profit by the grace God has given us, and not waste a single moment of these ‘days of salvation’. Let us redouble our fervour. The Holy Spirit is in the midst of this gathering. You know what our Lord said— ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, *ibi sum in medio eorum* (*I am there in the midst of them* – Mt 18:20). Even more, the Holy Spirit is in the very heart of each of us; let us profit by his visit, let us listen to his voice. We have a certain amount to put up with, but let us remember that we must do violence to ourselves if we are to belong to God.⁴

The overall thrust of this passage as a reflection of the Founder’s priorities but also of the dynamics of grace seems to be grounded in the penultimate sentence:

... Even more, the Holy Spirit is in the very heart of each of us ...

It is noteworthy how Colin uses an emphatic phrase, namely, ‘very heart’ (of each of us).⁵ It suggests the core of the person while being consistent with the group discernment which he alludes to earlier. A word of explanation on this.

In Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, the ‘heart’ is a symbol of the whole person. Scripture does not use modern psychological terms with thinking or knowledge in the intellect and love and decision in the will. *Heart* includes all that. As a symbol for the ‘inside’ of a person ‘it embraces feelings, memories, ideas, plans, decisions’.⁶ In the global and concrete anthropology of the Bible, the heart is the principle of morality, the centre of one’s freedom, of decisive choices and the place where one enters to be in dialogue with oneself but also where one opens oneself or closes oneself to God.⁷

⁴ Jean-Claude Colin, *A Founder Speaks* (Rome: Via Alessandro Poerio, 63, 1975), 141.1 (henceforth FS).

⁵ The original French is ‘au milieu du coeur de chacun...’ *Memoirs of Fr Mayet*, Vol. 7, 179.

⁶ Xavier Léon-Dufour, ‘Heart’ in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), 228.

⁷ Ibid., 228. Interestingly, Aquinas in one discussion notes how ‘elective love is an act of the will and the will is signified by “heart”’. For just as the corporeal heart is the principle of all corporeal movements, so, too, the will—especially with respect to the intending of the ultimate end, which is the object of charity—is the principle of all spiritual movements. Now there are three principles of action that are moved by the will, viz., (a) the intellect, which is signified by ‘mind’, (b) the lower appetite, which is signified by “soul”, and (c) the external

Further, the phrase of Colin has echoes in words of St. Paul. The basis of our hope is that ‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us’ (Rom. 5:5). As one commentator notes:

The gift of the Spirit is not only the proof but also the medium of the outpouring of God’s love. It signifies par excellence the divine presence to the justified.⁸

Colin encourages his listeners to profit from ‘this visit’—as a time of special ‘presence’ of the Holy Spirit during a retreat. For that reason, there is a need to make an extra effort (‘redouble our fervour’) and that, to ‘belong to God’, calls for a measure of self-denial. Further, Colin underlines that the Holy Spirit is a source of instruction and guidance (‘listen to his voice’). This is not only for each person but, importantly, for the group.

Which brings us to other key phrases: how ‘the Holy Spirit is in the midst of this gathering’ and a reminder of the Lord’s words ‘where two or three are gathered in my name ... *I am there in the midst of them*’ (Mt 18:20). This highlights the aspect noted above—as companion.

The context of the Matthew text is that of outlining a strategy for preserving the unity of the ecclesial community. But the gathering can be for prayer, study or decision-making. Those who gather in Christ’s name because ‘they belong to him ... there the risen Lord is present in community with them’ and such is a guarantee of ‘the acceptance of the heavenly Father’.⁹

Colin’s comments here are reflected in his strong views elsewhere on steps needed in any process of group discernment i.e., Chapters and meetings of the council—to be discussed in the next section of this essay.

In considering the Holy Spirit we started with the phrase used by Justin Taylor ‘the spirit of Mary is the spirit of Jesus, that is the Spirit of God’. This is a deep conviction of Colin. This highlights the companion aspect of the Spirit. So, Colin is being consistent in his explicit mention of Mary immediately after the passage cited above about the presence of the Holy Spirit and of the Risen Lord. It merits to be quoted in full:

executive power, which is signified by “strength” or “power” or “might”.’ *Summa Theologica* 2.2.44.5. [New Translation of Summa Theologica](#)

⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ., ‘The Letter to the Romans’, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R Brown, J Fitzmyer, and R Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 830-868, at 844.

⁹ Brendan Byrne, *Lifting the Burden: Reading Matthew’s Gospel in the Church Today* (Strathfield, NSW: St. Pauls, 2004), 143.

Let us remember also (and it will comfort us) that the blessed Virgin is in our midst, that we are her sons. Messieurs, during this retreat we should all make one great resolution, never to say or to do anything without first raising our hearts to Mary, saying ‘Blessed Virgin, what must I say? What must I do?’ If you do that, Messieurs, you will bring the choicest graces on yourselves and your ministry.

Colin is highlighting how, for Marists, Mary is integral to the process of decision-making, whether it be by an individual or by a group, which brings us our next topic.¹⁰

Group Discernment and the Holy Spirit

We are guided here by number of passages, perhaps indicative of the importance of the topic in Colin’s eyes and confirmed by their detailed nature.¹¹ In all this, the working assumption for Colin is that, once there is union with God, ‘it is he who sets everything in motion’ and ‘must work in us.’¹²

The Introduction of one article sets the scene and captures some of the essentials of Fr. Colin’s approach to how the Holy Spirit works within a group. It captures how much ‘prayer and democratic procedures were, for Father Colin, bound together in a single process of spiritual discernment in difficult cases.’¹³

Highlighted from the subsections of this number of *A Founder Acts* are the following points:

... Let us place unite ourselves with the Holy Spirit ... in the hands of God, for we are out to know his will. This is God’s work not ours.

... none of the graces coming to us from the heart of the Lord, comes other than through prayer...

.... the practice of an hour’s adoration before the Blessed Sacrament ...

¹⁰ When it comes to the individual and the Holy Spirit, especially in relation to prayer and the gift of wisdom, I offer an extended treatment of this in two chapters of my earlier book. They are Ch. 3 ‘The Taste Test: Prayer, Personhood and Resonance’ and Ch 5 ‘A Shared Taste: The Holy Spirit, Collaboration and Wisdom’ of *The Reasoning Heart: Jean-Claude Colin and the Marist Spirit* (Adelaide, SA: ATF Press, 2021).

¹¹ Jean-Claude Colin, *A Founder Acts* (Rome: Via Alessandro Poerio, 63, 1983), 265: 1-7 (henceforth FA). Also, FS 139 and 182: 53 and FA 396:3; 303:1.

¹² FS 63:2 and 67:3.

¹³ FA 265 Introduction.

.... Divided opinions after prayer indicates that ‘we do not know God’s will’ hence, ‘we must go on praying’... if the votes remained divided ‘the will of God is not clear.’¹⁴

Colin applies these principles at the personal level and offers safeguards for maintaining the integrity of the discernment process for members of a council.

He acknowledges the consultative role of a council, though there are matters when their consent is required (deliberative). The ultimate authority is the superior and he is God’s instrument. Obedience is a central issue and Colin speaks firmly on this matter. Some rules of thumb: be open-minded; try to see all sides of a question; no undue haste. The aim is to do the will of God.¹⁵

A central criterion for discernment for Colin is *peace* (which is mentioned a number of times), whether it be at personal or collective level.¹⁶ Speaking to the novices he says:

Above all look for peace; *non in commotione Dominus*. * He acts *fortiter* but always *suaviter*. ** I would urge you not to make decisions in moments of upset or agitation. It is a great thing if you can acquire this interior calm. It demands effort on our part, but with the help of God we can achieve it.¹⁷

We are offered here an insight into Colin’s concern to preserve the integrity of the discernment and decision-making process. This is still the case today in the legislation of the Society. The Superior General requires the consent or advice of his Council in matters indicated in ‘common or proper law’. The number continues:

...Without prejudice to his freedom to decide what seems best to him in the Lord, he is invited to follow Father Colin’s recommendation that, whenever a majority of the assistants differ from him in council, he embrace for humility’s sake, the opinion which is opposed to his own, for Mary was always ready to follow the will of others rather than her own

¹⁴ FA 265: 1-8.

¹⁵ FS 175: 12-28.

¹⁶ Re the group (council) see FS 175:23.

¹⁷ FS 140:8. *‘God is not found in agitation’, literally ‘in the earthquake’ (1 Kgs. 19:11); **‘Mightily but always gently’ (Wis. 8:11). ‘Whenever I feel agitated, I cannot arrive at a decision. At such times, the more pressing the matter is, the more I play for time’. FA 303:1.

(1987 Const. no. 197 citing Const.1872, n. 307).

This brings us to the final task in this section. How can Colin's understanding and practice of group discernment be evaluated? We turn to St. Ignatius Loyola.

A Benchmark: Ignatian Discernment

The key aspects can be summarised.

Key Principles

- Finding God in All Things: Trusting that God is active in daily life and choices.
- Freedom: Discerning with a heart detached from personal selfish desires, wanting only what God wills.
- The 'Rule of Thumb': If you are moving toward God, the enemy causes turbulence; if away, the enemy brings false comfort.

The essential steps in decision making:

- Identify the decision: State the choice clearly (e.g., option A vs. option B).
- Gather data: Use reason to list pros and cons.
- Prayerful reflection: Notice feelings of consolation or desolation attached to each option.

Confirmation: Seek a sense of deep, lasting peace regarding the chosen path.¹⁸

Our summary of the key elements of group discernment (and its underlying principle) as envisaged and practiced by Colin are consistent with the Ignatian principles and method outlined above.¹⁹ The crucial element is the final one, a deep sense of peace concerning the decision made on the particular matter—something about which, as noted above, Colin was insistent, and consistently so.

In his farewell to the members of the 1873 Chapter. Fr. Colin highlights,

¹⁸ [An Ignatian Framework for Making a Decision - IgnatianSpirituality.com](http://www.ignatian.org/An-Ignatian-Framework-for-Making-a-Decision)

¹⁹ See a parallel discussion of these principles and steps in Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (New York: Orbis, 2004) in 'Discernment of the Spirit' 159-169, especially the five point summary at the end which mirrors the key aspects noted above and the importance of a 'sense of peace in God' with any final decision.

again, the role of the Spirit and of Mary in Marist gatherings:

...You will carry on the work of the blessed Virgin. I am content to say how happy, how consoled the good spirit animating you makes me. I have seen the Holy Spirit in the midst of your deliberations, in your midst the Blessed Virgin, the one who is to guide you into the harbour of salvation'.²⁰

This brings us to the next stage of our discussion, namely, the Church.

Holy Spirit, Mercy, 'Sentire cum Ecclesia', and Magnanimity

Earlier when discussing Colin's words that 'the Holy Spirit is in the very heart of each of us', the link was made with God's love 'poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us'. Fitzmyer also comments that in the Hebrew Scriptures, the 'pouring out' of a divine attribute is common, for instance, of the Spirit (Joel 3:1-2) and of 'mercy', 'wisdom' and 'grace' (respectively Sir.18:11; 1:9; Ps. 45:3).²¹

Our focus here is 'mercy' as found in another consecrated phrase for the Society of Mary from 1987 Constitutions no.11. In living out the evangelical counsels through the three vows, and being 'attentive solely to the Lord and aided by the prayer and example of Mary, Marists strive to become, in their Founder's words, ever more effective "*instruments of divine mercy*" – citing Const. 1872, n 118 (emphasis added).²²

Taylor points out that, this italicised phrase, anchored in the relationship with both Jesus and Mary, was used by Colin in an address to the General Chapter of 1842 and recorded in Mayet Vol.1: 722 but not in *A Founder Speaks*. Colin says:

We are obliged by state and by duty to follow Jesus Christ and his divine Mother. May all our thoughts, all the movements of our heart, all our steps be worthy of our august models. Let us live their life, think as they thought, judge things as they judged them; let our union with them by prayer be such that we may never lose sight of them, and that the world with its false

²⁰ FA 396: 3.

²¹ Fitzmyer, SJ., 'The Letter to the Romans', 844.

²² The 1872 Constitutions no. 118, the phrase used is 'instruments of the divine mercies' in the context of the three vows. There is no mention of Jesus but only of 'following in the footsteps of the Virgin'.

glory may be what it was for the great apostle: *mihi mundus crucifixus est, et ego mundo*. It's only through this, my most honoured confreres, that we will do God's work, that we will become in his hands the instruments of his divine mercy in favour of others, and that we will ourselves carry out the great work of our perfection.

As Taylor sums up: 'Here, if anywhere, we have a synthesis of Colin's apostolic spirituality'.²³

Our concern here is with one 'outpouring' of the Holy Spirit, namely, mercy and its importance for Colin (and Marists) as being 'instruments of divine mercy'.

Colin, Mercy and the Church

We noted earlier the link between the gift of the Holy Spirit, the outpouring of God's love and how it can be specified in mercy. St. Thomas, so valued by Colin, addresses this precise issue. For Aquinas, *miserericordia* is most properly attributed to God since it is through mercy that God's omnipotence is, in a special way, made manifest.²⁴ Walter Kasper cites Aquinas in his summing up.

Mercy expresses God's essence, which graciously attends to and devotes itself to the world and to humanity in ever new ways in history. In short, mercy expresses God's own goodness and love. It is God's *caritas operativa et effecta*. Therefore, we must describe mercy as the fundamental attribute of God.²⁵

For Colin, the ecclesial context of mercy is central, through Mary's presence in the Church 'today as she was to the Church at its birth' (1987, Cons. 15). Marists also 'support the Bishop of Rome with all their strength' (Cons. 19). But

²³ See Taylor, *A Marist Reset*, 84-5.

²⁴ ST. 2.2 30. 4. [New Translation of Summa Theologica](#). To support his argument, Aquinas cites the Collect for (then) 10th. Sunday after Pentecost which in the revised Missal is now the Collect for the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time: 'O God, who manifest your almighty power above all by pardoning and showing mercy.' (This Collect phrase is not present in the New Translation used here but is found in New Advent translation). Interestingly, Thomas Aquinas' fellow Dominican Meister Eckhart said, 'You may call God love; you may call God goodness; but the best name for God is Compassion' (cited in Matthew Fox, *A Spirituality Named Compassion* (Minnesota, MN: Winston, 1979), 34.

²⁵ Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to the Christian Life* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2013/2014), 88, citing ST 1. 21.4 and ST 1. 21, 3.

this is not a call to a slavish conformity. Colin wanted to begin a new Church, not in a literal sense, but in a real sense, for all that).²⁶ Hence, as Coste notes:

... ‘this critical element in Colin’s thinking ... is intimately linked with that [Marian] devotion and cannot be separated from it...with Colin we should learn to think critically, we should learn not to appropriate necessarily everything that is being done in the Church, even when it is done as a matter of course...let us not be afraid of being on the side of those who want something else, not ‘another Church’ but ‘a Church other than it is’.²⁷

This ecclesial aspect can be viewed as a mode of discernment (as suggested earlier). But we need to ask—what is its scope? Who does it include?

We see it at work initially in the four years (1825-9) Colin and other Marists preached missions in country parishes in the Bugey region. The pastoral axiom that emerged (discussed at length in an earlier essay on grace) is succinct:

... we must win souls by submitting ourselves to them.²⁸

In other words, listen and learn!! Start with the people in the pews, the people of God. In his article cited earlier, Lessard refers to the hundreds of pages of Colin’s sermon notes from this period. In perusing them, he makes the telling point that Colin:

.... may have lived in an age of poor theology, but through the sermons he copied he probably became more familiar than many of us with the likes of John Chrysostom and Augustine, and he might have felt more at home with Vatican II than we tend to imagine.²⁹

More specific light is thrown on Coste’s words (about a ‘new’ Church and its scope)) by Colin himself in the area of moral theology (specifically, to the confessional). His comments reveal the impact on Colin of St. Alphonsus Liguori (and the encouragement of local Bishop Devie).

²⁶ FS 120:1.

²⁷ Jean Coste, *A Marian Vision of the Church: Jean-Claude Colin* (Maristica: via Poerio 63, 99152 Roma, 1998), 250.

²⁸ FS 102:33.

²⁹ Lessard, ‘Marists and Pentecost’, 59.

In the Society [of Mary] we shall profess all those opinions *which give greatest play to the mercy of God*, on account of the great weakness of poor human nature, without however falling into a laxist theology.³⁰

Colin describes his approach as ‘broad-minded’. How is it consistent with his (and Marists’) approach to Rome and of keeping ‘the faith of the Catholic Church’ and defending it ‘with all their strength’ (1987, Cons. 10)? It becomes evident in the manner in which the ‘greatest play to the mercy of God’ takes another (and now ecclesial) form for Colin.

The Liguorian approach evident in Jean-Claude Colin is also viewed by him in the context of the Church. It had received the ‘rubber stamp’ of approval from Rome. He saw his first visit to Rome (1833–1834) as an opportunity to become more informed and attuned to such a perspective (no doubt reinforced by his other visits to Rome). Colin sums things up:

... Rome was very useful to me on this point. It was there that I learned the maxim: ‘Law was made for man (*cf.* Mk. 2:27).’ If I cannot save him with the Law, I shall try to save him without it.’³¹

Looking back in 1845, Colin makes this further observation:

For myself, I am a Roman, and in the confessional, I follow the same approach as they, the Romans do. I am very fond of those principles: *All for souls and Salvation before the Law*.³²

These three quotes above (and the Bugey axiom) are, clearly, pastoral guidelines. But they are more than that. They reflect Colin’s readiness to *listen*—to the Church’s leadership (Rome, his local Bishop Devie), to its tradition (as in learning from Alphonsus Liguori and also the French school of spirituality), and as explored in an earlier essay on grace, to the faithful (as in the Bugey missions) together with his own pastoral experience (which included learning from his mistakes!).

Importantly, they also reveal, in Colin, a certain understanding of God and, importantly, of God’s attitude to us—as centred on mercy. His listening led to learning, even a shift in perspective and attitudes such that they became deeply

³⁰ FS 37:1 (emphasis added) and 2, 105.

³¹ FS 163:2.

³² FS 95:3 (emphasis in original).

held convictions. There is much truth in noting that, in all this, Colin anticipated the 1983 revised Code of Canon Law where the final code 1752 is part-imperative and part- exhortation: ‘Let the supreme law be the salvation of souls.’

For our purposes here, what we have highlighted above can also be viewed cumulatively as instances of another aspect of Ignatian discernment, namely, of ‘thinking and feeling with the Church’ (*sentire cum ecclesia*).³³ For someone such as the late Pope Francis (from his Jesuit roots), ‘thinking with the Church’ involves a dialogue among the people, the bishops and the Pope, a Church which is not a select group. He joins company with Ignatius and Colin: we are called to have the ‘mind and heart’ of the Church. Perhaps we find, from this discussion, good reason to suggest that Fr. Colin is anticipating Pope Francis, both in highlighting a Church centred on mercy and, in a broader context, with his emphasis on listening and the wisdom of the group, on ecclesial synodality?³⁴

Colin and ‘the Big Picture’

The attitudes displayed here by Colin are remarkable really. The trauma of his childhood, the early death of his parents, the crisis and instability in political life in France helped explain why (and how), as Coste suggests, ‘the fear of schism was to haunt Colin for the rest of his life.’³⁵ Haunt, yes, but not to control or to enslave him.

In his own words discussed above, Colin displays a certainly flexibility, an awareness of the ‘big picture’ that is consistent with a maturing process. This also the case with his original hope to have a Society with many branches. When the decision from Rome was for the Marist Brothers to be a separate body, for instance, Colin betrays an element of relief at having avoided an unmanageable situation which might well have ‘overwhelmed’ him (and others). His readiness to listen, explored earlier, now takes in another dimension. Colin remarks how the whole matter has been:

³³ Susan K. Wood, [Thinking and Feeling with the Church \(Sentire Cum Ecclesia\) in: Ecclesiology Volume 15 Issue 1 \(2019\)](#). This calls to mind the ancient provenance (from the time of Origen in the early 3rd. century) of this notion, encapsulated in the phrase ‘homo ecclesiasticus’. This is discussed by Henri de Lubac in his study *The Splendor of the Church*. I am grateful to Larry Duffy sm for drawing my attention to this point and for his reading and comments on this essay.

³⁴ See the interesting item in a recent NZ SM Province’s Newsletter (*Korero*) where AI (Artificial Intelligence) was used to produce an 800-word essay on ‘Hidden and Unknown’ and Synodality.

³⁵ Jean Coste, *A Marian Vision*, 24.

... one more proof among thousands of the wisdom of Rome, and that they are guided by the Holy Spirit... ³⁶

What Emerges from our Discussion?

Such is indicative (with other instances in his behaviour) that there is good reason to note that ‘Jansenist’ is certainly not an appropriate adjective to use of Colin. Plus, Jansenism was closely associated with Gallicanism. Colin saw Rome as the antidote to that, which he associated with a ‘big-picture’ perspective, which we explain further below.

These considerations about Colin’s view of the Holy Spirit, mercy, discernment and the Church exemplify what Timothy Costello, viewing the Founder from the perspective of a Christian anthropology and its developmental approach, highlights:

.... the interplay of two great existential realities: the first is the call to self-transcendent love; the second is the experience of human limitation. In the person of Jean-Claude Colin we see both realities written large.³⁷

For our purposes, ‘large’ also suggests a broad perspective and the word ‘magnanimity’. The way in which Colin comes to appreciate ‘mercy’ as an expression of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for himself, Marists and the Church not only reflected his readiness to listen. It indicates a growth in Colin of a virtue that is a variant of the cardinal virtue Fortitude— ‘courage’ is an exhortation often used by Colin.³⁸

In other words, as suggested above, Colin was a ‘big-picture’ person. ‘Magnanimity’, then, is a word rightly applied to Colin, if the sources are any indication.³⁹ But more than that. He wanted this quality to be a characteristic of the Society of Mary, as he says:

³⁶ FS 111:7.

³⁷ Timothy J Costello, SM, ‘The Personality of Jean- Claude Colin, Superior -General’, in Alois Greiler, SM, *Catholic Beginnings in Oceania: Marist Missionary Perspectives* (Adelaide, SA: Australasian Theological Forum, 2009), 183–200, at 199.

³⁸ See FS 9:1-3; 44:9; 60:2.

³⁹ See five sub-headings under ‘Magnanimity, force of character’ with more than 25 references in FA 489-490.

... Ah, how I want the Society to have a certain greatness of soul, how I want people to have a broad view of things.⁴⁰

In this, Colin is in very good company, if one traces the curve of history.

Looking backwards, we find Thomas Aquinas praising magnanimity as a virtue—the opposite of being petty-minded or mean-spirited (pusillanimous). It is linked with both courage and humility. In contrast with Aristotle, for Aquinas, the honour in question for the Christian virtue of magnanimity is not honour from human beings but honour (glory) that is a gift from God who is always faithful.⁴¹ It is a virtue that is part of what we noted earlier: of ‘God’s love [which] has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us’ (Rom. 5:5). There is some validity in saying that such a gift enables us to see everything with God’s eyes.

Looking forward, we find Pope Francis with a similar conviction:

Magnanimity which always makes us look at the horizon ... It means having a great heart, having greatness of mind; it means having great ideals, the wish to do great things to respond to what God asks of us.⁴²

So, when we consider Jean-Claude Colin in the light of history’s ‘big-picture’, could one ask for a better legacy?

Conclusion

From our exploration of the role of the Holy Spirit, the link with Jesus and Mary, its particular expression in mercy and its integral role in personal and group discernment two things have emerged.

It brings a deeper level to the central axiom of the Society of Mary, namely, ‘to think as Mary, judge as Mary, feel and act as Mary in all things.’

⁴⁰ FS 22:3.

⁴¹ *Summa Theologica* 2.2.129. a. 3 ad 4. [New Translation of Summa Theologica](#). See also Eleonore Stump, ‘Humility, Courage, Magnanimity: a Thomistic Account’, *Scientia et Fides* 10:2 (2022), 23-29, at 27. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/SetF.2022.016>

⁴² [Pope Francis: Teaching to be 'Great-Souled' - America Magazine](#); accessed 28.6.2026.

It also offers a clearer focus on the extent to which such a motto (and Colin's view of the Marist spirit) is, at the same time, deeply ecclesial—one of striving to have (and foster) the mind and heart of the Church (*sentire cum ecclesia*).
