



## Woman, mother and disciple

The Society of Mary can be called both “least Marian” and “most Marian” because its aim is to reflect the life of Mary, the first disciple of Jesus. It can be said to be “most Marian” because it models itself on Mary. But the very fact that Mary was a disciple of Jesus meant that the focus of her attention was off herself and on Jesus. Marists, too, will find that their focus of attention is off Mary and on Jesus - as Mary’s was. In this sense the Marist congregation can be said to be “least Marian”. Although Scripture says very little about Mary, we do know that she was there in the early church, and we know that she was there as woman and as mother; and that already tells us a good deal. Colin’s line of thinking adds something more: Mary was the perfect disciple of the Lord, whose one thought was the extension and development of the Church, and whose attitude was that of a hidden believer. In the course of the years, Mayet noted in his Memoirs the main lines of Colin’s thinking on Mary’s place in the Church. And by reflecting on these ideas, we can learn a lot not only about Mary’s place in the Church, but also about Marists’ relationship with her, and the sort of “new Church” they are called to begin.

In Chapter 8 of his Gospel, Luke outlines Jesus’ description of the perfect disciple. The perfect disciple is the one who has a noble and generous heart, who hears the Word and takes it to heart, and yields a harvest through perseverance. In fact, Luke also applies this description of the perfect disciple to Mary. In detail, he describes Mary as:

one who hears the word of God and accepts it wholeheartedly (1: 38):

- one who believes that what she has
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heard will be fulfilled (1: 42,45):

- one who cherishes what she has been told and ponders it (2: 19-51):
- one who hears the word of God, keeps it, and puts it into practice (8: 19-21, 11 :28):
- one who is with the disciples in the community, praying continuously, receiving the Holy Spirit, and witnessing to the Resurrection (Acts 1: 14).

And so, we learn a good deal about Mary when we reflect on her presence in the Church as woman, as mother, and as disciple. As disciple, Mary listened for the Word, pondered it, searched its meaning for her life, and then acted on it. By living this way of life, Marists will help a “disciple Church” to emerge: a Church which listens to, submits to, and acts on the Word that has been proclaimed. It will be a Church whose members try to discover the Gospel together and live it as Mary did.

## September, 1846

Rarely have I seen the spirit of God take possession of Father Colin with greater impetuosity than at that time. He came back from Rome and made ready to return there to work on our rules.... Throughout the retreat and the days that followed, Father Colin spoke of nothing but the stimulus to be given to the Society. He expounded more clearly than ever his view on the Society’s destiny, reverting to the theme, so to speak, at every moment. He spoke constantly about how the Society was to have the spirit of the blessed Virgin, and seized every opportunity to inculcate this spirit in us. He poured out his heart into ours in truly fatherly

fashion... He kept on repeating, "Let us be men of God, let us be dead to ourselves, let us be men of prayer", returning continually to "Hidden and Unknown" of our Rule. The foreign missions, courage, the need for prayer, for learning, for the spirit of prayer, his cherished article "Even hidden and unknown", these dominated all his conversations. - *The Mayet Memoirs*

## First disciple

To "make the whole world Marist" was the Marists' way of expressing their conviction that if the Church is to become what it really is – the virgin bride of Christ and the mother of believers – then the Church must become more and more like Mary. Their thinking ran thus:

Mary, from being Jesus' mother, becomes his first and perfect disciple, i.e. she makes the perfect human response to him and to the Spirit he sends. Therefore, every other follower of Jesus needs to look to her for guidance in becoming a true disciple of the Lord, needs to learn from her, what true discipleship means and how it is to be lived. Each christian, if he or she is to respond fully to Jesus, benefits immensely by being led and taught by Mary. Mary is present within the Church to share her life of response so that the Church may become what it is called to be, learning from Mary's faith, from her humility and love. The Church needs to become Mary-like, needs to become "Marist".

- *Romuald Gibson, fms*

## The disciple's ear

Openness to love implies listening, for us as for Jesus. We cannot speak of God's word to others except as a fruit of much contemplative listening in poverty of spirit and purity of heart; if we try to by-pass the listening we shall preach ourselves rather than the word of the Lord. Like Mary, the Church receives the word, ponders it in her heart, gives it life within her life, and brings it forth for every generation. God speaks in the scriptures, in our prayer and in the whole life of the word-bearing people. In daily life we have to listen, in weakness, need, compassion and forgiveness. Patiently we have to wait, watching and hoping for the growth of the new life, in ourselves and in others. - *Maria Boulding*

## Reference point

The New Testament is short on details, but clear on the fact: Mary was there. She was joined to the Church at the moment of greatest uncertainty and biggest risk, in the days preceding Pentecost. We are faced here with a situation whose meaning can be grasped only in faith.

The mother of a deceased great leader or founder is not normally expected to mingle with the members of the movement he founded. She is in a totally different position: they received everything from him and set out to follow him; but she gave him life, formed him, and has a unique relationship with him. She has no need to raise the party flag to express a communion of mind and purpose which was probably there long before the foundation of the party itself.

The one thing that Luke allows us to glimpse is that this was not the case with Mary, that she wished to be a member of the group and that she had no position of authority or privilege. One has only to read the Acts of the Apostles to realise that the apostles are the pillars of the Church, and that Mary is among the crowd with those women whom we know had no vote in chapter at that time.

There is an infinitely fruitful paradox here. The person closest to Christ, she who was the mother of the Messiah, she who was more apostle than the apostles and who later merited to be called their queen, did not claim any position of power or privilege, but simply joined the Church, bringing to it her own special richness. Coming in there, she gives us to understand that no destiny, however exceptional, can truthfully find place before Christ unless it comes within the Church. By accepting the last place under the authority of the apostles, she shows that the ecclesial community and its unity were more important to her than her personal situation. Today, when the longing is so strong for a renewed Church, for a return to that early Church, free from all ties, purified of all compromise, rich only in faith and in the power of the Spirit, Mary is there as the reference point to keep us from chasing after whims and shadows. - *Jean Coste, sm*