Marist approaches to mission inevitably reflect the prevailing ideologies and theologies of their time. It will come as little surprise, then, that the Marist mission to the Pacific in the mid-nineteenth century looks very different to contemporary Marist missionary approaches. Our task, however, is not simply to contrast these approaches, but
to ask the question: is there a specific Marist way of being missionary that expresses continuity as well as transformation? While this same question could be asked of the other congregations and the Church itself, our focus on the Society of Mary provides a case-study with wider applicability.

**Marist Mission Then – Nineteenth Century**

*Roman Catholic Mission Model*

The nineteenth century Roman Catholic mission model was as much a child of modernity as it was a reaction to the liberal ideas modernity had spawned. The reactive side was perhaps strongest in France where the upheavals of the French Revolution were most pronounced. It was also the centre of the Ultramontane movement which gave new impetus to papal authority and the universal Church in both the theology and politics of the day.¹ The Catholic Church saw itself as the bulwark defending the ‘true faith’ not only against liberalism and rationalism, but also against Protestantism. If not official theology, the dictum of ‘outside the church, no salvation’ was firmly entrenched in Catholic missionary theology and praxis. For Catholics, ‘the Church’ meant Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, the goal of mission was seen in terms of establishing local churches under the authority of Rome and the Pope.²

¹ The ‘romanization of the clergy’ was a general movement throughout France. Jean Claude Colin’s own Ultramontane leanings are well known. I have argued elsewhere that Colin’s Ultramontanism is linked to his preference for Ligourian moral theology in opposition to the Jansenist rigorism of the Gallican Church. Gerard Hall, ‘The Political Dimension of Colinian Eschatology and Praxis’, in *Forum Novum* (= FN), 1/2 (1990): 213-40.

In some ways, this represented a return to the ‘Christendom ideal’ whereby the Church saw itself as the essential ‘civilizing’ force in the world. However, there are also significant differences indicative of the Church’s adaptation to new political realities, especially the rise of the nation-state. As we have seen, the Church distanced itself from a too close identification with national interests. In this, there was an at least implicit acceptance of the Enlightenment principle of separation of Church and state. On the other hand, the Church continued to ride on the bandwagon of colonial expansion; and it shared with colonial powers a belief in the superiority of western culture. As well, both Catholic and Protestant missionaries continued their post-Reformation struggle accounting for their competitive—at times aggressive—approaches towards one another. This was nowhere more evident than in the Pacific where French Catholic missionaries and English Protestant missionaries saw themselves in opposition. This was further compounded by nationalistic agendas in which France and Britain competed for territorial gains across the Pacific.

Theologically, nineteenth century Roman Catholicism was at a low ebb. There was, at the time, no developed theology of mission—or even what we would call today a theology of Church. If ‘saving souls’ was the prime motivation for mission, the main strategy was one of bringing these ‘souls’ into the Church through baptism. The approach has been linked to Augustine, medieval theology and a particular reading of Luke 14:23: ‘Compel them to come in’.

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3 Alois Greiler notes the influence of the 28 volume work of René-François Rohrbacher (1789-1856), *Histoire Universelle de l'Église Catholique* which pictures the Catholic Church’s role as beacon of salvation and regeneration of the human race. The work was apparently studied by the Marist missionaries after 1845; information to the author.

4 Bosch identifies this text for ‘missionary purposes’ in Augustine and later in the Middle Ages, ‘The Medieval Paradigm’, 236.
Church is understood as the ‘kingdom of God’ on earth. The notion of salvation, for which the Church was considered necessary, was both other-worldly and individualistic. This translated into an eschatology focusing on individual judgment and hope of heaven at the end of time. Although stronger in Protestant than Catholic theology, there is also a connection between Christian mission and millennial expectation of the approaching ‘end time’—something we also note in Jean Claude Colin.\(^5\)

Despite what has been said about assumed western superiority, Roman Catholic missionary theology and praxis, even in the nineteenth century, often displayed a degree of cultural acceptance and adaptation that should be acknowledged. One expression of this was the early training and use of Indigenous catechists throughout the Pacific. Still, it would be fair to say that the overarching Catholic mission model followed the *tabula rasa* approach which identified the Gospel in predominantly European cultural terms—even though some accommodation to local cultures was admitted. In time, this accommodation transformed missionaries’ own experience and praxis.

*Colin’s Marist Mission Model*

As people of their time, the Marist missionaries to the Pacific operated predominantly out of this Roman Catholic model. It could hardly be otherwise. However, beyond these broad strokes and motivations, we need to explore ways in which Marists understood and expressed their own sense of mission. Such a task, of course, is too huge to cover in a single paper or colloquium—and beyond my competence. My approach here is simply to identify major themes in the missionary spirituality of Jean Claude Colin,

founder and first Superior General (1836-54) of the Society of Mary. This reveals an outline of a particular mission model which puts him at odds with ecclesiastical authorities who favour a different approach. The results of this are particularly significant in relation to the Society’s mission in founding the Church in Western Oceania.

Colin himself had a profound sense of mission which related, first and foremost, to the call of the Society to be a catalyst for transformation so that “there would be seen at the end of time what had been seen at the beginning: cor unum et anima una”.6 This idea, often repeated by Colin, sheds light on a number of factors. First, the role is ascribed not only to the priests’ branch of the Society: the Marist call included laity, sisters, brothers;7 and it was further inspired by the utopian vision of ‘the whole world Marist’.8 Second, it refers to the reinvigoration of the Church according to the model of the first Jerusalem community: “we must begin a new Church”.9 Third, it clearly identifies Colin’s missionary call in universal rather than particular terms: it is not confined to Oceania, other ‘mission districts’ or specific ‘apostolic works’. In a word, with reference to Mary’s role in the beginning and now at the end of time, he says: “Let us march at the head of the faithful: this is your mission”.10 How, though, does such a universal missionary vision translate into Colin’s acceptance and administration of the mission to the Western Pacific?

6 OM 2, Doc. 247, 2; “cor unum et anima una” Acts 4: 32.
7 In the original vision, the Society was to be a “many branched tree”, something that Colin, Champagnat, Chavoin and the early Marists all worked to achieve.
8 Often repeated by Colin. See, for example, FS, Doc. 1, 1.
9 Also often repeated by Colin. For example, FS, Doc. 120, 1.
Colin’s missionary theology is based on the sense of divine calling that comes from God the Father to share in the mission of the Son who, in turn, confides his mission to the Church represented by the Pope and the Congregation of Propaganda Fide. The papal mandate given to the Society for the missions of western Oceania confirms, for Colin, its place in the eternal mind of God. He never questions this. Equally, Colin understands this call in relation to Mary, mother of God, from whom the Society takes its name: it is she who is true founder, perpetual superior and only model. For Colin, there is no opposition here: “On the one hand, it is the Son who sends; on the other, it is the Mother”. On other occasions, Colin tells his departing missionaries that while the superior (namely himself) sends them forth, it is actually the Holy Father (the pope) who entrusts them with this mission. Through these multiple mediations of God’s will, Colin understands the missionary call to the Pacific as a special grace for the Society; yet he also knows it is God alone who brings people to faith. This is sound Catholic missionary theology for any age.

As Colin accepts the specific mandate for the Society’s missionary role in Oceania, he also has particular views about the manner in which that mission is to be carried out. While making due allowances for the special situation in the Pacific (although he never left Europe), he nonetheless reads the Pacific mission in terms of the Society’s universal mission. Being concerned to spread the faith according to the model of the first Jerusalem community, Colin’s first concern is with the spiritual formation of the Marists themselves. His insistence on prayer, the need to ‘taste God’, the interior life, ‘hidden

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11 Colin’s missionary theology is investigated by Pierre Allard, Le Père Colin et les missions (Ottawa: Université Saint Paul, 1966; MA Diss.).
and unknown’, the spirit of Nazareth, sacrifice, self-denial, community, the sacraments and ‘the rule’ are correctly interpreted today as apostolic principles of mission. Rather than being opposed to the work of the true Marist missionary, Colin understands these as its very foundation.

Consequently, for Colin, the geographical, cultural and political complexity of Oceania cannot compromise the heart and soul of what it means to be a Marist missionary. This comes to a crisis point and ongoing ache for Colin in his dealing with Bishop Pompallier who wants to separate the missionaries, to send them out one-by-one in order to cover the geographical dispersal of the Pacific islands. Colin was interested in establishing Marist communities on the model of Mary and the apostles. This has sometimes been incorrectly interpreted as Colin not founding a missionary congregation. The Society itself, as we have seen, was founded for mission; and its very approbation coincided with its mandate for the Oceanian mission.

What was at stake here was the manner of such missionary endeavour. Colin emphasised community because he saw it as the power-base for apostolic mission. Once this principle was established, he was realistic and adaptable. For example, he foregoes his insistence on communities having a minimum of four—but, at least “there should always be two together on the foreign

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15 Wiltgen states that the “Society of Mary was not founded as a foreign mission society” (522). This is true in the sense that the Society was not founded exclusively for foreign missionary work in the manner of congregations such as the Columbans or Divine Word Missionaries. Nonetheless, Wiltgen makes the judgment that the “Society of Mary went on to become one of the greatest missionary orders in the Roman Catholic Church, with Oceania as its field of specialization” (548).
missions”. Moreover, “the Rule that we give to our missionaries, Messieurs, will be broad in scope, so that it can be kept”. On another occasion Colin says Marists have “the vocation of the apostles: a spirit of prayer and action”, adding that he wishes the Society “to have less time devoted to vocal prayer so as to have more time to devote to souls”. Clearly, though, Colin’s model for Marist mission gave priority to the religious quality of life as the catalyst for missionary endeavour. This has been called the ‘intensive’ versus ‘extensive’ model of mission.

Colin does not perceive his insistence on personal holiness and community-life as undermining the apostolic, missionary vocation. To the contrary, by focusing on the hidden presence of Mary with the apostles in the early Church, he believes he has uncovered the most effective way for spreading the Gospel in his time—whether in Europe or the foreign missions. He never divorces the idea of Marist spirituality from missionary effectiveness: “Let those who are leaving for Oceania imitate the apostles; let those who are staying in Europe imitate the early Church”. This is an entirely missionary spirituality requiring great faith and perseverance especially for those

16 Colin reports the words of Father Forest on what he (Colin) required. FS, Doc. 66, 2. In his official request to Cardinal Fransoni in 1842, Colin asks that “missionaries ordinarily be not isolated, as they have been for entire years in the past”; rather they should be “in a group of at least two or three”; cf Wiltgen, *Founding of the Roman Catholic Church*, 248.

17 FS, Doc. 141, 15.

18 FS, Doc. 132, 15.

19 Hugh Laracy claims that Colin “expected the Marists, members of a religious order, to have as their primary concern not the active apostolate but the seeking of personal holiness according to the Marist Rule, for which the maintenance of community life and a semi-monastic routine were deemed necessary”. *Marists and Melanesians: A History of Catholic Missions in the Solomon Islands* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976), 13.

20 These models are developed by David Bosch. See Alois Greiler in this volume.

21 Stephen Bevans mentions that the original Constitutions for the Society of the Divine Word also named the salvation of its own members as its primary purpose. ‘Learning to Flee from Bishops: Formation for the Charism of Priesthood within Religious Life’, in *Australian eJournal of Theology*, 10 (Pentecost 2007).

22 Father Mayet’s annotation of Colin’s words, 2 September 1848, cf. FS, Doc. 159.
assigned to Oceania: “You are going to leave your homeland, your relatives, your friends, everything, to save souls and suffer martyrdom”. However, to paraphrase, you are not being sent as ones, but at a minimum as twos, so the effectiveness of your mission is safeguarded and enhanced.

We know that Colin selected his best men for Oceania; and that he put much effort into their spiritual direction and formation. We also know that twenty-one of the 117 Marists sent during his time as General died from disease, hunger or more violent means. His personal contribution to the work of the Oceania mission—such as administration, finance and letter-writing—are documented elsewhere; his limitations are also noted. The point I wish to emphasize is that Colin consistently, if not fully coherently, articulated a missionary spirituality that gave priority to community, witness and presence for the sake of the Church’s mission. In Marist-speak, Nazareth and Pentecost are co-joined symbols of authentic missionary praxis. This was often not appreciated, nor always followed, in the first century and a half of Marist involvement in the Pacific or elsewhere. However, neither was it ignored but remained in creative tension with the so-called extensive missionary model. Today its power as an effective mission model for Marists (and others) in the Pacific and elsewhere is more clearly recognized.

23 FS, Doc. 143, 4.
24 For example: Jan Snijders, A Piety Able to Cope, private paper and other presentations such as Alois Greiler in this volume.
Marist Mission Now – Twenty-First Century

The Catholic Church’s Renewed Call to Mission

Nobody doubts the immense changes that have occurred in both the world and the Church in the past century. Two world wars, the rise and fall of communist and fascist states, post-colonial independence and liberation movements, technological and communication revolutions, advances of globalism and secularization, the population explosion and the greatest migration of people in human history, cultural and religious resurgence of Indigenous traditions and ‘non-Christian’ religions together signalled the end of assumed European cultural and religious supremacy. There is also the post-modern challenge that provides an intellectual rationale for deconstructing all universal claims to truth or validity, whether cultural, religious or otherwise. Catholic and Protestant Churches alike have been challenged to deep soul-searching of their missionary motivations and strategies in light of these wider agendas.

The response of the Catholic Church is epitomized by Pope John XXIII’s convocation of the Second Vatican Council in 1962 where over a third of the twenty-three hundred bishops attending came from Africa, Asia and Oceania. The Council affirms the missionary character of the Church by locating it in the mystery of the Trinity: “It is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (Ad Gentes 2). Since the Trinity is the source, origin and goal of Christian mission, what then is the role of the Church? In the Council’s view, the Church is called to be universal sacrament of God’s saving presence in the world. The goal of mission then is not the Church itself, but God’s reign in the world, a reign which cannot be restricted to membership of the Church. We are
reminded it is Christ, not the Church, who is ‘light of the world’. The Church’s mission is to be sign and instrument of Christ’s illuminating presence (*Lumen Gentium* 1)—both within and beyond the visible Church.

The Council also enriches the Church’s theology of mission by acknowledging the importance of local churches, diverse cultures, interreligious dialogue, liturgical inculturation and integral human development. There is new emphasis on people’s freedom in view of the Church’s aim to bring Christ’s freedom and peace to people. Missionary activity is now described in terms of witness, solidarity, mutual encounter and enrichment (*Ad Gentes* 26). The conquest model of mission is replaced by the model of reciprocity in which we "learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations" (*Ad Gentes* 11). This also means the Church’s missionary agenda is set by listening to the “hopes, joys, griefs and anxieties” of all people (*Gaudium et Spes* 1). In particular, it is through dialogue we learn to speak the Gospel in ways the modern world will understand.

Post-conciliar thinking about mission is focused on the complex interaction between Gospel, Church and culture. Paul VI’s 1975 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), describes mission as ‘evangelization’: the aim is to bring “the Good News into all the strata of humanity” (EN 18) through direct proclamation, authentic witness and profound dialogue with culture. Importantly, the Church begins the process of evangelization by “being evangelized herself” (EN 15) so as to be formed into the community of Jesus’ disciples. We have seen that this is also central to Colin’s missionary model: Nazareth and Pentecost belong together as symbols of authentic missionary praxis. However, today it is more clearly recognized that the evangelization of cultures includes the work of justice,
peace and liberation. This document also gives prominence to the roles of local churches and popular piety in the Church’s evangelizing mission. Finally, we are reminded that “the Holy Spirit is the principle agent of evangelization” (EN 75).

The diverse situations in which the Church is called to live out its evangelizing mission are enunciated in John Paul II’s 1990 missionary encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM). He distinguishes three distinct types of mission: ‘mission *ad gentes*’, for those who have not heard the Gospel; ‘pastoral care’, for established communities of faith who always require ongoing evangelization; and ‘re-evangelization’, for those who have lost contact with their Christian roots (RM 33). More specifically, he calls for new methods and expressions of evangelization directed to particular groups—the urban poor, youth, immigrants, refugees, women and children—as well as cultural sectors—communications, peace, development, rights of minorities, liberation of peoples, scientific research and international relations. Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue are integral to the Church’s evangelizing mission; base Christian communities are also seen as a force for evangelization.

There are three metaphors which help us draw together these various threads for the Catholic Church’s renewed call to mission.25 The first is the ‘sending out’ image of mission highlighted by classical missionary approaches. It is based on solid biblical foundations: “As the Father sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). This gives priority to evangelization through direct proclamation of the Gospel. It most clearly resembles the ‘extensive’ model of mission most prominent at the time of the Society’s foundation.

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The second is the ‘gathering in’ image epitomized in the life of the first Jerusalem community, later monastic communities and the newer charismatic-type movements. The emphasis is on evangelization through witness, worship and fellowship. This is most closely aligned to the ‘intensive’ mission model which, in broad terms, has been identified with Colin’s own approach to Marist mission.

The third image is one of solidarity or ‘walking with’ people, especially with those on the margins of society, something at the heart of Jesus’ own life and mission. Today, solidarity manifests itself in dialogue with cultures and religions, option for the poor, work for peace and reconciliation, respect for creation and care for the earth. I will call this the ‘tensive’ or ‘dialogue’ model of mission which has taken on a new urgency in light of the massive humanitarian and ecological challenges confronting the world today.

Whether we speak in terms of metaphors, images or models of mission, these are not necessarily oppositional. Models, for example, can and often do overlap. Recent Church teaching makes it clear that all three approaches— which we are naming proclamation, witness and dialogue—are considered essential for the Church’s single, evangelizing mission. Moreover, it is clearer today than in the nineteenth century that all Christians are called to mission. However, in this new world, the challenge is to develop strategies for mission in response to one’s particular gifts, charisms and opportunities. The very complexity of the Church’s missionary agenda, as well as the diverse situations in which we are called to live the

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26 In this regard, I would argue that while Colin gives priority to the ‘intensive’ model of mission, he is also aware of the need to include aspects of the ‘extensive’ model, especially in regard to Oceania. The purer ‘intensive’ model is more properly applied to monastic communities which were never the vision of Colin.
Gospel, demand of us deep discernment and courageous decision-making in regard to setting and enacting our Christian missionary vocation. This is also our task as Marists at the start of the twenty-first century.

**Marist Mission Today**

Demographically, the Society of Mary today, in terms of numbers and age-profile, is dominant in the ‘south’. Its missionary outreach to Oceania is now reversed: the periphery has become the centre so that Oceania is becoming the major source of missionaries to other lands. In terms of the Society’s original mission, the Catholic Church is now well established in those parts of the Pacific for which it bore responsibility as founding missionaries. Elsewhere, in Asia, Africa and South America, there is evidence of small growth in the Society which is contrasted to declining numbers and aging members in Europe and North America as well as Australia and New Zealand. However, with the Church itself, the missionary focus of the Society of Mary is undergoing significant change in response to the kind of culture shock and mission reevaluation identified by Robert Schreiter as ferment, crisis and re-birth.27

The 2001 Marist General Chapter produced a document entitled ‘Declaration on the Mission at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century’. Earlier Society documents, such as the 1988 Constitutions, recognize that Marists are called to form a ‘communion for mission’ (36-56), to be a Marian presence in the Church (15-21) as Mary has been since the days of Pentecost (5). They are called to be ‘truly missionary’ (12), to ‘establish the Church where it does not

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27 Schreiter identifies four periods of Catholic missionary approaches which he names: certainty (1919-1962); ferment (1962-65); crisis (1965-75); and rebirth (1975-). Robert Schreiter, ‘Changes in Roman Catholic Attitudes toward Proselytism and Mission’ in James Scherer & Stephen Bevans (editors), *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization* 2 (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1994), 113-25.
exist and to renew existing communities’ (14). Marists are to be ‘fired with apostolic zeal for the Kingdom’ (23). They have special concern for the sick, imprisoned, neglected and those who suffer injustice (12). By being ‘hidden and unknown in the world’ Marists are able to hear the longings of God’s people and discern the signs of hope in today’s world (22-25). The importance of the hidden virtues, the vows, prayer, humility, learning and unity in the Society is given emphasis (26-29; 93-113). Any Marist meditating on the Constitutions will surely be inspired by the return to Colinian themes of a profound spirituality for mission today.

However, it is only in the 2001 Declaration that mission is enunciated in terms of deep dialogue with cultures, peoples and religions. Here we learn that “Marists wish to listen to and understand other Christian Churches and other religions” (7). Further, “we want to enter into dialogue with them and all persons of good will in order to work together for mercy, reconciliation, justice and peace” (7). Moreover, Marists are committed to work for “full participation of the laity in the mission of the Church” (16) and especially for the “dignity of women and their participation in the Church and in all walks of life” (15). With the rest of the human family, Marists are also committed to work for “human rights” and “the integrity of creation” (14). Here, we find the Society beginning to articulate its mission with a closer eye on conciliar and papal documents, including those of the two Pontifical Councils for Interreligious Dialogue and the Evangelization of Peoples.28

Some of these themes, especially the importance of dialogue, are further developed at the 2005 General

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Council of the Marists in Mexico. In fact, we are told our “ministry of evangelization ... should follow a path of dialogue” at all levels of life, action, exchange and religious experience. The Society is called to “increase its contribution to evangelization among non-Christians” (3) and to consider the feasibility of “implantation in a predominantly non-Christian area” (15). Prominence is also given to developing “partnership with the laity as missionaries and as active collaborators in its evangelizing task” (4). This is a vision for Marist laity that is genuinely Colinian.

Unless I am mistaken, a point of omission in all three documents is specific mention of the Church’s and Marist responsibilities in relation to Indigenous people. At any rate, there seems little reflection in official Society documents in this regard. This is something that needs to be rectified in future articulations of the Marist mission of evangelization—not least on account of our history in Oceania and the significant commitment of many provinces and districts to this most Marist of works.

From this brief survey of recent Society documents, two movements can be recognized. The first is the reclaiming


30 See Frank McKay’s The Marist Laity: Finding the Way Envisaged by Father Colin (Rome, 1991). Two more radical expressions of laity involvement in the Society’s evangelizing mission are: Marist Mission Ranong on the Thai-Burma border where two of the six members of the community are Lay Marists; and Australian Marist John Hopkinson’s community of Lay Marists in Bolivia, South America.

31 Of course, the importance of Oceania in the mission of the Society is acknowledged (e.g. Council of the Society 2005, 7-9); I am here referring mainly to Indigenous people who are minorities in their own countries.

32 In this regard, the ground-breaking missionary work of former Marist Superior General, Bernard Ryan, in working with Australian Aboriginal people, a mission now supported by the three Pacific provinces, needs to be acknowledged. The New Zealand province has a long and distinguished record of mission work with Maori people which stretches back to the original Marist mission under Bishop Pompallier. See the presentation of Mervyn Duffy in this volume. There are other examples such as Marist missions in Brazil, the Philippines and North America.
of Colinian themes that re-establish the essential missionary charism of the Society. We have seen here significant emphasis on an ‘intensive’ approach that sees personal conversion and community life as primary instruments of apostolic mission. Marists are asked to be missionary not just by doing ‘works of mercy’, but by inculcating Mary’s own virtues and attitudes in order to bring the new Church to birth. The second movement is one which responds to the wider Church’s agenda and renewed call for mission. This requires deep dialogue with other churches, religions and peoples. It also calls for specific commitment to inculturation, liberation, reconciliation and the ecology. This ‘tensive’ or ‘dialogue’ approach to mission is now recognized as central to the Church’s and the Society’s own evangelizing mission.

**Conclusion: Continuity and Transformation**

It is clear that the Church’s understanding of and approach to its mission have undergone enormous change since the nineteenth century. The weight of this change is particularly strong in the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. An outsider looking in might suggest we now have a different Church. In some ways this is true. The Church has made many transformations since the days of the apostles. Without agreeing that every change has been good, the fact is that unless the Church changes and adapts to the emergent world it finds itself in, its life and relevance will have little meaning beyond the remnant who wish to keep things in some kind of time capsule.

Still, if it is also true that the Church continues to have a mission to this emergent twenty-first world in which we live, this is because its unchanging message of proclaiming and witnessing to God’s reign has, if anything, even more relevance today. However, proclamation and witness are
not enough. We have a new call to dialogue and engagement with people of all cultures, traditions and religions. We might be spooked by the challenges this brings. Here, though, we will do well to remind ourselves that we are not the bringers of the kingdom: only God can do that since it is “the Holy Spirit who is the principal source of evangelization” (EN 75). Equally, it is the Holy Spirit who is the principal source of continuity and transformation in the Church.

This, at least, I take to be the central inspiration of Marist mission in our world. Some things are essential and, to that extent, unchanging. Marists are called to ‘see, think, judge and act as Mary in all things’, especially in their evangelizing mission. This requires a deep commitment to the interior life, epitomized for Colin in the home of Nazareth and the first Jerusalem community, where Marists discover their true missionary calling. It is here their hearts are set on fire with apostolic zeal for spreading the Gospel and where they learn from Mary the ‘hidden and unknown’ way of responding to the challenges of their times. To this extent, the ‘intensive’ model of mission will always have a certain priority in Marist missionary praxis.

However, like the Church itself, Marists are also called to transformative missionary praxis identified by the ‘tensive’ mission model’s emphasis on dialogue and engagement with others. In the words of the Constitutions:33

The Society is no longer true to its calling whenever it becomes so caught up in particular works as to cease to be available for more urgent needs to which it may be called by its mission.

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Those ‘more urgent needs’ are currently knocking at the Society’s door in a manner equivalent to the urgency to go to Oceania and the Bugey region of France in the nineteenth century. As the Church called us then, the Church calls us today, not to a particular region or country, but to a new manner of mission in solidarity with the poor, the marginal, refugees and other victims of violence and oppression. It calls us to this mission in dialogue with people of every race, tradition and language. Moreover, it is this model which most requires of us conversion of mind, heart and spirit; and it may well provide the avenue whereby the laity feel themselves called to be active collaborators with us in the Church’s evangelizing mission.

The Society of Mary has never existed for itself. Since its foundation, the Society has only ever seen itself as a catalyst for the mission of the Church. Today, it is challenged as never before to reincarnate its original vision in a manner that responds to the urgent but very different needs of our time and world. We should not get too caught up with models, but return with fresh eyes to interpret our mission anew in light of Mary’s role at Nazareth, Pentecost and the ‘end of time’. That is the deep continuity that Marists today share with Jean-Claude Colin and the first Marist missionaries. To keep the vision alive, it needs to be transformed according to the newly articulated mission of the Church and the very different challenges that confront us in the twenty-first century.