



I am sure that people who have followed the history of the Society of Mary will find the following both interesting and useful.

### Silent voice



Gabriel Claude Mayet

In Lewis Carroll's book, *Alice in Wonderland*, the King advises the White Rabbit who is about to read some verses: "Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end: then stop." With our story it's a little different. The beginnings of the Marist story are very complicated.

Unlike other movements which have one clear personality spearheading the group, the Marist project seems to have been much more of a corporate experience, with many different personalities entering the stage, some remaining in the forefront, some disappearing temporarily, and some disappearing forever. For this reason, it may be better for us not to follow the advice of the King, and instead to start somewhere after the beginning, meeting a man who was neither a

founding personality nor a member of the first group of Marists. He entered the scene early on and moved quietly into the background about twenty years later. But, for a particular reason, he is of great importance in the Marist story.

His name was Gabriel-Claude Mayet, and he was born in Lyon, France, in 1809. Mayet was not particularly drawn to the Church as a way of life, but in 1827 he experienced a deep personal conversion, and began to study for the priesthood. In 1832 he was ordained a sub-deacon, but at that stage he was not sure whether to be a diocesan priest or a Jesuit. He asked the advice of Jean-Marie Vianney, the Cure of Ars, and it was he who suggested that Mayet consider joining the group of Marists which was just then being established. At the time, Mayet did not follow this advice and he was ordained a diocesan priest in 1836.

At that time he began to develop a throat malady which was later to become a serious affliction. While he was convalescing, he decided to follow up the advice he had been given by the Cure of Ars, and he wrote asking for information about the Marists. The reply he received made such a deep impression on him that he decided to join this group. He entered the novitiate of the Marist Fathers in 1837.

Mayet was a meticulous person who had made a habit of collecting the advice of his spiritual directors in a journal which he entitled *Notes Personnelles*. One of his directors was Jean-Claude Colin, who by then had been given the leadership of the Marist enterprise. As time passed, Mayet realised that by keeping a record of these sayings of Colin he could make a significant and personal contribution to the history of the Marist project.

## Man with a mission

Mayet always considered the task he took on as a mission entrusted to him on behalf of the Marist enterprise, a mission which his delicate conscience forced him to accomplish with great exactitude and seriousness. At the same time, he was clear that his mission was limited to collecting material that might be used later on by others. Some of his comments indicate this:

“I am not writing a treatise; and so I am limiting myself to the words of [Father Colin], following my first and specific intention.”

“Keeping within the limits of my plan, I have collected only the facts which deal with Father Colin or the history of the Society, as well as the words of Father Colin.”

“In the same way I have not wanted to write a history, but only to prepare the bricks and carry the stones for other hands more able than mine to build something for the glory of God and the honour of May.”

“Father Colin, whose words I must record (that is my first, my primary and almost my only goal in these notes) said....”

“For my part I am limiting myself to what can't be found elsewhere, and especially to the history of the Society before its Approval, and to the words of Father Colin.”

## Personal notes

Mayet's early years were not marked by great religious seriousness. In 1826 he had managed to go to the city of Lyon to do his studies in philosophy in order, as he said, to get away from the watchful eyes of his family. But in the following year he experienced his conversion, and it is from this time that he began to live a serious spiritual life. The very first entry in his Notes Personnelles is entitled: “Rule for holidays 1827”. Although he writes that “the spirit of my rule will be a spirit of gentleness and of peace”, nevertheless there are 14 pages of rule which contain 27 points. His entry opens with a prayer which expresses something of the delicate and sensitive spirit of this man:

O my God, if I write out a rule for myself, if under the eyes of my director I forge chains that should hold my will captive, I do this only to bind myself more closely to your love. The desire I have to please you is also to please my good Mother. The desire I have to expiate my past sins and to advance more and more in your love is the only motive for my conduct....

## Making known the man

In 1853 Mayet wrote down how he saw his role in the history of the Marist project:

As for me, placed as I was not far from the cradle of the Society of Mary, and having had the good fortune to live with [Father Colin] for several years, and not having been able to be sent to any of the works of our vocation as my hard-working and tireless confreres were, I would have believed myself answerable to you, dear brothers, if I had not found ways of using my inactivity and of profiting from the spare time provided by a long sickness in making myself, with the help of God, the echo of what I have heard.

Given the admiration he had for Jean-Claude Colin, and the significant part Colin played in the whole history of the Marist enterprise, Mayet also felt that his task was to “make known the man” Colin. Another comment he wrote helps us to understand the real nature of the journal he kept:

In the earlier years, I sometimes side-tracked, and noted first impressions instead of confining myself to his considered judgements ...

Sometimes I wrote down on the spot things which he himself modified shortly afterwards. I have written my notes not just to make known Father Colin's views, but also to make known the man himself; and to do this I had to catch nature at work in him, to take it in the act. I am not writing for children; it remains to be seen whether the course I have followed is without its drawbacks. But if I were to be always taken literally, there would be the same drawbacks as exist when what [Father Colin] says is taken literally.