



This collection of essays on the beginnings of the Catholic Church in the South Pacific unites works by acknowledged authorities in the field and young researchers. All of them open up new subjects and incorporate new research based on French sources. Among these are valuable essays on women missionaries, the ecclesiology of the early Marist missionaries, and the Marist teaching brothers. This collection will be of interest to historians of the Pacific Islands and of nineteenth-century Catholicism.

David Hilliard, Flinders University, South Australia

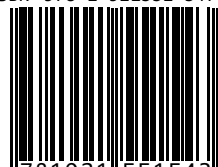
The many Pacific Islands have many founding stories. For the Catholics of Western Oceania, their stories go back to members of the Society of Mary and the man who sent them out as religious: Jean-Claude Colin, who agreed to staff the mission in February 1836. This book explores the relationship of Colin to the Marists, to Jean-Baptiste Pompallier, the first Catholic bishop, and to the pope in Rome. Relationships within this triangle were not always easy.

This book provides a context to the multi-volume collection of missionary letters edited and published in 2009. This volume, the fruit of international cooperation, focuses on the French presence (religious and political) in the Pacific and on the missionaries who were mostly Marists (religious men and women, and lay people). It recognises contributions to the origins of Oceania that are little known outside the Pacific and are sometimes undervalued. These essays offer a summary of current research and explore some of the critical issues involved.



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Catholic Beginnings in Oceania

Marist Missionary Perspectives

Edited by Alois Greiler SM



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The Marist Series

Through the Marist Series the Society of Mary (Marists) shares projects by Marists in the field of theology and history and works about the role of the Marists in the church, in particular in the Pacific.

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L. Verguet, New Zealand Maori: General Archives of the Society of Mary (Marist Fathers), Rome, Italy and photo of the desk by Bernd Kordes SM, France.

Back cover

'The True Vine': Diocesan Archives of the Catholic Diocese of Auckland, New Zealand; photo taken by Mervyn Duffy SM, Auckland.

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Preface

New editions of sources enable us to revisit the origins of the Catholic Church in Oceania and to discover who was behind the foundations of the Catholic Church in the emerging Pacific.

Considering the geography is important. We are looking at a third of the world, a region of 180 million square kilometres. The huge distances created immense problems of communication and logistics.

The many Pacific islands have many founding stories. We look at the islands within a triangle of thousands of kilometres originally called the Vicariate apostolic (forerunner of a diocese) of Western Oceania: from New Zealand to Samoa to Papua New Guinea. For Catholics, these stories go back to members of the Society of Mary and the man who sent them out as religious: Jean-Claude Colin. Colin accepted to staff this mission on 10 February 1836. This is the second triangle presented in this book—the Catholic Church, Marists, and Colin. A third triangle links the mission to the world church—Jean-Baptiste Pompallier as the first Catholic bishop, the Pope in Rome, and again Colin who negotiated with both in the interest of his men and the mission. And that had not been easy.

We go back in time to the first half of the Nineteenth century.¹ From the Eighteenth century on, James Cook and French explorers created a certain image of the Pacific in Europe. From 1800 on, Europeans and Americans gradually infiltrated the Pacific Islands as traders, adventurers, whalers, and immigrants. This caused various nations to establish colonies or zones of influence.

The Christian churches saw the newly discovered islands as places to begin Christian life and at the same time to bring what they saw as their unique message of eternal salvation. At the beginning, French Catholics, however, were still missionaries in their own country because of the French Revolution of 1789, the Napoleonic wars (1799–1815) and the 1830 revolution.

Before and after 1800, we find various missionary revivals in Anglican, Protestant, and Evangelical circles resulting in missionary societies. In 1797,

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1. See Charles W Forman, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific. Emergence in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982), 1–13; John Garrett, *To Live among the Stars. Christian Origins in Oceania* (Geneva – Suva: World Council of Churches and Institute of Pacific Studies, 1982); Ralph M Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania, 1825 to 1850* (Canberra, 1979); Claire Laux, 'Introduction historique', in Charles Girard (editor), *Lettres des missionnaires maristes en Océanie 1836 – 1854* (mémoire d'églises) (Paris: Editions Karthala, 2008), 19–70.

the London Missionary Society reached Tahiti. In 1820, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Boston) reached Hawaii. The Church Missionary Society came to Australia in 1820 and New Zealand in 1825. Methodists began in Tonga in 1826. Missionary activity spread from East to West with the Protestants as well as with the Catholics. Far away from the ecumenical age we live in, this caused rivalries and damage to the Christian message. However, it also created a Christian plurality.

The arrival of Catholic missionaries, first in Eastern Oceania (Picpus in 1827)² and then Western Oceania (Marists in 1837–38), added to the complicated situation. Catholics were ultimately directed by the centre in Rome, where the Pope acted through his missionary agency, Propaganda Fide (today Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples).

The original vicariate of ‘Western Oceania’ has developed with a growing Church into other vicariates and—after 1966—dioceses. Once strongly French, the Catholic Church has become Pacifican.

This book offers the context to 8,000 pages of missionary letters now edited, material that will influence Pacific studies.³ It is the fruit of the international symposium in Suva, Fiji, 5–10 August 2007⁴ and focuses on the French presence, the Catholic beginnings, and the missionaries who were mostly Marists. Their contribution to the origins in Oceania is sometimes undervalued. Outside the Pacific this story is little known. These contributions offer a summary of research and explore some critical issues involved.

The book is organized into four sections. The opening section gives stories and an overview of the main actor and events. The second section highlights Colin’s role in Rome and the foundations in the Pacific. A third section presents to us the men and women - some famous, some ‘invisible’ in their ministry. We look at the Marists, the priests, the religious brothers and sisters who came from France as missionaries. The first community of brothers was founded in 1817, of sisters in 1823, of priests in 1824.⁵ They came as the Marist family—all

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2. The Picpus or Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and of the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar (SS.CC): founded in 1800, approved in 1817. In 1833 they arrived on the Gambier Islands.
 3. See the presentation by the editor, Charles Girard, in this volume. Complementary to his work are the letters of the Marist Brothers (Edward Clisby) and the Marist documents concerning France, edited by Gaston Lessard as ‘*Colin sup*’.
 4. A similar symposium was held in Auckland, New Zealand, 27–29 July. The short papers presented at both symposia are published in the Marist journal *Forum Novum*, 8–9 (2008).
 5. Marist Fathers (with non ordained members, the brothers), Marist Sisters (SM),

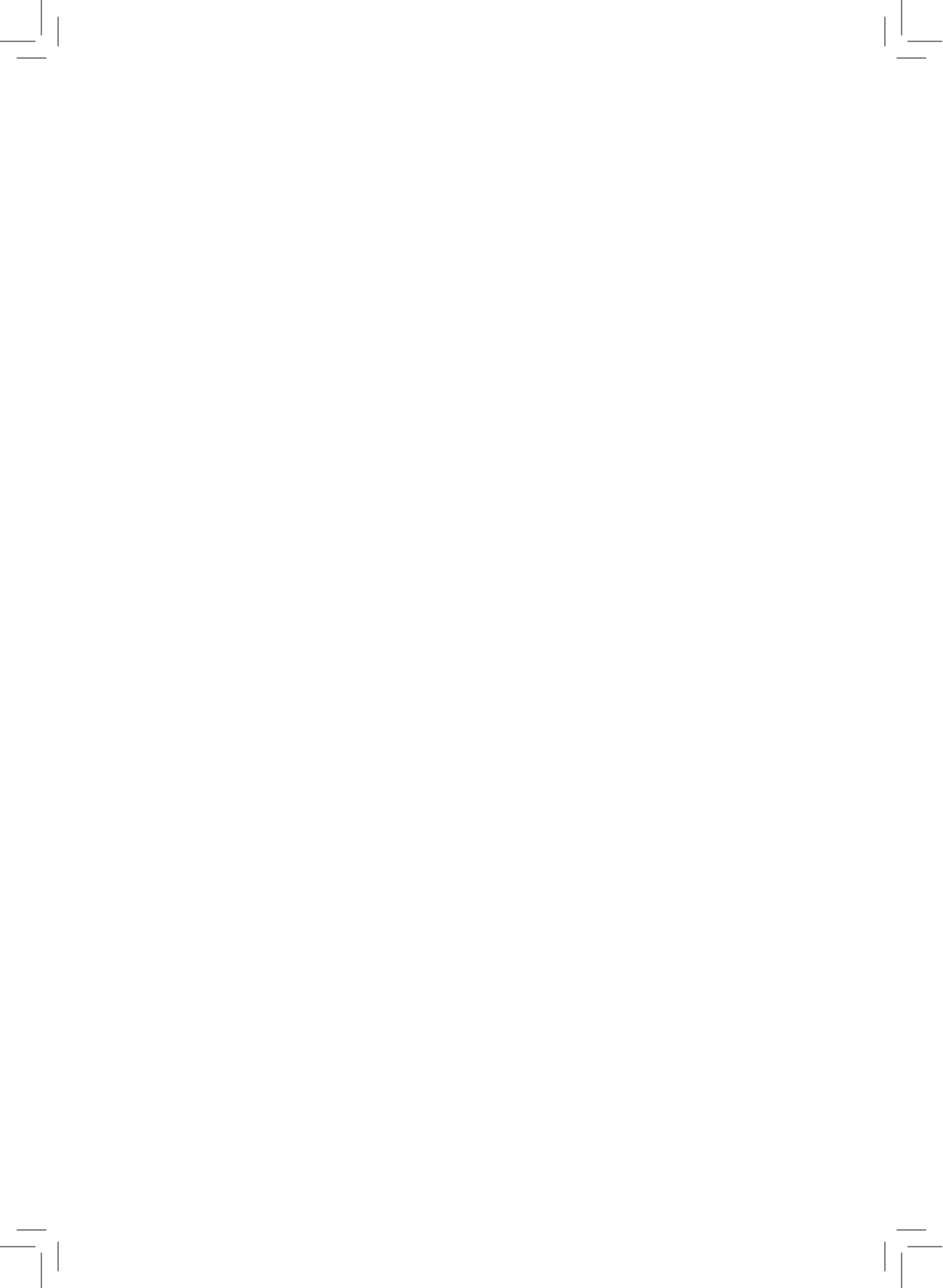
belonging to a new project planned in 1816 in Lyon which originally wanted men and women in one congregation for which Rome refused approval. Today they are independent congregations with the additional branch of the Marist Missionary Sisters (SMSM). They present a model of collaboration between lay and religious, men and women. A fourth section confronts us with underlying issues: the personality of Colin, the man behind the missionaries, their concepts of Church, contact with non Catholics, mission, and culture. A summary gathers the research done and points out where the 'Letters from Oceania' can yield even more fruit.

Reading each contribution is like moving from island to island — each distinct, each with its own founding story. Thus, the diversity of the presentations recalls the richness of the 'Church of the Thousand Islands'.

Various archivists contributed to the research. We thank Carlo-Maria Schianchi SM, Rome, for providing the illustrations. The copyright for the 'True vine' image was given by Bruce Bolland, Auckland, Diocesan archives, June 2008.

A heartfelt thanks goes to the authors and translators. *The Australasian Theological Forum*, Adelaide, has enabled us to share the results with a wider public.

Rome, 10 February 2009, Alois Greiler SM



Abbreviations

Much of the Marist material was published by the general house in Rome of the respective congregation of the priests, teaching brothers, sisters, or missionary sisters.

APM = Archivio Padri Maristi, General archives of the Society of Mary, Rome, Italy

Colin sup = Gaston Lessard (editor), '*Colin sup*'. *Documents concernant le généralat du père Colin*, volume 1, *De l'élection au voyage à Rome (1836–1842)*, Rome, 2007.

FS = Jean Coste (editor), *A Founder Speaks. Spiritual Talks of Jean-Claude Colin (1790–1875)*, Rome, 1975.

FA = Jean Coste (editor), *A Founder Acts. Reminiscences of Jean-Claude Colin by Gabriel-Claude Mayet*, Rome, 1983.

FN = *Forum Novum* (1990ff). Journal of the Society of Mary with studies on Marist history, spirituality and the life of the congregation.

LRO = Charles Girard (editor), *Lettres reçues d'Océanie par l'administration générale des pères maristes pendant le généralat de Jean-Claude Colin*. A provisional edition of three volumes documents and one volume indices was printed in a limited number in 1999 (Rome, APM). Researchers could use a later provisional electronic version of the full edition (10 volumes). The final edition will be published in 2009.

Mayet = Gabriel-Claude Mayet sm (1809–1894), *Mémoires*, 11 notebooks, c 1837 – 1854, quoted with volume and page number, APM, Rome.

OM = Jean Coste - Gaston Lessard (editors), *Origines Maristes (1786 – 1836)*, 4 volumes, Rome, 1960 – 1967.

LO = Edward Clisby (editor and translator), *Letters from Oceania. Letters of the First Marist Brothers in Oceania 1836–1875*, ten parts, Auckland, FMS, 1993–2005.

