

APRIL 2018



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CHAMPAGNAT

AN INTERNATIONAL MARIST JOURNAL OF CHARISM IN EDUCATION

volume 20 | number 01 | 2018

Inside:

- A Silent Nod
- Living the Marian Dimension of the Church
- Early Years in Bendigo and Kilmore

Champagnat: An International Marist Journal of Charism in Education
aims to assist its readers to integrate charism into education in a way that gives great life
and hope. Marists provide one example of this mission.

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Champagnat: An International Marist Journal of Charism in Education, ISSN 1448-9821, is published three times a year by Marist Publishing

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The papers published in this journal are peer-reviewed by the Management Committee or their delegates.

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Unsolicited manuscripts may be submitted and if not accepted will be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the journal should be sent by email to –

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Champagnat

An International Marist Journal of Charism in Education

Volume 20 Number 01

April 2018

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Viewpoint...

A Silent Nod

“As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19)

Mary’s pondering and her intimate connection to the sufferings of Christ have always been honoured by the Church, as only a mother consumed by grace could stand by and watch the unfolding of events of Easter (Frisk, 2018). In her book, ‘The Grace of Yes: Eight Virtues for Generous Living’ Lisa Hendey posits that whilst our yes to God is important, we must also be willing to say “no”, no to our own agendas, needs and hopes. Mary knew from the moment the Angel Gabriel spoke to her that it would require supernatural cooperation to allow God’s plans to play out in her life. Her response reveals a willingness to accept this invitation, “I am the Lord’s servant. Let everything you’ve said happen to me” (Luke 1:38). How often are we tempted to push our own plans onto God, to be in control, allowing anxiety to dominate our decisions, or slipping into frustration because of the situations we find ourselves in? For all that takes place in Mary’s life, we don’t hear of such a response. Indeed, she offers the exact opposite, a model of discipleship that was full of grace. Her ‘yes’ is a silent nod to God through her life, particularly through the trials of Jesus’s passion.

Mary was not the first mother to experience returning her son to the Father. Scholars note “the incredible gratitude and selflessness of Hannah in giving up or consecrating her son [Samuel] to God, and her love for him, as evidenced by her making his garments” (Anang, 2018). Could Mary have known what awaited Jesus when she and Joseph looked down at their new born son? Parents may feel a similar feeling of returning their child to the Father, as they leave home and follow their vocation in life. Whilst it is both healthy and necessary for the apron strings to be severed, as children find their independence and set out into adulthood, it also requires a letting go. While children make their own paths in life, empty nests once filled with school bags and toys can seem lonely. Did Mary experience this emptiness as Jesus embarked on his public ministry?

Parents have an awesome responsibility to raise children who can make good choices, love others, and follow their hearts, but they must allow the freedom to do this independently. It is a joy to see young adults blazing new trails, but this independence can also lead to disappointment in the paths chosen. Loving parents accept that their child’s choices are beyond their control and that their hopes and dreams may not always be aligned. Many parents raise their children in the faith to later watch them shed their religious practices as young adults. What more can they do than ask the Holy Spirit to guide their child? No doubt Mary wondered about the choices Jesus made and yet, we don’t see her intervening in Jesus’s life, other than to encourage Him at the Wedding at Cana. She stood firm as Jesus made his decision to place the lives of others ahead of his own.

Surely Jesus’s prediction of his betrayal at the Last Supper would have angered the most gentle of mothers and yet, the Gospel writers don’t mention any protest from Mary. Parents deeply feel an injustice directed towards their children, from playground quarrels and heartbroken relationships, to unscrupulous employers. Parents desire to advocate, defend and protect their children. Mary watched Peter deny her son three times, the same friend who had previously promised his undying love. The pain of seeing a love one betrayed is undeniable and instead of scorn, Mary’s demonstrates great forgiveness of Peter as he returns to the tomb of her resurrected son.

In Mel Gibson’s *Passion of the Christ*, Jesus falls under the weight of the cross and Mary recalls a scene of her child running care free and tripping over. It is a heart gripping moment for every parent who knows the feeling of seeing their child fall and cry out in pain. We resist the temptation to smother our children in bubble wrap in order to protect from injury, because we know that our children must experience the world and all its adventures, risks and dangers. When our children suffer we feel their pain and naturally want to remove it, but Mary somehow understood that the suffering of Jesus was necessary and she resisted the urge to take the yoke from Him. Kathy Thomas

recalls her experience of being unable to remove the suffering of her child, “covered in his blood, I stood silently, alone in the hospital room, watching my baby breathe with my hand carefully placed on his back, hoping to feel his heart still beating”. Like Mary at Calvary, Kathy recalls how she was “speechless as I endured the “privilege” that most people will never experience of literally being covered in the innocent blood of my beloved son. There is a depth of the gospel that is incomprehensible until you have experienced such a thing. It seared into my soul how great the Father’s love must be for us, that He would allow His beloved only Son to endure such undeserved suffering and draw us near to Himself”.

The audacious love of Jesus, poured out on the cross, is also evident in the enduring nature of Mary’s loyalty to her son and her faith in God’s promise. In a reflection on Mary, Cardinal Barbarin was struck by “how she continues to believe in God’s Word when, before her eyes, the exact opposite of what was promised and announced happens. When Jesus was on the cross, she remembered the words of the angel: “He will be great,” “He will be called the Son of the Most High,” “The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,” “He will reign forever,” ... She continues to believe the truth of these impossible words”. Mary’s faith in God’s ability to make all things possible is without question. “The Annunciation was a promise of splendour and glory: Mary is told that her Son will be the eternal, splendid Messianic king. A magnificent king? But look at the reality with her crucified Son dying in terrible agony with the mocking sign, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19). Mary can see no way in which the prophecy of an eternal kingship can be fulfilled; but she stands firm. Mary’s hope is horribly tested on Calvary. She can do nothing except hope against hope” (O’Donnell, 1996).

In his final moments of life, Jesus offers Mary hope, as she kneels at the foot of the cross with John the beloved disciple. Pope John Paul II summed up his reflections of Jesus’s words to Mary, “Behold your son”, making “Mary the mother of

John, and of all the disciples destined to receive the gift of divine grace. On the cross, Jesus did not proclaim Mary’s universal motherhood formally, but established a concrete maternal relationship between her and the beloved disciple. In the Lord’s choice we can see his concern that this mother should not be interpreted in a vague way, but should point to Mary’s intense, personal relationship with individual Christians” (Theotokos, p.190). Even through her unimaginable suffering, Mary adopts us as spiritual children and models a discipleship that is based on the hope of God’s promise. Despite an inability to fully comprehend all that has taken place, Mary knows that the story cannot be over and patiently awaits the next chapter.

How true it is that mothers never give up hope in their children, no matter how dire, their love is unending, always ready for a second chance and a fresh start. Whilst the Gospels mention various appearances of the resurrected Christ, there is no recorded meeting between Jesus and his Mother. “This silence must not lead to the conclusion that after the Resurrection Christ did not appear to Mary; rather it invites us to seek the reasons why the Evangelists made such a choice” (JP II, 1997). The Pontiff speculates that the Gospel writers omitted Mary because of her bias as a witness to the resurrection. He also considers that it is legitimate to think Mary was the first person that Jesus chose to appear to, on account of her faithfulness and therefore was not included in the account of the group of women who went to the tomb. It is these women who joyfully return to the disciples with the news of Jesus’s resurrection and it is easy to imagine Mary quietly smiling; with the full knowledge of the greatness of her Son, finally revealed to all.

Mary’s life reflects a silent, inward knowing. A pondering which drew the fragmented pieces of Jesus’s life together in her heart; the celebrations, healings, laughter and tears, taking it all in, but not taking it on. This Easter, may we join Mary in her humble yes to the Passion and participate in the mystery of God’s plan in our lives.

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NEXT EDITION OF THE JOURNAL

The second edition of the Champagnat Journal will appear in June of this year and it will carry two important papers:

- *The Transformative Leadership of St Paul*: this will be presented by **Chris Roga** who is the Director of Mission and Ministry at Lavalla Catholic College in Traralgon in Victoria, Australia. The paper was completed as part of Chris’s completion of postgraduate studies in scripture and theology.

- The Story of the Funding of Catholic Schools

1965 - 85 (particularly in the Sydney Archdiocese, although the experience would be similar across the country). This story is based on a recent lecture given to the Australian Historical Society by **Brother Kelvin Canavan**, the Emeritus Executive Officer for Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

Please note all papers are peer-read and published at the Editor’s discretion. We are more than happy to consider all contributions and these should be emailed to Br Tony Paterson at: tony.paterson@marists.org.au

THANK YOU

Our gratitude to those who have contributed papers to this edition, and to the proof-readers and to those who have assisted with the peer-review process. The Management Committee.

SIMON MARTINO

Living the Marian Dimension of the Church

The Christian life is fostered and nurtured through the Church. Pope Francis observes that it is not possible to be Christian without the Church and “claiming to be is purely idealistic and not real” (Harris, 2014). With the Church central to Christians, it is important to understand how to live and be church. The pontificate of Pope Francis has involved calls for a shift in the Church’s self-understanding and what the implications of this could mean for it. An example is his emphasis on the need for the Church to trust in the grace of God rather than creating bureaucratic obstacles (Hodges, 2014). This evaluation will explore this shift as a renewal of the Church today being called to live the Marian dimension. The discussion will begin with a reflection on the Church and the call for renewal. The different dimensions of the Church will be highlighted and the need for living the Marian dimension of the Church will be explained. This will lead to a definition of the Marian dimension, its relevance to the Church and reflect on how the pontificate of Pope Francis and his actions are encouraging a renewal that will make the Marian dimension a reality. The evaluation will conclude with a reflection on ecclesial movements and how the charism of the Marist Brothers and The Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat are seeking to be authentic examples of the Marian dimension in today’s Church. Living the Marian dimension of the Church is not a new way of living church but it is radical because it calls for the Church to have greater faith in the Holy Spirit to bring about the Kingdom of God.

THE CHURCH IN NEED OF RENEWAL

The renewal of the Church can only occur if the Church is open to being led by the Holy Spirit. A renewal does not change the Church, as Pope Benedict XVI said “the Church both before and

after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) is the same holy, catholic and apostolic Church (Lösel, 2008, p. 23). A renewal simply implies making what has previously occurred new again. “The Church has always had a duty of scrutinising the signs of the times and of interpreting in light of the Gospel” (*Gaudium et Spes*, §4) and for it to be able to do this, the Church must seek renewal through the Holy Spirit (*Lumen Gentium*, §15).

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was a bold renewal in the Church that attempted to place the Church back within the centre of society. *Gaudium et Spes* (§2) states “the Church yearns to explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and activity of the Church in the world of today”. At the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) “the Church had become a foreign body in a changed world, respected but misunderstood and unloved” (Pesch, & Dempsey, 2014, p. 19). Whilst the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) brought about a renewed life in the Church for a short time, the understanding of the Church being misunderstood and unloved still applies today. One just needs to look to the treatment of the Church in the media to affirm this truth. The media will highlight controversies involving Church teaching, the Church comes out on the losing side and the Church hierarchy is pitted against the low lever clergy and lay Catholics (Shaw, 2012, p. 459). The Church seems to be disjointed in its view of the world and can only be united through renewal.

The mystical Body of Christ is the Church who “were all baptised by the Spirit to form one Body” (1 Cor 12:13, NRSV) and as the Body of Christ its mission should be to initiate activities, especially those designed for the needy, such as the works of mercy, unity and the basic right of every person (*Gaudium et Spes*, §42). The Church is the mystical Body of Christ complete with lay, ordained and

consecrated men and women (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §904). The institutional Church, the hierarchy and magisterium, make up only a part of the mystical Body of Christ. Trust in other parts of the Body, like the laity, is needed if the Church is to faithfully carry out God's mission. The Church needs to make new again the same Spirit that guided the first apostles to "go make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt, 28: 19-20, NRSV). It needs to lead Christians to an encounter with Christ through compassion, service, trust, unity and through personal relationships.

THE DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF THE LIVING CHURCH

For the Church to undergo genuine renewal, it needs to trust in the direction it is being led by the Holy Spirit. Hans Urs von Balthasar preferred to speak of the Church as multi-dimensional and by understanding these dimensions an appreciation for renewal can be ascertained. This idea pictures the Church with Mary, Peter, James, John and Paul around Jesus forming a network of principles, which relate to Jesus (McDade, 2005, p. 99). Each of these principles is a dimension of the Church and contributes to the life of the Church. Each dimension is unique, yet each needs the other for the Church to prosper. The Church needs renewal because too great a focus has been given to the Petrine dimension. The Petrine dimension involves the pastoral office (McDade, 2005, p. 105) that comes from the knowledge that Jesus handed Peter the keys to the Kingdom and gave him authority over the Church. This dimension is the hierarchy, the magisterium that guides the Church and conveys teachings on the important doctrine and dogma. It is the authority that gives structure, proper instruction and articulates the beliefs of the Church. A problem has arisen because the Petrine dimension has been placed at the centre of church life, with an over emphasis on the judging and condemning of others (McDade, 2005, p. 104). The Petrine dimension should be in service of the other dimensions and supporting their functioning if the Church is to flourish. This will only happen when the Marian dimension is placed at the centre of the Church. With Mary at the centre, the other dimensions flow because she is always in relationship with either Jesus, Peter, Paul, James and John (Larkin, 2007).

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MARIAN DIMENSION OF THE CHURCH

The Marian dimension of the Church is the renewal the Church needs to find its proper place in the world again. Living the Marian dimension suggests the Church, as the mystical Body of Christ, will be able to perceive through faith and personal experience, Mary's motherly care in the ministry of the Church (Kereszty, 2013, p. 790). The Marian dimension is a living Church which makes a choice for compassion over competition, an option for relationship over dogmatism, for humility over power, for service over dominance and it is a Church that pushes boundaries to include all, rather than defining its boundaries to include only the chosen (Larkin, 1995, p. 80). It is these qualities that will flow from a Church that chooses to live the Marian dimension.

The Church acknowledges the Marian dimension precedes the Petrine (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §773) and needs this to filter through to bring the laity into their rightful place within the mystical Body of Christ. The Marian dimension is the secular dimension which makes the Church grow by making it present and operative in places and circumstances where only through the laity can it become relevant (McCarthy, 2015). Where the Petrine dimension of the Church has led to frustration over Church rules and bureaucracy, the relationship between the institutional Church and the laity will most likely change once the all-pervasive Marian dimension of the Church is revealed (Kereszty, 2013, p. 789). This is the renewal the Church is being called to live, a renewal in compassion, unity, relationship, humility, service and trusting in the Holy Spirit.

POPE FRANCIS AND THE MARIAN DIMENSION OF THE CHURCH

The renewal of the Church to live out the Marian dimension has been inspired by the Holy Spirit and is being lived out by Pope Francis. As Francis affirms, "the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of the living Church and it is important to live up to the mission of the Holy Spirit to stop reducing faith to morals and ethics" (Bordini, 2016). Since the beginning of his pontificate, Francis' leadership and rhetoric have been deeply Marian. One need look at his first encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* (§1),

“The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus...I encourage the Christian faithful to embark on a new chapter marked by joy.” These sentiments touch on the very essence of the Marian dimension, an encounter with Jesus and the experience of joy. Francis has recognised the need for renewal in the Church, the need to make new again a way of being church that has been forgotten. “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own securities” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §49).

Living the Marian dimension however, requires a renewal of the mystical Body of Christ. Francis speaks to the everyday Christian about what they need to be doing to bring forth Christ in their own way (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §285). There is a shift in the language used by the Church, it is not an ‘us’, the clergy, and ‘them’, the laity, rhetoric, but rather a ‘we’ as the Body of Christ. Francis is holding every member of the Body of Christ to account to help with living the Marian dimension of the Church. There is a call for the laity to cooperate more immediately in the apostolate of the hierarchy, like those men and women who helped the apostle Paul in the Gospel (McCarthy, 2015.)

It is necessary to point out that Pope Francis is calling the Church to live the Marian dimension through his actions and his language. In his writings, he never explicitly mentions the Marian dimension, yet he writes of a Church that is communal, personal, collegial, compassionate, serving and trusting in the Spirit, all essential elements of the Marian dimension. It is the responsibility of the Church as the mystical Body of Christ, to respond to the challenge of Pope Francis and to be renewed in living the Marian dimension.

ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS MAKING THE MARIAN DIMENSION A REALITY

The Marian dimension of the Church is the mystical Body of Christ acknowledging the role of each member, as lay, ordained or consecrated and it is the Church that is inclusive, compassionate, humble and trusting in the Spirit. These are simple characteristics that focus on the spirit of the Church rather than emphasising the clericalism and hierarchy. The Church has always shared in the

characteristics of the Marian dimension and it is now being called to make it central to a way of being Church. This is happening through ecclesial movements which have been growing in the Church since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). There has been an emergence of new ecclesial movements built around particular styles of discipleship and these men and women from all states of life, seek to serve the Church (Green, 2013, p. 3). Everything is destined to come to an end and this is the challenge faced by every institute that wishes to last in history, that is to renew itself, remaining itself, without changing its identity (Hoy See Press Office, 2016, p. 1). This is what the Church is trying to do, renew itself in the world and remain truthful to the Gospel message.

THE ASSOCIATION OF ST MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

One example of ecclesial movements growing in Australia is the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat. This Association has grown from a knowing and loving of being Church through the Marist charism. The Marist charism is a spirituality flowing in the tradition of St Marcellin Champagnat, who through his life and works, inspired the Institute of the Marist Brothers. The spirituality has at its heart Marcellin’s own experience of being loved by Jesus and called by Mary (Marist Brothers, 2007, p. 9). Key elements of Marist spirituality are trusting in God, making Jesus Christ known and loved, family spirit, simplicity and in Mary’s way (Marist Brothers, 2007, §17, 19, 30). Those identifying as Marists understand these as a way of being Christian that is humble, serving, merciful, that is openness to others and embedded in the knowledge that “without Mary we are nothing and with Mary we have everything, because Mary always has her adorable Son within her arms or in her heart (Marist Brothers, 2007, §25). These qualities of the Marist charism link to the Marian dimension of the Church offering a church that is relational, humble and gives service to others. It is from this charism of the Institute of the Marist Brothers that the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat blossomed.

Ecclesial groups are a new way of being church that cannot simply be understood as a voluntary association of persons because they provoke an

attraction to the Gospel and offer a proposal of the Christian life which touches every aspect of human existence (*Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, §2). The Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat does this in a way that is Marian and is an example of the Marian dimension of the Church. What makes the Association an example of the Marian dimension of the Church is its acceptance that men, women, lay, ordained or consecrated are equally involved in God's mission, which is the mission of the Church. The Association is a genuine response to a call for co-responsibility for the life and mission of the wider Australian Marist community and the Church (Ministry together with Lay Marists, n.d.). It is an expression of Church that embraces God's mission with Marian joy, hope and audacity and is a place of compassion, communion and service in the Church (Marist Association, 2016, p. 5). It is ecclesial movements like the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat that are helping the Church renew its identity by living the Marian dimension that is inclusive, inviting, merciful, full of joy and incredibly human.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This evaluation has been an attempt to understand the Church and its need for renewal. It has identified issues with the image of the Church in society and the negative attention drawn to the Church when it emphasises dogma and doctrine. There was a discussion on the multi-dimensional Church and the problems that have arisen from living only the Petrine dimension. It was concluded that the Marian dimension is the mediating dimension between the others as it draws forth the best aspects of each dimension that allow them to be fruitful for the Church. An argument was made that the Spirit is inspiring the mystical Body of Christ to live the Marian dimension, which is being led by the words and actions of Pope Francis. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) new ecclesial movements have flourished, with this evaluation focusing on the Institute of the Marist Brothers and the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat. It has shown that the Marian dimension of the Church as inspired by the Spirit and being lived by Pope Francis, is also being made a reality by the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat whose members aim to bring the mind and heart of God to actuality of

human experience (Green and McGregor, 2015, p. 12). The Church will always need renewal if it hopes to remain meaningful in the world. At this point in history, the Church needs renewal in terms of its relationship with the world and the best way to do this is to respond to the call of the Spirit to live the Marian dimension of the Church.

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From the Archives

125 Years of Marist Ministry in Bendigo and Kilmore



The original Marist Brothers College in Bendigo

Below: Original Brothers Monastery in Bendigo – now the Diocesan Chancery



Grade 5 at Marist Brothers College in 1923



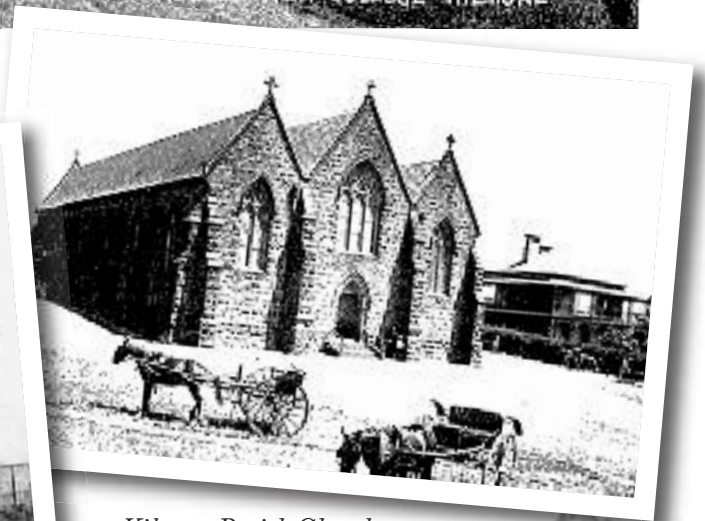
Brothers Community in 1915 – back left to right: Brothers Ildephonsus, Columba, Louis (Director), Gonzales. Seated left to right: Edmund, Baptist and Xaverius.



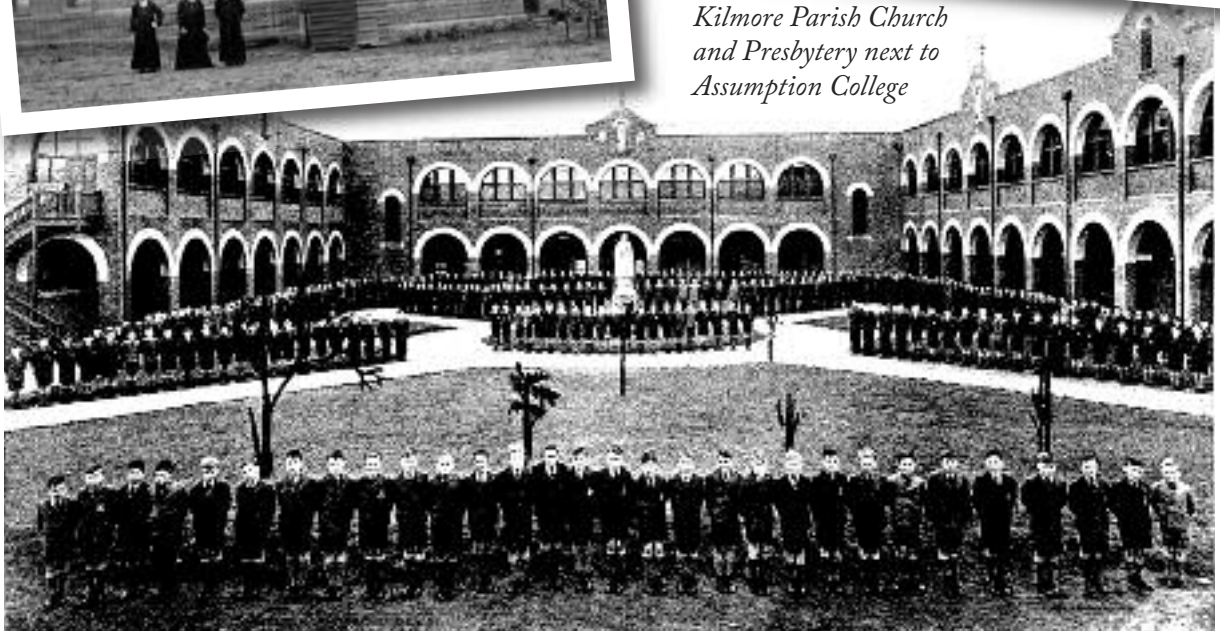
Main Entrance to Assumption College early Twentieth Century



Below: The original Assumption College building with the entire staff in 1890s



Kilmore Parish Church and Presbytery next to Assumption College



College Assembly in Quadrangle in 1940s/50s. Majority are boarders.

JOE MCCARTHY

Resting Fully with God – Marist Mission and Life

Practice these low and humble virtues which grow like flowers at the foot of the Cross
St Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, p209

INTRODUCTION

Marcellin Champagnat, a French priest, founded the Marist Brothers in 1817¹. His preferred title for this budding expression of consecrated life in the Church was ‘The Little Brothers of Mary’. By the time this new religious order eventually gained formal recognition, well after Marcellin’s death in 1840, the name given by Church authorities of the day was ‘Marist Brothers of the Schools’. In its brief statement on the origins of the Institute, the Constitution of the Marist Brothers notes that whilst Marcellin founded it “under the name of the Little Brothers of Mary, in 1863 the Holy See approved us and, whilst respecting our original name, gave us the title of Marist Brothers of the Schools.”²

This paper will demonstrate why this shift in name was significant in influencing the balance between contemplation and action in a way that perhaps prioritised the workforce dimension of a Brother’s life, more so than that of the faith community. It placed the emphasis more on the ‘doing’ of religious life, rather than the ‘being’ of religious life. Schools were now the explicit focus

in the name, rather than *Mary*. Although teaching and evangelising young people was indeed Marcellin’s focus and primary intention, the formal title of *Marist Brothers of the Schools* pointed to the structure for how the mission would be lived, replacing a name that had emphasised humility – and being led by Mary to do her work – whatever form that may take. In his contribution to the history of the Institute, Br Michael Green cautions against the distortion that can occur if we try to understand any spiritual family in the life of the Church by simply looking at what they do, or focus too heavily on their works

It is a misunderstanding of the Church’s spiritual families – including those associated with the so-called “apostolic” religious institutes such as the Marist Brothers – to try to understand them and their members by looking at what they *do*, or to focus on their works as their *raison d’être*.³

Rather, Green draws attention to the spiritual families as “schools of Christian spirituality.”⁴ Community and mission come second to the primary place of people growing in Christian discipleship and experiencing “conversion of heart.”⁵ That is, *who we are* is the most defining

1 The context for Marcellin doing this was as a member of the ‘Society of Mary’. This new Society, yet to be formally integrated into the hierarchical church, was initiated by a group of 12 priests in Lyon, France, on July 23, 1816. Marcellin was one of these priests, being newly ordained one day prior. The dream was for the Church to be renewed by placing Mary at the centre. Those leading this vision, imagined a variety of vocational expressions for people contributing to this new renewal – priests, sisters, laity. This is the broad context for Marcellin’s move to have ‘Brothers’ who would primarily serve young, rural people as teachers of the faith.

2 Constitution and Statutes of the Marist Brothers, 1986 Edition.

3 Michael Green, *A History of the Marist Brothers Institute Volume III – Dawn’s Uncertain Light*, (Rome: Marist Brothers General House, 2017), 192

4 Green, *Dawn’s Uncertain Light*, 192

5 Green, *Dawn’s Uncertain Light*, 192

element of any spiritual family. The distinctive style and approach for being attentive to God in life, and responsive to the challenge of participating in God's mission.

This paper will expose that at the very heart of Marcellin, and therefore the Marist charism, is mysticism: the dynamic, repeating experience of God leading to mission, and mission being the experience of God. In the introduction to *Water From The Rock*, a spirituality document for the Marist Institute, there is the claim that "Marcellin's Marist Apostolic Spirituality is a living and dynamic experience of God, contemplative and action oriented at the same time".⁶ Such a mystical disposition is the very essence of what it is to be Marist. A case will be made to suggest that if action and doing are given too great a place at the table, we can easily neglect an essential element of who we are as Marists – that of contemplation. Finding the right balance is a very real dilemma and challenge for people living in the twenty first Century. By looking at two people who significantly influenced Marcellin's spiritual journey, namely Br Lawrence and St Francis de Sales, evidence will be provided to support the case that Marcellin's primary lens into his faith life was that of a mystic, balancing the contemplative and active dimensions of Christian discipleship. The extent to which Marists can explore and grow as mystics in the context of their apostolic spirituality, will determine the capacity for them to continue to have a meaningful and vital presence across the Australian Catholic landscape.

The importance of Mary in Marcellin's faith journey will be revealed, as will Marcellin's position that being one with the presence of God is what both pushes us towards, and pulls us to, mission and community. He witnessed the belief that what you do and how you do it, is the fruit of being attentive to God. Everything else hinges on the extent to which individual and collective attentiveness to God is nurtured. Or, put differently, the extent to which we are willing to be led by the Spirit. With this emphasis, what we actually do because of our oneness with God will

be shown to be less about a specific mission, as long as it is responding to those people who are most in need, most marginalised, most on the peripheries of life. Green puts this succinctly

All founders of the great spiritual traditions of the Church acted out of a prior and intense God-encounter in Christ. This was indisputably the case with Marcellin; those who seek to follow him are called to the same.⁷

The assertion in this paper will be that the Marist contribution to the life of the Catholic Church in Australia, would do well to recover this guiding principle of 'God-encounter in Christ'. Placing God's mission, Jesus's life and message, and the work of the Spirit at the heart of who Marists are as a faith community, in turn will lead them to new missionary endeavours addressing the needs of the poorest and most distressed young people in our world today. This also impacts our understanding of and relationship with the hierarchical and institutional face of the Church, whichever way we look at it. We are being challenged to be creative, agile and flexible – individually and collectively – in how we go about witnessing our faith and living out our vocation. It brings with it new expressions of ecclesiology, the need for on-going spiritual formation, and new modes of ministry. Essentially, then, it is about rediscovering the very heart of Marist charism, which is described by Br Sean Sammon

At the core of our Marist charism lie these three elements: one, the experience of the love of Jesus and Mary for each of us; two, an openness and sensitivity to the signs of our times; and, three, a practical love for children and young people, especially those most in need.⁸

The suggestion in this paper will be that it is timely for a cultural realignment to happen which brings into focus once again the primary place of 'God encounter' for all else that happens in the name of Marists. In doing so, Marists will be in a position to understand and embrace a renewed ecclesiological mindset, giving witness to and

6 Br AMEStaun, *Water From The Rock – Marist Spirituality Flowing In The Tradition Of Marcellin Champagnat* (Rome: Institute of the Marist Brothers, 2007), 10

7 Green, *Dawn's Uncertain Light*, 192

8 Sean Sammon, *Making Jesus Known and Loved – Marist Apostolic Life Today* (Rome: Institute of the Marist Brothers, 2006), 23

celebrating a diverse understanding of vocation in the modern world. In the context of the wider Church, it forecasts a paradigm shift. The hierarchical, clerical face of the Church, is being invited to fully embrace laity in a way that enables shared responsibility for God's mission in the contemporary world. At the same time, laity are being invited to fully embrace the challenges that come with not being overly reliant on consecrated religious to lead and inspire service to the poorest and most marginalised. Sammon predicts the roots of this shift ten years ago

The challenge we face during a time of renewal or paradigmatic shift is different: re-imagining our charism anew in light of the signs of the times...the charism of our Institute needs to be lived and preserved not only by those of us who are members; it must also be developed and deepened in union with the People of God... today we realize that the charism that came into our world through Marcellin Champagnat is touching the hearts and capturing the imagination of both brothers and laity alike.⁹

MARCELLIN'S SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES

For the purposes of this paper, focus will be given to the works of two major influences on the shaping of Marcellin's inner, spiritual life. One, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (1614 – 1691), a disalced Carmelite. The second being that of Francis de Sales (1567 – 1622), canonized in the Catholic Church in 1665. Both lived over one hundred years before Marcellin was born, but their ideas had greatly influenced the theology and spiritual life in the seminaries by the time Marcellin was training to become a priest. To appreciate their influence, we will glance back to some of the spiritual insights of St Bonaventure. There were other influences on the growth and development of Marcellin's contemplative life that are not included in this paper, notably Saint Jure, Jean Baptiste (1588 – 1657), a Jesuit spiritual

director and writer who enjoyed extensive success as a writer, and a had a significant influence on the Christian practices of 17th Century France¹⁰. Another Jesuit, Alphonsus Rodriguez, whose writings included *Practice of Perfection* and *Christian Virtues*, was also a significant contributor to this body of work.

Most significant for Marcellin, it must be said, was the profound influence of Mary. Having described inspiring women in Marcellin's life, including his mother, Marie Therese Chirat, and his aunty, Louise Champagnat, Sammon emphasises

Finally, there was Mary, the mother of Jesus. While a late arrival in Marcellin's life, in the end, she would make all the difference. Devotion to her was part of the rich texture of faith in the local dioceses of Lyons and Le Puy. Marcellin would, in time, place Mary at the center of the community of Brothers he founded...she became eventually for him a "Good Mother," his "Ordinary Resource".¹¹

In his seminary years, Marcellin would be swept up into the plans to establish a new religious congregation, one that would place Mary at the centre of the Church's life and mission. The day after his ordination on July 22nd 1816, Marcellin, along with seven other men ordained with him, along with four other seminarians, "renewed their pledge and dedicated their lives to Mary."¹² This was the beginning of the Marists, or Mary-ists. Of that day, now referred to as the Pledge of Fourviere, Green says of the twelve men involved

They felt called by Mary that morning to do her work. The intuition that impelled them that morning was that it would be as Mary-ists that they could most effectively heal, reconcile, encourage, teach, and bring the Good News of Jesus to the people of their time.¹³

⁹ Sammon, *Making Jesus Known and Loved*, 31.

¹⁰ Andre Lanfrey, *Essay on the Origins of Marist Spirituality*. Trans. by Jeff Crowe. Unpublished study. Marist Brothers: Lyon 1991, Chapter III

¹¹ Sammon, *Making Jesus Known and Loved*, 12

¹² Sammon, *Making Jesus Known and Loved*, 24

¹³ Green, *Dawn's Uncertain Light*, 442

The foundation to Marcellin's faith journey and interior life was profoundly shaped by Mary. All was to be done in *Mary's way*.

The contribution of Br Lawrence can be largely gleaned from a short book he wrote, *The Practice Of The Presence Of God*¹⁴. Known as Nicholas Herman before religious life, it was clear that the fundamental underpinnings to his theological stance and spiritual intuitions were being played out even when he took up the profession of arms, and conducted himself "with simplicity and honesty."¹⁵ He was not afraid of death when taken prisoner by German troops and threatened with hanging¹⁶, which was an early sign of his faithful disposition. He was inspired to join the discalced Carmelites by virtue of his uncle being one, and spent most of his life in a Carmelite monastery in Paris.

Central to Br Lawrence's spirituality was the passion of Jesus Christ, "which he never thought about without being sensibly moved". He was particularly drawn to "the humility of the cross"¹⁷. Some of the insights and language of Br Lawrence seem to have been picked up in a very direct and literal way by Marcellin Champagnat. For example, we read that right from the beginning of Lawrence's novitiate

His devotion to the Blessed Virgin was extraordinary, tenderly devoted to her, he had a confidence in her protection, she was his refuge. He called her his 'good Mother' and gave himself particularly to the practice of prayer. He focused on the presence of God and the love which are its effects, and the grace of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

As we saw above, the very same could be said about Marcellin. Sammon comments about Marcellin that

His belief in the continual presence of God

helped him bear experiences and events in life that would have crushed others. He also trusted completely in Mary's protection and intercession; she was truly a fellow pilgrim and sister in faith for him.¹⁹

Among the qualities listed in Br Lawrence's eulogy were "patience, gentleness, firmness and humility"²⁰ and in his own words his "usual practice is to remain in the presence of God with all the humility of a useless but faithful servant."²¹ Marcellin, in one of the first letters that he wrote to the Brothers, used similar language in saying "let us pray that God will show us His holy will, and let us always say that we are His useless servants."²²

Marcellin was remembered by his early followers as someone who lived these qualities

His first disciples remembered with affection the Marcellin they knew: open, frank, resolute, courageous, enthusiastic, constant and equable. His whole life gave witness of a person with a practical disposition, a man of action, and of humility.

This enabled him to draw together from various sources a simple and down-to-earth spirituality.²³

The unmistakable parallels and influence on the Marcellin Champagnat we have come to know through those who have written about him continue as Br Lawrence's gentle disposition is noted. Also, his gracious and affable air and simple and modest manner. It allowed Lawrence to have a very egalitarian disposition, not looking to be separate from others through his religious position, and able to move kindly among his brothers and his friends, without trying to be distinguished from them. It has been said about him that "he tried assiduously to lead a hidden and unknown life."²⁴ The parallels with Marcellin's ability to write

14 Br Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New York: J.J Little & Ives Company, 1945)

15 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 10

16 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 10

17 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 12

18 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 14

19 Sammon, *Making Jesus Known and Loved*, 29

20 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 18

21 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 20

21 Writings of Marcellin found at: www.champagnat.org, Letter 001

23 Br AMEStaun, *Water From The Rock*, 23

24 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 24

pastorally and simply to his Brothers is captured in the comment that Br Lawrence was able to communicate his ideas, and showed a particular interest in the “little ones and the simplest.”²⁵

Br Lawrence deliberately grew both his desire and ability to be attentive to God, being described as having “a profound conception of the power and the wisdom of God, which he carefully cultivated by a great fidelity in dismissing every other thought.”²⁶ This is a fundamental dimension to the life of a mystic. All is God. He went about the task of “cultivating in his heart this deep presence of God, considered by faith”²⁷ and believed that “God is everywhere: in every place one can address Him, can make one’s heart speak to Him in a thousand ways.”²⁸ Br Lawrence saw God as much in his domestic duties and when repairing a pair of boots, as he did when praying with his community or leading a retreat. Marcellin shared this sense of God being the constant, no matter what the changing circumstances of life. Whilst in Paris in 1838, he remarked in a letter to Br Hilarion that he could experience the presence of God as much in the streets of Paris as what he was able to at the Hermitage – the home of the Brothers.²⁹

Francis de Sales also significantly influenced and shaped the interior life, or spirituality, of Marcellin. It is believed that his book *Treatise on the Love of God*³⁰ was one that Marcellin personally had and read. He would have been exposed to works such as *Introduction to the Devout Life*³¹ in the Seminaries he attended as part of his formal training to become a priest. The significance of the former text is captured in a story that Lanfrey tells. Marcellin, in response to a Brother asking if he knew a good book on the love of God, pulled *Treatise on the Love of God* from his bookshelf saying, ‘here’s an excellent one’.³² The Brother

asking the question, Brother Louis, was entrusted at one point by Marcellin with the role of Novice Master. As we have done above with ‘The Practice Of The Presence Of God’, it is instructive to look closely at the content of these two books written by Francis de Sales to shed light on their formative influence with regard to how Marcellin’s life and sense of mission grew.

The direct impact that theologians and Church thinkers had on each other’s lives around the time of Marcellin, and on generations to come, is captured in Francis de Sales comment that “I have said nothing which I have not learned from others.”³³ It is in this spirit of influence that we explore some of the thinking and reflections of Francis de Sales and the impression he made on Marcellin. Francis emphasised the relationship we build with God; that this encounter is all about a conscious and deliberate relationship. He sees perseverance as “the most desirable gift we can hope for in this life” fuelled by “prayer, fasting, alms-deeds, the sacraments and the hearing and reading of the holy words.”³⁴ It is interesting to note the place of humility and modesty that shaped Francis’ life. He, in turn, attributes this to one of his main influences, where he tells that “I have always considered that the learned modesty and most wise humility of the seraphic Doctor S. Bonaventure were greatly to be admired and loved.”³⁵

It is worth, briefly tracing back to the life and influence of Bonaventure, a thirteenth century Friar and mystic, who is considered the second Founder of the Franciscan Order, and the chief architect of its spirituality.³⁶ It provides a further thread to Marcellin’s own mystic nature, and the foundations of his prayer, simplicity and humility. Bonaventure’s sense of God in all things is captured succinctly in his claim that “God can be thought of

25 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 25

26 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 45

27 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 47

28 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 61

29 Writings of Marcellin found at: www.champagnat.org, Letter 181

30 Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God* (Maryland: The Newman Press, 1953)

31 Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* (New York: Doubleday Company Inc, 1955)

32 Lanfrey, *Origins of Marist Spirituality*, 18

33 Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the love of God*, 10

34 Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the love of God*, 139

35 Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the love of God*, 185

36 Ewert Cousins, ed., *The Souls Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St Francis* (New York: Paulist Press), 1

as an intelligible sphere whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere.”³⁷ It was in Bonaventure’s time that the learning of the monastic orders had found new homes outside the monasteries. Influenced greatly by St Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure

took the concerns of a rich tradition of spirituality and theology together with the claims of a spiritual vision grounded in the religious experience of St Francis of Assisi and brought these into a creative engagement with some of the dominant categories of the increasingly critical and secular culture of his time.³⁸

The critical role of humility permeates all of Bonaventure’s thinking, as he understands it as the central component to the life and faith of Francis of Assisi. He says of Francis of Assisi “not only does humility define his relation to God; it comes to shape his relation to other people as well as to the entire created world.”³⁹ He adds that “from the roots of humility, the human spirit grows in active love of God and neighbor which expresses itself in the virtues of the Gospel.”⁴⁰ It is no coincidence that the small and hidden flowers of the three violets have become a lasting symbol for what is at the heart of Marist spirituality: Modesty, humility and simplicity.

Martignetti⁴¹ writes of the significance of Bonaventure turning to prayer when he was given the responsibility of leading the Franciscans. He argues that it illustrated the priority that prayer had taken in Bonaventure’s life

Here was a person, newly burdened with the responsibility of leading a Religious Order at a sensitive time⁴² in its development, who took time out of this new era of his life by withdrawing to the solitude of a mountain to

pray and see the peace of the Lord.... Bonaventure had entered into a mystical journey to God and had made prayer a priority in his life.⁴³

The theme of simplicity is interconnected with that of humility for Bonaventure, where the alignment of what a person desires in their heart with what God desires for them, leads them to a more simple and loving life. For Bonaventure, as we make prayer a common practice to grow our relationship with Christ and experience unity with God, the fruits are humility, simplicity and a loving attitude.⁴⁴ The journey into Christ, into mystical consciousness, draws us into a place of contemplation and unknowing. It is also noteworthy that Bonaventure was interested in the monastic tradition of theology, which placed the opening of a vision, a way of life, above purely theoretical knowledge.⁴⁵

Returning to Francis de Sales, the living out of your prayer life in the world around you, as your way of being, was a deep conviction. He distinguished between two dimensions for the task of tuning in to God. One is affective, which encourages us to “practice the sacred infusions and minglings of our spirit with God’s.”⁴⁶ The other is effective, or active, a willingness to do God’s work. Put another way “by one we conceive, by the other we bring forth...by one we place God upon our heart, as a standard of love; by the other we place him upon our arm.”⁴⁷

In his book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, there is further evidence of the lasting influence that St Francis de Sales had on the spiritual life of Marcellin Champagnat, providing something of a bloodline, or rich source, for what would develop as Marist spirituality. All was about the experience of God in our heart, and our loving response. There is a message of inclusivity in the editor’s note that

37 Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure – Mystical Writings* (USA: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1999), 15

38 Hayes, *Bonaventure*, 26

39 Hayes, *Bonaventure*, 28

40 Hayes, *Bonaventure*, 29

41 Richard Martignetti, *St Bonaventure’s Tree of Life: Theology of the Mystical Journey* (Fratelli Editori di Quaracchi, 2004)

42 Cousins, Ed., *The Soul’s Journey into God*, 13

43 Martignetti, *St Bonaventure’s Tree of Life*, 38

44 Martignetti, *St Bonaventure’s Tree of Life*, discussed on page 46-48

45 Hayes, *Bonaventure*, 37

46 Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, 231

47 Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, 231

“this life of devotion is as open to the soldier, the shopkeeper, the courtier, the man of affairs, and the woman in the home as it is to the desert solitary and the nun in her cell.”⁴⁸ Francis distinguishes his work for spiritual enrichment to be for the common folk

Almost all those who have hitherto treated of devotion have had in view the instruction of persons wholly withdrawn from the world, or they have taught a kind of devotion that leads to this absolute retirement. My intention is to instruct those who live in towns, in families, or at court.⁴⁹

This is a crucial concept if we are to create a culture whereby our ecclesial understanding is renewed today. It is with this vision in mind and heart that Marcellin went about calling young men to become Brothers. It is with this vision in mind and heart that Marcellin dared to imagine the extent to which the ministry and work of the Brothers would reach. Marcellin himself, in 1816, the year he was ordained a priest, had pledged his commitment to a new movement in the Church which at the time was called the Society of Mary, which we will hear a little more of later. At the heart of this movement, generating out of France, was the belief that people would contribute it to it, and belong to it, equally, coming from a variety of vocational choices and circumstances. There would be priests, religious sisters, brothers and lay people, all part of the same institutional body.

The revolutionary and radical aspect of this movement was not the actual doing, or the *what* was being done. Other religious congregations and institutes were doing much in the fields of education and evangelisation. The revolutionary and radical aspect of this movement was in the *how* and the *who*. The how was captured by the fact that a loving relationship was the defining influence on the Marian teaching style, and the motivating principle for learning. This encouraged attitudes and practices centred on persistence, tolerance, inclusiveness and welcome. The *who* provided a

framework for a renewed sense of ecclesiology whereby it was the commonality of being a baptised Christian that united the group. Diversity in vocation was celebrated as a dynamism and gift, rather than being seen as a reason to create division or hierarchy.

It is reasonable to assume that St Francis de Sales influenced Marcellin’s belief in the value and potential of everyone to contribute to God’s mission, whatever their vocation be. St Francis emphasised that God is asking Christians to “bring forth the fruits of devotion, each according to his character and vocation.”⁵⁰ Again, though, there is an emphasis put on the importance of prayer and attentiveness to God as the core ingredient that will have us leading faithful lives and contributing to mission

Every vocation becomes more agreeable when united with devotion. The care of the family is rendered more peaceable, the love of the husband and wife more sincere, the service of the prince more faithful, and every type of employment more pleasant and agreeable.⁵¹

So, what did Marcellin possibly glean from Francis’ influence about what such a prayer life looks like? Francis suggests devoting an hour to prayer each day, preferably early in the morning “when your mind will be less distracted” and to always begin “in the presence of God.”⁵² He distinguishes between mental prayer and vocal prayer, whereby mental prayer is essentially about placing yourself in the presence of God. To achieve this, four principles are provided as a scaffold. First, God is in all things and in every place. Second, God is not only in the place you are, but God is also in your heart and in the very centre of your spirit. Third, consider the humanity of Jesus and his presence in the sense of looking over us. Fourth, drawing on our imagination, tap into the presence of God as friend.⁵³

We see the nurturance of humility being connected to prayer life when Francis also

48 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life – St Francis de Sales* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1955), 11

49 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 29

50 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 39

51 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 40

52 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 78

53 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, discussed on 80-81

encourages brief morning prayer as a way of preparing the events of the day carefully, and in doing so, to humble yourself in the presence of God, acknowledging that you will not be able to achieve your hopes without God.⁵⁴ This is further emphasised using the analogy of the purist of balm resting on the bottom when it is poured into water. St Francis tests whether people are “truly wise, learned, generous, and noble” by seeing if they “tend to humility, modesty, and submission, for then they shall be good indeed.”⁵⁵

He also encourages an examination of conscience, which includes “rekindling in your heart the fire of your morning meditation”⁵⁶ where we give thanks to God, examine our behaviour and efforts, and acknowledge that any achievements are God’s doing. The mystic influence of God being in all things emerges with Francis when he writes that aspirations to God are about noticing and vocalizing God in beauty, giving thanks for God’s assistance, knowing God’s goodness and opening ourselves up to God. He captures it with the statement that we are moving towards this space when we “make a thousand different motions of our heart, to give you a love of God and to arouse yourself to a passionate and tender affection for this divine Spouse.”⁵⁷

There is language and imagery used by Francis that relates something of the interior dynamic of God’s work in our life. It describes God as ‘proposing’ something to us by inspiration, and that we consider it and are drawn to it, or ‘delighted’ in it. Then we give our full consent to it. This is an encounter, an experience, that requires attentiveness, faith, discernment, and practice. There is an intimacy and closeness for how Francis talks about this, drawing on the image of God as the ‘Spouse’. Francis is drawing on the language of another great mystic of the Catholic tradition, Saint Catherine of Siena, who talked about her “interior closet, where she comforted herself with her heavenly Spouse.”⁵⁸

In describing some of the fruits of prayer, we get glimpses into some features of the foundational spirituality to flow from Marcellin and the Brothers

Let us endeavor sincerely, humbly and devoutly to acquire those little virtues which our Savior has set forth for our care and labor. These are patience, meekness, mortification of heart, humility, obedience, poverty, chastity, tenderness toward our neighbors, bearing with their imperfections, diligence, and holy fervor.⁵⁹

Francis highlights the place of hospitality, inspired by love for people. There is a clear teaching that actions and witness, whereby time is spent with people, is a necessary component of serving the poor. He states that “if you love the poor, be often in their company, be glad to see them in your house, and to visit them in theirs.”⁶⁰ Marcellin, and the Marist tradition that has developed since his time, has strongly nurtured the place of hospitality and presence. Francis provides reason for this to deepen, to become not only about relationships with people, but at the same time an experience with God

Should your mutual and reciprocal communications relate to charity, devotion, and Christian perfection, O God, how precious will this friendship be! It will be excellent, because it comes from God; excellent, because it tends to God; excellent, because its very bond is God... I speak here of spiritual friendship⁶¹

All of this is to be understood as doing the work of God, as experiencing our relationship with God. The approach of Francis is that it is through our attentiveness to smaller, everyday moments of life and work, that we in fact build our attentiveness to God. In his words

Practice these low and humble virtues which grow like flowers at the foot of the Cross: care

54 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 90

55 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 129

56 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 91

57 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 94

58 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 93

59 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 123

60 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 160

61 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 170

of the poor, visiting the sick, taking care of your family...great occasions of serving God seldom present themselves, but little ones are frequent.⁶²

A final point of synergy between the beliefs and teachings of Francis de Sales and the life and work of Marcellin Champagnat resides in the place of persistence and grit, along with an unwavering faith in God. Francis promotes an openness to the total experience that comes with serving God's mission. He encourages people of faith to not be afraid of turmoil, confusion or contradiction, along the journey, but to ultimately turn to the source of one's love for God for direction and comfort. It is captured beautifully in the comment

let everything be in confusion, I say, not only around us but even within us. Let our soul be overwhelmed with sorrow or joy, with sweetness or bitterness, with peace or trouble, with light or darkness, with temptation or repose, with pleasure or disgust, with dryness of tenderness. Let it be scorched by the sun or refreshed by the dew. For all that, ever and always the point of our heart, our spirit, and our higher will, which is our compass, must look unceasingly and tend always toward the love of God.⁶³

MYSTICISM TODAY

Father Bede Griffiths has said "if Christianity cannot recover its mystical tradition and teach it, it should just fold up and go out of business. It has nothing to offer."⁶⁴ This may be a little drastic, but it serves its purpose – the Church cannot continue in a *business as usual* way in the contemporary world. The Marists, in Australia, are no different. Based on the most recent census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported that 30% of people are now choosing 'none' when asked which religious tradition they are connected to. For the first time, this response, 'none' is greater than those who nominate their religious affiliation as Christian, and has become the highest single response. Admittedly,

statistics need to be broken down carefully to be understood, and consideration given to the various social, political, cultural and historical factors at play. However, at the surface level, gone are the days where a hierarchical, institutional Church unquestioningly authors the narrative and asserts sizeable influence on the lives of the vast majority of people that make up the body of the Church.

Alongside this development, perceived by some as something of a paradox, there is a thirst for meaning and a hunger for connection in Australian culture today. There is a reaching out to spirituality, an increasing desire for mindfulness, and an expressed need for 'retreat' in life, whether it be 'tree-change', 'sea-change', interest in Eastern practices, or other manifestations. This suggests that there is a healthy yearning and searching, perhaps even an instinctual want for 'otherness' or what many would call 'God', that is not being reached or satisfied by what we might call traditional Church structures.

In the introduction to his book *Christian Mystics*, writer and former Dominican, Matthew Fox, draws on the anecdote about Albert Einstein when he was asked at the end of his life if he had any regrets. He answered: "I wish I had read more of the mystics earlier in my life."⁶⁵ Fox goes on to warn against the 'antimystical' nature of fundamentalism, and the predominantly 'left-brain' attraction to much of theology and religion which, he says, "ignores the right brain, which is our mystical brain."⁶⁶ He laments the lack of adventure and inner exploration, suspects that this is the reason that religion has become boring for so many, and encourages the spirit of St John of the Cross to "launch into the deep."⁶⁷ Fox goes on, "this launching into the depths often gets stymied by Western religious dogma, guilt trips, and institutional churchiness. The mystic gets starved."⁶⁸ He provides us with a sound basis for looking at the role of the mystic today

I believe that there is a great wisdom in our

62 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 209

63 John Ryan, ed. & trans., *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 251

64 Matthew Fox, *Christian Mystics – 365 Readings and Meditations* (California: New World Library, 2011)

65 Fox, *Christian Mystics*, introduction

66 Fox, *Christian Mystics*, 1

67 Fox, *Christian Mystics*, 1

68 Fox, *Christian Mystics*, 2

species and in Western spiritual traditions, but that this needs a new birth and a fresh beginning. We in the West must take these insights into our hearts on a regular basis, allow them to play in the heart, and then take them into our work and citizenship and family and community. This is how all healthy and deep awakenings happen; they begin with the heart and flow out from there. Deep down, each one of us is a mystic. When we tap into that energy we become alive and we give birth. From the creativity that we release is born the prophetic vision and work that we all...getting in touch with the mystic inside is the beginning of our deep service.⁶⁹

David Tacey, writing in the Australian context, reveals his comfort in the 'mystic' space, echoing from Bonaventure that he likes "the mystical description of God as a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."⁷⁰ Siding with the above challenges named by Matthew Fox, Tacey emphasises the creative element to our faith life and spiritual journey if it is to evolve in contemporary life saying that "the poetic imagination is a central organ of theology and the perceptual mechanism of the spirit."⁷¹ Tacey warns, however, that this requires a daring spirit and humility in Church leaders today, to move away from a safe conservative and controlling mindset, to accepting that the creative Spirit leads us to new and unknown places

"Making new" calls for connection with the deep roots of creativity. But we do not have control over the deep roots or over what they produce for us...the hope for the future is that we can overcome our obsession with imitation, stand-ins, substitutes and copies, and face the nature of the real. Not just the surface real, but the deep real, from which surprising, alarming and transforming things emerge.⁷²

It is the disposition of the mystic that will encourage, cultivate and embrace the necessary changes and challenges that come with such transformation.

RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO MYSTICISM

Thomas Merton (1915 – 1968), a Trappist monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky, has made a significant mark on the field of mysticism. Using the language of contemplation, Merton has provided a rich groundwork for encountering God in the everyday. He is quick to establish the right order of events for this, reminding us that "it is not we who choose to awaken ourselves, but God who chooses to awaken us."⁷³ Merton claims that it is through contemplation that awakening is experienced, whereby "our free and personal reality becomes fully alive to its own existential depths, which open out into the mystery of God."⁷⁴ This is an intentional 'set' for mind and heart, and runs counter to the ever increasing search for contentment, and fullness of life, in the economy of possessions and achievement. For Merton, this represents a lack of creativity and newness, as people "hurry to magnify themselves by imitating what is popular – and are too lazy to think of anything better."⁷⁵ It is in contemplation and mystic experience of God that we will find our true self, which in turn is an experience of being called to humble service to the needs of life around us. For as Tacey reminds us, "once spirit is contacted it brings with it an imperative to go outside ourselves and serve others and the world."⁷⁶

This is the same spirit that stirred Marcellin's life and mission, and inspired him to found the *Little Brothers of Mary*⁷⁷. It is the same spirit that will provide for the Church of the future. Pope Francis, at the beginning of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he wishes to "point out new paths for the Church's journey in years to

69 Fox, *Christian Mystics*, 2-3

70 David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution – the emergence of contemporary spirituality* (Australia: Harper Collins, 2003), 165

71 Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution*, 166

72 Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution*, 226

73 Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1972), 10

74 Merton, *New Seeds*, 9

75 Merton, *New Seeds*, 98

76 Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution*, 147

77 As noted earlier in this paper, the name given by the Church after Marcellin's death was *Marist Brothers of the Schools*

come”⁷⁸ highlights that God, and the call to service, will not be found in the world of ego and self-interest

Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades.⁷⁹

Pope Francis goes on to provide a context for reaching beyond ourselves and experiencing fullness of life, in encountering God, and that it is “thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love” that we are “liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption.”⁸⁰ Tacey understands faith as having a role to play in “letting go and knowing that something greater than ourselves is present.”⁸¹ Spirituality, flowing from the mystic understanding of encountering God in the everyday, stirs within us our humility and ‘deepest’ self, by-passing the realm of the ego. Tacey explains that

The fact is that true spirituality is not something that makes itself available to our egotistical designs, but rather something that draws us into a larger world and makes us subordinate to a greater will that transcends us on all sides.⁸²

We have here a critical part of the puzzle for anyone wishing to grow the Marian Church – Marcellin’s sense of coming to know and love Jesus in Mary’s way. One must take the journey away from self-interest, impressing others, being in control, certainty and knowing; and towards God. The necessary itinerary of this journey includes not knowing, humble service, a handing over of control, and transcending the impulses of the ego for the greater good. The good news is that this journey has already begun in us – it is not foreign country or unfamiliar. Richard Rohr, Franciscan priest and founder of the Center for Action and

Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, reminds us that “the gift is objectively already within, and yet it has to be desired and awakened” and that “the core task to all good spirituality is to teach us to *cooperate* with what God already wants to do and has already begun to do.”⁸³

How do we cultivate this in ourselves and in others? What enables people to “cooperate” with that which God has already begun in them? Clearly it is a question that points to our interiority, our inner being. In a world that is increasingly busy, with more distractions and interventions on our time at our finger tips than ever before, part of the response to this question is to do with being able to be present to the moment that we are in. Present to ourselves. Present to others. Present to the environment. Present to God. Now. Rohr captures it when he says that “true spirituality is a search for divine union *now*.”⁸⁴ He points out that such presence journeys us toward humility and service, as mentioned above. For him presence is when

our heart space, our mind space and our body awareness are all simultaneously open and nonresistant. It is experienced as a moment of deep inner connection, and it always pulls you, intensely satisfied, into the naked and undefended now.⁸⁵

To explore the question of how to cultivate this, and what methods foster this in people, let us turn to Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk and priest known as one of the architects of Centering Prayer, a contemporary method of contemplative prayer. He claims that “centering prayer brings us into the presence of God and thus fosters the contemplative attitudes of listening and receptivity.”⁸⁶ It echoes back to Br Lawrence’s book *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Taking the time, making the effort, and nurturing the intentionality of knowing God in our everyday experiences and encounters. This includes the necessary intelligence to be attuned to

78 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel* (Rome: Vatican Press, 2013)

79 Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 2

80 Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 8

81 Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution*, 143

82 Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution*, 146

83 Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now – learning to see as the mystics see* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 22,23

84 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 16

85 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 28

86 Thomas Keating, *Intimacy With God – an introduction to centering prayer* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 11

the interior motivations that drive us. Religion will survive and flourish if it is led by such principles. Rohr goes as far as to suggest that it is the source of the next reformation saying that “tossing into the soul (mysticism) could be the next reformation. Our age, I believe, is destined to discover the divine as a dimension of the human.”⁸⁷

One of the key practices to improve being present to God is being able to think about and approach things in a non-dualistic way. Keating emphasises that before the Second Vatican Council, the Western Model of Spirituality which dominated Western thinking was that of dualistic thinking, which places higher value on external acts such as fasting at the expense of internal acts, or motives. It also places the human seemingly in control – initiating good works, based on the premise that God will reward them. This encourages a narrow mindset, with too great a concern on getting to heaven, rather than the here and now.⁸⁸ In relation to this last point, Keating says

Excessive concern about future rewards or punishment tended to take ordinary people’s attention away from their primary duty of manifesting here and now the love of Christ toward their neighbours, and led Christian people to underestimate the duty of social action.⁸⁹

Thomas Merton connects such dualistic thinking to the image of God that people carry with them, pointing out that it is unhelpful to imagine God being as an “external dictate of impersonal law”. Rather, Merton suggests, we are better to experience God as an “interior invitation of personal love” and that we must “learn to realise that the love of God seeks us in every situation, and seeks our good.”⁹⁰ Rohr concurs, placing a caution on the outer life, full of action and works that are seen to be ‘good’, if there is not a God-centeredness: “without an inner life, our outer prayer will soon become superficial, ego-centred, and

even counter-productive on the spiritual path.”⁹¹ He extends this to include the style of prayer we practice, suggesting that we need to balance spoken prayer, full of words – ‘saying prayers’, with what he calls “unsaying prayers” which is the quiet, contemplative style of prayer.⁹²

Thomas Keating provides a further insight for the ‘how to’ question in highlighting the discipline and practice that goes with Centering Prayer. Ultimately, it leads us towards living life from the center, which carries with it the challenge of tempering the dominant practice of thinking our way into life. This task revolves around to letting life itself increasingly impact our consciousness and thinking. Keating points out that this shift is integral to any pathway towards contemplation, suggesting that “all methods that lead to contemplation are more or less aimed at bypassing the thinking process...to cultivate spiritual awareness.”⁹³ He goes on to highlight that such practices have the potential to impact our whole understanding of God and sense of responsibility to life around us

Centering prayer is an exercise in *intention*. It is our will, our faculty of choice, that we are cultivating. The will is also our faculty of spiritual love, which is primarily a choice. Divine love is not a feeling. It is a disposition or attitude of ongoing self-surrender and concern for others similar to the concern God has for us and every living thing.⁹⁴

The final sentence of the above quote is important to this paper – contemplation as the source of action and outreach. This is of interest to the type of apostolic spirituality that has grown in the Marist tradition. Importantly, it dismisses the myth that contemplation is about non-action, or distancing oneself somehow from the encounters of everyday life. Quite the contrary. Keating highlights that the spiritual journey, in fact,

87 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 129

88 Keating, *Intimacy with God*, discussed on page 25

89 Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 25

90 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 15

91 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 74

92 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 73

93 Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 68

94 Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 57

transforms our struggles and failures as we grow into our full expression of self, saying that it is “the transformation of our pain, woundedness, and unconscious motivation into the person that God intended us to be.”⁹⁵ Similarly, Rohr suggests that the two main portals are, “love and suffering, that open up the mind space and the heart space, breaking us into breadth and depth and communion.”⁹⁶

Contemplation, then, leads us toward *right action* and encourages *right living*. It entices us to understand the experiences of human existence through the lens of our conviction of one-ness with God, rather than life experiences shaping our understanding of the one God. Keating emphasises that “our focus on God is not just for the time of the prayer but for the whole day. The presence of God is going to accompany us into daily life.”⁹⁷ Tacey situates this in the context of the renewal of spirituality today, noting an inextricable relationship between following the will of the sacred other, and serving the needs of other people, commenting that “in our new call for spirituality... we experience not just a human craving for the sacred, but also a sacred craving for the human.”⁹⁸ For Marists to continue to participate in God’s mission, in the style that Marcellin Champagnat dreamed of, this understanding is key. The dynamic between prayer and action is continuous. Keating sees action emerging from contemplative prayer, otherwise it stagnates and turns in on itself. Equally, action without contemplative prayer “leads to burn-out or running around in circles.”⁹⁹ The Marist spirituality document, *Water From the Rock*, suggests that Mary provided a sound guide for Marcellin working towards this balance

Mary inspired Marcellin’s style of being on mission. She received the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation and responded immediately to Elizabeth’s need. In so doing, she shows us that

contemplation and action are both indispensable elements of spirituality.¹⁰⁰

For Marists, and all other expressions of Christian discipleship, the action component of God’s love causes us to be in solidarity with, and to reach out to, the poorest and most distressed in our community – those most on the margins. Thomas Merton makes this very clear

The contemplative needs to share something of the hardship of the poor. He needs to be able to identify himself honestly and sincerely with the poor, to be able to look at life through their eyes, and to do this because he is really one of them.¹⁰¹

David Tacey sees the spiritual revolution as an uncontrollable spilling out of the spirit; the same spirit that is fundamental to human creation, and all of life, compelling us to respond to the needs around us

Spirit is the fount of human creation and the core of the natural world...once released from its hiding place in the self, it rushes out to the wider world, and we need to move beyond ourselves with it.¹⁰²

Holding firm to this dynamic – that contemplation and action are two aspects of the same love of God, and that action impels us to make a difference in the lives of the poor – sheds light on the formative dimension that befits people who yearn to share in an apostolic spirituality. It places the emphasis on the extent to which we can “help others uncover or release the divine potential in themselves.”¹⁰³ To do this, we need to have first done the same work – uncovering and releasing the divine potential in ourselves.

Rohr believes we need to be giving people experiences of their own inner aliveness, and not simply using “public, verbal and social prayer forms and group rituals”, otherwise we are promoting

95 Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 22

96 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 123

97 Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 159

98 Tacey, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 221

99 Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 159

100 Br AMEStaun, *Water From the Rock*, 72

101 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 251

102 Tacey, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 147

103 Tacey, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 147

religion “on the level of social contract...cultural Christianity or civil religion.”¹⁰⁴ This, he says, holds people together but it does not necessarily transform people at any deep level. If there were to be a way to measure the effectiveness of formation programs and experiences, it would be the extent to which another person has been helped to see that God is present and active in their life, enabling them to wake up and be the best version of themselves. Rohr’s way of putting this is that “we need transformed people today, and not just people with answers.”¹⁰⁵

Writers on mysticism and contemplation are unified on the fact that the human ego presents significant challenges, some of which were mentioned above. Merton uses language such as the “false self”, “external self” or “superficial self”.¹⁰⁶ This is the ‘self’ that competes, controls, owns and accomplishes. It is the desire in us to only think our way through things, and interpret achievements as our own. Rohr believes that it is our ego, and how we tend to think about the world and our place in it, that builds resistance to change as we move through life. That is why “most people hunker down into mere survival. Ego is just another word for blindness.”¹⁰⁷ Yet, “change is God’s clear pattern.”¹⁰⁸ Merton attributes part of this blindness to what he observes to be an obsession with busyness in our life. He squarely challenges any notion that a sense of importance and worthiness is tied up with the extent to which someone is busy

Some never get as far as contemplation because they are attached to activities and enterprises that seem to be important. Blinded by their desire for ceaseless motion, for a constant sense of achievement, famished with a crude hunger for results, for visible and tangible success, they work themselves into a state in which they cannot believe that they are pleasing to God

unless they are busy with a dozen jobs at the same time.¹⁰⁹

This is a challenge for today’s Church in Australia. As Religious Congregations transfer the responsibility of their works to non-consecrated people, commonly referred to as the laity,¹¹⁰ there is a distinct vulnerability of the works remaining truly that of the Church, let alone the continuation of a charismatic tradition. This vulnerability comes in the form of a corporate mindset and heartset permeating the work culture, focused on *getting the job done!* The irony is not lost to the mystic, who is conscious that because of the interplay between who I am, what God is doing with me, and what I am doing with God, then the job is never *done*. What we do as people of faith, should never be separated from who we are as people of faith, and why we are people of faith. The fundamental premise that we are opening ourselves to God in our life, knowing ourselves more deeply, and in turn being drawn to participate in the work and activities that bring about unity, emphasises internal transformation as much as it does on outward results. Rohr names it as

When so many become professional church workers without going through spiritual transformation at any deep level, religious work becomes a career, and church becomes something one “attends”.¹¹¹

However, he suggests that this is not necessarily a recent phenomenon, describing how in the Catholic tradition, monks, nuns and friars have over the years become workers for the institution, accepting how things are done, often at the expense of their own deeper traditions of transformation. “We morphed” he claims “into ‘Churchianity’ more than any genuine, transformative Christianity”.¹¹² Rediscovering our contemplative tradition can lead

104 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 72

105 Richard Rohr, *Things Hidden – Scripture as Spirituality* (USA: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2008) 11

106 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 7,25

107 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 90

108 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 96

109 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 206

110 The reluctance to use the word ‘lay people’ in this context is because men and women of religious orders are strictly understood as ‘lay people’ in Church language when talking of clerical and other responsibilities.

111 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 37

112 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 108

us back to a more transformative Christianity, starting with practicing our attentiveness to God, and a greater consciousness of God's active presence in our life.

The development of our 'true-self' is connected to the extent to which we can expand our level of consciousness to the present moment, and become more aware of the presence of God in all things – including in us. Merton says it like this

There is an irreducible opposition between the deep transcendent self that awakens only in contemplation, and the superficial, external self which we commonly identify with the first person singular. Our external, superficial self is not eternal, not spiritual. Contemplation is precisely the awareness that this "I" is really "not I".¹¹³

For Merton, this escape from what he calls the "prison of our own false self"¹¹⁴ will bring with it an unrivalled sense of joy as we enter into union with God, with ourselves, and with all of life. The summary phrase he uses for when we reach this state of life is "loving God perfectly."¹¹⁵ As we overcome our false self, and embark on this journey towards fullness, our authentic self, it taps into the notion of *vocation* in the truest sense of collaborating with God – of hearing God from within. We cooperate with what God is already doing in us. In Merton's words, "our vocation is not simply to be, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life",¹¹⁶ or perhaps even more succinctly, "the contemplative enters into God in order to be created."¹¹⁷

In our exploration of the 'how question' in relation to cultivating a contemplative attitude or mystical stance in life, the role of humility deserves particular mention. As was highlighted earlier in the paper, those who contributed to what is often

referred to as the French school of spiritual writers,¹¹⁸ emphasised humility. The same can be said of writers on the mystic tradition from the twentieth century onwards. Humility is a non-negotiable for living contemplatively. Merton describes humility as the ultimate freedom, where a person ceases paying attention to their own deeds, reputation and need for achievement, such that they "are at last completely free to serve God."¹¹⁹ He describes it as the very thing that will liberate a person from their "external and egoistic self",¹²⁰ and it being integral to the journey to authenticity

humility brings with it a deep refinement of spirit, a peacefulness, a tact, a common sense... and it takes heroic humility to be yourself and to be nobody but the man, or the artist, that God intended you to be.¹²¹

Humility has something to do with resting fully in God, and knowing that all in our life flows from there. Rohr describes the role of contemplative prayer for cultivating humility as "the awareness of God's presence supplants the awareness of our own presence."¹²² Merton concludes that

It is almost impossible to overestimate the value of true humility and its power in the spiritual life...for faith and humility are inseparable. In perfect humility all selfishness disappears and your soul no longer lives for itself – it is lost and submerged in Him and transformed into Him.¹²³

A final point on the 'how' of living contemplatively today, drawing on the mystic tradition, is the role of the imagination. Returning to the pivotal thinking of Bonaventure, it is said about him that he engaged his imagination to illuminate his faith journey, and encouraged others to do the same

113 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 7

114 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 25

115 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 25

116 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 32

117 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 111

118 When listing key influences and practitioners of contemplative prayer, among the French school of spiritual writers, Thomas Keating includes St Francis de Sales.

119 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 58

120 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 66

121 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 100

122 Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 40

123 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 181

Bonaventure is not hesitant to let his inspired imagination serve him on his journey into God...he will encourage the reader to reflect on the biblical scene he is referencing and enter into it in his/her mind in order to tend to the tree of life and prayerfully feast of its fruits.¹²⁴

Further, Bonaventure was aware of the essential role of the imagination in all aspects of prayer life, seeing it as “one of the six faculties or powers of the soul which help us draw closer to God.”¹²⁵ Merton picks up the role of creativity and imagination in believing that in every moment and every event of a person’s life, seeds are planted into their soul, hinting towards something of the role of leaders in the future Church saying that “for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of freedom, spontaneity and love.”¹²⁶ In responding to these moments and events

We will learn to take the risks implied by faith, to make the choices that deliver us from our routine self and open to us the door of a new being, a new reality.¹²⁷

The creative and imaginative dimension is also reflected in the way Merton talks about the experience of our inner self awakening, “with a momentary flash, in the instant of recognition when we say ‘Yes!’ to the indwelling Divine Persons”.¹²⁸ He captures the journey and dynamism of becoming more conscious and being at one with God, describing that “what is really *new* is what was there all the time. The really “new” is that which, at every moment, springs freshly into existence.”¹²⁹ Tacey believes that religion today needs to draw from the “poetic imagination and the contemporary arts”¹³⁰ if it is to remain relevant to the times. The art of poetry and metaphor illuminate God’s presence, “so that we can see things in a new light.”¹³¹

CONCLUSION

This year, 2017, The Marist Brothers celebrate two hundred years of life and mission in the Catholic church. Having started in a rural setting in France, Marcellin’s desire to extend his vision abroad was made clear in a letter he wrote to Bishop de Bruillard in 1837 where he stated that “our plans include all the dioceses of the world.”¹³² Today, the Marist Brothers have a presence in over eighty countries. For the Marist spiritual tradition in Australia to remain a genuine and authentic expression of what began in the small hamlet of Lavalla, a significant indicator will be the extent to which tomorrow’s Marists can cultivate practicing the presence of God. This was at the heart of it for Marcellin. Being at one with God aligns, and gives ultimate meaning to, all that flows from this experience. We have learnt from some of Marcellin’s influences, that this practice is not easy and takes “application and courage”, and in a world that is increasingly busy and distracting, it provides a way to keep one’s spirit “recollected in God”.¹³³ Along with the many schools, solidarity projects and other ministries that are carried out today in the name of Marist mission, it is this gift, growing the capacity in people to be attentive to God and the inclination to rest fully in God, that will define Marist life and mission in the future. After all, this is the root spirit of Mary’s way, and therefore the foundation to the Marian face of the Church. Mary was attentive to God and made the choice to rest her life in God. This provides assurance that any activity and action that emerges is of God. Marcellin was particularly fond of Psalm 126 – *if the Lord does not build the house!*

Contemporary writers on this contemplative disposition, have clearly reinforced the point that *resting in God* compels us to reach out, to serve others, to engage in God’s work of responding to

124 Martignetti, *St Bonaventure’s Tree of Life*, 48

125 Martignetti, *St Bonaventure’s Tree of Life*, 66

126 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 14

127 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 16

128 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 42

129 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 107

130 Tacey, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 161

131 Tacey, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 166

132 Writings of Marcellin found at: www.champagnat.org, Letter 93

133 Br Lawrence, *Presence of God*, 23

the needs of the most vulnerable in our world. Mary's experience sets this pattern of contemplation and action, and Marists today are encouraged to embrace this same dynamic, having the potential and capacity to break into each moment of our life and our being. Our journey in life becomes an ever-increasing fabric of one with God. In Merton's words

Contemplation is awakening, enlightenment and the amazing intuitive grasp by which love gains certitude of God's creative, dynamic intervention in our daily life.¹³⁴

Lanfrey warns against confusing passivity with inactivity in these moments. The former relates to the initiative being with God as the "transcendent breaks into one's human existence"¹³⁵, which changes the way we see and know things.

Marists of the future will be people who are practicing and promoting contemplation in the life of the Church. They will do this knowing that it is Mary's way, the Marian Church, faithfully nurturing the seed that Marcellin wanted to grow – the *Little Brothers of Mary*. Today, our world, therefore our Church, needs more leaders who operate out of this contemplative space more so than the space of competition, popularity and ego. Pope Francis is seen by many to be doing this. Merton reminds us that it is counter-cultural, inevitably leads to change, and involves offering something new. It prevents what Merton describes as the great temptation of people today to immerse themselves in the mass of others, providing an "escape into the great formless sea of irresponsibility which is the crowd."¹³⁶ The mystic experience of life draws us, through love, to stand up and be a participant in God's mission, and a voice for those who are voiceless. That is, to *be* Church.

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134 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 5

135 Lanfrey, *Origins of Marist Spirituality*, 9

136 Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 54

