

APRIL 2021



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# CHAMPAGNAT

AN INTERNATIONAL MARIST JOURNAL OF CHARISM IN EDUCATION

volume 23 | number 01 | 2021  
200 years of Catholic Education in Australia

Inside:

- Six Characteristics of Marist Spirituality (Part2 )
- Catholic Authorities and Lay Teachers In Nineteenth Century New South Wales

*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 twice a year by Marist Publishing

## Peer-Review:

The papers published in this journal are peer-reviewed by the Marist Tertiary Group or their delegates.

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# Champagnat

An International Marist Journal of Charism in Education

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Volume 22 Number 01

April 2021

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# CONTRIBUTORS

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## **Br Michael Green, fms**

Br Michael is a well-known and highly respected Australian Marist scholar whose research and contributions have spanned many decades. Presently the Rector of Aquinas College in Adelaide, he has been a Marist Principal,

Provincial Councillor, Founding Executive Director of Marist Schools Australia, member of the Association Council, international scholar and researcher of the Marist Institute and its Founder. We are very blessed to have Michael's articles on the Characteristics of Marist Spirituality made available to us in such depth, while at the same time being so readable and enjoyable.



## **Fr Andrew Murray sm**

Andrew Murray was born in Lithgow in 1949. His father was an engineer, and the family, eventually of eight children, moved with him through the western and Hunter coal fields as he led the mechanisation of the mines. Andrew did

most of his primary schooling at Toronto and all of his secondary schooling at Marist Brothers, Hamilton. It was the Marist Brothers who introduced him to the Marist Fathers. He was immediately drawn to their gentle approach to the world ('hidden and unknown'), and Emmet McHardy's letters to his family from Bougainville (*Blazing the Trail*) inspired him towards a missionary vocation in the Pacific. He joined the Marist Fathers in 1968, taught for two years and then completed an Ma and PhD at the Catholic

University of America. On returning to Australia, he taught at Catholic Theological Union at Hunters Hill and then for twenty-five years at Catholic Institute of Sydney. He did some teaching in PNG and Solomon Islands and visited much of the Pacific. In 2016 he wrote *Thinking about Political Things: An Aristotelian Approach to Pacific Life*. The Marist and Pacific Mission History Library was envisaged in late 2019 and executed in 2020. This project garnered immediate and generous support from all four Marist branches.



## **Charles McGee**

Charles McGee was educated by the Brigidine Sisters and Marist Brothers at Randwick and completed his senior schooling at Marist Brothers Mittagong. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Sydney and

later a Diploma of Education at Castle Hill.

He spent forty-two years in Catholic schools initially as a Marist Brother and then as a lay teacher. He taught a wide range of subjects and served in a number of capacities including Principal.

He is the author of *On a Winner – A History of Marcellin College Randwick*; *The Forgotten Ones – Teachers in the Catholic Schools of New South Wales before 1880*; *In a Class of Their Own – 40 Years of Australian Secondary Schools Rugby League*; *A Touch of Green – Sydney's First Catholic Schools and their Sites*; *St Michael's It Is – 75 Years of Golf at Little Bay*; *People of Faith and Generosity – The Catholic Teachers of New South Wales before 1883* and *The Forgotten Beginnings of Catholic Education in New South Wales*.

**Br Michael Flanagan, Editor**

## **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.

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These are the final three articles in our series on the Six Characteristics of Marist Spirituality that are described in *Water from the Rock*. The focus is on the historical sources and the spiritual emphases of these six characteristics.

BR MICHAEL GREEN

## 4. In Mary's way

Where does a Marist even begin when it comes to Mary? It's our name, our identity, and our purpose: we are the 'Mary-ists'. That was the name that Marcellin and his idealistic companions coined for themselves as they imagined the Society of Mary more than two centuries ago.

An obvious and helpful place to begin would be Scripture – we could go to the Lucan imagery of Mary in the Gospel and Acts, especially the Annunciation, the Visitation, and Pentecost; looking at the interplay between virginity and fecundity, the action of God's Spirit, and the themes of joy, mercy, fidelity, holiness and justice. Or we could draw on the symbolism of the Johannine image of Mary as 'mother of Jesus' at Cana and Calvary; or Paul's 'born of woman'; or the image of Mary as the 'new Eve', and dip into the Book of Revelation. There is much to plumb there. Then, in our Marist world we have recourse to some rich documents on the theme of our Marian identity, especially from the last five decades.<sup>1</sup> Another option would be to tap the centuries of Marian theology, or explore the plethora of popular Marian piety and customs. Or, we could approach the question by delving into the perspectives offered by the array of titles and imagery that dogma,

teaching, tradition, culture and art each gives us. It is an immense treasure chest of insight and wisdom, built over generations of experience of Christian discipleship, scholarship, and religious imagination. While the emphases and approaches of some of these options may leave us a little curious or even uncomfortable, each has some validity for its own time and community. So where to begin?

Let us start where we mean to end: with Jesus Christ.

The term that each of the Marist founders was given to using to describe what he or she was about goes to the heart of it. In the writings of Marcellin Champagnat, Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn and Jean-Claude Colin, and others of the first generation, we find recurring reference to l'œuvre de Marie – 'Mary's work'. That is how they understood their *raison d'être*: they were seeking to be participants in Mary's work. And what precisely was this 'work'? *Water from the Rock* frames an answer in this way:

*The Marists understood their project to be a sharing in Mary's work of bringing Christ-life to birth, and being with the Church as it comes to be born.*<sup>3</sup>

Bringing Christ-life to birth. Christ-life? To birth? Here we touch something at the core of Pauline theology. One important key for unlocking his Letters

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1 For example: the Marial Document published after the watershed post-Vatican II General Chapter of the Marist Brothers in 1967-68; the Circulars of several Superiors General of the Marist Brothers – *A New Space for Mary*, Brother Basilio Rueda, 1976; *In Her Arms or in her Heart*, Brother Seán Sammon, 2009; *He Gave Us the Name of Mary*, Brother Emili Túru 2012; and the first Circular of the current Superior General, Brother Ernesto Sanchez, *Homes of Light*, 2020.

2 Many of these approaches to Mary were explored in the author's 2019 series for Christlife - 'Marian Today. Holy Today'.

3 *Water from the Rock*, #11

is Paul's understanding of 'living in Christ', and of the Spirit working in us to bring this life to birth.

Borrowing from the 1986 Constitutions of the Marist Brothers, *Water from the Rock* goes on to say that '*we share in the spiritual motherhood of Mary as we take our part in bringing Christ-life to the world of those whose lives we share, [nurturing] that life in the ecclesial community.*'<sup>4</sup> To share in 'Mary's spiritual motherhood', now there's a concept and a half!

In one of his letters, Marcellin goes even further.<sup>5</sup> As he offers some counsel to one of the Brothers, he asks him why 'Mary' isn't enough for him. Marcellin seems to be using 'Mary' as shorthand for both the Society of Mary, and the work of Mary. It is a revealing turn of phrase, and a profound one theologically. What Marcellin infers is that Mary is not just someone to whom to be devoted and to be affectively close – which was unquestionably the case for the early Marists – but that their core identity and purpose was actually *to be Mary*. They saw themselves as the Mary-figures for the people whom they served. Mary's essential role, as theirs, was to 'bring Christ-life to birth' and to 'nurture its growth', to employ the phrasing of *Water from the Rock* written two centuries later. As for Mary, this was something that began in themselves interiorly as they opened themselves trustingly and vulnerably to the Spirit, and then was borne to others with joy, mercy, humility and fidelity.

The group of ordinands with whom Marcellin aligned himself to form the Society of Mary had been exposed in their seminary studies to what might be called a quite 'high Mariology'. This was typical of the French school. 'High' does not mean that they were trained to pedestalise Mary with unduly exalted honour or as an object of independent devotion. Whatever might have been the popular devotional customs of the rural areas from which most of them came, the Marian theology they were taught situated Mary as bound inextricably with God's mission in Jesus. That was her primary

identity. They would have understood that Mary had no place theologically in or of herself. 'High' Mariology can be considered analogous to 'high' Christology: theologians sometimes speak of a spectrum of perspectives on Jesus Christ, from a so-called 'higher' Christology that focuses on the 'Christ of faith' or 'Lord of history', to a 'lower' Christology that seeks more to understand the 'Jesus of history'. It is not a matter of one end of the spectrum's being more correct or of greater worth than the other; both are valid and important. One enlightens the other.

Similarly, with Mary, there is a range of lenses for seeing her – from a focus on her eternal role as figurative mother of God's love incarnate, to one that touches more into the concrete experience of Myriam in first century Jewish Palestine. It was the former that found itself the subject of the theology textbooks that the first Marists studied. The very same is captured in the paragraphs of *Water from the Rock* cited above. Mary's essential role is her maternity of God incarnate, not only exercised once in human history two thousand years ago, but carried on eternally. It is Mary who brings forth the living Christ who seeks incarnation in every person in every time. This is the idea that captured the minds and hearts of Marcellin and his companions, and to which they gave their lives. It is something that was famously distilled four centuries before by the German Dominican theologian Eckhart von Hochheim, usually known as Meister Eckhart, in these words:

*What good is it to me that Mary gave birth to the son of God fourteen hundred years ago, and I do not also give birth to the Son of God in my time and in my culture? We are all meant to be mothers of God. God is always needing to be born.*<sup>6</sup>

While Eckhart himself might not have been on the curriculum at the Saint Irénée Seminary in 1812–16, certainly this emphasis in Marian theology was. Contemporary missiology might put it in terms of realising *missio Dei*: making real, in time and place

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4 *Ibid.*, #26

5 Letter 42 in *Letters of Marcellin Champagnat* edited by Br Paul Sester, Rome 1991. The letter is to Brother Cassien Chomat who had joined the Brothers in middle-age, in 1832, as an experienced and successful schoolmaster, and a man of solid character and principle. Marcellin had been his spiritual director for some years before that. This letter is received by Cassien during the summer of 1834 when he has apparently been disheartened by that the behaviours of some younger Brothers did not match his own more mature principles.

6 Another German, but someone from our own time and a Marist, has written powerfully on this theme: Fr Fritz Arnold SM. See his book *Like Mary: Towards Christian Maturity in the Twenty-First Century*, Columba Press 2001. And an article by him: 'You Should Become Mary and Give Birth to God: Giving Birth to God, a theme in Christian Mysticism'.



and people, the timeless and boundless mission of God or, better, the mission that *is* God. Love.

Jean-Jacques Olier, a disciple of Pierre de Bérulle who went on to found the Sulpicians, who in turn trained just about all of Marcellin's professors at the Saint Irénée, wrote of Mary as a sacrament of pure mercy and life that is God.<sup>7</sup> Mary as a sacrament! That presents itself as a theological concept that sounds rather contemporary, but it is one that comes from the 1600s and about which Marcellin would have most likely read. Olier develops Bérulle's emphasis on Mary's maternity and puts it in terms of Mary's *fecundity*.<sup>8</sup> Mary's role is life-bringing because she is so completely at one with the God who generates all life. He proposes this as an exemplar for all Christians.

Part of the genius of the Marist project, from the time of its conceiving, was to integrate this exalted Marian theology with a sense of Mary that was grounded, human and immanent. Today we may have better language for it than they did back in nineteenth century France. *Water from the Rock* uses some of this, describing Mary as 'our sister in faith', as 'first disciple', and as a 'woman with dust on her feet'.<sup>9</sup> Such language probably makes it easier for us to identify with Mary, or as Mary.

At the same time, let us be careful not to be too reductionist. Chefs can use a good 'reduction' in their cooking, to offer both intensity and complexity of flavour to their cuisine. The same is not always true in spirituality or theology. The risk of going to readymade or easily-applied labels is that we end up with understandings that are facile and simplistic. We Marists can be as guilty of this as anyone. We are quick to dismiss politicians, and the market research people in their back rooms, who love to throw around formulaic slogans of three or four words. But we can do the same. For example, it is common in some Marist quarters to hear people describe the 'five characteristics' (or, worse, the five 'pillars') of Marist education that are taken from one of the eight chapters of *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat*, as if these five descriptors of style represent either the essence, or

even the extent, of Marist education (overlooking rest of that text, notably the previous chapter that discusses Marist educators as sowers of Good News – arguably something of significantly greater definitional importance!). We could equally be critical of the framing of this very series, based as it is on the six characteristics of Marist spirituality that are named by *Water from the Rock*. Can Marist spirituality be reduced to six dot-points?

We Marists have other little phrases; 'being the Marian face of the Church', for example, is one that we have used in the last decade or so, appropriating it from the Balthasarian theology promoted by Pope John Paul II. What does the phrase actually mean? Or another one: going 'in haste' with Mary, 'into the hill country'. Marcellin himself had favourite terms. Most would know that he was fond of the expression *Notre Bonne Mère* ('Our Good Mother'); and sometimes he and others used the expression 'Ordinary Resource', one that has less currency these days. In decorating the new chapel at the Hermitage in 1836, the Founder cherry-picked fourteen titles for Mary taken from a Marian litany, his choices making an interesting study in themselves. There are and will be other phrases and terms. Most of them are not 'little phrases' at all, of course, but attempts to encapsulate much deeper ways of describing Mary and her place in Christian living. The challenge is, like appreciating a good reduction in French cuisine, to take time to savour both the intensity and the complexity that the phrase or title may represent.

The fact that the two millennia of Christian history and imagination have generated such multi-faceted scriptural, doctrinal and figurative language, imagery and cult around Mary is argument itself against a simplistic understanding of Mary, or of 'Mary's way'.

Mary is perhaps best understood through the pivotal verse of John's Gospel – 'I have come that they may have life, life to the full' (10:10). Mary is the epitome of this: humanity in its fullness. She is so because she is one and entire with the desire of God, with God who is mission, who seeks to be love incarnate.

7 Olier, J.J. *Le catéchisme chrétien pour la vie intérieure*. p.59. See Letter 304, in Volume 2 of Olier's *Lettres*.

8 He develops this concept in the book *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiennes*, the last book he wrote and reflective of his mature thinking. Interesting, it was still in print in Marcellin's time, a new edition coming off the presses in 1830.

9 *Water from the Rock* #29. While the first two of these descriptors have wide currency in today's Marian discourse, the third is distinctively Marist. It comes from the Circular of Superior General, Brother Charles Howard, 'Marist Apostolic Spirituality' (Marist Brothers, Rome, 1992).

Whether you prefer the synoptic Gospels' language around 'hearing and obeying', or the triumphal fantasy literature of the Book of Revelation, or deep dogma such as the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption, or the poetry of the Magnificat, or the inexhaustible efforts of artists and composers, or the gentle rhythm of the Rosary, or wherever it is that portrayal of Mary has most cogency and immediacy for you, it will come back to the same thing: to be Mary, is to be you, the most authentic and most alive you. It is, as Brother François wrote in his signature Circular on what it was to be a Marist, to be someone who can read Galatians 2:20 and recognise yourself in the verse.

The new 2020 Constitutions of the Marist Brothers present Mary as the one who welcomed and lived deeply the mystery of God's love that in *time became flesh* (cf. Jn 1:14).<sup>10</sup> The corollary is that Marist spirituality is intrinsically missionary, carrying the fullness of life to others. In Luke, the Annunciation and the Visitation are two sides of the same coin. Mary is not the creator of life, but the bearer of life (consistent with understandings of human biology at the time that the seed of life was entirely from the male).

The Bérullian theology that Marcellin learnt put this in terms of 'conversation', as we have seen in a previous article: the Christian is called to be like Mary in conversation with, or in 'visitation' with, one's neighbour. Bérulle described this as being continually moving from one's interior self to the exterior, from one's encounter with God's Spirit to an encounter of joy with the other, so that Christ will be born in time and place and people. To be Marian can never be to be caught in a self-absorbed spiritual ecstasy. Mary waits, listens, ponders, dialogues and receives, then she sings. Her whole being sings, as the words of the Magnificat put it. The Annunciation/Visitation later finds a parallel in Luke with the account of Pentecost.

*Water from the Rock puts it this way:*

*Today we continue to be convinced that to follow Jesus in the way of Mary is a privileged way of*

*bringing our Christian journey to fullness. With a heart filled with compassion, we share this experience and conviction with children and youth helping them to experience the maternal [life-bearing and nurturing] face of the Church.*<sup>11</sup>

In 1886-87, the then elderly Brother Sylvestre wrote a memoir, a kind of short biography of Father Champagnat. Sylvestre's contact with Marcellin had been as a quite young Brother in the 1830s and as somewhat of a rascal. Indeed, he remained quite the lively character all his life. For the most part, the memoir repeats incidents and events that Brother Jean-Baptiste included in the official biography written in 1856, which Sylvestre augments with some personal anecdotes. But he also offers several fresh insights. One of these comes at the end of the book. Sylvestre tells us that Marcellin was fond of calling Saint John the 'first Marist'. The Beloved Disciple, the personification of the perfect disciple, the one mystically closest to Jesus, this is how Marcellin understood what it was to be Marist. At the end of the book, it is with Mary that Sylvestre leaves his reader, as Jesus left John. The final proposal to his readers (the Brothers at the time) was that, to become living images of the Founder, they needed strive to be genuine 'brothers of Mary'.

What is 'Mary's way'? No concept makes a more frequent appearance in contemporary Marist identity discourse than the imperative to follow Mary's way: to be 'like Mary', to minister 'in the manner of Mary', to go 'with Mary', to 'live Mary's spirit', and so on. The *Rule of Life* for the Brothers, for example, published at the start of 2020, mentions Mary sixty-four times, and in almost every case carries this sense.<sup>12</sup> Mary's way is to bring life. It is to be life-giving in and through the most human of everyday circumstances and interpersonal relationships, and to do so through mercy, joy, justice and a sense of harmony and consonance with the living God.<sup>13</sup> That Christ may be born, in faith. That there be life in all its fullness.

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10 *Constitutions of the Marist Brothers*, 2020 #8.

11 *Water from the Rock*, #28

12 *Wherever You Go, A Rule of Life for the Marist Brothers*, 2 January 2020.

13 The Circular *Homes of Light*, released on 8 September, carries the subtitle: *caring for life, generating new life*. Brother Ernesto discusses this role of Mary, and by consequence of Marists generally, to bring life and to do so by creating 'homes'. Marists are home makers. He offers a down-to-earth exploration of what 'maternity' means in this context, using the image of 'light' for God's will or God's mission.



## 5. Family Spirit

There may be nothing more characteristic of the Marist way than what we have always called, from the time of St Marcellin, our ‘family spirit’. This is something about which any Marists can usually speak without hesitation. It will come from their lived experience. It’s Marist DNA. Walk into to any Marist community, school, project or gathering and it will be amply evident to you, and quite tangibly experienced. You will see it, and indeed feel it, in the warmth of the place, in the welcome and hospitality, in lack of pretence or arrogance, in the sense of belonging and the broad inclusivity of that, in people’s care and kindness, in trust and respect, in hanging-in there with the one in difficulty, in intuitions that are nurturing rather than exacting, in a deep desire to reconcile and heal what is fractured rather than punish or ostracise, and in the priority and character of interpersonal relationships. People will be known, and loved. They will talk about feeling to be part of a ‘family’. They will use that word, and do so both easily and genuinely, as the best way of describing their daily experience. They may even have a photo of the table from La Valla displayed prominently somewhere.

Often enough, they will be ready with additional phrases to describe what they mean. They may be able to quote from the Marist education reference text, *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat*, and tell you that the adults there relate ‘to each other and to young people as the members of a loving family would intuitively do’, that their approach to

young people is to be ‘a brother or sister to them.’<sup>1</sup> They are likely to be able to quote Marcellin himself, and tell you that to educate the young, ‘first you must love them, and love them all equally’.<sup>2</sup> They may be able to quote from Marcellin’s biography:

*The spirit of a [Marist] school ought to be a family spirit. Now, in a good family, sentiments of respect, love and mutual trust prevail, and not fear of punishments.*<sup>3</sup>

They may recall the first Brothers asking if they could call Marcellin *Père* (‘Father’) rather than *Monsieur*.<sup>4</sup> They may point you to Marcellin’s ‘Spiritual Testament’ with its emphasis on love of one another, the phrasing offering a seamless interweave of the lofty theology of the First Letter of John with the lived enthusiasm and unity of the first Christians in Luke’s Acts of the Apostles.<sup>5</sup> Or they may cite one or more of the many other examples in our early documents that extol love, and family-style ways of teaching and ministering. Our founding story is replete with them, as is our ongoing lived experience of Marist life and mission.

Of all the attributes or self-descriptors that we customarily employ in Marist discourse, ‘family spirit’ is not only the one that is arguably the most defining, but it may also be the most original. This was Marcellin’s term. While he drew extensively from the writings and emphases of people such as Pierre de Bérulle, Jean-Jacques Olier, Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, Vincent de Paul and, especially, Francis de Sales, to shape what became known as Marist

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1 *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat, A Vision for Marist Education Today*, #107, 108.

2 Cf. *Avis, Leçons, Sentences*, Ch.41 ‘What is a Teacher?’

3 *Life of Marcellin Champagnat*, Part 2, Ch.22, p.530.

4 Although it is now customary in the Catholic Church to give the appellation ‘Father’ to all priests, before the mid to late nineteenth century this title was reserved to members of religious orders (and, even then, not all religious orders). In France, a priest was called ‘Monsieur’ like any other man, or, more formally ‘Monsieur le Abbé’. A parish priest’s title was ‘Monsieur le Curé’, like a town mayor was ‘Monsieur le Maire’. Brother Jean-Baptiste tells us that the first men at Lavalla, after Marcellin moved into the house in 1818-19, asked if they could call him ‘Father Champagnat’. Interestingly, none of the other founding Marist priests presumed to use this appellation for himself, including J-C Colin, until they took vows for the first time in 1836, after the Society of Mary had been approved by the Holy See.

5 *Ibid.* Part 1, Ch.22 p.239; I John 4:7ff.

spirituality, none of these people made much or anything of the precise expression ‘family spirit’. There is much from these theologians and pastors that favours gentleness, friendship, practical ways of loving and relating, even intensely so. They use the word ‘family’ from time to time in describing the church in general or a religious community in particular. But not ‘family spirit’ as such. Today’s Salesians do use the term, and in much the same way as do we Marists, but this usage comes from St John Bosco in the nineteenth century rather than from the one who inspired him, St Francis de Sales. Drawing on the spirituality and teachings of de Sales – as Marcellin had done in France several decades before – Don Bosco wanted his oratory for disadvantaged youth of Turin to be marked by what he called ‘a family spirit’.

One possible documentary source for the concept championed by Marcellin is in a book that had an enormous influence on elementary school education in France during the same period that the new currents of ‘heart’ spirituality – later called ‘the French school of spirituality’ – were beginning to run strongly. Written in Paris by teacher and priest Jacques de Batencour in 1654, *L’Ecole Paroissiale* (‘The Parish School’) was the first treatise on the ‘petite écoles’ for which parishes had responsibility to establish after a royal edict of Louis XIV in 1698.<sup>6</sup> There is much that could be said about the ‘petite école’ movement in the century before the French Revolution, but suffice it to say that the movement in general, and this text in particular,

were major influences on the work of Jean-Baptiste de la Salle and his founding the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and also of Charles Démia who took responsibility for expanding and regularising elementary education in the Diocese of Lyon. Both these seventeenth century projects helped to shape Marcellin’s in the nineteenth, more especially that of de la Salle as it came to be formalised in the manual *La Conduite des Écoles Chrétiennes* (‘The Conduct of Christian Schools’).<sup>7</sup>

Batencour begins the first chapter of his book with these words:

*Just as the heart is the first thing to come alive in a person and the last to die, and is the seat of the soul, so must the Master be the heart of the school, animated by the spirit of God who gives spiritual life to all his small family ...*<sup>8</sup>

The school is described as a family, the teacher as its heart, or soul. The book then goes into considerable detail on the practical implications that flow from this starting premise. Arguably, the contents of *L’Ecole Paroissiale* find more echoes in the first Marist teaching manual – *Le Guide des Ecole* (in English called ‘The Teacher’s Guide’)<sup>9</sup> – than does the Lasallian *La Conduite*, even though the opposite is conventionally considered to be the case. Yet, even so, the exact phrase ‘family spirit’ is not used.

Marcellin’s opting to use *the family* as the root metaphor for both school and community is not only original, it was also unusual in the religious discourse of the time, even within the founders of the Society of Mary.<sup>10</sup> It was indeed more common

6 The full title of the book is: *L’Ecole Paroissiale, ou la manière de bien instruire les enfants dans les petites écoles* (The parish school, or the way to instruct children well in [parish primary] schools). The ‘petite écoles’ were charity schools for children of poor families, and part of a move in France to introduce universal education for all children – under the direction of local clergy, and as unambiguously Catholic. De Batencour was a priest of the Community of Priests of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet in Paris, a group responsible for a number of educational projects in that part of the city, and in the orbit of Olier over the Seine in Saint-Sulpice. Charles Démia later studied in this Community (and also at Saint-Sulpice), and took his learnings back to Lyon to implement and develop.

7 All three projects – those of de Batencour, de la Salle, and Démia – led to books of practical manuals, based on the lived experience of teaching in schools. *La Conduite*, first published in 1706, was closely used by Marcellin’s Brothers in their first two decades.

8 *L’Ecole paroissiale*, Chapter 1.

9 The first edition was produced by the General Chapter of the Marist Brothers in 1853, thirteen years after Marcellin’s death. It appeared in English in 1931.

10 There is a fascinating reference in the *Memoires* of Father Mayet, a chronicler of early Marist history, especially among the Marist priests. He records a remark that Jean-Claude Colin made at a General Council meeting in November 1846: ‘Gentlemen, most of us have country backgrounds, and poor education and we call this simplicity; that’s easy to say. We further say, “That’s family spirit”. Do you know what this points to? To a lack of education.’ He said these words forcefully. *Doc.136, p374*.

for the family milieu to be considered as a danger rather than as an ideal for the development of a child's faith and religious practice. The school with its faith-filled teachers was seen to be the place where the taints of the world and the deficiencies of parents – as both nurturers of faith and as teachers of literacy and numeracy – could be redressed. This was certainly a motivation for the Lasallian project, and for others around France. Nor were first Marists were blameless on this score: in both the writings of Brothers François and Jean-Baptiste, there is reference to the need for Brothers to take the place of parents who were neither capable or available to give proper Christian education to their children.<sup>11</sup>

Marcellin, however, does not seem nearly as disposed to this negative opinion of the family experience. On the contrary, he draws deeply on what he calls 'family life' to imagine what a good school and a good religious community could be. We can only conclude that did so because of his own experience of family life. We know how close he remained to his family.<sup>12</sup> We know how frequently, and with what intensity, he spoke and wrote about love. To do so, he must have known love. Deeply and abidingly.

The image of the kindly and gentle father, for example, appears recurringly in early Marist

documents as an ideal both for the teacher and the superior of the community, as does that of true brotherhood. We know that Marcellin drew on the Rule of the Sisters of the Visitation (founded by Francis de Sales and Jane Frances de Chantal) when writing the first Brothers' Rule in 1837. Francis de Sales advocated what he called 'friendship' among the Sisters, wanting them to be genuine sisters to one another, in joy and humility.<sup>13</sup> It was for these Sisters that de Sales first wrote his famous *Treatise on the Love God*, which Marcellin prized so highly.

*Douceur* was a central concept for de Sales and for Marcellin,<sup>14</sup> not neatly translatable into English but a word that carries a sense of gentleness, kindness, patience, softness of touch and deep respect towards others. The *Teacher's Guide* almost equates *douceur* with family spirit.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the concept of 'family spirit' is even more important for Marcellin as a defining feature of the Brothers themselves, before it was a descriptor of the kind of schools they conducted. It was central for Marcellin:

*After visiting a certain community of the Institute, Father Champagnat was not at all satisfied with what he had seen, so he told the Brother Director, 'I am not pleased with your community.'*<sup>16</sup>

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- 11 See, for example, the Notebook 307 of Brother François where he expounds on the goal of the Institute: 'The Brothers take the place of parents close to the children. Their schools are sanctuaries that God has prepared for the children, to preserve them from the corruption of the world ... Most parents are not capable of giving their children Christian instruction, whether this be because they are too busy, or even more, because they are impious or not very religious. God has raised up the Brothers to replace them.' In *Avis, Leçons, Sentences*, Brother Jean-Baptiste has almost the same words, and presents the Brothers as 'substitute parents'. He quotes St Cyprian: 'How many children today could say with St. Cyprian, "Our own parents have proved to be murderers. We owe them our bodily life, but within our families we quickly lost the life of grace, because those who brought us into existence neglected to instruct us in the truths of salvation and to teach us to fear God!"'
- 12 See, for example, his letter to his last brother's widow at the time of Jean-Baptiste Champagnat's death in 1838. (Letter 180). It is a letter of deep emotion, and reveals how involved he was his family's affairs, and how natural it was for him to visit them. We know how he and Jean-Baptiste financially helped their other brother, Jean-Pierre Champagnat, and how Marcellin took in Jean-Pierre (and some of his children) at The Hermitage in 1833, after the break-up of Jean-Pierre's marriage and his personal difficulties. He and two children were buried there.
- 13 See *Spiritual Conferences of Francis de Sales*, especially No.10. Find a good translation by William Ruhl OSFS at: [www.oblates.org/spiritual-conferences/](http://www.oblates.org/spiritual-conferences/)
- 14 The lengthy (but unpublished) treatise which Brother Jean-Baptiste wrote in 1849 on the Marist approach to education, allocates three chapters to the subject of 'douceur'.
- 15 *The Teacher's Guide*, Ch.16, p.53 (1931 edition).
- 16 *Avis, Leçons, Sentences*, Ch.31: 'What a religious community should be like.' (*Avis, Leçons, Sentences* is a compilation of conferences given by Marcellin, published in 1868 by Brother Jean-Baptiste, some 28 years after the Founder's death. Just how much is Marcellin and how much is Jean-Baptiste, we cannot be sure. But this Chapter seems quintessentially Marcellin.)

‘What did you notice that was wrong, Father?’

‘Your community has no religious life, no family life. Happiness cannot be found there.’

In seeking to describe the essence of community, Marcellin’s first recourse was to seek to understand it in terms of love, and how love is described in Scripture. We know that his go-to Scriptures were in the Johannine corpus, especially the First Letter of John. Also important for him was St Paul. An entire chapter on community in *Avis, Leçons, Sentences* is also given to Paul’s famous passage in I Corinthians 13.<sup>17</sup> He also like to emphasise the importance of being one in heart and mind, and being drawn to straight-shooting verses from the First Letter of Peter that put this in practical terms.<sup>18</sup> Francis de Sales intuitively made a great deal of sense to him for the same reason: de Sales emphasised what loved looked like in practice. Marcellin, for example, took up de Sales’ practical ‘little virtues’ in communal living, and made them his own.<sup>19</sup> They have remained important in Marist culture as descriptors of what family spirit looks like in practice.

*Water from the Rock* encapsulates much of the above in how it introduces the spiritual trait of family spirit:

*Marcellin and the first Brothers were united in heart and mind. Their relationships were marked by warmth and tenderness. In their discussions about living together as Brothers they found it useful to compare the spirit of their community life to that of a family. Like our early communities, we are inspired by the home of Nazareth to develop those attitudes that make family spirit a reality: love and forgiveness, support and help, forgetfulness of self, openness to others, and joy. This style of relating has become a characteristic of our way of being Marist.*<sup>20</sup>

But, importantly, the text takes us deeper:

*Wherever the followers of Marcellin are present, working together in mission, this ‘family spirit’ is the Marist way of communal living. Its wellspring is the love that Jesus has for all his brothers and sisters – all of humanity. Through this spirit we offer an experience of belonging and union in mission.*<sup>21</sup>

‘Family spirit’ is not simply a way of describing Marist cultural mores; it is also a pathway into Marist spirituality. While all the characteristics that we have been exploring of Marist ministerial style and the Marist way of forming community are true and important, they are the means and end of something else. They lead to and come from somewhere. That somewhere is Jesus. Or God’s mission in Jesus.

Family-related imagery is, indeed, an important figurative device that permeates both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Divine love is often described in terms of a father’s or mother’s love for a child – intense, intimate and unfailing. For Paul, God is *abba*, something he knows at core of his being. Various books of the Bible take us to both the closeness and betrayal of siblings, the joys and heartaches of lovers, and the betrothal and infidelity of spouses. The nature of God is revealed in familial figures of speech, as are the complexities of the human heart.

But it is in Marcellin’s favourite Gospel, that of John, that *family* becomes a key motif for revealing the incarnate and indwelling God.

The movement of the Fourth Gospel invites the reader to move from not knowing or recognising Jesus, to becoming a disciple, to becoming a friend, and finally to becoming a member of Jesus’ household. For there are many rooms in the Father’s house.<sup>22</sup> This is where the Beloved Disciple

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17 *Ibid.* Ch.32.

18 Some verses from this Epistle that appear in Marcellin’s writings and talks include. 1 Pt. 1:22; 2:1-3; 3:8-12; 4:8-11; 5:5

19 In *Avis, Leçons, Sentences* devotes a chapter to the ‘little virtues’ (Ch.28) and enumerates twelve of them as building blocks of community life: tolerance; turning a blind eye; cheerfulness; empathy; keeping an open mind; sensitivity; affability; gentleness and politeness; sensitivity; commitment to the common good; patience; humility; and equanimity of soul and character. There is, however, no definitive list. Indeed, *Water from the Rock* names them differently, p.108. The point that Francis de Sales wanted to make was that it was small, concrete things that made love real.

20 *Water from the Rock*, #30

21 *Ibid.*, #32

22 John 14:2. For an exploration of these concepts in John’s Gospel, see the works of Mary Coloe PBVM, especially *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007



finds himself in the culmination of the Gospel at the foot of the Cross: 'Woman, behold your son';<sup>23</sup> that is, Jesus is saying 'This is my brother.' In the Semitic mindset, this was huge. Family was – and to this day is – primary to one's personal identity. While offering hospitality to guests and strangers was one thing, to be recognised as one of the family was at another level entirely. Yet, in the Last Supper Discourse, this is what happens: '... we will come to you,' says Jesus, 'and we will make our home in you.'<sup>24</sup> Our *home*, what a powerful concept! Whoever dwells in love, dwells in God – the great theme of the Johannine school. This is the new Temple, the new place of encounter with God. The new temple is an inclusive place, not one that is only open to the High Priest in the Holy of Holies.

Each of the Synoptic Gospels gives us a similar image which, because of its familiarity to us, may lose some of its figurative punch. But to Semitic hearers, with their understanding of the fundamental role of family, the punch was paradigmatic in its newness. Let us take Luke's version:

*Jesus' mother and brothers came looking for him, but they could not get to him because of the crowd. He was told, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to see you. But he said in answer, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.'*<sup>25</sup>

There would be no more arresting way for Jesus to say that a person is one with him. That the first Christians then came to call one another 'brothers and sisters', as we see in Paul's letter and in Acts, amplifies this. We Christians continue to use the same terms in our liturgy and in other ways to this day, but perhaps its power has been tamed. It is indeed a profound concept. The new Encyclical of Pope Francis – *Fratelli tutti* – opens its meaning for us in a contemporary context.<sup>26</sup>

There is a telling parallel in Marcellin's teaching about the kind of community he wanted. In one of

the Founder's conferences recorded in *Avis, Leçons, Sentences*, we read of the 'kinds of Brothers that Father Champagnat did not like'.<sup>27</sup> There were ten types. Unsurprisingly, he did not warm to lazy Brothers, or fickle ones, or proud or vain Brothers. He had no time for 'preacher Brothers' or 'executioner Brothers'. There are a few others, but one is a little intriguing: Marcellin didn't like those he called 'servant Brothers'. 'Loving friendships', which Marcellin said he wanted to mark the relationships of the Brothers, would not occur if people had the self-concept of being a servant, however dutifully he may discharge his duties. For Marcellin, a servant Brother was someone who did not see himself as one of the family but, rather, had a sense of being in 'someone else's country', without a feeling at home with his brothers.<sup>28</sup> He would not become true friends with them, or find love. It seems to come straight from John.

Interestingly, and even perhaps unwittingly, Marcellin seems to have distanced the Marist way from a significant theme in French spirituality of the time: what was called *anéantissement*, literally 'annihilation', which had a sense of sharing in Jesus' self-emptying servitude.<sup>29</sup> While, of course, this is a rich concept theologically, and a theme of the Pauline letters, it had become perverted in some quarters to mean a kind of unhealthy self-effacement or self-abnegation in servitude. It smothered rather than enlivened what it meant to be human. We can imagine, on the contrary, how well John 15:15 – 'I do not call you servants' – sat with Marcellin. Living with and for others was where a person came alive, indeed where and how one discovered 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10).

The intuitions and language of Marist spirituality consequently came to favour immanent and family-related emphases. *Water from the Rock* puts it this way:

*From our family spirit develops a spirituality that is strongly relational and affective. Marcellin's*

23 John 19:26

24 John 14:23.

25 Luke 8:19-21. See also: Matt 12:46-50 and Mark 3:31-35.

26 *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020. [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/index.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/index.html)

27 *Avis, Leçons, Sentences*, Ch.5

28 *Ibid.*

29 For a treatment of this concept, see William Thompson's essay 'Theology and Spirituality of the French School', in *Bérulle and the French School*, Paulist Press, NY, 1989.



*preferred ways of relating to God and to Mary were through familial terms: Jesus in his 'Sacred Heart,' Mary as 'Our Good Mother.' The relationships he encouraged among the Brothers, and between the Brothers and their students were described in similarly fraternal and loving ways. Among today's Marists, with the expanded presence of women, the image of sister has enriched the ways Marists relate, and define their ministry. Essentially, our relationship to one another is being brother and sister.*<sup>30</sup>

In the decade or two after Marcellin's death, the curriculum of initial training for the Brothers became more regularised and strategic. It needed to be; there were now not one but several novitiates around France, and an exponential growth in the number of novices, most of whom had not known Marcellin or the early Brothers. So, a little handbook was developed for the novices, called the *Manuel de Piété*.<sup>31</sup> It comprised a series of catechism-like questions and answers, and a collection of Marcellin's favourite sayings. A chapter of this little gem is devoted to family spirit. It begins thus:

*Q: What is family spirit?*

*A: For a Brother, family spirit is:*

- 1. the distinctive spirit of his Institute;*
- 2. a mix of feelings of respect, love, trust and belonging which he has towards his superior as his father, the members of his Institute as his brothers, and the Institute*

*itself as his family and his shared possession*

It goes on to make clear that all religious institutes have the same general purpose and character, but each has its own particular 'spirit', what we may call today its 'spirituality'. For the Marists, this 'spirit of the Institute' was 'family spirit'. And what makes up this spirit, another question asked. The answer and follow-up question are:

*A: It is a spirit of humility, of simplicity, and of modesty.*

*Q: From where does this spirit come?*

*A: From Mary; because since we have chosen her specially as our Mother and as we carry her name, it is only right that we acquire her spirit, that we imitate her virtues, and that, in going to God and doing good, we follow the way that she has followed.*

The 'three violets' of humility, simplicity and modesty, and the reference to having a primarily Marian disposition, take us back to the spiritual core of the Marist way. To live out a family spirit as a Marist person is essentially a spiritual orientation. At its best, Marist spirituality offers people – including young people – a space in which to feel at home, to belong. It is accessible rather than dense, immediate rather than distant; it speaks to the heart. It comes from the heart. It is sustained from the heart. Like a family.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, #31.

<sup>31</sup> Compiled first in the 1840s, perhaps principally by Brother François, the oldest extant version we have comes from 1855. It nevertheless contains much that appears to be part of the living and immediate memory of the Institute and close to what Marcellin himself taught. These extracts are from Chapter 9 of Vol.2. The book later evolved into *The Principles of Christian Perfection* which was used in Marist novitiates well into the 20th century.

## 6. A spirituality of simplicity

**A**fter about forty thousand words in this little series on Marist spirituality, enmeshed in an unpicking of an intricate weave of historical, theological and ecclesial threads, it is to risk irony to propose that the most defining trait of our spirituality is, in the end, simplicity. But let us not confuse being simple with being simplistic.

To live and act from a simple heart – or, as Marcellin was once described as having, *un cœur libre* (a free or unencumbered heart)<sup>1</sup> – is one of the more complex challenges that the gospel brings us. For most of us, it becomes the project of a lifetime, one that goes to the essence of the *metanoia* to which each of us is called, and called again. So often, however, we develop an expertise in subterfuge, even with ourselves – tempering that call, shrinking from it, kidding ourselves. ‘Happy are the pure in heart’, we read in the Beatitudes, ‘for they shall see God’. A straight-forward thing, surely? The key to it all. Then why can it be so difficult to realise in our lives?

When we come to ‘simplicity’ we have something that, at least at one level, we Marists think that we do well and like to recognise in ourselves. And that’s true. As with ‘family spirit’, here we touch into something written deeply into the Marist genetic code. Lack of pretence, integrity of character, openness in relating, genuineness of intention, an accessible and uncomplicated way of

Christian living, an unfiltered joy – these are all markers of an authentic Marist person and a vital Marist community. Simplicity. What you see is what you get. No masks, no power games, no duplicity. No argument with any of that.

We extend it to valuing people for who they are as fellow human beings rather than what they do, or which positions they happen to occupy. All good work is worthy. In the spirit of a Founder who defied the niceties of the clerical customs of the time by rolling up his sleeves and putting himself on the end of a pick, we are uncomfortable with hierarchical cultures or with people standing on ceremony. We can read a piece such as this, written by Brother Laurent, and readily honour it as part of our founding story:

*When [Father Champagnat] came in at evening, his clothes were often torn, and he was covered in sweat and dust. He was never happier than when he had worked long and hard ... At the beginning we were quite poor. We had bread that was the colour of the earth, but we always had enough.*<sup>2</sup>

Or this from one of the townspeople:

*Our curate is not haughty: you can say what you like to him.*<sup>3</sup>

Such straight-forwardness in personal relationships became a feature of the Marist way from the

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1 From a letter of Jean-Louis Duplay tendered in evidence to the diocesan enquiry for the introduction of the cause of the beatification of Marcellin Champagnat, Session 44 (15 Dec 1890). *Témoignages sur Marcellin Champagnat, Enquête Diocésaine, Oct 1888-Déc 1890*. Father Duplay (1788-1877) was almost the same age as Marcellin, although several years ahead of him in the seminary. He came from Rebaudes (Jonzieux), near Marcellin’s hometown of Marlhes. They became good friends in the minor seminary at Verrières. Duplay later became Rector of the Seminary of Saint-Irénée in Lyon and Marcellin’s spiritual director and confidant. He knew Marcellin intimately.

2 *Memoir of Brother Laurent*. This unpublished text of just a few pages in a notebook was written, probably in 1841, by one of the first Brothers, Laurent Audras. It is the oldest recorded account of the Lavalla years and the character of Marcellin himself. Laurent moved into the nascent community at Lavalla at the end of 1817 at the age of 23. He had been a farm-hand: a stocky, ruddy-faced, barely literate fellow. He seems to have become one of the lively personalities of the founding group – an indefatigable catechist, a passionate teacher, a great communicator and entertainer.

3 Evidence of Brother Aidant given to Session 28 (27 May 1889) of the enquiry for the introduction of the cause for Marcellin’s beatification.

start. Indeed, the characteristic ‘family spirit’ depended on it, as indeed did Marcellin’s whole approach to education in which the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student was pivotal. A noted Marist scholar from the last century, Brother Alexandre Balko, was strongly of the opinion that simplicity is the most distinctive feature of Marist education. He wrote extensively on it.<sup>4</sup>

Balko took a passing expression that Marcellin used in one of his early letters to build a whole paradigm of Marist education. He claimed that Marist educators have a characteristic ‘*bon enfant* style’ in their ministry. What did he mean? This rather odd term comes from an almost throwaway line in the letter where Marcellin tells his correspondent that the young students in the town of Tarantaise in 1823 had described Brother Laurent as a *bon enfant*. In the official English translation of Marcellin’s letters published in 1991, done by American Brother Leonard Voegtle, *bon enfant* was translated as ‘nice guy’.<sup>5</sup> A rather American expression. It is probably not possible, however, to offer any easy English translation of it – and Balko purposely didn’t in his own English translation of his writings. This is because what Marcellin was doing was quoting the kids of Tarantaise who, like young people of any time or any culture, had their own expressions, their own cant, for describing their assessment that someone was one of them, one with them, okay by them. Their judgement was that Laurent fitted this category. He would have only done so because his students found him approachable, personable, open, unpretentious, understanding, able to relate easily with them, friendly, fair, someone who spent time with them, and ‘got’ them – all the timeless criteria that any young people would intuitively apply. In Tarantaise, in 1823, such a person was a

*bon enfant*. Balko argued that a *bon enfant* approach to education was to become defining of the Marist way. It was to find ways to be personally present in the lives of young people, understand their world, and to be accepted, even liked, by them.

The reference text for Marist education, *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat*, captures a sense of this style in other words:

*Our simplicity expresses itself primarily through contacts with young people that are genuine and straightforward, undertaken without pretence or duplicity. We say what we believe, and show that we believe what we say.*<sup>6</sup>

*In our teaching and organisational structures, we show a preference for simplicity of method. Our way of educating, like Marcellin’s, is personal, rooted in real life, and practical. Likewise, simplicity of expression, avoiding any ostentation, guides our way of responding to the possibilities and the demands of our contemporary educational settings.*<sup>7</sup>

*Our way of relating to young people is to be a brother or sister to them*<sup>8</sup>

*We are convinced of the educative value of quality relationships between ourselves and the young, and of the importance of being ourselves in their presence and their feeling at their ease with us.*<sup>9</sup>

Great teachers can always make their subject matter simple, of course. It is a sign of mastery of an academic discipline to be able to do so. A stand-out example is a memorable meeting in 2005 of Pope Benedict XVI with young children who were first communicants. This highly educated theologian, the university professor and inhabitant of a rather rarefied academic world, was able to explain to children with simplicity and impact what it meant to receive Holy Communion.<sup>10</sup> Many of us would have had experience of such effective teaching. I

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4 See, for example, his article ‘Simplicity’, in the edited collection his works. *Reflections on Our Origins, an anthology of selected articles, published and unpublished, written by Brother Alexandre Balko FMS*. Henri Vigneau FMS (ed.), 2001. Many of these articles appeared over some decades in the French Marist journal *Voyages et Missions*.

5 Letters of Marcellin Champagnat, Vol. 1, edited by Br Paul Sester. Marist Brothers, Rome, 1991. Letter 1.

6 *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat, A Vision for Marist Education Today*, Marist Brothers, Rome 1998. #103

7 *Ibid.* #105

8 *Ibid.* #109

9 *Ibid.* #171

10 [www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/october/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051015\\_meeting-children.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/october/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051015_meeting-children.html)

recall two of my own secondary teachers – Brother Barry Lamb who could make modern history zing (even in the period after lunch), and Denis Callaghan who made Economics a snack, using just the daily newspaper as his textbook. Both educators also brought a contagious enthusiasm and a love of their subjects. And a tangible enjoyment of the company of those they were teaching, relating easily and openly with them. They were bon enfants!

*Water from the Rock* speaks similarly of Marists’ ‘simplicity of behaviour’:

*We strive to be persons of integrity – truthful, open-hearted and transparent in our relationships.*<sup>11</sup>

Another element of simplicity for the Marist has often been the promotion of simplicity in lifestyle. This, in turn, has been linked to a commitment to equity and justice – the ‘live-simply-so-that-all-can-simply live’ argument. Pope Francis, in both *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti*, has emphasised this attitude of shared responsibility for our global community. *Water from the Rock* does the same in its introduction to simplicity:

*This same spirit encourages us to develop a simple style of life. This implies that we avoid consumerism, with its accumulation of disposable goods and wasteful use of resources. We choose to be responsible for creation, a precious gift of God to humanity. This attitude encourages us to join with others in actions necessary to preserve our environment, to enhance the harmony between humanity and nature, and to collaborate with the Creator in bringing creation to its fullness.*<sup>12</sup>

Yet there are differences both of meaning and motivation in the range of the above understandings of simplicity. The concepts of integrity and transparency of character, those of effectiveness in teaching method and directness in personal relationships, and those of equitable and responsible use of resources, are not all the same thing. While there are some obvious links and overlaps, we need to be alert to potential confusion as to what we mean precisely when we talk of Marist simplicity and, more importantly, what is driving it.

The essence of Marist simplicity is spiritual. This should be the litmus test we apply to any description of it.

We are talking about a *spiritual simplicity*, or a ‘spirituality of simplicity’, as *Water from the Rock* describes it, a simplicity of heart before God and others. While this will surely come to express itself in, for example, a cultural simplicity in institutional and communal settings, or a pedagogical and relational simplicity in teaching and ministry, or a broadly attitudinal simplicity of lifestyle – as it did for Marcellin and the founding generation – its kernel is in a relationship with God, a Beatitudes-type relationship. Such a way of relating with God is mirrored, indeed expressed, in our relating with others.

The way to such a relationship with God is sourced in human experience of love, trust, belief and self-acceptance. *Water from the Rock* goes straight to this:

*At the heart of Marist spirituality coming from Marcellin and the first Brothers is humility ...*

*This attitude grew from the experience of Marcellin and the first Brothers. Marcellin’s formative environment was that of a loving family in a small rural village. From his mother he learned to trust in the providence of God; from his aunt he learned filial abandonment into the arms of this God. From his father he learned sincerity and honesty. Through the joys and struggles of life he learned to be humble and confident. Aware of his limitations he experienced them as a grace when he was able to dispose himself with confidence to the will of God. The first generation of Brothers were young men from environments similar to that of Marcellin. All these providential circumstances developed a spirituality that was uncomplicated and down to earth.*

*This spirituality of simplicity shapes the whole life of the disciples of Marcellin. In humility, we seek to know ourselves in our strengths and weaknesses and readily accept the help we may need. We grow to be at peace with the person God has created.*<sup>13</sup>

11 *Water from the Rock*, #33.

12 *Ibid.* #38

13 *Ibid.* ##33a, 34, 36



For Marcellin, simplicity and humility were inextricably bound up with one another; they were two sides of the one coin for him.<sup>14</sup> References to this are found with great frequency through the writings of Brother François, for example:

*The spirit of the Little Brothers of Mary, their particular and distinctive character, is a spirit of humility and simplicity ... Humility and simplicity must always be the principal privileged and characteristic virtues of each one of us.*<sup>15</sup>

*... the spirit of the Brothers of Mary, their distinctive character, must be a spirit of humility and simplicity ... after the example of the Blessed Virgin ... Entry to heaven is barred against all who do not possess the humility and simplicity of a small child ...*<sup>16</sup>

The primary spiritual attitude of humility – of recognising God as God and allowing God to be God in one's life, with both the self-belief and the vulnerability that such a mindset needs if it is to be a healthy and liberating thing – was for Marcellin best nurtured through a spiritual simplicity. He understood this and lived it as an uncluttered, transparent, trusting, discerning and direct personal relationship with God. This kind of simplicity has become a signature element of the spiritual inheritance we have from Marcellin and, importantly, one of the most effectiveness means that Marists have in their ministry of evangelisation with young people:

*Young people are attracted to this simple spirituality. The images of God we offer them, and the language, experiences and symbolism we use, are accessible and touch the heart. The more our evangelisation and catechesis are rooted in our distinctive Marist spirituality, the more effective they become.*<sup>17</sup>

While it is admittedly conjectural and a stretch of historiographical legitimacy to suggest it, it is easily believable that Marcellin would have been a fan of the liturgical and catechetical reforms of the

post-Conciliar period. A vernacular liturgy (a genuinely vernacular one, in contrast to the confected 'sacralised' language of the 2011 English translation of the Roman Missal), and approaches to catechesis and youth ministry that meet young people in the existential realities of their lives, these would have been intuitively attractive to him. He would have rejected any criticism that these were somehow a banalisation or dumbing-down of the ineffability of the Divine. Confidence for such a view of Marcellin is sourced in his conscious advocating of simplicity. He opted to use the word, and he understood it conceptually.

Simplicity as a concept was, however, grated against the prevailing prejudices of the French church at the time (much of it still aligned with the pretentious mores of the *ancien régime*), and perhaps French culture more generally where fashion, appearance, and *savoir-vivre* esteemed. Champions of simplicity were scarce because of its allusions to ignorance, coarseness and rusticity. Simplicity was hardly in vogue in the private salons or the public cafés of Paris.

Such an attitude was evident even among some leading members of the Society of Mary, including Father Colin himself. Father Mayet, for example, was critical of his fellow Marist priests, 'the majority of whom were incapable of preaching in front of an educated congregation because they were illiterate and made [grammatical] mistakes in French.' Perhaps he was exaggerating to make the point that the effectiveness of the Society of Mary was going to be impeded if its priests were seen to lack sufficient sophistication. Similarly, Jean-Claude Colin is on record for being dismissive of *simplicité*, associating it with being poorly educated, something that he did not want for the Society and was more than a little embarrassed about in his own life story because its self-described peasant origins.<sup>18</sup>

Marcellin was somewhat marginalised in the Society – at least by some of the younger

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14 Marcellin's *Spiritual Testament* expresses the hope that 'simplicity and humility be always' the markers of the Marists. The writings of Brothers Jean-Baptiste and François are replete with the twinning of these spiritual attitudes. It was clearly something that was central to the spirituality they learnt from Marcellin.

15 *Instructions of Br. François*, Vol 1, pp. 147-150.

16 *Circular on the Spirit of Faith*. (The last sentence was put in italics in the original text, indicating the strength of François' conviction on this point.)

17 *Water from the Rock*, #35



generation of Marist priests – for his country ways. Indeed, Marcellin described himself as a *campagnard* (a man from the country), and he seemed to like to do so.<sup>19</sup>

But for most people, simplicity was for simpletons.

Again from Colin via Mayet's writings, we have this explanation for Marcellin's lack of success in Paris when he was attempting to get legal recognition for the Brothers:

*A Marist [priest]<sup>20</sup> said that what had hampered Father Champagnat in Paris was his great simplicity – and that after having seen him it was said, 'That is truly a courageous man!' But everything about him is speaks of the country and he lacks the elegant formalities and he lacks the elegant formalities of Paris.'*<sup>21</sup>

It was a sentiment still echoing half a century later when the cause of Marcellin's beatification had been introduced:

*His confreres criticised him a lot from the moment he started his work. There was an attempt to have him suspended under the pretext that he disgraced the priestly state by living a life so wretched and poor – he even made a stonemason of himself while he built the Hermitage.*<sup>22</sup>

It was apparently a criticism extended to the Brothers, as Balko relates:

*The behaviours of the Brothers, undisguisedly those of the common people, easily led them to be treated as peasants; it was not fully understood by certain ecclesiastics. Fr Rouchon, parish priest of Valbenoite, and his group of Brothers, headed home from a visit to Lavalla [to investigate a possible merger] shaking their heads. Fr Mazelier himself hesitated for a long time before deciding to unite the Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux with those of the Hermitage. Those who came to Fr Champagnat lived the simple, poor, hard-working, pious life of country people.*<sup>23</sup>

Simplicity did, nonetheless, have some noteworthy advocates in French spiritual discourse, among them two popular authors with whom Marcellin aligned himself closely and deliberately. The first has been mentioned frequently on these pages: Francis de Sales; the second was Vincent de Paul. Both men saw that simplicity was the pathway to gospel living.

Let us turn first to Francis de Sales. In a conference he gave to the Sisters of the Visitation, whom he had co-founded and whose way of life was well-known to Marcellin, de Sales took up the topic of simplicity, a theme he says that 'he had

18 *Memoires* of Fr Mayet. Doc.136, p.374. In another telling note of Mayet (Doc. 128), Colin admits his embarrassment at receiving dinner invitations from the Jesuits, and also the Capuchins and Missionaries of Lyon, because he didn't have good enough manners, being from the country. He said he could not reciprocate and invite them to the Marist house. The contrast between Colin and Champagnat is interesting here, for Marcellin – even though he explicitly worked on enhancing politeness and etiquette among his Brothers, seeking to polish their rough, rustic ways – was never uncomfortable with his or their humble origins. Indeed, he delighted in them.

19 Marist historian, Brother André Lanfey, has written on this subject, citing comments made about Fr Champagnat by Frs Maitreperre and Mayet. See his article : *Champagnat Pretre « Campagnard » Fondateur d'Ecoles de Campagne*.

20 Probably Jean-Baptiste-Justin Chanut SM, the young priest who accompanied Marcellin to Paris for a couple of months in 1838, and who had been with Marcellin at The Hermitage. He was then to have rather unusual life story: later in 1838 he was appointed to manage the Marian shrine at Verdélais in Bordeaux (which had been entrusted to the Society of Mary but to which Marcellin refused to send any Brothers to be sacristans); five years later he was dismissed from the Marists, became a diocesan priest of Lyon and was appointed to Saint Louis in Rome; after appointments back in Lyon, he applied to re-join the Society of Mary, did another novitiate, and was then appointed superior of two successive communities, including a time when he lived with Father Mayet who recorded his memories of the early days of the Society. Later he left the Marists again. He seemed to be a rather opinionated man.

21 Interview of Jean-Claude Colin with Bishop Frayssinous. *Mémoire Mayet*, 1, 26.

22 Testimony of Fr Matthieu Bedoin to the diocesan enquiry into the cause of the beatification of Marcellin Champagnat, Session 38 (22 Oct. 1890). Matthieu Bedoin was the nephew of Etienne Bedoin (d.1864), who became the long-serving curé of the parish of Lavalla soon after Marcellin moved to the Hermitage. The older Bedoin was a contemporary of Marcellin. He testifies that he stayed periodically with his uncle, as a boy met Marcellin, and heard many stories about him from his uncle.

23 Balko, *op.cit.*, p.122

often addressed'.<sup>24</sup> He takes his audience immediately to the tenth chapter of Luke's Gospel – to the episode of Martha and Mary (Lk.10:38-42). We know it well: Mary sitting at Jesus' feet, leaving her sister Martha to attend to all the serving of their guests. 'It is Mary who has chosen the better part', counsels Jesus. Francis de Sales frames this encounter in terms of desire, and simplicity of desire, or, to put it another way, the essence of desire. De Sales is never fearful about the power of human desire; indeed, he urges people to embrace it, because, he argues, all human desire is essentially a desire to find the love that is God.<sup>25</sup> The quest is holy.<sup>26</sup>

*Our heart is simple when we have no other aim in all that we do or desire ... That is 'Mary's part' which 'alone is necessary.' And that is simplicity ... as it looks straight at God, without tolerating any mixture of self-interest*

*Simplicity removes from our hearts all the worry and anxiety which many have suffered uselessly as they look for a variety of exercises and means to be able to love God, as they say ... They are tormented in their search to know the art of loving God. They are not aware that there is no other way of loving God, except that of loving Him. They think that there is a special art to obtain this love. Nevertheless, it is to be found only in simplicity.*

*That is the only way we can find and acquire the love of God. but we are to go about it in simplicity, without angst or anxiety.*<sup>27</sup>

The virtue of simplicity, de Sales points out, is the opposite of what he calls the 'vice of guile'.

*From this vice flow all kinds of subtlety, cunning and duplicity. Guile is an accumulation of deceit, cheating and treachery. It is by means of guile that we find ways to deceive our neighbour and all those with whom we have dealings. In this way we lead them to the goal of our designs. We*

*try to make them understand that we only know what we are telling them. All this is entirely opposed to simplicity, which requires that our interior matches our exterior.*

De Sales thus joins the dots between simplicity and love: 'Simplicity is nothing else but a pure and simple act of charity which has only one end in view – the love of God.'<sup>28</sup>

The evangelist Luke, in this chapter of the Gospel, presents things in the same way as Francis de Sales: the episode of Martha and Mary cannot be read separately from the passage that immediately precedes it, the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37). *The listening of Mary at Jesus' feet is juxtaposed to the acting lovingly to one's neighbour of the Samaritan in the story, which is contrasted with the duplicity or hypocrisy of the Levite and the priest. Love of God is love of neighbour; love of neighbour is love of God. Simple. But there's more: we also need to go back to the first part of the same chapter, which sets a conceptual framework for both the Martha/Mary story and the Good Samaritan parable. In the first 22 verses of the chapter we find one of the recurring themes of Jesus' message, that of simplicity of heart:*

*At the same hour [i.e. after the sending out of the Seventy and their return, having cast out demons and announced the immanence of God's reign] Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.'* (Cf. Lk.1-22)

The constitutive elements of this tenth chapter of Luke encapsulate well the characteristic simplicity to which we Marists are called.

Second, let us look at St Vincent de Paul. This saint was promoted, from the first years in Lavalla, as a model of the kind of spirituality that Marcellin

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24 *Conférences de St François de Sales*, Vol.1, No.9

25 This is one of the main themes of his *Treatise on the Love of God*, a book that we know that Marcellin not only had on his bookshelf but one which he recommended to his Brothers as a primer of the spiritual life. 'Desire' has over 300 mentions in this book.

26 In contemporary spiritual discourse, this is an idea that has been developed extensively by Ronald Rolheiser OMI. See, especially, his book *Holy Longing*.

27 *Conférences de St François de Sales*, Vol.1, No.9

28 *Ibid.*

wanted to nurture in his Brothers.<sup>29</sup> Reference to him appears with increasing frequency in both official and informal primary sources in later decades.<sup>30</sup> ‘Monsieur Vincent’, as he was widely known, drew consciously from the spirituality of Francis de Sales.<sup>31</sup> He saw himself, especially in his later years, as a disciple of de Sales. Vincent and the Congregation of Mission<sup>32</sup> that he founded to undertake inland missions in France were, with St John Francis Regis, models for the nascent Society of Mary.<sup>33</sup>

Vincent was famous for his charitable work and his disarmingly respectful attitude to the poor. But, for the man himself, it was simplicity that was the most important thing. He often called it ‘his gospel’.

*The heart must not think one thing while the mouth says another.*<sup>34</sup>

*The missionary must avoid all duplicity, dissimulation, cunning, and double meaning.*<sup>35</sup>

*God gives me such a great esteem for simplicity that I call it my gospel. I have a particular devotion and consolation in saying things as they are.*<sup>36</sup>

We can imagine how comfortably Marcellin would have sat with such sentiments. He was never one to dissimulate, not his relating with others, nor in his spiritual life. He would have appreciated the directness of the injunction in perhaps his favourite book of the Bible – the First Letter of John: *He who says he loves God but hates his brother is liar* (1 Jn. 4:20). He strove consciously to be a simple man. He did not shrink from using the term *simplicité*, however much it may not have been attractive to many others.

Yet, while we can be fairly sure that he would have had no difficulty eschewing the coiffured hairstyles or flamboyant fashions of Paris, we should not think that being simple came easily to Marcellin, at least not spiritually. As for each us, his was the journey of a lifetime. We have observed previously that the self-confessed major struggle of his life was with pride, taking himself out of the centre. Marcellin was like all of us: the innate simplicity with which we are born – the evangelical simplicity of the child – is something that has to be born again in us. And again. And again.

29 In the *Life of Marcellin Champagnat* (Part 1, Ch.10, pp.306–07), Brother Jean-Baptiste tells us that during the building of the extensions to the house in Lavalla, there was reading at meals. He mentions the lives of several saints which were read; St Vincent de Paul is the second of the three mentioned, the other two being the great inland missionary, St Francis Regis, and foreign missionary, Francis Xavier. He further tells us that the reading was frequently interrupted by Marcellin himself who spoke with some passion about the saint who was being featured.

30 For example, as an appendix to the *Rules of Government* drawn up by the General Chapter of 1854, there is a list of books recommended for the Brothers to read. Among them are: *Esprit de St Vincent de Paul (Vols 1 et 2)*, by André-Joseph Ansart CM. (Interestingly two others are: *Esprit de St François de Sales (Vols 1–4)* by Louis Baudry PSS, *Esprit de Ste Thérèse* [of Avila] by M. Emery PSS – further evidence of the influence of both the Carmelite and Salesian sources of the Marist spirituality of Marcellin Champagnat.) Another book in wide circulation among the Brothers was *La Vie de St Vincent de Paul* by Pierre Collet CM. Each of the books by Ansart and Collet was regarded as a spiritual classic and each had a new French edition published in the mid-1820s. Excerpts from both books appear numerous times in the notebooks of Brother François and Brother Jean-Baptiste. In *Avis, Leçons, Sentences* there is a dozen references to Vincent, and in the *Manuel de Directeurs* (a handbook for superiors/principals), there is a long section on Vincent. The explicit influence of Vincent de Paul on Marist spirituality probably grew even more in the years after Marcellin’s death, promoted by both Brothers François and Jean-Baptiste, arguably because of the obvious resonances of Vincent in the life of Marcellin.

31 There are over 150 references to St Francis de Sales in the extant writings of Vincent. See *Vincent de Paul, Conférences, Correspondence, Documents* (14 Vols). Pierre Coste CM (ed.), 1920–26.

32 Various known popularly in different countries as the Vincentians or the Lazarists.

33 There are numerous references to Vincent de Paul in documents associated with Jean-Claude Colin. See especially an article by Marist scholar Jean Coste SM. ‘Saint Vincent de Paul and Father Colin’ in *Acta Societatis Mariae* (Vol. VI, n.28, August 1960). Note also this comment of Colin in the *Memoires of Mayet*, Doc.110: « *Je vous recommande aussi beaucoup, Messieurs, l’esprit de St. Vincent de Paul. Je ne trouve rien qui me semble mieux représenter l’esprit que la Société doit avoir, que l’esprit de saint Vincent de Paul* ». (‘I also highly recommend to you, gentlemen, the spirit of St Vincent de Paul. It seems to me that nothing captures the spirit that the Society [of Mary] should have better than the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul.’)

34 *Ibid.* 9:81; 9:605; 12:172

35 *Ibid.* 2:340; 9:81

36 *Ibid.* 9:60

We know that there is a plethora of factors that can lead to us to feel the need to become masked or mistrusting, to doubt that others will accept us for who we are, to believe that we somehow need to prove ourselves or to be something that we are not, to lust for power or privilege. It may be that we have been emotionally hurt along the way, that we have faced rejection, been denied love or been betrayed in it, or been made unfairly to fear consequences or question our goodness. The resulting artifice, our intricately constructed system of self-defence and survival, needs to dissolve if we are to progress spiritually. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are those who live out an integrity of desire.

It is always about dying to self. The vulnerability to which this exposes us is something that can be forbidding. It certainly was for Mary, as we can see from how Luke constructs the Annunciation passage. Yet, finally she trusted. It was a source of dark doubt also for Marcellin, but he learned more and more to trust, from his 'dark night' experience of 1826. His increasing recourse to Psalm 127 was emblematic of this, as was his simple but prayerful jotting of 'You know' in his personal journal. He calls us to do the same:

*Like Marcellin, our journey with God is also one of simplicity. We approach God with transparency, honesty, openness and trust. We consciously seek uncomplicated ways to help us in this journey.*<sup>37</sup>

The Gospel reading for the feast-day of Saint Marcellin on 6th June is fixed (Mt. 18:1-7;10), because the day enjoys the rank of a solemnity in Marist communities, and one is not supposed to fiddle with the pre-determined prayers and readings of liturgical solemnities. It is the same reading that was used at his beatification in 1955 and his canonisation in 1999. Why was it chosen? I long assumed that the choice must have been related to the educational aims of the Marists: the passage seems to be about having children come to Jesus. Maybe so. But that overlooks the little detail in verse 2 that, in fact it is Jesus who brings the child to the disciples, not the other way around. This gives us another lens to this passage, a lens of simplicity:

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me.' ...*

To be able to welcome Jesus, that is surely the moment of arrival in anyone's spiritual journey. Again, as it was for Mary. But it is never really an arrival; it is always the journey, a now-but-not-yet, a continual renewing and rebirth. The fourth and final part of T.S. Eliot's magisterial work 'The Four Quartets' is called 'Little Gidding'. Written at a dark time for the poet and the world (1942), it explores the purgation that Eliot sensed was needed to reach salvation. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross would have concurred. So would have Marcellin. In the end, Eliot names this purgation as 'simplicity', and its price as 'not less than everything'.

Marcellin, Teresa, John, and anyone who has wrestled and matured spiritually would have also affirmed Eliot's leaving his reader, ultimately, with hope. To come home finally to ourselves and to know ourselves in a new way, to know as fully as we are known (cf. 1 Cor 13:12), to become like him because we shall see him as he really is (1 John 3:2).

*With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling*

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, unremembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple-tree*

*Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, here, now, always—*

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37 *Water from the Rock*, #41



*A condition of complete simplicity  
 (Costing not less than everything)  
 And all shall be well and  
 All manner of thing shall be well.  
 When the tongues of flames are in-folded  
 Into the crowned knot of fire  
 And the fire and the rose are one.*<sup>38</sup>

As profound as this poetry from Eliot unquestionably is, with its typically arresting array of figurative devices, literary constructions and thematic allusions – not least the linking of simplicity to Mother Julian of Norwich and to her Easter imagery at the time of the Black Death – let us conclude our exploration of simplicity in Marist spirituality with a Scriptural image. For Marists especially, the motif *par excellence* for simplicity is arguably that of Mary and Elizabeth in the first chapter of Luke.

The little town of Ein Karem, now a leafy suburb in south-west Jerusalem, is traditionally linked to this passage of Scripture. When we visit with Marist pilgrimage groups, people are often taken by how the intensity of the Mary-Elizabeth encounter is compellingly captured in the statue in the courtyard of the Franciscan church there. The women's eyes are wholly caught on one another: no mask-wearing, no hidden agenda, no dissimulation. Their presence to one another absorbs them both in a way that their hearts meet and speak.

The Lucan scene of the meeting of these two pregnant women depicts a literal jumping with stirrings of new life. 'From the moment your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy' (Lk1:44). It is an encounter of joy and of hope, fecund in promise. We should not overlook this context. In our reading of this passage we sometimes rush to the wonderful words of the Magnificat, skipping over how and where it happens: in a relationship, in an unfiltered and embracing encounter. A simple relationship, a relationship of simple hearts.

At the bottom of the hill in Ein Karem is a small mosque, now disused, and a little spring that was once known for the purity and sweetness of its water. The mosque is called 'Mary's Spring', as was the church that was there before it. And before that there was a Greek temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of fertility. 'Ein' in Hebrew means 'spring', and 'kerem' means 'vineyard'; 'ein kerem' is the 'spring of the vineyard'. This is a place that celebrates fertility. Mary is at once simple before Elizabeth, simple before God – 'my whole being rejoices in God my saviour' (Lk. 1:47), and simple before herself – 'the lowliness of his servant' (Lk. 1:48). It is this tri-faceted simplicity that allows her to meet Elizabeth and for God's reign to take root, bud and flower in them, between them, and around them. To be the spring of the vineyard. Simple.

38 T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding' from 'Four Quartets', in *Collected Poems 1909-1962*.



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CHARLES MCGEE

# Catholic Authorities and Lay Teachers In Nineteenth Century New South Wales

By 1816 nearly 4,000 prisoners had arrived in New South Wales from Ireland and by the 1820s Irish convicts were arriving at an average rate of 1,000 per year. By the mid-1850s over 40,000 had been transported directly from Ireland and a further 8,000 had come from England. The majority of Irish who came to New South Wales during the 1800s, over 240,000 of them, came as free immigrants, many of whom took advantage of assisted immigration schemes. It was largely from the ranks of these Irish-born convicts, emancipists and immigrants that the Catholic authorities of the time obtained teachers for over 130 elementary schools that catered largely, but not exclusively, for Catholic children.

Catholic historians, such as Fr John Kenny, Cardinal Patrick Moran, Fr Henry Birt and Archbishop Eris O'Brien largely excluded these lay teachers from the Catholic education story in colonial New South Wales. Br Urban Corrigan in *Catholic Education in New South Wales* (1930) stated that "the early schools were neither properly organised nor properly taught" and that "the typical teacher of the period took the occupation only after failure in other walks of life". Their narrative focused on the decision of the bishops to go it alone after the loss of state aid in 1882 and to call on religious congregations to staff their schools. As Corrigan put it "the Church was beginning to build up a great system of schools controlled by religious orders of teachers".

Portraying the bishops and religious teachers of the 1880s as the founders of Catholic education does not do justice to the lay teachers who went before them and without whose contribution the events of 1882 may have taken a very different course. The early Irish clergy were involved in an itinerant form of ministry as they covered hundreds

of miles each year on horseback to provide Mass and the Sacraments to their scattered people. Where possible, they built humble structures of wood or rough stone that served as a chapel and school. It was the teachers who kept the Catholic faith alive, so that when the bishops, faced with the loss of state aid, proposed Catholic schools taught by religious, the laity were prepared to support their call, even though it would impose a severe financial burden on them. Would that support have been there without lay conducted Catholic schools from the 1820s to the 1880s?

A rare tribute to the early lay teachers appeared in *The Freeman's Journal* of 25 August 1900 "Lay teachers, of course, had to give way to the arrival of the brothers and sisters. In justice to the lay teachers, it may be said that they did their work remarkably well under trying circumstances and assisted the clergy nobly in the great work of training the young not only in secular knowledge but also in the paths of morality and religion".

In more recent times, Fr Brian Maher acknowledged their contribution in his many publications. In *Planting the Celtic Cross – Foundation of the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn* (1997) he noted "The acclaim for the success of Catholic schools has been given to the religious orders who came from Ireland and Europe after 1880. The noble achievement of a generation or more of Catholic laity who laid the foundations has been neglected. To them may well be applied the words of scripture, 'And there are some of whom there is no memorial, who are perished as if they had never been born'. Ecclesiasticus 44 V9. While the religious had their own chroniclers, the early lay teachers had no scribe to record their labours,".

Br Kelvin Canavan in *St Benedict's School*,

*Broadway – A History of a Catholic School 1838–2012* (2014), in contrast to many school histories, provided a detailed treatment of the period from 1840 to 1880 when lay teachers conducted the school prior to the arrival of the Marist Brothers and Good Samaritan Sisters. As Professor Hayden Ramsay noted in his Foreword “this publication salutes those early lay teachers who conducted the school for the first forty years”.

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In 1819 Governor Macquarie was informed that two Catholic chaplains – Fr Philip Conolly and Fr John Therry had been appointed to the Colony of New South Wales. When they arrived in 1820 there were no schools for Catholic children – some may have attended Church of England schools, most simply stayed at home. Unable to work together, Conolly went to Hobart in 1821.

Therry’s relationship with government was poor and competent Irish-born lay teachers George Marley, Andrew Higgins and Sydney-born Thomas Byrne did not receive adequate financial support for their teaching in Catholic schools set up by Therry and were forced to seek other employment.

Therry was removed from his chaplaincy in 1826 and was succeeded by an ailing Fr Daniel Power who was treated harshly by Therry supporters among the laity. Power endeavoured to build a better relationship with government but achieved little before his death in 1830. At that time, not one chapel had been completed and only three Catholic schools were in operation – Parramatta, Campbelltown, and St Mary’s Chapel.

In 1835 Governor Richard Bourke’s Church Act provided financial assistance for denominational schools. Two influential Catholic laymen – Solicitor General John Hubert Plunkett and Commissioner of the Court of Requests, Roger Therry, played major roles in bringing about this legislation that made possible significant growth in the number of Catholic schools.

Fr John McEncroe, Fr William Ullathorne and Bishop John Bede Polding improved Catholic relations with Governor Bourke and salaries were approved for lay teachers in some 30 Catholic schools by the end of the decade. Some were in Sydney at Kent Street, Castlereagh Street and Campbell Street. Others were in country areas such as Appin, Maitland, Windsor, Liverpool, Richmond, Wollongong, Gosford, Dapto and Penrith.

In a Report to Rome in 1842 Bishop Polding stated: “Schools have been opened in several districts, in fact, in all parts of the colony, yet I regret to say, much has not been done in them. On account of the low salary that is paid, we cannot secure a sufficient number of teachers for the schools. The children are taught the catechism, reading, writing and a little arithmetic”. Relationships between Catholic authorities and government had deteriorated somewhat and overall grants were low. In 1843 Church of England schools catered for 2,984 pupils and received a grant of £3,025. There were 2721 pupils in Catholic schools and the grant was only £1,321.

In 1844 Archbishop Polding appeared before a Select Committee on Education. The Committee pointed out to him that instead of blaming the deficient state of Catholic schools on the lack of good schoolmasters, a major reason was the control of the schools by members of the Catholic clergy. The local priest usually appointed the teacher, was chairman of the local board, gave occasional religious instruction and approved the salary claims of the teacher. The teacher relied on the priest to maintain the school building. Some priests required the teachers to perform a variety of menial duties and this was deeply resented. This problem persisted for many decades in Catholic schools.

In 1848 Governor Fitzroy dramatically altered the face of education in New South Wales. He established two boards to control all schools. The Board of National Education had the power to set up National or Public schools and to acquire land and buildings for such enterprises. The Denominational School Board (DSB) would control Church of England, Presbyterian, Wesleyan Methodist and Catholic schools. It had the power to appoint and dismiss teachers, pay their salaries and conduct inspections. No financial assistance was available for purchasing land, building new schools or carrying out repairs. The Board, in effect, left the conduct of the schools to the individual denominations and did little to improve educational standards in its schools.

By the end of the 1840s, there were 13 Catholic schools in the Sydney region, 13 in nearby rural districts and 17 in country areas.

In 1850, newly arrived Bishop Charles Davis was less than enthusiastic about Catholic schools – “Our means for the education of the poorer classes of Catholics are very limited and parents, either through poverty or apathy, neglect their

children exceedingly; and thus we have hundreds of children growing up in a state of almost barbarity”.

*The Returns of the Colony* for 1852 listed the salaries for Catholic teachers. Some of these were: Campbelltown £50, Appin £40, Penrith £45, Goulburn £45 Bathurst £55 and Raymond Terrace £30. Later in the year, a petition signed by teachers of all denominations was presented to the Legislative Council asking for increased salaries. Early in 1853, a substantial increase was granted. Of 28 Catholic schools only one, East Maitland, was granted a salary increase from £50 to £55. This would indicate that Fr McEncroe had again circumvented the intentions of the Legislative Council and that the DSB had acquiesced in his using the money for other purposes. Not long after this, he applied for another increase due to the impact gold was having on the cost of living. He was informed in no uncertain terms by the Legislative Council that he had not used the money already granted to increase salaries.

Archbishop Polding appeared before another Select Committee on Education in 1851. *The Freeman's Journal* of 9 October 1851 recorded his testimony – “I would not wish to throw a general slur on the body of teachers we have had, but by reason of the small sum allowed for their support, it was impossible to obtain properly qualified persons and hence we looked to their moral character rather than to their literary acquirements. Most have tried to do their duty”.

Some progress was made in the area of teacher training. From 1848 male teachers underwent training at the Kent Street North school and from 1851 female teachers attended a training school at Church Hill. From the mid-1850s both male and female teachers were trained at the Parramatta Street school in Chippendale. By 1858, fifty-seven percent of Catholic teachers had received some training. Many of the Irish-born teachers possessed teaching qualifications from the Dublin Model School.

School inspections were begun for the first time. In 1851, Thomas Levinge of the Kent Street North school was asked by Fr McEncroe to carry out school visits. He was dismissed for conveying information to the DSB without McEncroe's approval and was replaced by Thomas Makinson in 1852. In 1859 the DSB proposed one inspector for all denominational schools. Polding disapproved of

this proposal as “it would embarrass fatally the working of that system in our regard”.

In 1856 the DSB increased its grant to Catholic schools by £900 and in 1858 when, for the first time, it received the same grant as Public schools, it passed on a further increase. It still exercised no control over how the Church used these grants. By the mid-1850s there were sixty-nine Catholic schools and this rose to eighty-one by 1859.

On 21 November 1859 Archbishop Polding issued a Pastoral Letter on Education. It contained little to raise the morale of Catholic teachers. “Denominational schools then we must have. The only question is, how can they be multiplied and raised in character and efficiency. One may presume that the Government will provide such stipends for schoolmasters as will be reasonable inducement to teachers of a class superior to that found in our schools at present; such inducement will bring forth men specially and adequately prepared for the employment and content to remain in it”.

Catholic inspector William Casey visited 83 schools in 1861. He regarded six as excellent, sixteen as good, eighteen as fair, twenty-six as inferior, and seventeen as very inferior. Forty-eight school buildings were in good condition and fifteen in bad condition. He recommended that thirty-two teachers should be dismissed. He also observed frequent changes in the location of schools. Out of 27 schools, 12 had been in their current location only between 3 and 5 years and 15 schools had only been there between 6 and 15 months. He noted as well that the striking feature of tenure of office in Catholic schools was the frequency of change. Henry Carolan and John Beston taught in 6 schools over 10 years. Thomas Moore taught in 8 schools over 13 years. The Newcastle school had 15 teachers in 14 years, Appin 15 teachers in 19 years, Bungendore 13 teachers in 14 years and Sussex Street had 12 teachers in 8 years. In the 19 years of the DSB's operation, 480 different teachers had served in Catholic schools.

Casey noted that schools were poorly supplied with books and materials “so that the teachers are not, in many cases, so much to blame in not having their pupils show that progress that may be required of them”. (*DSB Inspectors' Reports* 3 August 1861). He also regretted that few school buildings were being erected as the clergy were





*John Kevin Taught from 1862-1874 in Catholic schools. He became an inspector of State schools.*

concentrating their effort on building chapels that would also serve as schools. Church authorities were also not giving sufficient encouragement to pupil teachers – some of whom had been teaching for 12 months with no remuneration.

Examinations were also becoming part of Catholic schools. *The Freeman's Journal* of 1 February 1860 reported “a few days ago the Miller’s Forest school which numbers about 90 pupils underwent the half-yearly examination. The children on the occasion were neatly dressed and were examined minutely in the several branches of elementary education. They displayed a smartness and intelligence that convinced one of what pains Mr O’Callaghan and Miss O’Callaghan had taken with their education. At the conclusion of the examination, there was a plentiful spread of tea, cake and buns which it is needless to say the little ones did ample justice”.

In December 1866 the Public Schools Act ended the dual board system and set up a Council of Education to control all schools receiving government financial aid. Such aid would only be granted to those Catholic schools that underwent inspection and met Council of Education standards. Council inspectors began moving through Catholic schools and actually certified all of them in the Sydney region to continue operation and thus receive aid. A concession was made in terms of teacher appointments with the Council

allowing the Church to nominate teachers for their schools subject to approval by the Council. This provision remained for many years.

At a meeting of the Catholic Association in 1868 Fr Samuel Sheehy claimed that the Council of Education was “proceeding quietly to shut up Catholic schools”. The 1869 Report of the Association also claimed that the Council was retaining inferior and incompetent teachers in Catholic schools, particularly those near Public schools. The Catholic Association struggled to raise funds as wealthy members of the Catholic community had contributed little and the burden had fallen on poor Catholics. Its final meeting took place in 1871 and it had achieved little other than increasing the antagonism of the Council towards Catholic schools by its constant criticism of their actions.

Living conditions for many Catholic teachers remained deplorable. In 1866 a small slab building with a shingle roof and board floor was completed at Saggart Field north of Campbelltown through the efforts of Fr John Roche. Nanno Clarke was the first teacher in the new building. She was born in Dublin in 1829 and had previously taught at schools in the Goulburn and Braidwood districts for seven years. The school had not been certified by the Council of Education and she had to survive on school fees and food given to her by the children. Because of the poverty of the area, where the people could scarcely meet their own needs, she barely survived.

Nanno Clarke did not give up. She wrote to the Council of Education in March 1867 and requested a salary. She was supported by John Roche, who asked that Saggart Field be given provisional school status. In April 1867 John Huffer inspected the school. Only two children were present as the roads had become impassable due to rain. He reported that Nanno Clarke was not a qualified teacher, but as a person of some education, she might be able to conduct provisional school and receive a small salary. Nanno Clarke taught at the school in 1868 and 1869. On 26 December 1869, John Roche wrote to the Council of Education “I regret to inform you that Mrs Clarke died yesterday”. The life and death of Nanno Clarke say much to us about what the early teachers endured even as late as the 1860s.

Three Irish bishops took up their appointments in country dioceses- Bishop Matthew Quinn at



Bathurst and Bishop James Murray at Maitland arrived on the scene in the early 1860s and William Lanigan became Bishop of Goulburn in 1867. All three instigated a policy of replacing lay teachers with religious as soon as possible. Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St Joseph, and Irish Dominican Sisters soon appeared in their dioceses.

In Sydney, Sisters of the Good Samaritan took over the girls school at Sussex Street in 1861 and in 1862 they taught at Balmain, St Mary's Cathedral, and Pitt Street. Sisters of Mercy taught at Church Hill. In 1872 Marist Brothers opened a school at Harrington Street, The Rocks and took over lay-controlled schools at Parramatta and Chippendale. By 1875 Good Samaritan Sisters had taken over the schools at Wollongong and Windsor.

It was becoming increasingly apparent to lay teachers, that Catholic authorities had little enthusiasm for retaining them once religious were available. In some schools, religious were replacing the female teachers and the male teachers were being asked to remain until the arrival of Brothers. They also would have observed that with the arrival of the religious the Catholic people of the locality were expected to contribute financially for a better school building and a residence – something they had largely gone without.

In 1880 The Public Instruction Act ended financial aid to Catholic schools, effective from the end of 1882. Later in that year a circular was sent to the teachers in Catholic schools. It outlined the provisions that would operate as regards their employment in government schools. It made it clear that they would need to undergo classification by examination if schools of a certain grade were applied for. Teachers were guaranteed employment and would not be made redundant.

Much uncertainty still existed for Catholic teachers. Would they be treated fairly in examinations? Did they have realistic chances of promotion? Would they and their families be faced with frequent transfers? Would their service in Catholic schools be fully recognised at the end of their career?

*The Sydney Morning Herald* of 16 July 1880 contained the following announcement, typical of many at the time “By direction of Archbishop Vaughan, the Roman Catholic Denominational School in Kent Street North, for many years under

the charge of Mrs Fay, has been withdrawn from the supervision of the Board of Education and handed over to the Sisters of St Joseph of Providence, who will take charge on 1st August”. As a result of such decisions, many teachers and their families faced the situation described in *The Bega Gazette* of 3 January 1883 “a clearance sale of household furniture will take place at the teacher's residence at the Catholic school. Mr John Doyle will sell by public auction, without any reserve, household furniture and many sundries in consequence of the closing of the school and his departure from Bega”.

Many school handovers were announced without any thanks or expression of appreciation for the contribution of the lay teachers. *The Freeman's Journal* of 16 December 1882: “The schools close next week and with their closing, the government aid to denominational schools ceases. They will, however, be continued as before and at Morpeth, Muswellbrook, Lambton, and East Maitland the Nuns will take charge”. *The Freeman's Journal* of 23 December 1882: “The teaching staff of the Paddington Catholic schools, according to the new law, bade farewell to the pupils. The Sisters of Charity are to take up the school immediately”.

In his Lenten Pastoral of 1883, the last he wrote prior to his departure for Europe and his death in England, Archbishop Vaughan had little good to say about Catholic lay conducted schools under the Council of Education “Even if it (the Council) had been conducted with moderate fairness, it would never have been in harmony with the interests of a truly Catholic mind. As it was, it became a crying evil in many important aspects. Our schools were not in fact in our own hands. The bishops determined to bring things to a crisis – to cause the government to do away with their abominable system, though it should be at the price of our share of state aid”.

Catholic authorities had done little to support their teachers once their schools came under the authority of the Council of Education in 1866. Many Catholic schools were judged as being deficient in terms of buildings and resources by Council inspectors and were closed. The teachers usually had little prospect of finding another Catholic school. Some schools were taken over by religious with little notice being given to the lay teachers. Catholic teachers had no alternative other



*William and Mary Bradstreet taught in Catholic and State schools from 1876-1910*

than turning to the Department of Public Instruction for employment where they often faced bitter sectarianism and an uncertain future.

The rapid replacement of lay teachers was largely instigated by the Irish bishops. Archbishop Vaughan may well have contemplated using both religious and lay teachers in Catholic schools, but Bishops Quinn, Murray and Lanigan prevailed upon him to proclaim their vision of the power of education under religious and a key part of this was to stress their superiority over lay teachers. In *The Express* of 27 March 1880 Vaughan described lay conducted schools as being “too flimsy to meet the evil” and that “in order to set the limb straight, it had to be broken again”.

The majority of Catholic lay teachers continued their employment in Public schools. Their fortunes under the Department of Public Instruction were mixed. Jacob Knopp taught at the Catholic school at Goulburn until the end of 1882. He took charge of the Mittagong Public School in 1883. *The Maitland Mercury* of 26 July 1883 reported that “a deputation waited upon the Minister of Public Instruction to ask him to remove Mr Knopp from his position on the grounds that he was a Roman Catholic, and that, his reign at the school would not be conducive to the wellbeing of the Protestant

children”. A counter deputation spoke strongly against the removal and said, “he was in every respect an excellent master who had already gained the confidence of scholars and parents”. A significant number of children were removed from his school and in May 1884 he accepted a transfer to Goulburn North Public School where he remained until his retirement in 1920. One of his daughters, Eileen, became a Sister of Mercy.

Archbishop Vaughan’s successor was Archbishop Patrick Moran who arrived in Sydney in 1884. With the arrival of another Cullenite, the Catholic Church in New South Wales would remain solidly Irish. What had occurred in Irish schools would be replicated throughout New South Wales. *The Freeman’s Journal* of 11 October 1884 noted that “the Catholic School Board established by the late Archbishop, met on Friday last, when a report was presented to Archbishop Moran who had been invited to attend. We understand that it is his intention to make other arrangements for the general management of the schools of the Archdiocese. It is his desire to put things on a better footing and to affect many necessary improvements”. The first “improvement” made his position on the role of the laity in Catholic education abundantly clear. He dismissed John Rogers, a layman, who was the Inspector of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese. Moran wanted a priest in the role and informed Rogers that his services were no longer required. Rogers sued the Church and was awarded £2,500 for wrongful dismissal.

Archbishop Moran believed that Catholic children should be in schools staffed by religious. By 1911 three-quarters of the Catholic children of Sydney were in his primary schools. He almost trebled the number of teaching brothers and more than trebled the number of female religious. He spent over £1,000,000 on building churches, schools and institutions. Twenty years after his arrival he had personally blessed 88 foundation stones for churches or schools in his Archdiocese. Although he lacked the wisdom and scholarship of Vaughan he did strengthen the determination of the Catholic laity to support their schools. Ironically, an ongoing problem for Moran in the 1880s and 1890s, and serious enough to be discussed at the Second Plenary Council of 1895, was the matter of the many unqualified Catholic teachers, particularly nuns.



*Thomas O'Sullivan taught from 1849–1885 in Catholic schools John Kevin Taught from 1862–1874 in Catholic schools. He became an inspector of State schools.*

The lay teachers who conducted Catholic schools in New South Wales prior to 1882 were poorly treated by Church authorities. Salaries were the lowest of any denomination and in many cases, this was the result of government grants being used to open new schools. The conditions in which they taught were at times deplorable and they had access to few teaching materials. Often the teacher and their family were forced to live in a corner of the school building as no residence was available and they could not afford to rent one.

A letter to *The Freeman's Journal* of 7 June 1884 described their plight "Would we leave these old servants of the Church to starve? The Department deserves credit for absorbing so many Catholic teachers at a time when they were all thrown out of employment by no fault of theirs. Had these teachers served the state half as long as they had served the church they would be much better off in the goods of this world. I could tell you Sir, tales of sacrifices made by Catholic teachers, and instances of ingratitude on the part of those for whom they long laboured, which would perhaps astonish you".

Triumphalist church historians have sought to present the decision of the hierarchy to abandon

their lay teachers and to replace them with religious in the best possible light. One way of doing this was to barely acknowledge the significant lay presence in Catholic schools prior to 1882. Perhaps they were also endeavouring to downplay the fact that young lay women and men of the time would no longer be able to teach the children of their own faith unless they became a member of a religious congregation.

Sadly, at the time, there was little compassion shown by the Church for those teachers who had given many years of loyal service. They did not speak up for themselves, nor did the Catholic newspaper *The Freeman's Journal*. The teachers realised that they mattered little in Church affairs and their only consolation was that they were entitled to employment under the Department of Public Instruction, however difficult this might prove for them.

*We should rescue the lay women and men who staffed the Catholic schools of the 1800s from anonymity and recognise and celebrate their contribution as it was surely they, and not the religious, who were the real pioneers of Catholic education. In their own era, the lay teachers accepted that theirs would not be the way of recognition. It is time to rectify that situation.*

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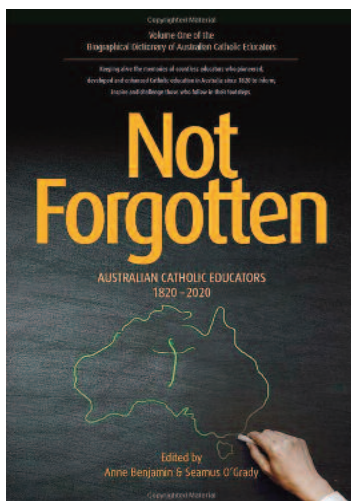
# Book Review

## NOT FORGOTTEN, AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC EDUCATORS 1820-2020

In the week before Christmas, Coventry Press released a significant book for Catholic education. *Not Forgotten, Australian Catholic Educators 1820-2020*, edited by Seamus O'Grady and Anne Benjamin, features 30 biographies of Catholic educators spanning 200 years. The biographies are grouped in four periods and were chosen for those who have made a note-worthy contribution or are considered representative of certain groups of Catholic educators. The editors are indebted to the biographers,

archivists of religious congregations and historians who provided the biographies and encouraged the enterprise. Each of the four sections of the book is prefaced with an essay providing the historical context for that period, while a more reflective essay on the relevance of the chosen biographies for current educators rounds off each section. Essays have been carefully commissioned from historians such as Charles McGee and Janice Garaty and commentators, such as Graham English, Bishop Vincent Long, Br Kelvin Canavan, Dr Brian Croke and Dr Lee-Anne Perry.

The title of the book, *Not Forgotten*, emphasises the commitment of the editors to honour the women and men who have created and built Catholic education in this country. It is the first hard-copy publication for a much larger project, the Biographical Dictionary of Australian Catholic Educators (BDACE) which was created to keep alive the stories of the people of Catholic education in Australia so as to inspire current and future teachers and leaders in Catholic schools and become an invaluable research tool for researchers and the general public in Australia. Initiated around 2008, BDACE will ultimately be an online resource for research, education and formation within ACU.



*Not Forgotten* appropriately coincides with the bicentenary of the establishment of the Parramatta school in 1820-1821, a school that still lives on 200 years later in Parramatta Marist. The brief stories of a handful of the many women and men, who since the early days of European settlement in Australia, have made a commitment, in the name of the gospel, to conduct schools for children – Catholic and otherwise – offer glimpses into Catholic education in this

country. The stories offer flesh and blood insights into the commitment, struggles, mistakes and achievements of Catholic education. The biographies in this book reveal women and men of generosity, competence and courage, sometimes even foolhardiness, in imagining what Catholic schooling could offer children. Above all, it shows the dual love for faith and children's future.

This book ensures that the story of those who forged Catholic education in Australia are not only not forgotten, but are honoured appropriately, in a way which can inform and influence new generations of Catholic educators.

*Not Forgotten: Australian Catholic Educators 1820-2020* was scheduled to be launched at the NCEC Conference in 2020. Details of a rescheduled launch shall be provided once they become available.

**Seamus and Anne always welcome advice and suggestions about the project. You can email them at:** Seamus.O'Grady@acu.edu.au or Anne.Benjamin@acu.edu.au

**The following link to Coventry Press gives information about purchasing the book:** <https://coventrypress.com.au/Bookstore/not-forgotten-australian-catholic-educators>