

The central challenge is this: "If all this was believable for the first Marists, is it still believable for us who live in the 21st century? Or are we so theologically sophisticated and so secularized that we cannot believe that Mary is still calling and choosing? Many modern theologians hesitate to believe such things. They can believe that we should imitate the virtues of Mary and take her as a model, but they cannot believe that Mary calls, that Mary chooses. I assure you that they are missing the boat. I can assure you further that if you present the Marist spirituality to today's young people in the terms I have explained, there will be vocations, because a certain number of young people today desire to enter into relationship with the supernatural. For them the "supernatural" is not a word to be avoided, as it is for some of today's theologians. Today's young people love the world but they also want to go beyond the world. They would welcome the thought that Mary is calling them personally, that Mary is choosing them to live her life in the world. Many of them would desire to tell you a story of their own personal encounter with God, or Jesus or Mary.

Can we still believe that we are called by Mary, that she chooses us more than we chose her? I think we can. And this makes all the difference. It is the difference between imitating a person and entering into a living relationship with that person. I believe that still today, Mary calls, Mary chooses, and that we Marists are chosen, by a grace-filled choice, to stand in her place in the world. We who are called Marists - laity, priests, brothers or sisters - belong to her society and are proud to be "**of Mary.**" We love to bear her name and to take part in her work, which is of her Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.



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Please feel free to contact me if I may be of any assistance to you.

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which is the work of her Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*

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Marist Spirituality

Proud to be "of Mary"



***Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee
blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the
fruit of thy womb Jesus.***

***Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.***

Marist Spirituality

by Fr. Albert DiIanni, s.m.

For years I have tried to find simple formulas that captured the spirituality of the Society of Mary, the religious congregation whose members are called Marists. Such formulas would help me to present this spirituality to the laity and invite them to participate in it. To this end I read a book entitled *"Becoming a Marist"* by Fr. Gaston Lessard, a Canadian Marist. I thought I would find in it some neat phrases that distilled the Marist spirituality. But I found nothing of the kind. Rather the book was a detailed recounting of the historical events that led up to the founding of the Society of Mary. I should have expected this because Fr. Gaston Lessard had often told me that the only way to truly imbibe Marist spirituality was to read and re-read the history of the first Marists. In his opinion one had to relive what they had experienced at Fourviere, where they had vowed to found the Marist Society, at Cerdon where Fr. John Claude Colin wrote the first rule, and in the Bugey mountains of France where the early Marists learned how to be missionary.

I began to realize that Marist spirituality could not be captured in a few abstract phrases. This was because at the center of our spirituality was not a set of ideas, but a person, the person of Mary, Mary and her desires.

Fr. John Coste, our most gifted Marist historian, hinted at this in a set of conferences that he gave years ago on the spirituality of the Marist beginnings. In these conferences Coste presented several grand themes that were part of the vision of our founder, Fr. John Claude Colin. Among these Colinian themes were the phrases: "to be hidden and unknown in the world," "to make the whole world Marist," "Marists as instruments of divine mercy," the three great No's of Fr. Colin, namely, saying "No to greed, No to vanity, No to ambition," and Colin's vision of a Marian Church. But at a certain point in his conferences Fr. Coste paused and asked a question of his audience. He said: "I have explained many of the themes of Fr. Colin and the early Marists, but what for the early Marists was their point of departure? What gave them their sense of urgency? In what did they find their fire? Was it in the call to imitate Mary by living a hidden life in the world? Was it in Fr. Colin's call to say No to greed, and vanity and excessive ambition?" No! answered Fr. Coste. The fire of the early Marists came from their conviction that Mary wanted something.

The early Marists were convinced that Mary was alive in the Church

and that she could and did desire something. She wanted something of them, the early Marists. She had spoken to one of them in a kind of inner locution. To him she had said: *"Behold what I want!"* and she went on to say that she wanted a religious society bearing her name, the Society of Mary. She wanted its members to be called Marists and to stand at her side countering the major loss of faith that was occurring at that time..

The early Marists were convinced that more than they choosing Mary, Mary had chosen them. The initiative was hers. Mary wanted something of them. She wanted a religious congregation that bore her name and persons who would be extensions of her in the world. She wanted persons who would become, as it were, Mary in the world. She wanted Marists who would lend her their hands, their voices, their feet, in order to share in her task of proclaiming the gospel of her Son in a world which in the 19th century was in the process of being lost.

This means that becoming a Marist - priest, sister, brother or lay Marist - does not happen by simply taking Mary as a model and imitating her virtues. Being a Marist means answering a call. It is Mary's call to us to become Mary, to live her very life, breathe her spirit, and share in her work. For the early Marists, Mary was a living person, active in the Church. She was the real founder of the Marist society, its first and perpetual superior. The three Marist founders, John Claude Colin, Marcellin Champagnat, and Jeanne Marie Chavoin, all referred to the Society of Mary as "the work of the Blessed Virgin," and called Mary their first and perpetual superior. So strong was their sense of identity with Mary, so convinced were they that the founding of the Society had been Mary's work.

I have now come to realize that the most important words in the history of Marist spirituality are not "hidden and unknown in the world," nor "the whole Marist," nor "living the spirit of Nazareth," nor that Marists must be "instruments of the divine mercy." The most important words in Marist spirituality are the words **"of Mary." We belong to her.** She has chosen us more than we have chosen her. She is our first and our perpetual superior. This relationship to Mary is the very center and pivot of our Marist spirituality.

To truly enter into Marist spirituality we must have the conviction that even in our own day Mary wants something. She wants to do something in the Church by means of us. She wants people - Marists - to consider themselves extensions of herself and to invade everywhere in the world.