



*The kingdom of heaven is like
a treasure hidden in a field.
Matthew 13: 44*

3. Life force

In his letter to the Philippians, St Paul poetically describes the mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus:

*Being in the form of God, he did not count equality with God something to be grasped,
but he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,
becoming as human beings are;
and being in every way like a human being he was humbler yet,
even to accepting death, death on a cross.*

With these words, St Paul opens up our understanding of Jesus' spirituality. Out of compassion for us, and in order to save us, Jesus stooped down to the level of our human existence. Through this self-emptying, Jesus let go his privileges, his rights, his dignity as Son of God, and became hidden in our human nature, identifying with us so as to encourage us back to the Father. When Christians confront this mystery, they begin to understand one of the Christian paradoxes: that what is significant in God's sight is often hidden from human recognition. The life of Mary reflects a similar self-emptying. She did not cling to her privilege as Mother of Jesus. She submerged herself among the disciples, becoming hidden and unknown at the heart of the Church. Father Colin saw that living this Marian way of life was a very effective way of doing the great things we are called to do as followers of Jesus. So it is appropriate to speak of a "Marian Church". By that title we don't mean a Church focussed on Mary, but a Church that bears the features of this believer who was both mother and disciple of Jesus, and who was a hidden, compassionate presence in the Church Jesus founded. Karl Rahner writes of this Marian way of being Church: "The unnoticeable thing may be the most important; the snowball may become an avalanche; the archimedean point of leverage is not always located at the spot where the loudest talk is going on. Courage to make an unimpressive start, the humility of small beginnings, is the charism of a truly great apostolate."

Icons

The Eastern Christian Church uses Icons to portray saints and the mysteries of faith. Icons are more than pictures or paintings. They are presences; and their purpose is to teach a truth, either about the saint portrayed, or about the faith. For this reason, the painting of Icons is surrounded by strict rules and principles of style. For example, the Icons that portray the Blessed Virgin are all grouped in five broad but easily distinguishable categories, even though there may be many variations of details within those categories. Three of these categories are significant.

The Virgin pointing the Way. This Icon is known in Greek christian spirituality as the "Hodighitria" or the Blessed Mother teaching, indicating, or showing the way. Mary is seated, and looks out at the believer from a position of dignity, holding the Infant Jesus on her left arm. The Child himself, already a miniature adult, is also depicted in majesty. He is the "Ancient of days", the Lord of the Universe. Mary's right hand indicates or points to the child, so that one's attention is drawn from the mother to the child.

The Virgin of Tenderness. This form of Icon is in contrast to the Hodighitria Icon, which emphasises the divinity of Jesus. In this Icon, it is the human aspect of the mystery of the Incarnation which is uppermost. The principal theme of this style of Icon is the compassion which Mary feels for Jesus in his coming suffering, a compassion which is extended to all humanity and to all creation.

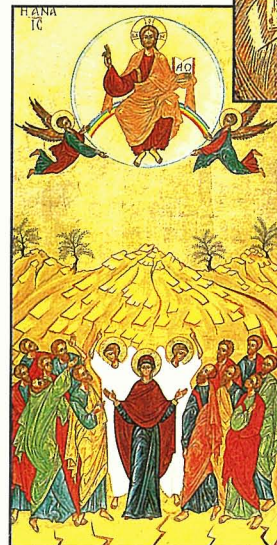
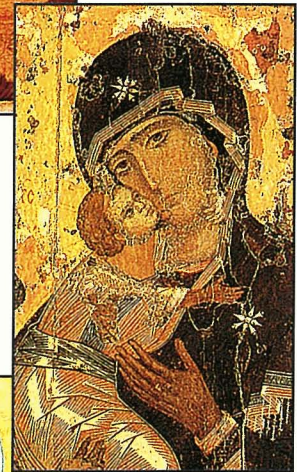
The Virgin in the Mysteries. Another form of Icon which features Mary is the Icon depicting the mysteries of faith where Mary appears in the scene: the Crucifixion, the Ascension, and Pentecost, for example. Here Mary is among the believers.

What is telling for us in the Western Church is that in Eastern christian spirituality Mary is never depicted alone. Either she is pointing to Jesus, or she is holding Jesus in compassion, or she is among the believers. But always she is in *relationship*: to Jesus, to the disciples, to the Church, and especially to the one who is looking at the Icon. These three forms of Icon vividly portray the way Marists look at Mary, and the way they understand their place in the Church. Rather than *talk about* Mary, they prefer to *be like* her, especially in those attitudes so clearly portrayed in the Icons of Mary. They prefer to find their place submerged among the believers, looking on the world with compassion, and always indicating Jesus as the way to the Father.

1847

Father Colin said: "Look at our mother after the Ascension of the divine Master. She is the support, the director, of the new-born church. She is called 'Regina Apostolorum', yet she seemed to be doing nothing, although she did more by her prayers than the apostles did by their preaching."

The Mayet Memoirs



Icon: Mary

A good illustration of something of the mystery of Mary's place in the church and the Marist's relationship with her can be seen in a piece of sculpture which was in fact never intended to convey that mystery. The work is by an Australian artist, and is entitled: "Icon: Mary, mother of the priest".

It depicts the relationship of Mary with the priest in the Church. The priest is shown as the intercessor on behalf of the world, his arms raised in the praying position. Mary is with him, supporting his arms, in a gesture which reminds us of the story of Moses' prayer in the battle against the Amalekites. (Ex. 17: 1-16) The priest is not on his knees in front of Our Lady, but is standing with her. Both are facing in the same direction, though the tilt of the priest's head is sufficient to indicate his special relationship with Mary and the way he will draw strength and inspiration from her. The two figures blend into one form and become identified with each other.

Much of this could be applied to the Marist's relationship with Mary. Mary's concern is for the Church. She looks out towards the Church and the world. The relationship of the Marist is not simply the relationship of child to mother. It is a relationship of two people who identify with each other. The Marist looks *to* Mary, but also *with* Mary; together they are looking towards the world and the Church. And yet, like the priest's head in the Icon, the Marist's mind and heart will be turned towards Mary in a gesture of trusting personal relationship, attentive to whatever Mary may have to teach or say.

One could say that the Marist does not so much ask Mary, "How would *you* act in this or that situation?" but rather, "How do you want *me* to act in this or that situation?"



Mary, though the Mother of Christ and the perfect image of the Church, nevertheless remained in the new-born Church among the Apostles as a simple believer. A life so hidden and yet so fruitful for the Church seemed to Father Colin the model of what the life of the whole Society of Mary should be in every age.

Marist Sisters' Constitutions n.3

Least Marian yet most Marian

The Marist approach to Mary, graphically mirrored in Icons of Mary in the Eastern Christian Church, helps us understand what seems to be a curious aspect of Marist spirituality. In the Constitutions that Colin wrote for the priests and brothers of the Society of Mary, he had a special section entitled "Marists are to be especially devoted to the Blessed Virgin." One would naturally expect to find such a chapter in the Constitutions of a Marian congregation. Yet when one examines what Colin recommends as "special practices", one finds nothing more or less than what was traditional practice for every Catholic! Furthermore, in the present Constitutions of the Marist Fathers and Sisters and the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, there is no section devoted to Mary in herself. In all its years of existence, the Society of Mary has not initiated any special form of devotion or place of devotion to Mary. No significant prayers to Our Lady or books on Our Lady have been written by Marists. Marists have not identified themselves with any particular image or cult of the Blessed Virgin. It seems that the Society of Mary is a Marian congregation with the least external reference to Mary. And yet, in a review of Marian Congregations made 60 years ago, a Jesuit researcher said of the Society of Mary: "No other institute seems to us so totally and exclusively Marian." How can one explain what seems to be a contradiction? The clue to this paradox can be seen, again, in the Icons of Our Lady. Instead of focussing attention on Mary, the Marist tries to identify with her, and so tries to be someone whose attention is focussed on the needs of people, and on the "extension and development of the mystery of the Incarnation." The Marian Icons of the Eastern Church may help us also to understand another slant given by Colin himself in his Constitutions. Generally, Constitutions of Religious Congregations followed a set pattern. Article I of the Constitutions dealt with the aims of the Congregation; Article II dealt with the way to achieve those aims; and Article III with some distinguishing mark of the Congregation. Significantly, Article III of Colin's Constitutions dealt not with Marists and Our Lady, but with "Relationships with people in the Church and in Society". Clearly, Colin saw that the best way to describe the Marist was to situate him or her in relationship with the Church, with the world, and with other people. In this way Marists show their devotion to Mary by reflecting her attitudes and way of life in the world.

On September 21, 1846 Father Colin said:

"Let us imitate our mother; she did not have people speak of her; the gospel named her four times only, and yet what good she did! The time has come when we must make her power burst forth. As for us, let us have her spirit, let us do good 'as if hidden and unknown in the world'. May the world not know of our works, but the eye of God will see them from heaven and we shall be rewarded for them."

The Mayet Memoirs

In relation

"I don't pray to her often, but vivid thoughts about her come to me...."

"Mary enters my life as a presence, in somewhat the same way that the presence of a woman is felt in a home, without one's knowing who precisely is there."

Comments of Marist priests on Mary.

What seems to me the most typical thing in the relationship of our congregation to Mary is the extremely interior slant given to it, and the consistency with which it leads people to seek the good suggested by Mary's life rather than devote explicit attention to her. With Father Colin the Blessed Virgin is meant to be seen essentially in her relation with the Church in which she lived, instead of being the subject of talk.

Jean Coste, sm

Marist paradox

A Marist in a missionary country tells that at the beginning of their mission in that country the team of Marist missionaries lived with another Marian congregation. After two years of living together, members of the other congregation said to the Marists: "But you are not at all a Marian Congregation! You have been with us for two years now, and despite our encouragement you have written no hymns to Our Lady; you have composed no prayers or poems to her; you have not celebrated any special feasts in her honour. How can you call yourselves Marist if you do not give special honour to Mary?"

Jean Coste writes:

"Here we touch on what I am prepared to call the Marist paradox, which must be grasped if there is to be understanding of the way that the role of Mary is lived in the Congregation (of Marists) at the present time. It might be put like this: among congregations claiming to be Marian, that of the Marist Fathers is one of the least Marian and one of the most Marian of all."



Point of view

Colin did not promote any new Marian devotion. For him, Mary is a person to be entered; a mind, a heart, a consciousness to be embraced, a vantage point from which to view the world and the Church in all its aspects. It is perhaps for this reason that the Society of Mary has been called "one of the least and yet one of the most Marian" of Congregations. The least in the sense that it promotes no particular Marian devotions, and does not look to Mary as a model placed in front of it to be emulated. And yet the most Marian, in that it attempts an identification with Mary's own consciousness, with Mary's own viewpoint. Its concern is not with Mary, but with the world and its needs and the mystery of salvation.

Michael Fitzgerald, sm

To choose Mary's name is to enter into a special relationship with her, which teaches Marists to relate to their neighbour in such a way that through them Mary can be present to the Church of today as she was to the Church at its birth. Mary did not press her privileged position as the mother of Jesus, but was ready to be first and foremost his disciple, one who "hears the word of God and keeps it". (Lk.8:21)

Marist Fathers' Constitutions n.15

Woman, mother and disciple

The Society of Mary can be called both "least Marian" and "most Marian" because its aim is to reflect the life of Mary, the first disciple of Jesus. It can be said to be "most Marian" because it models itself on Mary. But the very fact that Mary was a disciple of Jesus meant that the focus of her attention was off herself and on Jesus. Marists, too, will find that their focus of attention is off Mary and on Jesus – as Mary's was. In this sense the Marist congregation can be said to be "least Marian". Although Scripture says very little about Mary, we do know that she was *there* in the early church, and we know that she was there as woman and as mother; and that already tells us a good deal. Colin's line of thinking adds something more: Mary was the perfect disciple of the Lord, whose one thought was the extension and development of the Church, and whose attitude was that of a hidden believer. In the course of the years, Mayet noted in his *Memoirs* the main lines of Colin's thinking on Mary's place in the Church. And by reflecting on these ideas, we can learn a lot not only about Mary's place in the Church, but also about Marists' relationship with her, and the sort of "new Church" they are called to begin. In Chapter 8 of his Gospel, Luke outlines Jesus' description of the perfect disciple. The perfect disciple is the one who has a noble and generous heart, who hears the Word and takes it to heart, and yields a harvest through perseverance. In fact, Luke also applies this description of the perfect disciple to Mary. In detail, he describes Mary as: one who hears the word of God and accepts it wholeheartedly (1: 38): one who believes that what she has heard will be fulfilled (1: 42,45): one who cherishes what she has been told and ponders it (2: 19-51): one who hears the word of God, keeps it, and puts it into practice (8: 19-21, 11 :28): one who is with the disciples in the community, praying continuously, receiving the Holy Spirit, and witnessing to the Resurrection (Acts 1: 14). And so, we learn a good deal about Mary when we reflect on her presence in the Church as woman, as mother, and as disciple. As disciple, Mary listened for the Word, pondered it, searched its meaning for her life, and then acted on it. By living this way of life, Marists will help a "disciple Church" to emerge: a Church which listens to, submits to, and acts on the Word that has been proclaimed. It will be a Church whose members try to discover the Gospel together and live it as Mary did.

September, 1846

Rarely have I seen the spirit of God take possession of Father Colin with greater impetuosity than at that time. He came back from Rome and made ready to return there to work on our rules.... Throughout the retreat and the days that followed, Father Colin spoke of nothing but the stimulus to be given to the Society. He expounded more clearly than ever his view on the Society's destiny, reverting to the theme, so to speak, at every moment. He spoke constantly about how the Society was to have the spirit of the blessed Virgin, and seized every opportunity to inculcate this spirit in us. He poured out his heart into ours in truly fatherly fashion... He kept on repeating, "Let us be men of God, let us be dead to ourselves, let us be men of prayer", returning continually to "Hidden and Unknown" of our Rule. The foreign missions, courage, the need for prayer, for learning, for the spirit of prayer, his cherished article "Even hidden and unknown", these dominated all his conversations.

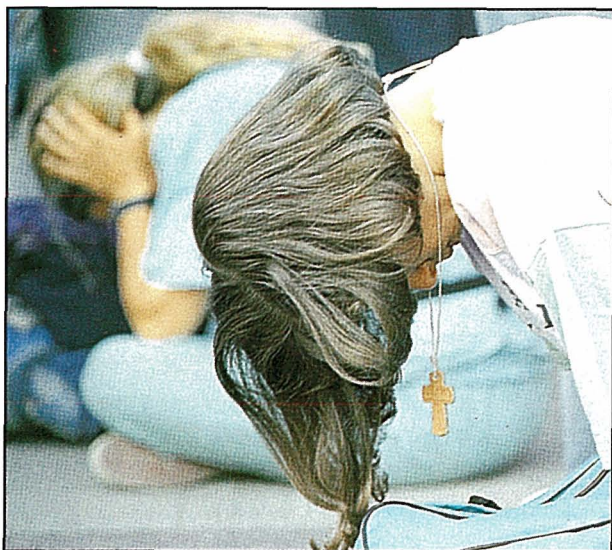
The Mayet Memoirs

First disciple

To "make the whole world Marist" was the Marists' way of expressing their conviction that if the Church is to become what it really is – the virgin bride of Christ and the mother of believers – then the Church must become more and more like Mary. Their thinking ran thus:

Mary, from being Jesus' mother, becomes his first and perfect disciple, i.e. she makes the perfect human response to him and to the Spirit he sends. Therefore, every other follower of Jesus needs to look to her for guidance in becoming a true disciple of the Lord, needs to learn from her what true discipleship means and how it is to be lived. Each christian, if he or she is to respond fully to Jesus, benefits immensely by being led and taught by Mary. Mary is present within the Church to share her life of response so that the Church may become what it is called to be, learning from Mary's faith, from her humility and love. The Church needs to become Mary-like, needs to become "Marist".

Romuald Gibson, fms



The disciple's ear

Openness to love implies listening, for us as for Jesus. We cannot speak of God's word to others except as a fruit of much contemplative listening in poverty of spirit and purity of heart; if we try to by-pass the listening we shall preach ourselves rather than the word of the Lord. Like Mary, the Church receives the word, ponders it in her heart, gives it life within her life, and brings it forth for every generation. God speaks in the scriptures, in our prayer and in the whole life of the word-bearing people. In daily life we have to listen, in weakness, need, compassion and forgiveness. Patiently we have to wait, watching and hoping for the growth of the new life, in ourselves and in others.

Maria Boulding

Reference point

The New Testament is short on details, but clear on the fact: Mary was there. She was joined to the Church at the moment of greatest uncertainty and biggest risk, in the days preceding Pentecost. We are faced here with a situation whose meaning can be grasped only in faith.

The mother of a deceased great leader or founder is not normally expected to mingle with the members of the movement he founded. She is in a totally different position: they received everything from him and set out to follow him; but she gave him life, formed him, and has a unique relationship with him. She has no need to raise the party flag to express a communion of mind and purpose which was probably there long before the foundation of the party itself.

The one thing that Luke allows us to glimpse is that this was not the case with Mary, that she wished to be a member of the group and that she had no position of authority or privilege. One has only to read the Acts of the Apostles to realise that the apostles are the pillars of the Church, and that Mary is among the crowd with those women whom we know had no vote in chapter at that time.

There is an infinitely fruitful paradox here. The person closest to Christ, she who was the mother of the Messiah, she who was more apostle than the apostles and who later merited to be called their queen, did not claim any position of power or privilege, but simply joined the Church, bringing to it her own special richness. Coming in there, she gives us to understand that no destiny, however exceptional, can truthfully find place before Christ unless it comes within the Church. By accepting the last place under the authority of the apostles, she shows that the ecclesial community and its unity were more important to her than her personal situation. Today, when the longing is so strong for a renewed Church, for a return to that early Church, free from all ties, purified of all compromise, rich only in faith and in the power of the Spirit, Mary is there as the reference point to keep us from chasing after whims and shadows.

Jean Coste, sm

We need to deepen and enlighten our understanding of Mary's role in the mystery of salvation: listening and responding with an open and ready heart. If we contemplate Mary, if we allow ourselves to learn from her, then we will learn to pray in the Spirit, and once again the Word will take flesh in our lives.

Marist Brothers Today. Letter from XVIIth General Chapter.

Most hidden

Among the things that Mayet noted when Jean-Claude Colin spoke of his years at Cerdon was Colin's reference to those years as years of great grace. *Over a period of six years, I experienced extraordinary serenity when thinking of the Society, with a clear feeling that it was the work of God.*" One special grace seemed to be connected with this period of time, and later Colin spoke of it publicly. It was the only one to which he has made significant reference. He said, *When God speaks to a soul, He says a lot in a few words. That phrase for example, 'hidden and unknown in the world'.*" For Colin, and for generations of Marists, this phrase, 'hidden and unknown in the world' has been a type of watch-word. In countless ways, Colin returned to the practical application of this approach as a way of being able to do an extraordinary amount of good in a world which was more and more allergic to the Church and the way it was perceived. Whether he was giving advice about a style of preaching, or an approach to sinners in confession, or a way of relating to diocesan priests and bishops, Colin could see that this was a sign of the extent to which Marists were seeking the interests of Jesus rather than their own interests, and it was at the same time, as he said, "the only way to do good". Many Marists seemed to understand this from the start. In a rather beautiful sentence in one of his letters, one of the early Marists wrote: "Work in depth, even when nothing or very little is to be seen, for it is there that the essential is often to be found."

Once when Arturo Toscanini was preparing his orchestra to play one of Beethoven's symphonies, he said, "Gentlemen, I am nothing; you are nothing; Beethoven is everything." He knew that his main task was to sink himself, and his orchestra, and let the music of Beethoven flow through. A similar idea was expressed by Archbishop Romero in a speech he made at Louvain: "I am a shepherd who, with his people, has begun to learn a beautiful truth: our Christian faith requires that we *submerge* ourselves in this world." Mary's way of living the Gospel encourages us to ask, "What are the needs of this person? How can I help this woman to meet God? How can I help this young man to find his path to God, because *he* will find *his* path to God before *I* find his path to God." This is the meaning of the hidden way of life. Mary's transparency is such that we see through her – to Christ. She is the signpost, pointing away from herself to Christ, whose mission on earth is her only concern.

1848

On March 1 at lunch, Father Colin told us, "Gentlemen, let us remain small. I say that so that no one will ever think of changing our way of doing things." (By this I think Father meant our way of doing everything in an unassuming way). "This is the only way to do good, being small. The Society is called to do an enormous amount of good. It must be faithful to its vocation. To be small, 'hidden and unknown', the times call for that, we must accommodate ourselves to our times."

The Mayet Memoirs

Key formula

But what precisely was Mary's way of being in the midst of the new-born Church? Hidden and unknown. That is the key formula.

The further I go, the more I am struck by the fact that Colin puts himself, and invites Marists to put themselves, in the shoes, in the skin of the other.

Gaston Lessard, sm

Painting and canvas

If we look at a painting that has been produced on canvas, it is the painting we look at. The artist signs his name in the corner of the painting. No one knows who made the canvas, yet without the canvas there could be no painting.

Let us suppose that the canvas and the picture were two persons. Someone would come along and speak to the "picture-person" but would not even look at the "canvas-person".

Suppose the "canvas person" were to speak up and say, "How about me?" The admiring person would probably react this way and say, "Thank you for the picture." He would realise that the painting and the canvas formed a unit.

Brother Andrew, sm

Prompt box

The Marist, in a certain sense, is like the man in a prompt box. What matters is the stage. On it you have the actors, the various protagonists playing the drama, and you have also someone that nobody sees, that nobody knows is in the prompt box. The prompt is there only to suggest at the last moment if the actor does not remember, or does not say what he is supposed to say, and he makes the dialogue easier. But nobody will look at him; and if he happened to go onto the stage himself he would spoil the drama. That in a certain sense is the Marist — the Marist in the prompt box only to help others, to help the soul and God to dialogue together.

Jean Coste, sm

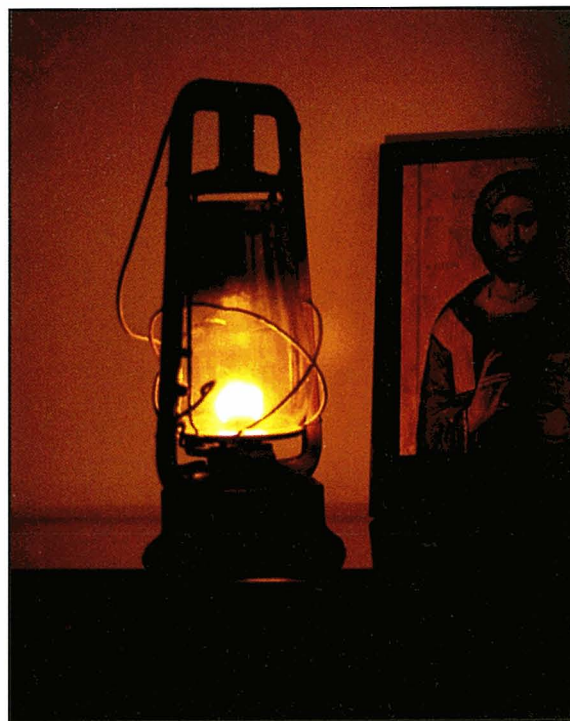
The place of meeting

The principal concern of Marists is to prepare the meeting place between God and the soul. They do this especially by being sensitive to all obstacles which they themselves place to such a meeting, and also to the obstacles placed by our modern culture. They overcome the obstacle which is themselves by striving for hiddenness, by getting out of the way, and trusting that God will speak to a soul. They become acquainted with the obstacles placed by modern culture because they strive with great sensitivity to understand the deepest longings of modern men and women. They try not to criticise but to encourage, coax, beseech, and take all the means possible to help bring people into contact with their God. Like Mary of the Visitation, at Cana, and at the foot of the Cross, Marists are concerned about the place of meeting.

Albert Di Ianni, sm

Mar-ist

One of my most unforgettable lessons about the Marist spirit was given to me by someone whom I thought I was teaching! I was giving a Retreat to some high school girls, and I was trying to explain how Marists model themselves on Mary, and how Mary related to Jesus. I used the image of the oil-burning lamps, and I explained how in the lamp there is the wick which burns the flame, and there is a glass covering to protect the light. The light shines through the glass, and if the glass is clean, people never even notice it is there. They see only the light. If the glass is covered with soot or other impurities, people notice the glass, not the flame. I explained that Mary was like the clean glass round the light. People saw right through her, as it were, to Christ. A girl put up her hand and asked me, "Is that why you are called Marist?" I didn't know what she was getting at and could not follow her line of thought. "Well," she said, "it's easy. The word 'Marist' is composed of the first three letters of Mary's name, and the last three letters of Christ's name. You may begin by looking at Mary, but you always end up looking at Christ." I was reduced to silence.



Let them learn from the first Marists to find in the presence of Mary at Nazareth and Pentecost, in the early Church and at the end of time, the secret of their own presence in the Church and the world today: a presence attentive to God and vibrant with zeal, so that while doing great things for the Lord, they may seem to be unknown and even hidden in the world. This was Mary's way: this is Mary's work.

Marist Fathers' Constitutions n.228

Most present

Even though Our Lady makes only occasional appearances in the New Testament writings, it is deeply rewarding to study those appearances. One common feature is in them all: she is "there", she is "available", and even though she may be most hidden, she is also most present. Right through the hidden life at Nazareth, at Cana, during Jesus' public ministry, at Calvary and in the Upper Room at Pentecost, Mary is present, ministering to Christ in the Church. When we search for the "spirit" of Mary, we will find it somehow here in this "presence", this 'availability': service without noise, the primacy of living over talk, availability for work with others, a simple and warm approach to people, a certain ability to work without too much insistence on personal success or consolation. This at least is how Father Colin saw the meaning of "hidden and unknown". Whenever he encourages Marists to be "hidden and unknown" it is always in the context of the most active and varied work: in the pulpit, in the confessional, in the classroom, in the workplace - in fact anywhere in the world. It is by being willing to clear a space for God to work with the other person that one becomes "hidden and unknown". And so, Colin never presents "hiddenness" as a goal to be sought in itself. It is always seen as a consequence of an interior attitude of mind, and as a means of doing the work of Mary more effectively. To speak properly of being hidden and unknown, then, we need to link this phrase with the other phrases that Colin uses to describe the Marian disciple. We need to see it as connected with what he says about greed and ambition, about "the only way to do good", about 'winning souls by submitting to them', and above all we need to remember that he always used the phrase when he spoke about "going everywhere", "doing everything or anything", "invading the world". There's always the danger that we may think of this charge to work in a hidden way as applying only to the big things we take on: our global mission and our important activities. But it runs much deeper than that; it permeates everything we do, even the little details of our daily routine. That is why the Marist enterprise allows for such a variety of personalities within it. Reflective types, outgoing types – all can be, each in his or her own way, hidden and unknown, if that spirit is rightly understood. Perhaps what it best means is: "Be present wherever you are, and let the love of God and Mary flow through you to all those whose lives you touch, and don't let yourself get in the way".

August 22, 1847

Father Colin said: "Let us go everywhere, let us do all the good that we can, all the while remaining unassuming and hidden... Let us understand (the Society's) goal properly. There are those who think that Marists devote themselves only to works that are hidden, unknown, neglected... Gentlemen, the Society does not refuse them, it greatly prefers them.... But the Society will not shrink from any ministry, from any task."

The Mayet Memoirs

Quiet action

In 1986 the CBS-TV team produced a series of four programmes on the Church in Latin America. The series covered the work of the Church in Lima, Peru; in Sao Paulo, Brazil; and in Managua, Nicaragua. These places were chosen because they showed the many diverse challenges facing the Church in Latin America. In Peru and Brazil, the CBS team followed the work of Marists working in both these countries. Callao in Peru has a population of close to one million Catholics, there are few jobs available, there is massive poverty, and not much hope for economic change. The Marist parish of St Rose runs a food bank which provides breakfast for about 500 school children each morning. In Brazil, Marists serve in Sao Paulo, which is the largest archdiocese in the world. They work among those whose chances of economic improvement are minimal. At the end of the filming, CBS producer John Santos said: "What impressed me tremendously in the filming of the programs is the quiet dedication of the Marists we met along the way. On the one hand we met the great thinkers and the church hierarchy, but on the other hand is the profound ministry of the Marists who put all of the talk into action."

Hidden, yes: sterile, no!

Colin never at any time suggested that the unobtrusive way of acting that he recommended for Marists meant they should not be in the forefront of the church's mission. And yet, even from the early years of Marist existence, there appear to have been Marists who interpreted the ideal of the hidden life as a reason for excluding this or that type of work. Once again, we have reason to be grateful to Mayet, the faithful observer of the scene, who in 1867 wrote this forceful comment:

May we be permitted to remark that Father did say unceasingly: "hidden and unknown", but not "dead". It is the hidden life that he praised, not a useless, sterile life; it is the nothingness of humility, of self-contempt, of modesty, not the nothingness of the tomb. While he repeated without ceasing "hidden and unknown", he also repeated without ceasing that we are called, that we must offer ourselves, to do great things for God. More, he even made his "hidden and unknown" the true basis for great deeds. How wrong would be those who, being of a temperament that is soft and peaceful, or fearful and pessimistic, or cowardly and lazy, would want to shut themselves up in their shell under the pretext that we must lead a hidden life, and who would do nothing, or next to nothing, under the pretext that we must act "hidden and unknown". That mistake would be even more prejudicial to good, and to souls, if it were made by a local Superior. Nature is clever at self-justification. Corpses are also "hidden and unknown"; good-for-nothings are "hidden and unknown", too. Yes, it is the hidden life that Father extols, and to which we are called with Mary's example, but it is LIFE.... We will make this remark only once; the thing is so obvious. But we do feel that we should make it at least once, because, on very rare occasions, we have seen some subject, and even a superior, make a false application, at least in part, of this vital, productive principle "hidden and unknown", which they made a principle of death, of sterility, and even of sheer idleness.

False interpretation

The statement of Mayet shows what Father Colin really meant: it was the basis for great deeds and never a pretext not to do something. And it is very well analysed: "Nature is clever at self-justification". It is so easy for us to look for pretexts not to go out and work, to look for pretexts precisely to shut ourselves in our shell; and it is so hard, sometimes, to leave our warm houses and go out, go out into the cold to meet the danger, to meet the world and what it requires from our responsibilities. Always the danger will be to say: "Oh no! We are not supposed to do so, we are supposed to be hidden and unknown. Let us stay at home, then; let us not undertake this or that work, these new things, because you know, we are supposed to be hidden and unknown." "Never would such a reasoning enter into the preoccupation of Father Colin. That would be a false interpretation.

Jean Coste, sm

Wrong interpretations

The dangers of half-understanding this phrase, of seeing one side and not the other, are obvious: we go for the "hidden" bit, and finish up hermits; or go for the "unknown" bit, and be simply lazy, inactive, opposed to change; or go for "in the world" and become mere activists, or secular humanists. Or we make "hidden and unknown" selective, and think that it restricts us to special kinds of works, the hidden and unwanted works. All of these interpretations are wrong.

Kevin Maher, sm

The personal inspiration of our Founders, "hidden and unknown in the world", forcibly recalls this ideal for us. Far from preventing us from undertaking great things for God, it tells us how they should be done, how to become useful instruments in God's hands, fully open to his action.

Marist Sisters' Rule of Life n.6

"I am watchful"

The eighth world gathering of young people called together by Pope John Paul II took place at Czestochowa on Jasna Gora (the Bright Mountain) in Poland during the middle of August, 1991. It was the largest gathering of youth the world had seen, attracting over a million and a half young people from at least 80 different countries. Pope John Paul described the gathering as a "turning point in history", and on the eve of the feast of the Assumption he led the pilgrims in a personally-written reflection on the three symbols at the shrine of Jasna Gora: the Bible, the Cross, and the Icon of Our Lady. He linked each of the three symbols to the three phrases in the Old Slavonic "Call of Jasna Gora", a prayer which is said each evening at the shrine: *Tebje prjestojim, pametiwiji, Jesm bydeszte* - "I am standing by you, I am remembering, I am watchful". The phrase "I am watchful" he applied particularly to the Icon of Mary, whom he saw as present in the church with the attitude of a mother, whose life is spent watching over her family: watching with faith, with joy, with concern, with sadness, with satisfaction, with compassion, with hope. The image of Mary as the mother watching touches a deep chord with Marists. It would not be difficult to see a likeness between the church as it emerged in the beginning and the church as it re-emerges in many places today. And it would not be difficult to see a likeness between the role of Mary the woman of faith, submerged among the people of God, unnoticed but offering strength by the sheer force of her faith, and the role of Marian disciples of Jesus today, whose main vocation is to watch, in faith, solidarity, hope, compassion and concern, with the heart of the mother who stands and waits. Gaston Lessard puts another picture before us: "I still have before me the image of a child I saw in Ticoman in November, 1983. The Chiquihuite hill is one of the many hills surrounding Mexico City, along the sides of which shantytowns creep up, providing shelter for hundreds of thousands of people. A Mexican Marist accompanied me there on a Saturday morning. At a corner, in the open space, all by herself, lost, there stood a girl who could have been twelve or fourteen years old, skinny, poorly fed, in shabby clothes, and in the last months of her pregnancy. Suppose we take her as a symbol of Mary in the new-born Church, or rather, of the new-born Church itself, of which Mary is the figure, what happens to our meditation on our role in the church being born?"

September 17, 1849

Father Colin said: "It is in the midst of this century that the Blessed Virgin shows herself. She is saying to us: 'My children, it is not you who chose yourselves, it is I who chose you. I know your weakness, your troubles. The enemies you have to overcome are no less numerous, no less to be feared than those the apostles encountered. They are perhaps even more fearsome.... But I am with you.'"

The Mayet Memoirs

Woman of strength

Look at the way the Holy Spirit portrays Mary in Scripture. She is a real person, and one of strength, charm and vivacity.... She was the "poor serving girl" who lived in a village so small that it is never mentioned in the Old Testament. She belonged to an impoverished and tiny colony in an arrogant Roman Empire. Yet how free and self-possessed she is - first questioning the angel, and then setting off in haste to Elizabeth's hill-country, 92 miles away. And what a masterpiece of prayer springs from her lips! Her magnificat song is actually a glorious chorus with the voices of over 20 Old Testament passages. The Mother of God responded to Elizabeth's greetings not by a speech but by allowing the lovingly contemplated Word of God to pour from her heart. The Holy Spirit in a few bold strokes in Luke has portrayed a valiant woman, who prayerfully contemplated God's words and deeds. And lived freely and lovingly.

Paul Glynn, sm

In solidarity

"I am watchful" expresses the attitude of the mother. Her life and her vocation are expressed in being watchful. She keeps watch over men and women from the first moments of their existence. Her keeping watch is accompanied by sadness and by joy. Among all of Christ's disciples, Mary is the first who "watches". We learn from her to be watchful, to keep watch with her: "I am near you – I remember you – I am watchful."

Pope John Paul II



The perfection accorded to Mary must not produce in us the impression that her life on earth was a kind of heavenly life, very different from ours. In reality, Mary had a life like ours. She knew the daily difficulties and trials of human life; she lived in the darkness that faith involves.

Pope John Paul II

As woman and mother, she knew in her heart the joys and sorrows of life. In Jesus' company, she lived in utter trust in the Father, even to the foot of the Cross. In the glory of the risen Christ, she becomes, in a special way, the mother of all those consecrated to God.

Marist Brothers' Constitutions n.18

A parent's care...

Mary is most present, even if most hidden, in the Church. She is there as disciple, and she is there as mother. She is there especially like a mother who watches over all her children with tender and compassionate love. At this time, when we are endeavouring to restore the feminine to our image of God, our understanding is enriched by that figure of the woman who highlights the feminine qualities of God. Of course, this does not mean that Mary is the feminine God. But it does mean that in Mary the woman we can see a reflection in human terms of the maternal qualities of God, especially the qualities of mercy and compassion. The mystery of compassion lies at the heart of the Old Testament. The very first self-portrait made by God was of a "God of tenderness and love, abounding in mercy and fidelity, showing kindness to a thousand generations" (Ex.34: 6). This is the God who allowed Abraham to bargain over the Israelites, forgiving them even if only ten just men could be found in the city (Gen.18: 16-32). It is this same God who spoke to Moses as a friend, assuring him, "I have seen the misery of my people" (Ex.3: 7). This is the God who cannot bear even one person to be lost; and in an effort to emphasise this compassion, the Scriptures describe God not only as a tender father, but also as a tender mother who has carried the child in her womb. In Hebrew, the word for compassion is a plural form of the word for "womb", and it signifies yearning love, like that of a mother for her baby in the womb. Compassion is what a pregnant mother experiences - the love that is with, suffers with, and is yearning to bring to birth; then years to see the child grow to independence. It means waiting, watching, never forcing, yet always being ready. In this sense, Mary reflects the inner, maternal compassion of God. As a mother, she *gathers*, she is *compassionate*, she *unites* at all costs. These are the qualities that Jean-Claude Colin saw as particularly necessary in these times, and as particularly evident in Mary. She is the woman who gave birth to Jesus, who nursed Him and then let Him grow into independence. She is the woman who was present at the birth of the Church, bonding the believers to the Risen Jesus, and watching, waiting, gathering and uniting as the church grew to independence. These attitudes of gathering, uniting and suffering with are the attitudes that Jean-Claude Colin would like Marists to learn from Mary: they are the attitudes he would like to see Marists bring to all their relationships.

The retreat of 1844 was conducted at Lyon in the usual devout and exemplary fashion. The elder Father Épalle gave the conferences and his brother, Bishop Épalle, took part. At the end of the retreat, Father Colin spoke a few words in the Chapel, among which I noted the following: "We are now in the age of Mary. ... What gratitude should we show to Mary for having chosen us to spread her Society, this Society comprising the three branches, because Mary intends to cover the whole earth with her mantle."

The Mayet Memoirs

A mother's love

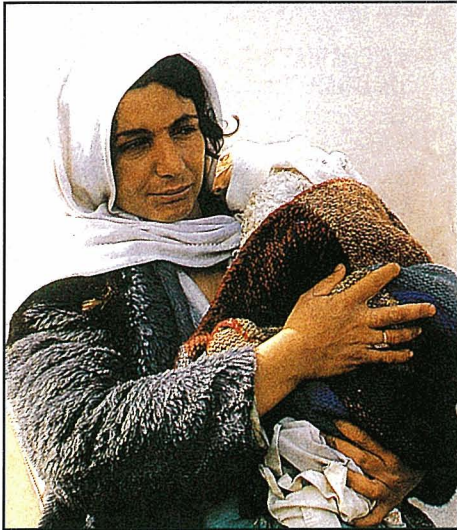
A mother's love does not depend upon any particular quality in the son, or on any similarity in thinking, or on any type of behaviour, but simply on the fact that this person is her son. Nothing can hide this reality. For a mother, an unbelieving son is not an unbeliever, but a son. That is what we must be if we have a mother's heart like Mary had. To react as a Marist before an unbeliever, is to accept him and not to see in him the unbeliever but to see James, or Paul, or Andrew, a person whose heart and desires can be understood by God alone.

Jean Coste, sm

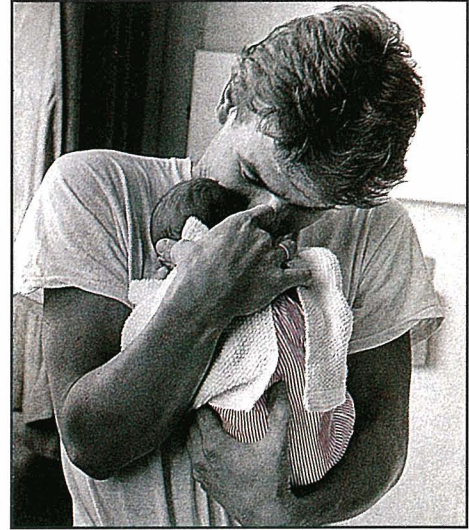
A place in the heart

Her love for her children is not the possessive type of love that can stifle rather than quicken. Yet, her love remains a mother's love: it never gives up on her children; it favours especially those children who have lost their way and who seem least deserving. And so, Mary is the Mother of Mercy: she has found a place in her heart for all; she has a special concern for sinners who have lost their way, and her favourite place is to be hidden in the midst of the family of humankind, to be able to identify with them all in their needs, to be able to speak to all as from heart to heart without pretence.

Edwin Keel, sm



GOD FATHER AND MOTHER



Does a woman forget her baby at the breast,
or fail to cherish the son of her womb?
Yet even if these forget,
I will never forget you.
See, I have branded you
on the palms of my hands.
Isaiah 49:15

When Israel was a child I loved him,
I myself taught him to walk,
I took him in my arms.
I was like someone
who lifts an infant close to his cheek,
stooping down to him I gave him his food.
Hosea 11:1-4

Good qualities

I think the values and qualities of a true Marist are those which will be very effective in meeting the needs of the future Church. The idea that most captures for me what a Marist is, is that of a *mother*. We are called to be like Mary in showing forth the qualities and concerns of a mother, dedicated to her family and their welfare. This means that our first concern is for the needs of others, no matter how great or trivial. To a mother, no task is unimportant, from preparing lunches to dressing scraped knees; not because she may enjoy these sorts of things, but because her family depend on her and need her and she has a responsibility towards them. A mother would think nothing of leaving a sink of dishes to nurse a child with an illness or visit one in hospital. It also amazes me how wives are prepared to leave friends to follow their husbands to a different part of the country, or even a different country, because of his job. I think we should look on our bishop like this, and be prepared to go and do whatever he wishes.

Compassion

An image that springs to mind...

It is the hand outstretched that cools the fevered brow; it is the voice that says, not: "I see your problem", but rather: "I am with you in your trial and I understand what you are experiencing."

I like to think that my mother exhibits this virtue.

It is the hand that prepares the lunch each day, that soothes a troubled spirit. In fact compassion is there when you arrive home from work or school each day, just as compassion was a carpenter's wife and the mother of Jesus.

For me compassion is a virtue of sharing. It is the ability to see another's need and to respond to it. Compassion allows us to enter into something of the experience that another person is having.

Attentive solely to the Lord, and aided by the prayer and example of Mary, they strive to become, in their Founder's words, ever more effective "instruments of divine mercy".

Marist Fathers' Constitutions n.11

Care for the people of God

As if it were not enough for God's compassion to be revealed in both masculine and feminine images, the picture that Jesus painted of God was even more vivid. When the Pharisees and Scribes complained that Jesus was too close to sinners, He told three parables about God's compassion: the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. Jesus' crowning picture is that of the Father who waits anxiously, daily, for the return of the prodigal, and is "moved with compassion" when he sees the son "a long way off" in the distance. Jesus Himself is the image of the Father; and He is the friend of sinners, Samaritans and lepers, and all those who for one reason or another are, or feel themselves to be, on the margins. The Gospels often describe Jesus as being "moved with compassion" and the Greek words used in this phrase mean literally "moved in one's bowels". The Greeks regarded the bowels as we might regard the heart: as the centre of one's deepest feelings. So the words for compassion in Hebrew and in Greek stem from the words for "womb" and for "bowels" - in other words, the deepest, most personal and most intimate parts of one's being. When Jean-Claude Colin said that Marists were to be "instruments of divine mercy", this is the sort of mercy we are to think of: a compassion that comes from one's depth, a love full of longing to gather, to unite, and to reconcile. He saw this compassion mirrored in a particular way in Mary, and in his view Marists are to resemble her in this attitude to the people of God. He saw Marists as *agents of gathering*, bringing everybody into the People of God, and pushing the boundaries of the Church to the furthest limits to ensure that everybody can be included. This means being *agents of compassion*, ensuring that God's longing for closeness is experienced by everyone, especially those at the edge of the Church. It also means that Marists will be *agents of unity*, doing all they can to break down and heal the divisions and barriers that exist between the people of God. Sometimes this will create tensions for Marists who may find that they are "loyal critics" of the Church, loving and supporting the Church while all the time working "to begin a new church". But Colin insists that Marists begin this work "at home", as it were, in their own local church or diocese, working with such support for the bishop of their diocese that he can look on them - priests, religious and laity - as people who are really with him: in fact, "as his own" people.

On September 27, 1842, the last day of the general retreat at Belley, Father Colin said:

"Look at the Blessed Virgin! See how she hastened the coming of God by her burning desire. When she learned that she had been chosen to be his mother, what an effort she made to co-operate! When Jesus Christ was born, he was the object of all her thoughts and affections. After his death, her sole thought was the extension and development of the mystery of the Incarnation. That is the sign by which, precisely, you can recognise a Marist."

The Mayet Memoirs

Agents of gathering

The Society of Mary exists not because of the early Marists' concern for Mary, or because of their concern about people's devotion to her, but because of Mary's concern for the Church, because of her devotion to God's people.

Edwin Keel, sm

One of the characteristic features of the "new church" that Father Colin envisaged was that it would be a community which would not be restricted to clearly definable and easily observable boundaries, but which would push the limits of welcome and mercy to the furthest extremes, in order to gather everyone into its fold. This is why the involvement of lay people was so important to his idea of the Society of Mary. It is clear that from the very beginning Colin considered lay involvement in the Society's mission as an essential means of diffusing the work of Mary, to "bring everything under her fold". This would be a way of continuing her wish to "extend and develop the mystery of the Incarnation".

Agents of prodigal love

Marist artist Peter Healy portrays something of the rugged strength of compassion in his painting of the prodigal son and the prodigal father. In telling this story, Jesus tried to show that our God is a God who creates a community of equals, a community of brothers and sisters. The main point of the story is probably the point that frequently escapes us. Both sons in the story put too much emphasis on their actions, their concrete behaviour. The younger son sees his deeds as making him undeserving of his father's forgiveness, so he does not expect or hope for wholehearted forgiveness. He is prepared to accept the position of a servant as long as his hunger is satisfied. The older son sees his actions as totally justifying him, and is angry when his father acts in an unexpected way. But the father begins with quite another logic: both boys are my sons, and one has returned to life. What matters is not the virtues of one son and the vices of the other. The only thing that matters is what leads to tenderness and compassion. To be an "instrument of divine mercy" is to be an agent of *this* sort of compassion.



Agents of unity

"The Church recognises in her a mother who keeps watch over its development and does not cease to intercede with her Son to obtain for Christians more profound dispositions of faith, of hope, of love. Mary seeks to promote the greatest possible unity among Christians. There is no ecumenical heart greater or more ardent than Mary's."

Pope John Paul II

One of the wonderful stories told about King Solomon's wisdom is found in the book of Kings. (1 Kings 3: 16) Two women came to Solomon for judgement in their dispute. The two women lived in the same house together, and had both given birth to infant boys at the same time. During the night, one of the women lay on her child in her sleep and smothered him. She

surreptitiously swapped her child for the other woman's child, so that when the other woman woke up to feed the child, she found it was dead, but she was sure it was not her baby. The two women argued their case before Solomon. In the end, he decreed that a sword be brought, and that the living child be divided, giving half the child to each woman. The false mother was content with this judgement in order to win the argument. But the woman who was the true mother of the child cried out: "No! Give the child to this other woman, but do not divide the living child!" Solomon then knew who the true mother of the child was.

A true mother of any living body – including the Church – will do everything possible to avoid "dividing the living child".

The Marist prepares himself to be present in the Church in Mary's way by learning to love the Church as it is while at the same time being an agent of its renewal. Because of their desire for the unity of the Church, the healing of divisions among God's people will be one of their constant concerns.

Marist Fathers' Constitutions nn. 16,78

A Marian Church

Perhaps now we are able to understand some of the richness in Colin's words about "beginning a new church". Some writers suggest that many aspects of the Church today simply reflect the characteristics of modern society: a preoccupation with systems and organisations, with competition, achievement, power, control, success, words, and logic. In this sort of society and Church, it is hard to find a place for compassion, silence, contemplation and relationship. So it is easy to see what a significant change could be made in this society and Church by a group of people – including men – who live by the spirit of the woman Mary, and who in a very real sense honour the feminine within themselves, in the Church and in society. In this sense, it becomes very enriching to speak of "a Marian Church" or "a Church with a Marian face". If we think of Church simply as "the place where we can be *saved*", then it is difficult to see where Mary fits in, because there is only one Saviour and Mediator – Jesus Christ. But if we think of Church as "the place where people *grow in life*", then it is easy to look on Mary – woman, mother, disciple – as one who teaches us how to be disciples of Jesus, and how to keep the Gospel values always in focus. A Marian Church is a Church which makes a choice for compassion over competition; an option for relationship over dogmatism; for humility over power; for service over dominance. It is a Church which pushes its boundaries to include all, rather than one which defines its boundaries to contain the chosen. And it is a Church which includes the feminine in its attitudes, which can too easily become over-masculine. The Church with a Marian face does not feel the need to create bigger and bigger things to ensure that God is properly honoured. It is a Church which understands that small things can be, and often are, the most significant things. We live in an age that worships size and numbers. Yet history shows again and again that it is not the big things but the small beginnings that are of greatest importance. No one who remembers the events of the student uprising in China's Tiananmen Square in 1989 will forget the photograph of the lone civilian standing calmly and defiantly in front of the line of tanks. What remains in the memory is not the impression of the fragility of one person in face of the power of the tanks, but precisely the opposite: the immense power of that solitary individual, and the uselessness of the tanks to produce anything of lasting value.

September, 1850

Then Reverend Father [Colin] spoke to us of how fortunate we were to bear the name of Mary, and of the zeal with which we should imitate her. "She did not create a great stir during her earthly life," he said, "but how much good she did and still does for the Church! There is our model. Let us clothe ourselves in her spirit."

The Mayet Memoirs

Marian Church

I would like to plead for a Marian Church; not for a church which multiplies processions and blesses huge statues.... rather a Church which "lives the Gospel after the manner of Mary."

The Marian Church follows Mary into the mountains, going off with her to encounter life; she visits men and women, and, though things may seem to be sterile, she is on the watch for what is coming to birth, for possibilities, for the life which beats in things.

The Marian Church rejoices and sings. Instead of bemoaning its fate and the world's woes, she is in wonder at the beauty there is on the earth and in the human heart, as she sees what God is doing there.

The Marian Church knows she is the object of a gratuitous love, and that God has the heart of a mother. She has seen God on the doorstep, on the lookout for the improbable return of a son; she has seen him throw his arms around his neck, place the festal ring on his finger, and himself organise the home-coming feast. When she pages through the family album, she sees Zaccheus in his sycamore, the woman taken in adultery, the Samaritan woman, foreigners, the lepers, beggars and a common prisoner at his place of execution. So you see, the Marian Church despairs of no one, and *does not quench the smoking flax*. When she finds someone on the side of the road wounded by life, she is moved by compassion, and with infinite tenderness tends their wounds. She is the safe harbour, who is always open, the refuge of sinners, "*mater misericordiae*", mother of mercy.

The Marian Church does not know the answers before the questions are posed. Her path is not traced out in advance. She knows doubt and unease, night and loneliness. That is the price of trust. She takes her part in the conversation, but makes no claim to know everything. She accepts that she must search.

The Marian Church lives in Nazareth in silence and simplicity. She does not live in a castle. Her home is like all the other homes. She goes out to chat with the other villagers. She weeps with them, she rejoices with them, but she never preaches to them. Above all she listens.

The Marian Church stands at the foot of the Cross. She does not take refuge in a fortress or in a chapel or in prudent silence when people are being crushed. She is vulnerable in her deeds as in her words. With a humble courage she stands alongside the most insignificant.

The Marian Church lets in the wind of Pentecost, the wind which impels one to go out, which unties tongues. In the public square, not for the sake of hammering doctrine, nor to swell her ranks, she proclaims her message: the promise has been kept, the fight has been won and the Dragon crushed forever. And this is the great secret which she can only murmur: to win the victory God has laid down his arms. True, we are in an intermediate time, the time of human history. And that history is a painful one.

Yet every evening at the end of Vespers the Church sings the Magnificat. For the Church knows where her joy is to be found. And look: God has not found our world or its afflictions, its violence or its wickedness uninhabitable. It is there that He has met us. And there, on the Cross, we have seen the "mercy", the open heart of God.

There at the foot of the Cross a people was born, a Marian people. *Seeing his mother and near her the disciple whom he loved, Jesus said to his mother: 'Woman, this is your son.'* Then to the disciple he said: *'This is your mother.'* From that moment, the disciple made a place for her in his home.

Brothers and sisters, let us belong to this people. Let us make a place for Mary in our home. Let us enter with her into the "humble and heart-rending happiness" of loving and being loved. And, in the words of Thérèse of Lisieux, the Church will be in this world "a heart resplendent with love".

François Marc, sm

Our religious consecration unites us in a special way with the Church in all its mystery... Very special bonds unite us to the other branches of the Marist Family, as we attempt to foster in the Church the spirit of Mary, which is our common heritage.

Marist Brothers' Constitutions n.10

"Silence gives you perfect sound"

Where does one find the power to "begin a Marian Church", to "begin a Church with a Marian face", to "renew the Church in the image of Mary the perfect disciple of Jesus?" Here we face one of the paradoxes of the christian life, that all this activity and energy is rooted in interior solitude and silence. A recent advertisement for high-tech sound systems claimed: "Silence gives you perfect sound". Without realising it, the advertisement was doing more than making a claim for good audio technique. It was also highlighting a feature of the Gospel life which Jesus chose for Himself, and which He has pointed out to those who wish to follow Him. The desert, solitude, and silence were part of His very life-style. We know why He was led into the wilderness after His baptism. He was led there by the Spirit in order to be tested, as a preparation for His mission. These three events: the baptism of Jesus, His testing in solitude, and His energy for mission cannot be separated. He was set apart in baptism, purified and tested in solitude, and then sent out on mission. Followers of Jesus experience the same journey: we are drawn into some form of wilderness experience which tests our willingness to put all our trust in God alone. In our personal solitude and silence, we too are shaped into an image and likeness of God. The "perfect sound" of our compassion comes from the silence of our solitude in which we enter into the compassion of God. We leave behind our many activities, our concerns, our plans and projects, and we remain alone with God who little by little forms in us the Word which we are to make flesh for our world.

What actually happened during Colin's years at Cerdon is not completely clear to us. But we do know that those were the years when he was transformed interiorly. He himself described those years as years of "extraordinary serenity" when it seems he was touched by the experience of "tasting God". So important was this to him, that he looked on it as the key experience for anyone beginning Marist life. From his own experience he believed that once a person had "tasted God" everything else would fall into place. But "tasting God" in prayer was never to be an experience that happened just once in life, or that happened just to priests and religious. It was to be a constantly repeated inner experience even in the busiest moments of one's life. For Colin, the symbol of this experience was Nazareth, which for him represented a state of soul which rested in God, which waited in solitude and silence where the perfect sound of God's love could be heard.

On one occasion, in 1842, Father Colin said to us: "...I really do not know what ideas they have of the novitiate and its conduct. To me nothing appears so simple. I should like to spend a month or two there to set the house running as I understand it should.... I would try simply to unite (the novices) to God, to bring them to a spirit of prayer. Once they were united to God, everything else would take care of itself. When the good Lord dwells in the heart, it is he who sets everything in motion. Without that, everything that you do is completely useless; no matter how you plant the seed and tire yourself out, the life-giving principle is still lacking. But having once tasted God, a novice will turn to him again and again."

The Mayet Memoirs

The cave of the heart

India has an ancient tradition of contemplative prayer. The Indians have a saying that the deepest prayer takes place not in the head but in the "cave of the heart". A cave is a dark place. The cave of the heart is our deepest heart, our spirit - a place where we might not "see" clearly, but where we experience love, commitment and God. The cave of Bethlehem has taken on a richer symbolism since I heard this Indian expression. Mary had to leave the lighted, boisterous town and walk out into the darkness of the Bethlehem hills. Then in the deepest darkness of a cave, she saw the Face of the Light of the World.

A Zen disciple seeks as the ultimate religious experience *satori* (enlightenment). This comes after a long, arduous spiritual pilgrimage, in which hours of daily prayer and ascetic living in a context of brotherhood are of the essence. Satori is written by adding the ideograph "heart" to the ideograph "oneself". You find your true self in your heart - not your head.

Paul Glynn, sm

Inner sounds of silence

Marcel Marceau is one of the greatest mimes of our day. His work takes him into the realm of wordless communication. But like all mimes, he knows that what is communicated in silence and from silence can be more powerful than any words. It also requires extraordinary discipline. Marceau writes: "I want my pupils to study the art of mime with profound humility, in an effort to develop the capacity to study life, mankind, and the nature of the universe. It is through this never-ending search that an artist learns to lift his vision towards the heights where myths are born; by subjecting our students to our forms of discipline we attempt to inspire them with the love of the inner sounds of silence. By discovering this new world, they will also discover the very roots of their existence. .. The School of Mime is a tough apprenticeship which will certainly not succeed without obstacles. The path to self-knowledge is a long one, strewn with tentative steps and silent tears, not only of anguish, but also of love, compassion and exultation."



Silent touch of compassion

Father Brown is one of the central characters in Graham Greene's play "The Living Room". Confined to a wheelchair for 20 years, he has been living with his eccentric spinster sisters. Their niece falls in love with a divorced man, much to the horror of the overly-Catholic aunts who do all in their power to shame her out of the affair. In desperation she turns to Father Brown, asking for some way of finding peace. He is unable to find the right words, and his niece leaves him and commits suicide. Alone with his thoughts, Father Brown reflects:

I dream of helping someone in great trouble. Saying the right word at the right time. In the old days in the confessional – once in five years perhaps - one sometimes felt one had done just that. It made the years between worthwhile. For more than twenty years I've been a useless priest. I had a real vocation for the priesthood. And for 20 years it's been imprisoned in this wheelchair.... the desire to help. Last night God gave me my chance. He flung this child, here, at my knees, asking for help, asking for hope. I said to God, "Put words into my mouth." But he's given me twenty years in this chair, with nothing to do but prepare for such a moment. And all I said was, "You could pray." If I'd ever really known what prayer was, I would only have had to touch her to give her peace. "Prayer," she said. She almost spat the word.

Mary is a model of prayer for us. Virgin of the Annunciation, she welcomes the Word of God. Woman blessed among all women, she rejoices in God her Saviour. Faithful handmaid, she lives out her YES even to the Cross. Mother, she ponders in her heart what Jesus does, and relates His actions to the words of Scripture. She intercedes at Cana and prays with the Church in the upper room.

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