

A Short History of Marianist Spirituality

By Lawrence J. Cada

[This reader's guide accompanies *A Short History of Marianist Spirituality*, which was produced as part of the Society of Mary's "Modern Theology & Marianist Spirituality" series. The publication is available at NACMS.]

Study Guide

Opening Considerations About Terminology

1. Cada stresses that he uses the term *Marianist* "to refer to *everyone* in the Marianist Family, not just to members of the Society of Mary (SM) or to Marianist religious," thus including both lay Marianists and religious Marianists (pp. 23-25).

Why does this matter?

*For background, consider the maturing of lay Marianist communities worldwide as evidenced by the 1st International Convocation of Marianist Lay Communities in Santiago, Chile in 1993 up to the 3rd International Convocation in 2001. For an understanding of what Marianist community means to lay members see **Being in Community** www.mlhna.com/Text8.htm.*

Not all SMs agree with Cada. What is your position on the use of the word *Marianist*?

Note: The footnotes are extensive in this book. Don't give in to the temptation to skip them. Not only do they add factual information but also give a glimpse of the ongoing debates on the subject matter, the respect for varying opinions, and interesting nuances.

2. If Marianist spirituality is fundamentally a lay spirituality and one "does not need to profess religious vows to live Marianist life fully," what is the distinction between lay and vowed religious (pp. 27-28)?

What are three things you notice that all Marianists have in common?

(Answers: Baptism, founding spirit of Father Chaminade, Marianist spirituality)

Name three ways that lay and vowed religious differ.

(Answers: vows, permanent celibacy, communal life in which resources are shared, prescribed daily communal prayer, obedience to a religious superior and rule of life.

Note: Some lay Marianists may also take on one or more of the above but it is optional.)

Why do some Marianist scholars differ with Cada? (See footnote p. 27)

What is your position?

3. Marianist spirituality started with lay sodalists in 1800. Some sodalists eventually expressed a desire to commit to a specifically religious lifestyle and thus between 1809-1817 the State of Religious Life in the World (the State) and two religious orders (FMI and SM) developed. By

1830 “most new members of the Daughters of Mary and the Society of Mary became Marianists because they wanted to join a religious congregation devoted to teaching.” The number of sodalists decreased significantly as the emphasis was on the vowed religious. In time, Marianists spread to six continents thus responding to the desire to serve in many locales. Since the 1950s there has been a resurgence in the number of lay communities. This history is consistent with Chaminade’s maxim to “read the signs of the times” and shows the adaptive nature of Marianist spirituality (pp. 28-30). (See *Chaminade – Pragmatist with a Vision* by Joseph Stefanelli, SM, for further insights into the development of Marianist spirituality and the branches of the Family of Mary. The North American Center for Marianist Studies is the source for this book and many other useful resources.)

What do you think are the most significant signs of the times to which today’s Marianist should pay attention? Consider technology, the media, increasing gap between the rich and poor, terrorism, distrust of clericalism and the institutional church...

How do you see that Marianists can be adaptive for the sake of making the gospel more widely lived today?

Is there a change you would like to make in the lifestyle or ministries of your own Marianist community?

4. In describing the term “spirituality,” Cada distinguishes between a general spirituality to which all Christians are called and a more specific spirituality which “focuses on special aspects of the Gospel which are given emphasis through devotions and practices” (pp. 30-34).

Within the Catholic tradition, if you could invent a spirituality that reflected your current life experience and emphasized the values that are most important to you, what would be the key features of it?

The Modern Era: Matrix of Marianist Spirituality

1. “Modern spirituality” does not just mean “up-to-date” or “recent” but has a specific sociological meaning. It refers to the 500 years from 1500 to the present in which spirituality moved from being more self-contained to being in dialogue with new thoughts in philosophy and the social sciences.

Marianist spirituality arose as a response to the historical and cultural circumstances of the Modern Era. What are those influences (p. 37-38)?

2. Marianist scholars differ on the importance of the Modern Era as a touchstone for Marianist spirituality. Some (Benlloch) believe that Cada should have given the French Revolution and Chaminade’s exile in Saragossa higher priority, while others (Roten) believe our Benedictine roots should be highlighted more.

Which of the approaches on pp. 37-38 makes most sense to you? Why?

3. Which of the seasons of the Modern Era do you think most fits your adult life? Why?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| A. *1500-1517: Age of Exploration | geographic, intellectual, and artistic explorations |
| B. 1517-1545: Reformation | Martin Luther and the wars of religion |
| C. 1545-1648: Catholic Reformation | Council of Trent, religious orders flourish,
systematic instruction of youth develops |
| D. 1600s-1800s: Enlightenment | rationalism dispels the darkness of ignorance and
superstition |
| E. 1685-1715: Christianity questioned | antagonism toward the Catholic Church |
| F. 1789-1800: French Revolution | Reign of Terror, the government persecutes church
Chaminade founds the first sodality |

*all dates are approximate

If you could live in any of the above ages, which one is most attractive to you? Which would stir your imagination and motivation? Why?

4. Reflect on Chaminade’s early days as a priest and what expectations he might have had for how he would live out his vocation. Fast-forward to “his adventures as an underground priest in Bordeaux, his exile in Saragossa, and his return to found the Sodality in 1800.”

What times in your life have your expectations of life changed significantly?

Have you (or your community) had any experiences of God calling you through adversity into new insights or works?

The Dawning of Marianist Spirituality

1. The French Revolution was not only a political revolution but also marked a cultural transition. France changed from a society in which culture and religion were inextricably linked to a secular society in which religion was suspect and needed to be separated from government, work, and public life. This seemed a great defeat for Catholicism – a heresy even. In Chaminade’s time it was called “religious indifference” or the heresy of Modernism and was an evil to be fought. This “Church resistance to Modernity lasted...up to the time of the Second Vatican Council. There for the first time a break in the prevailing stance of the Church occurred with a clear, official recognition that there might be something good and worthwhile about the Modern Era” (p. 64).

What was it? What were some of the positive contributions of Modernism?

Answer: It recognized the value of the world as “an authentically good reality created by God and given to us as a gift.”

2. So if religious indifference and secularization were the enemies of Catholicism, yet they also prompted the Church to deepen itself, how did this come about? What are the remedies that Marianist spirituality brought to bear on religious indifference?

Answer: the weapon of faith (This may seem like a weak weapon against the world where the enemies of God are so numerous and so powerful but God does not fight like humanity does. For Marianists, “the clearest manifestation of this paradoxical strength of faith was the example of the gentle power of Mary” for she was not deceived by the beguiling glamour of evil (p. 65).

3. Looking at the current balance of secularization and faith in your own country, how would you evaluate the role of religion?

Is there a separation of Church and State? How does that hurt or help the faith of the people?

4. Marianist spirituality calls us to acquire an “interior spirit” (p. 68). Describe what steps Marianist with an interior spirit might take to revive the faith of your own country today. How can this be done without violence?

5. The first Marianists dedicated themselves to both forming faith communities and joining the new movement of education. In forming faith communities Chaminade saw that gentleness was “stronger than violence and force” and that “gentleness is not weakness” (p. 69).

What examples have you seen of the “contagion of goodness” in faith communities to which you have belonged?

When have these communities failed to exhibit a contagion of goodness?

6. There is a classic debate among Catholics and Protestants about the role of Mary in Catholic devotion. How does Chaminade reconcile faith in Christ with “Mary as the most salient point”?

Development of Marianist Spirituality After 1850

1. After 1850 the “Marianist lay communities had almost passed out of existence” while the Society of Mary “was expanding and improving its identity and competence as a prospering teaching congregation.” Which of the following do you think were most significant factors?
 - A. Marianist sodalities had been outlawed by the Revolution of 1830.
 - B. The Marian confraternities that took the place of sodalities were comprised of primarily older sodalists.
 - C. The culture supported new religious orders and the need to educate youth.
 - D. The nature and structure of religious life, including the vow of stability, gave more permanence to religious orders.
 - E. Gifted Marianist educators like Jean Baptiste Lalanne inspired followers.
 - F. Other.

Do you think it was good, bad, or necessary that this transition occurred?

2. The Constitutions of 1839 of the Society of Mary defined *education* broadly to include “all the means of implanting and developing the faith of Christians from cradle to the grave.” Thus it would not be limited to the traditional sense of teaching in schools but would include forming sodalities. Do you think this definition helped or hurt the Marianist mission?
3. Two educational concepts became associated with Marianist education (pp. 85-86):
 - A. The Society of Mary teaches only in order to educate!
 - B. Marianist education links faith of mind with faith of heart.

What has been your experience of how Marianist education today applies these principles?

4. Joseph Simler, fourth superior general of the SM, is credited with the following two major contributions to Marianist spirituality. Which do you think was more important (p. 88):
 - A. Raising awareness of special devotion to Mary through filial piety
 - B. Rehabilitating the reputation of Father Chaminade
5. One of Father Chaminade’s maxims was “Love to be unknown and to be esteemed as nothing.” Although the humility prompted by this love for the “hidden life” is laudable do you think that today is this wise or foolish? What are some advantages and disadvantages of working in a quiet, self-effacing way to change the world and the church?
6. Perhaps more than any other Marianist writer, Simler raised piety to the level of supernatural virtue. He talks about piety of the natural order (affection among family members), divine piety (within the Trinity), and filial piety (the relationship of Christ to Mary). He understood the vow of stability to be a “vow of filial piety toward Mary.” But Simler’s Constitution of 1891 also says the Society of Mary has “but one object in view, namely the most faithful imitation of Jesus Christ, Son of God become Son of Mary, for the salvation of mankind”

(pp. 92-97). Do you think these are one and the same or does the Constitutional version weaken the focus on Mary? Which do you prefer?

How do you understand the terms “vow of stability” and “filial piety”?

If you were to observe a Marianist living the “vow of stability” or “filial piety” what would it look like? What difference would it make in his/her life?

Whom do you know among Marianists that you think lives the vow of stability or filial piety well? Why?

6. Do you think the vow of stability adds significance to the Marianist commitment or, as Father Joseph Verrier states, “the consecration is complete without it since the SM and FMI are consecrated to Mary by the very fact of their religious profession and acceptance into the order (pp. 108-109). *You might find the critique of Father Benlloch in the appendix helpful in forming your opinion.*
7. Not everyone is a historian or writer. Suppose for a moment, however, that you have these gifts and interests. Which of the *Possible Paths for Future Study* seem most important to you or call to you?
 - A. The Spirituality of Twentieth Century Marianist Educators
 - B. Marianist Vocal Prayers
 - C. National Embodiments of Marianist Spirituality
 - D. System of Virtues
 - E. Rebirth of Marianist Lay Communities
 - F. Spirituality of Marianist Religious After Vatican II
 - G. History of Formation of Marianist Religious
 - H. Mary in Recent Marianist Spirituality
 - I. Marianist Spirituality Beyond Europe and North America
 - J. The French School of Spirituality
8. If you could give a new name to this book what would it be and why?