The Marist Way of Being a Catholic School

Part Three: Marist School with a Mission to a Secular Society

Before I focus specifically on Fr. Colin's vision of a Church with a Marian face, I want to reflect on how Catholic schools serve the mission of the Church, which is to evangelize the culture of every age.[1] The message (Gospel) the Church announces is that Jesus is Lord which is consistent with Marist spirituality that is Christ-centered. The Marist charism is not in competition with the Church but serves the Church's mission of evangelization.[2]

Some Catholics may be surprised to learn that Catholic schools are an expression of the mission of the Church, which is to evangelize the world. At first glance, that may come as a surprise since Marist School is a college-preparatory school. That does not change. As I have said previously, many schools can prepare students for college. The Church needs Catholic schools to teach youth how to be Catholic and, together with students from other Christian traditions, to be authentic Christians in an increasingly secular society. Catholic schools also need to equip students to advance the mission of the Church, which is to proclaim Jesus is Lord (evangelization).

The National Catholic Education Association describes the mission of Catholic education this way:

> The Church's teaching mission includes inviting young people to a relationship with Jesus Christ or deepening an existing relationship with Jesus, inserting young people into the life of the Church, and assisting young people to see and understand the role of faith in one's daily life and the larger society. "This unique Catholic identity makes our Catholic elementary and secondary schools 'schools for the human person' and allows them to fill a critical role in the future life of our Church, our country, and our world" (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1997).[3]

Fr. Colin described a Marist education as having a three-fold purpose:

1. To form students into strong and faithful disciples of Christ
2. To encourage and instruct them how to know and exercise their responsibilities and rights as honest and upright citizens useful to society.
3. To teach them the humanities, sciences, technical skills, critical thinking, and life skills.

Bishop Robert Barron, lamenting the decline of Catholic schools in the United States, commented,

> It is very, very bad news because the Catholic school system is essential to evangelization, the formation of the next generation of Catholics, and the foundation of

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[1] Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education: U.S. Province Schools and Sponsored Schools, Standard 1: #203 "By learning from Mary's presence in the early Church, the Marist mission is simply the evangelizing mission of the Church."

[2] Standards and Expectations of a Marist Education: U.S. Province Schools and Sponsored Schools, Standard 3: "They [Marist schools] should always be transparent in their dealings with others, especially the bishop, and see that thei work is a gift of the Spirit to the local Church. They should not create a "shadow Church."

[3] https://www.ncea.org/NSBECS/The_Standards/Mission_and_Catholic_Identity/NSBECS/Standards/Mission_and_Catholic_Identity.aspx?hkey=a2e11a75-29bd-4635-a6a1-f72e58a51bfa

> the culture and society. For the Catholic tradition to fade away from the culture, the culture will suffer. So, that's not just a minor kind of institutional hiccup. It's a major cultural problem…[4]

Noting Bishop Barron's connection between Catholic schools and evangelization, the document "*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 14) states,

> Evangelizing is, in fact, the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists to evangelize. (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 14)

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops expands on this basic principle:

> "The mission of evangelization is entrusted by Christ to his Church *to be carried out in all her forms of ministry, witness, and service*. By evangelizing, the Church seeks to bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus and strengthened by the sacraments, most especially the celebration of the Eucharist, they freely share that faith with others to transform the world.[5]

The Marist Way of proclaiming Jesus is Lord (evangelization) is described in my essay, "*The Marist Way of Promoting Social Justice, Part 7 - As if Hidden and Unknown in the World*." As shown in that essay, the Marist Way (strategy) of proclaiming Jesus is Lord is not "in your face" that some of us may associate with the word evangelization. I would add that our students proclaim Jesus is the Lord of their lives when they discern how their lives are to serve God's purposes in the world (vocation).

In addition to what I just said, the Marist Way of publicly proclaiming Jesus is Lord is to do so with the Church. This happens:

- Whenever the liturgy (word and sacraments) is celebrated, and prayers are said in Jesus' name.
- Where Catholic or Christian schools, hospitals, and orphanages are found,
- At Eucharistic Congresses and Corpus Christi processions,
- Wherever the reign of God (social justice) is advanced,
- When the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (service) are practiced,
- In the lives of Christian witnesses and saints.

That public witness does have an "in your face" tone to it in so far as it flies in the face of a secular mentality that believes we human beings are the lord of our lives.

The other public dimension of evangelization requires us to be able to answer questions about our faith and be able to explain it to an increasingly secular mindset. That is why our students must be learned in the faith (doctrine and morals) and see its connection to other disciplines. For example, a student from Marist should graduate without believing faith and science are incompatible or that faith is irrational.

Of course, this hinges on having a personal relationship with Christ that can best be described as walking in easy friendship with our Lord. Friendship with the Lord includes being a friend of the Church, the

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[4] Bishop Robert Barron, WordonFire.com, spoke about the Future of Catholic Schools, which was recorded on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTPRcb35I9I.

[5] Go and Make Disciples, A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States, *1990"*

Body of Christ. That requires making peace with the Church for its sinfulness, pointing out where legitimate reform is needed, and balancing its obvious failings with the recognition that the Church is not only made up of sinners but also saints.

No one is drawn to play basketball by only watching those players who fail by missing baskets, dribbling erratically, and fouling out within minutes of getting into the game. Athletes will want to play basketball by imitating those players who excel at playing the game. They want to be like them. That applies to all sports and all careers and professions. We see those who are the best at what they do. They inspire us to follow in their footsteps and be our best.

Consequently, we should not look at only those who fail at living the Christian life through personal weakness or indifference and conclude the Church is failing at producing Christians or is only filled with hypocrites. Instead, we should look at the beauty of the saintly lives of those who remain in the Church or who make up the communion of saints in heaven. Then, go and do likewise.

As I mentioned in my previous reflection, when we are baptized, we become members of the family of God. Each member of God's family is to help the other members grow in holiness and assist them on their earthly pilgrimage, which is meant to be with God in heaven. We are not only recipients of the graces God gives us through the Church. We are to be conduits of God's grace (love) by actively helping the Church, beginning with our families, including the community of believers, to grow in holiness and one day be with God in heaven. For more about the relationship between the Marist spirituality and the Church, go to this essay: *"The Marist Way of Worship, Part 5: Where Will You Find the Marists? In the Church, the Body of Christ."*

These are some key components of a Marist Catholic education: mission, evangelization, sacraments, prayer, Church, friendship with the Lord, advancing the reign of God (social justice), and service. I will treat ecumenism and interreligious dialogue as important components in future reflections.

However, I have yet to talk about Mary, the mother of God. Neither have I talked about how Fr. Colin's vision for a Church with a Marian face distinguishes a Marist Catholic School from other Catholic schools. I suppose you can say I have saved the best until the last. That will be the focus of the following reflection.