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**Abstract**

This paper proposes a Marial framework for Marist formation grounded in the mystical movements of **Call, Ponder, and Response**. Drawing on biblical theology, classical mysticism, and the French School of Spirituality, it argues that formation is not primarily preparation for ministry but a participation in divine life. Central to this process is **pondering**—the active discipline of *naming, treasuring, and waiting*—through which faith deepens into hope and vocation matures in interior freedom.

Mary's journey, especially her listening at the Cross and her prayerful presence in the Cenacle, reveals waiting as a transformative mode of discipleship. In her, contemplation and mission converge: the mystic becomes the prophet, and receptive love becomes apostolic availability. For the Marist tradition, the triad of Call–Ponder–Response forms a recurring rhythm that shapes the whole of consecrated life. To walk in the way of Mary is to let God's slow, hidden work form the heart for service.

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## Introduction

The expression *In the Way of Mary* invites us to reflect on the profound intersection between mystical theology and formation practice within the Marist tradition. It seeks to articulate not merely a devotional imitation of Mary, but a spiritual methodology—a way of formation rooted in her experience of faith, hope, and love.

While this reflection emerges from within the Marist tradition, its underlying concern is not confined to a single charism. The question of how persons are formed in faith—how they come to recognise, receive, and respond to God’s self-communication—is central to all Christian life. In this sense, formation is always more than institutional preparation; it is a participation in the mystery of God’s transforming presence.

It is precisely here that Mary’s significance becomes universal. Her journey—marked by listening, pondering, and responding—reveals a pattern of discipleship that is not limited to one tradition but expresses the very structure of Christian life. The Marian pathway explored here is therefore offered not only as a contribution to Marist formation, but as a lens through which the wider Church might reflect on formation as a mystical and relational process grounded in the ordinary yet open to divine transformation.

In the formative journey of those discerning Marist religious life, the question is not simply how values or knowledge are transmitted, but how a person is accompanied through a process of spiritual awakening, transformation, and integration—a process that, I suggest, follows the same mystical pattern we discern in the life of Mary.

The Constitutions of the Marist Brothers remind us that the purpose of the pre-novitiate—both aspirancy and postulancy—is to help the candidate come to a deeper knowledge of self, to listen attentively to the Spirit, and to discern whether they possess the dispositions required to live as a Marist Brother.<sup>1</sup> This threefold dynamic—knowledge, listening, and discernment—is itself profoundly Marial. It mirrors the spiritual posture of the one who ‘kept all these things and pondered them in her heart’ (Luke 2:19, 51). The invitation to live in the way of Mary arises within what Karl Rahner calls the mysticism of everyday life—that deep awareness of God’s self-communication within the ordinary. Mysticism, in this sense, is not an esoteric privilege but the full flowering of baptismal grace. Formation, therefore, is not the cultivation of the exceptional but the deepening of the ordinary: the discovery of divine presence woven through the small fidelities of daily life.<sup>2</sup> Formation, in other words, is not primarily a pedagogical system; it is a mystical process—a journey of conversion that is human, Christian, and Marist in its contours.

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<sup>1</sup> Marist Brothers, *Constitutions and Statutes of the Marist Brothers*, C66, Rome: Casa Generalizia dei Fratelli Maristi delle Scuole, 2020, 44.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 7, trans. David Bourke, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1969, 15.



## Formation as Mystical Process

From the earliest centuries, Christian mysticism has been understood as the gradual transformation of the person in love. Clement of Alexandria spoke of faith ripening into divine knowledge; Origen described the soul's ascent through purification, illumination, and union; and Dionysius the Areopagite gave voice to the *via negativa*—the reverent unknowing that leads to communion with God beyond concepts. The Desert Fathers and Mothers lived this mystery in radical simplicity, embodying the truth that to seek God is to become love. Evelyn Underhill, the early-twentieth-century mystic and scholar, gathered this lineage into a vision of the spiritual life as 'the ordered movement toward perfect consummation with the God of love'.

When we speak of formation in the Marist context, we are speaking about a path toward that same union. For Underhill, mysticism is not an extraordinary or esoteric phenomenon, but 'an authentic life process'. It is a transformation of the whole person—intellect, emotion, and will—into greater conformity with divine reality.<sup>3</sup>

Underhill's *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, published in 1911, remains a classic precisely because it insists that mysticism is a human vocation, not a privileged exception. It is the fullest flowering of what grace intends for every Christian life: union with God through love.<sup>4</sup> Mysticism, in this sense, is an active process involving the whole person. It is animated by love, directed toward what is spiritual, and always transformative. Underhill lists five hallmarks of authentic mysticism: it is active, it seeks the spiritual, it is explained only by love, it brings about a transformed life, and it is never self-seeking. These hallmarks likewise serve as indicators of an authentic Marist formative process—one that seeks not to produce mere functionaries, but to accompany the growth of true disciples.

In the context of Marist formation, this perspective reframes the postulancy—indeed, the whole of one's consecrated life—as a laboratory of mysticism. It is not merely an introduction to community life or religious discipline; it is a space where the person in formation learns to perceive their life as a dialogue with God—to hear the question Jesus asks in John's Gospel: 'What do you seek?' (John 1:38).<sup>5</sup>

When formation is understood through the lens of mysticism, this question of seeking becomes, in the light of love, a question of desire—a transformation that moves the heart

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<sup>3</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, London: Methuen, 1911, 81–82.

<sup>4</sup> See Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, New York: Crossroad, 1991, 1–3, on mysticism as the normal consciousness of God's presence in Christian life.

<sup>5</sup> As Paul Creevy fms notes (drawing also on John T. Ford's commentary on John), the Johannine question evolves across the Gospel—from 'What are you looking for?' (John 1:38) to 'Whom are you looking for?' (John 18:4–7; 20:15). This progression reveals a deepening of vocation: the movement from seeking a *what* to encountering a *who*—the personal, relational call to communion with Christ himself. See also John T. Ford, 'The Gospel of John', in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 9. Nashville: Abingdon, 1995.

from seeking *what* to discovering *who* it is that calls. Desire, in this context, expresses the deepening of the search—the movement from curiosity to communion, from knowing about God to yearning for union with God.

Priest and spiritual writer, José Tolentino Mendonça, reminds us in *The Mysticism of the Present Moment: Embodied Spirituality*, ‘desire is not something that is satisfied, but something that deepens’.<sup>6</sup> This is a critical insight for formation: desire orients, purifies, and moves the person in formation to an ever more intense and expansive experience of encounter with God. Hence, the task is the continual deepening of human experience and of personal encounter with God. In this way, formation helps each person to recognise that their deepest longings find their true meaning only when directed toward God. Formation, therefore, becomes an accompaniment in this continual deepening of desire and understanding of the experience of God’s love.

### **Mary’s Life as a Mystical Paradigm**

If mysticism is the authentic pattern of spiritual maturation, Mary’s life offers the archetype of how such a process unfolds in human history. Her journey, traced through the Gospels, reveals a dynamic correspondence with Underhill’s stages of the mystical life: awakening, purification, illumination, and union.

In Mary, awakening takes the form of a call—the Annunciation, where divine initiative and human openness meet. Purification is expressed in her pondering—the long interior journey through uncertainty, misunderstanding, and waiting. Illumination emerges in her responses—in the Visitation, in Cana, at the Cross, and finally in the Cenacle, where she becomes the contemplative heart of the emerging Church.<sup>7</sup> Union, for Mary, is not an abstraction; it is embodied in her motherhood and her discipleship. She bears the Word in her flesh and again in her faith.

As José Tolentino Mendonça notes, drawing on the striking insight of Michel de Certeau, a mystic is someone ‘who cannot stop walking’.<sup>8</sup> Mary embodies this truth. Her life is not a static receptivity, but a continual movement deeper into God’s mystery. From Nazareth to Ain Karim, from Bethlehem to Egypt, from Calvary to the Cenacle, Mary’s faith is always in motion—listening, responding, and walking into the unknown with trust. She reveals that mysticism is not withdrawal, but journey; not escape, but accompaniment. Mary

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<sup>6</sup> José Tolentino Mendonça, *The Mysticism of the Present Moment: Embodied Spirituality*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2021, 83.

<sup>7</sup> The synthesis developed here draws together Lukan and Johannine portrayals of Mary. While these traditions differ in emphasis—Luke highlighting Mary’s contemplative faith, John presenting her at Cana and at the foot of the Cross—they offer complementary insights when read theologically rather than strictly exegetically.

<sup>8</sup> José Tolentino Mendonça, *The Mysticism of the Present Moment*, 24. This phrase rooted in de Certeau’s broader understanding of spirituality as an ongoing, embodied journey.



is the mystic who walks, and her walking becomes the path by which God draws her ever more fully into divine life.

Thus, Mary's life is not merely exemplary; it is mystagogical (from Greek *mystagōgikos*, 'leading into the mystery'), inviting the faithful into the salvific mystery of Christ through her *fiat* and ongoing intercession.<sup>9</sup> It teaches us how God forms the soul through the movements that I will later describe as *Call*, *Ponder*, and *Response*.

From her initial 'yes' at the Annunciation, through her pondering of the mystery of her Son's life, Mary is gradually drawn into deeper participation in the divine mystery. This journey reaches its fullest expression as she stands at the foot of the Cross—the place where her long pondering comes to a moment of piercing clarity. There, amid suffering and apparent defeat, Mary begins to perceive the full consequence of her first 'yes': the cost and the magnitude of the divine plan to which she consented. Though the mystery of resurrection remains veiled, its promise is already implicit in her faith. At the Cross, Mary's assent matures into understanding; her discipleship becomes the contemplative acceptance of love's final depth—the threshold of a faith that will soon give birth to hope.

### **The Marial Mystical Triad: Call, Ponder, and Response**

Standing at that threshold, we can now trace within Mary's journey three movements that shape a pathway of formation—Call, Ponder, and Response. These three movements form what we might call the Marial mystical triad: the dynamic by which faith becomes hope, and hope flowers into love. These movements reveal the rhythm of her discipleship and the pattern by which God forms the soul in love. To walk *in the way of Mary* is to allow this same rhythm to shape our own formation, as we learn to see, to dwell with, and to act in the light of God's transforming presence.

Before we turn to the three Marial movements that shape this formative pathway—Call, Ponder, and Response—it is helpful to recall a parallel insight from the French School of Spirituality. Fr Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–1657), one of its principal figures, described the Christian life as unfolding through three attitudes: Adoration—to have Jesus before our eyes; Communion—to have Jesus in our hearts; and Cooperation—to have Jesus in our hands.<sup>10</sup> These movements outline the rhythm by which Christ is contemplated, received, and served, and they illuminate the same interior dynamic that characterises Mary's discipleship. Her life

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. 1. 'Seeing the Form', San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982, 327–329, where Mary is described as the transparent form of the Church and the archetype of discipleship; see also *Lumen Gentium*, no. 56, on her free cooperation in redemption, and *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 7, on her graced role in the 'fullness of time'.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Jacques Olier, *Introduction to the Christian Life and Virtues*, trans. A. P. Roche, London: R. Washbourne, 1878, 46–48; see also Henri Brémond, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, Vol. 2, London: Burns & Oates, 1928, 254–256. Olier's method epitomises the French School of Spirituality, whose influence extended to the founders of the Marist family in the nineteenth century.

becomes the living embodiment of this movement: she adores in receptivity, communes through pondering, and cooperates in love. Seen in this light, the Marial pattern of Call, Ponder, and Response offers a pathway of formation in which contemplation, communion, and mission flow together as one continuous act of love. This same rhythm, translated into Marian experience, becomes the formative pathway through which faith becomes hope, and hope flowers into love.

### **Call – Faith: To have Jesus before our eyes**

Every journey of formation begins in the grace of a call. For Mary, this was the angel's greeting—an unexpected irruption of divine possibility into ordinary life. Her 'yes' at the Annunciation reveals faith as the first movement of the mystical path: the courage to receive what one does not yet understand. In the same way, those in formation are invited to recognise that God's initiative always precedes their response. Faith opens the eyes of the heart; it invites the person in formation to see as God sees—to trust the promise of a future not yet revealed. In this first movement, formation teaches us to stand before God's call in humility and wonder, echoing Mary's words, 'Here I am' (Luke 1:38).

### **Ponder – Hope: To have Jesus in our hearts**

The second movement, Ponder, unfolds in the quiet interior space where faith matures into hope. Mary's pondering is not a passive reflection but an active engagement with mystery—a patient holding of questions before God. She 'treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart' (Luke 2:19), allowing time, silence, and prayer to transform uncertainty into insight.

Mary's pondering, however, is not without joy. Her consent to God's call begins with Gabriel's greeting—'Rejoice'—and flowers in the Magnificat's song of praise. The joy born in her heart is not a fleeting emotion but the quiet radiance of one who knows herself held in love. In the Marist journey, contemplation likewise matures into a joy that is gentle yet enduring—the fruit of nearness to the Word within.

This Marian movement of interior reflection finds deep resonance with Fr Jean-Jacques Olier's second attitude of the Christian life—Communion, to have Jesus in our hearts. In Olier's vision, the Christian life is shaped by an interior indwelling: Christ received, welcomed, and allowed to live and act within the believer. Pondering names the way this indwelling is received, held, and allowed to mature within the believer over time. Here, I understand pondering as the movement *to name, to treasure, and to wait*—an interior attentiveness by which the Word received is gradually recognised, held in love, and allowed to come to fruition in understanding.



For those in formation, this becomes the contemplative discipline of waiting: the willingness to live with incompleteness and to let desire deepen rather than be prematurely satisfied. To name is to recognise the traces of God's presence; to treasure is to hold them in reverent love; and to wait is to entrust their meaning to God's unfolding in time. In this way, pondering becomes the lived expression of communion—the space in which Christ is received inwardly and allowed to take shape within the heart. In this space of pondering, hope takes root—not as optimism or wishful thinking, but as trust in God's hidden work continuing beneath the surface of ordinary experience.

As Philip Van Linden writes,

What began in the Jerusalem temple ends on the cross in Jerusalem as the fruit of Jesus' growing in wisdom, age, and grace. Although Mary did not grasp what he said to them, through her contemplation she would come to be among those few trusting ones who would gather in Jerusalem, devoting themselves to constant prayer.<sup>11</sup>

Van Linden's insight captures the spiritual evolution of Mary's pondering—a movement from not-understanding toward steadfast faith, from questioning to persevering prayer. Pondering leads to perseverance; waiting leads to wisdom.<sup>12</sup>

In this movement, formation cultivates interiority—teaching the person in formation the art of holy waiting that prepares the heart for understanding. Through such patient attentiveness, the soul learns to hope, to listen, and to be transformed.

### **Response – Love: To have Jesus in our hands**

The final movement, Response, completes the rhythm of grace as love made active. Mary's love, born of faith and purified through pondering, expresses itself in action—first as she 'goes in haste' (Luke 1:39) to serve Elizabeth, then as she stands steadfast at the Cross, and finally as she prays with the disciples in the Cenacle awaiting the Spirit. Across these moments, her love is courageous, steadfast, and generative. It is a love that does not retreat from suffering, but expands into mission sustained by prayer.

For those in formation, response is the fruit of interior transformation: what has been seen and contemplated now becomes service. Love impels the disciple to act, not out of obligation but from the overflowing joy of encounter. In this third movement, the mystic

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<sup>11</sup> Philip Van Linden, *Mary, Mother of the Lord, Icon of the Church*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013, 89. Van Linden's reflection is grounded in Luke's Gospel rather than John's. The reference to Mary 'not grasping' Jesus' words recalls Luke 2:50 (the finding of the boy Jesus in the Temple) and links forward to the Cross (Luke 23:44–49) and Mary's presence in prayer with the disciples (Acts 1:14).

<sup>12</sup> See also David Fleming, SM, *See How They Love One Another: The Spirit of the Society of Mary*, St Louis: Marist Fathers, 1989, 56–59, who describes formation as accompaniment in the rhythm of grace.

becomes the prophet<sup>13</sup>—contemplation gives birth to proclamation, and vocation finds its apostolic expression. The candidate learns that contemplation and action, silence and mission, are not opposites, but complementary expressions of the same love that once moved Mary to say ‘yes’ and that continues to move the Church, alive in the Spirit, into the world.

### **The Rhythm of Grace and the Space Between: Toward a Theology of Waiting**

Taken together, these three movements—Call, Ponder, and Response—reveal the inner rhythm of Mary’s discipleship and offer a template for Marist formation. Each movement unfolds into the next: faith awakens the call, hope deepens through pondering, and love matures in response. In this rhythm of grace, formation becomes both mystical and practical—a participation in God’s own dynamic of invitation, reflection, and mission. To walk in the way of Mary is to live this continual flow between interiority and action, contemplation and proclamation. Yet this journey is never hurried. Between the call that stirs the heart and the response that sends us forth lies the long, transformative space of waiting—the space where hope learns to listen and love gains depth. It is to this essential dimension of formation that we now turn: the theology of waiting.

### **The Theology of Waiting**

Between the call that awakens faith and the response that embodies love lies the quiet, necessary interval of waiting. In the spiritual life, this interval is not a pause between two active moments but a space of formation in itself—a sacred middle where God continues to speak, often in silence. Waiting is not inactivity but a form of listening—an attunement to the slow rhythm of grace. In this sense, waiting becomes the atmosphere where hope listens and faith grows receptive.

Scripture teaches that waiting is woven into every authentic encounter with God. Abraham waits for the promise, the people of Israel wait through the wilderness for forty years before receiving the covenant on Sinai, Israel waits again in exile, the prophets wait for redemption, and Mary waits—through pregnancy, through silence, through loss. Her entire discipleship is marked by the willingness to dwell within divine time rather than human

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<sup>13</sup> The phrase ‘the mystic becomes the prophet’ reflects a long-standing insight within Christian mystical theology: authentic mystical experience naturally overflows into prophetic witness. As Karl Rahner observed, ‘The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all’, a mysticism that is inseparable from mission (*Theological Investigations*, Vol. 7, 15). This integration of contemplation and proclamation is also evident in the Carmelite tradition—notably in John of the Cross and Teresa of Ávila—where union with God impels service to others. Modern writers such as Evelyn Underhill and Thomas Merton have likewise emphasised that true mysticism bears fruit in active love and witness. In this sense, Mary’s journey from contemplative disciple to apostolic presence in the Cenacle exemplifies the transformation by which the mystic becomes the prophet.



urgency.<sup>14</sup> In her, waiting becomes a school of listening: a discipline of trust, a posture of availability, a readiness to receive the Word again and again.

For Marist formation—and more broadly for Christian formation—this theology of waiting has profound implications. The candidate, too, must learn to live in the interval—between hearing the call and knowing the full shape of their response. Formation requires patience with God’s unfolding work: the courage to remain open, to listen deeply, and to allow grace to mature at its own pace. To wait is to become aware of the time necessary to hear and to be transformed by what is heard. It is a reminder that growth in vocation is never hurried; it ripens in the stillness where the Spirit’s voice becomes audible.

Waiting, therefore, is not a deficiency to be overcome, but a virtue to be embraced. It teaches the rhythm of receptivity: to receive life, to receive others, to receive God. In this waiting, Mary becomes our model and companion—not because she understood everything, but because she listened to the One who did. Her quiet fidelity at the Cross and her persevering prayer in the Cenacle reveal waiting as an act of attentive love, an active readiness for the coming of the Spirit.

### **Mary at the Cross and in the Cenacle: The Maturity of Waiting**

If waiting is the atmosphere of faith, then Mary’s waiting at the Cross and in the Cenacle reveals its mature form. At the Cross, waiting becomes a pierced listening—a fidelity that remains open to God even as the mystery wounds. In the Cenacle, it becomes communal attentiveness to the Spirit. Between these two moments, we glimpse the full horizon of Christian waiting—a faith that listens through loss and a love that anticipates new life.

John’s Gospel portrays Mary standing by the Cross, silent yet profoundly attentive. Her posture is not one of passive endurance but of contemplative listening. In this moment, the memory of Cana gently resurfaces: the first sign in John’s Gospel began with her invitation to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you’ (John 2:5). At the foot of the Cross—the place of the final and fullest sign—that instruction is not only fulfilled but deepened. Now Mary herself stands in the listening she once asked of others, her words at Cana echoing quietly within the scene. She does not flee from the darkness or seek to explain it away; she remains, open to the Word spoken even in the silence of suffering. Here, waiting is stripped of sentimentality. It becomes communion through listening—to stand with, to attend with, to believe with. In this stillness of faith, Mary listens into the mystery of redemption. Her listening holds space for revelation: the Word made flesh now speaks in silence, and she receives it in her heart as she did at the Annunciation. Her *fiat* echoes still—not in words, but in presence.

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<sup>14</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Meditations on the Church*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989, 1–3. De Lubac presents Mary as the contemplative image of the Church who listens within divine time—a living sign of the Church’s patient receptivity to God’s Word unfolding in history.

## In the Way of Mary

This Marian waiting reaches its transformation in the Cenacle. There, in the upper room, the same woman who once stood beneath the Cross now listens again—this time with others. Her listening, sustained through the silence of Holy Saturday, opens into the song of Pentecost. Luke tells us that the disciples ‘devoted themselves to constant prayer, together with Mary the mother of Jesus’ (Acts 1:14). Her solitary attentiveness becomes shared expectation; her maternal presence gathers the community into a listening posture, ready for the Spirit’s breath. At the Cross, she listens in sorrow; in the Cenacle, she listens in hope. The two moments are inseparable: the silence of Good Friday matures into the speech of Pentecost.

For those in formation, Mary’s posture in these two sacred spaces offers a profound model of vocational waiting. The Cross teaches deep listening—the willingness to remain open amid confusion and pain, to discern God’s voice in silence. Here the memory of Cana returns with new significance. The first sign began with Mary’s instruction, ‘Do whatever he tells you’, and now, standing with her at the foot of the Cross, those words become our own summons. As we pray beside Mary, we too are invited to listen to him speaking from the Cross—through silence, surrender, and love. The Cenacle teaches communal listening—the shared readiness to receive and respond together to the Spirit’s prompting. Together these two spaces reveal that waiting is both cruciform and paschal: a movement from silence to song, from hearing to proclaiming.

Mary’s waiting thus becomes the paradigm of mature faith. She embodies the truth that love listens before it speaks, and that listening is the highest form of fidelity. In her, we learn that formation—and indeed all Christian life—unfolds in divine time: the slow, faithful rhythm of those who listen, who wait, and who are finally filled with the Spirit’s fire.

### **The Stillness Where Love Ripens: Synthesis of the Theology of Waiting**

In Mary, waiting becomes the crucible of transformation—the stillness where love ripens into fidelity and hope matures into vision. From Nazareth to Calvary, from the empty tomb to the Cenacle, her life reveals that divine time moves differently from human time. The promise spoken at the Annunciation unfolds not in haste but through patient trust, each silence preparing the way for new grace. Her waiting is not delay but participation in God’s own rhythm—the eternal patience of love bringing creation to fulfilment.

For those on the formative path, this insight is both consoling and demanding. Waiting tests the authenticity of vocation; it unmask false urgency and teaches the posture of receptivity. It forms in the person in formation a contemplative heart—one capable of dwelling in the tension between call and fulfilment, between longing and joy. The mystery of waiting is thus inseparable from the rhythm of Call, Ponder, and Response. It is the silent interval that holds these movements together, the breathing space of grace in which the soul learns to trust the slow work of God.



To walk in the way of Mary is therefore to embrace this divine tempo—to live formation as a journey that cannot be rushed, because it is God who forms the heart. Out of such waiting, love is purified and mission is born. The heart that has learned to wait becomes the heart ready to serve. And when the time is fulfilled, as in the upper room, the Spirit descends upon those who have waited—transforming waiting into witness, contemplation into action, and seekers into disciples.

### **Mission in the Spirit: Mystical Action and Marist Vocation**

All true formation finds its fulfilment not in completion but in mission. The end of the mystical path is not escape from the world but renewed engagement with it—to love as God loves, to serve as God serves. In this sense, the fruit of formation is not perfection but participation: a sharing in God’s own creative and redemptive activity within history. What begins as the quiet listening of faith and matures in the patient waiting of hope becomes, in love, an apostolic impulse—a life lived in the Spirit for the sake of others.

Mary’s journey, culminating in the Cenacle, reveals this movement with luminous clarity. The one who first conceived the Word in her womb now conceives the Church in prayer. Her contemplative fidelity becomes the womb of apostolic life. When the Spirit descends at Pentecost, it is into the space her presence has helped prepare—a community gathered, waiting, and ready to be sent. Mary does not speak; she simply is—a living epiclesis, a silent invocation of the Spirit. Her mission is her presence: receptive, generative, and empowering.

As Dyckman and Carroll remind us, ‘The mystic becomes the prophet’<sup>15</sup>—contemplation becomes communion. The movement from contemplation to proclamation is the natural fruit of love’s maturity. In Mary, this transformation is revealed at Pentecost: the one who waited in silence now abides in the community that will speak the Word to the world. The prophetic dimension of mysticism thus completes the formative cycle—for to be drawn into God is to be sent for others.

For Marist life, this is not an ideal to be admired, but a pattern to be lived. It is important to note that the pattern of Call, Ponder, and Response is not a linear progression but a living fractal—a rhythm that repeats within every stage of growth. Each new call contains its own moment of pondering and response, revealing that formation is a lifelong unfolding of grace. In this way, the journey in the way of Mary is dynamic, never static: always returning to the beginning, yet always moving deeper into communion.

The Marist vocation, as the Marist Constitutions remind us, is to be ‘hidden and unknown in the world’, yet profoundly generative—to make the presence of Jesus real in the

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<sup>15</sup> K. Dyckman and L. Carroll, *Inviting the Mystic, Supporting the Prophet*, New York: Paulist Press, 1981, 42.

midst of ordinary life through the spirit of Mary.<sup>16</sup> This requires a spirituality that is both contemplative and apostolic, rooted in prayer yet oriented toward service. The mystic's interior transformation must naturally unfold into the prophet's compassionate action.<sup>17</sup> In this way, mission becomes the outward expression of the inner life of God—a continuation of the Incarnation in time and place.

Mystical action, therefore, is not activity energised by self, but love made visible through the indwelling Spirit. It is the action that arises when one has waited long enough to receive, and received deeply enough to give. It is what Marcellin Champagnat envisioned for his brothers—men who would be 'strong in faith, gentle in manner, and apostolic in zeal',<sup>18</sup> contemplatives in action who reveal God's tenderness through presence, simplicity, and service. To act in the way of Mary is to embody this rhythm of availability: to surrender gratefully, to rest assuredly, and to love completely.

In the end, mission in the Spirit is the transformation of waiting into witness. The one who has pondered becomes the one who acts; the one who has received becomes the one who gives. This rhythm lies at the heart of Marist life, capturing the mystical journey in a practical pattern: to surrender gratefully is the act of faith, keeping one's eyes fixed on Christ; to rest assuredly is the act of hope, keeping one's heart open to the Spirit; and to love completely is the act of charity, keeping one's hands ready for service.<sup>19</sup> In this integration, mysticism and mission meet, and formation becomes vocation—the continual unfolding of God's love through lives that have learned to wait, to trust, and to respond.

### **Formation that supports Participation in Divine Life: Integrated Vision**

Every stage of this journey—Call, Ponder, and Response—reveals that formation, in the Marist sense, is ordered toward participation in the mystery of God's own life. Within this dynamic, formation is never merely preparatory; it orients one's life. It is itself a sharing in the mystery it seeks to serve. The goal is not to produce mere functionaries but to nurture persons

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<sup>16</sup> The expression 'hidden and unknown in the world' appears in the *Constitutions of the Marist Brothers* (1984), C4, where it characterises the Marist vocation as shaped by Mary's humility, simplicity, and quiet presence. The phrase reflects an earlier and broader Marist intuition found across the Marist family—especially in the writings of Jean-Claude Colin and the early Marist Fathers—who understood the Marist mission as imitating Mary's unobtrusive, Nazareth-like presence in the Church.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, New York: Doubleday, 1971, 49–53, on the inseparability of contemplation and mission.

<sup>18</sup> *Water from the Rock: Marist Spirituality Flowing in the Tradition of Marcellin Champagnat*, Rome: Marist Brothers, 2007, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Marcellin Champagnat's spiritual practice illustrates this dynamic: his frequent, humble visits to the Blessed Sacrament nourished a deep interiority that translated into the founding of countless schools and the daily ministry to children. Pope John Paul II underscored this integration, noting that Marcellin was 'captivated by the love of Jesus and Mary' and thus 'proclaimed the Gospel with a burning heart' (*Homily at the Canonisation of Marcellin Benoît Champagnat, Giovanni Calabria, and Agostina Livia Pietrantoni*. Pope John Paul II, 18 April 1999).



who, like Mary, live from the heart of God—where receiving, waiting, and responding flow together in one continuous act of love.

When understood in this way, formation becomes an environment of communion. It draws the whole person—intellect, emotion, and will—into an integrated response to grace. It is not primarily about mastery of content or conformity to rule, but about cultivating availability to the Spirit. The formator, therefore, is not a supervisor of progress but a companion in discernment, one who, like Mary, ‘ponders all these things’ and helps another to read the movements of God within their own experience. Such accompaniment honours the gradual pace of grace and the sacred uniqueness of each vocation.

In this integrated vision, mysticism and mission are no longer opposed but mutually inclusive. The same Spirit who leads the candidate inward in contemplation sends them outward in service. The silence that teaches them to listen for God also teaches them to listen to others. The transformation that deepens one’s love of God expands the capacity for fraternity and compassion. Formation thus becomes a participation in the Trinitarian movement of love itself—a rhythm of receiving and giving, contemplation and action.<sup>20</sup>

In the spirituality of the French School, this participation is profoundly Trinitarian—a call to live so that ‘God is all in all’.<sup>21</sup> To be formed in the way of Mary is to be drawn into this divine rhythm of giving and receiving, the circulation of love that unites Father, Son, and Spirit. Formation, then, is not preparation for function but participation in divine life itself.

To be formed in the way of Mary is to discover that holiness is not achieved through effort but through consent. Mary’s life demonstrates that the human heart can become the dwelling place of divine life when it remains open, receptive, and responsive. Formation in this sense supports participation in that divine indwelling: it teaches the art of staying with God’s work until it bears fruit. Such formation is both deeply mystical and profoundly practical—mystical, because it awakens awareness of God’s presence at the core of being; practical, because it expresses that presence through concrete love and service.

Ultimately, formation that supports participation in divine life invites us to live as Mary lived—in quiet availability to grace, attentive to the Spirit’s movements, and ready to respond with courage and tenderness. It calls us to be contemplatives in action, people whose presence communicates God’s nearness through simplicity, humility, and compassion. In this way, formation is not merely a stage on the path to vocation but an enduring posture of discipleship—a lifelong apprenticeship in love, a continual participation in the mystery of God’s own life unfolding within us and, through us, for the world.

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<sup>20</sup> See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, New York: Crossroad, 1997, 11–14, and *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 7, 15, for the theological basis of human participation in divine life.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Meditations on the Church*, 1–3.

### **Conclusion: In the Way of Mary**

As we come to the end of this reflection, we return to where we began: to the image of Mary, the first disciple and the model of all formation. Her life reveals that the path to maturity in faith is always a path of relationship—a dialogue between divine initiative and human response. She teaches us that the call of God is heard in simplicity, that understanding is born of pondering, that love is proven in waiting, and that mission flows from the Spirit's indwelling presence.

In Mary, we see the entire formative journey condensed into a single attitude of the heart: 'Be it done unto me according to your word' (Luke 1:38). Her 'yes' continues to echo through the life of the Church and through every Marist community that seeks to make her presence visible in the world. To walk in the way of Mary is to allow that yes to become our own—to consent, again and again, to God's creative work within us and through us.

For the formator, this vision transforms pedagogy. Formation becomes less a programme of instruction than an accompaniment in awakening—helping each person recognise the mysticism already present in daily life. To form in the way of Mary is to accompany another in learning to see: to perceive the traces of God hidden in ordinariness, and to let those glimpses of grace shape one's whole response to the world.

This is the essence of Marist formation and, more broadly, the heart of Christian mysticism: to live in continual availability to the Spirit of love. The Marian rhythm of Call, Ponder, and Response names a pathway that extends beyond any one tradition, inviting all disciples into a life shaped by attentive listening, patient waiting, and generous response. In a world restless for outcomes, Mary invites us to rediscover the slow fruitfulness of grace—to believe that God's most powerful work is often hidden, silent, and unseen. And so we end as we began: in gratitude for the mystery of a God who forms us gently, patiently, and completely—until Christ is formed in us, and through us, in the world.