

A love affair in the Dutch Reformed Church: a reflection¹

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Abstract

As a community of silence, solitude and prayer, and a place of learning and formation the Andrew Murray Centre for Spirituality (AMCS) is a remarkable institution in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). In this article it will be studied from the perspective of spirituality, understood as an academic discipline. The leading question is how the AMCS can find its own way of learning as distinct from the learning in seminaries and local communities of the DRC. The chapter starts with an insider's perspective of the AMCS which provides the context for the research question. Based on Waaijman's distinction of three main forms of spirituality, the AMCS will be considered as a school of spirituality in the Reformed tradition. The connection between Andrew Murray and Bernard of Clairvaux will guide the further exploration of a truly authentic way of learning of the AMCS within the Reformed tradition.

Keywords

Andrew Murray; Bernard of Clairvaux; spirituality and mysticism

Introduction

In February 2019 the Andrew Murray Centre for Spirituality [AMCS] in Wellington, South Africa, opened its doors. It presents itself as a community of silence, solitude, and prayer. The minutes of the Synod of the Western

1 This article is reflection of the author's experience at the Andrew Murray Centre for Spirituality combined with a study of mysticism greatly influenced/promoted by Bernard of Clairvaux, which has greatly influenced Andrew Murray's life. The author gratefully acknowledges the invitation as a research fellow from Stellenbosch University and a study leave granted by VU University Amsterdam.

Cape's executive committee show that the decision to proceed with the establishment of the AMCS was based on the vision to develop a missional spirituality that builds on the life and work of Andrew Murray based on the Reformed identity of the DRC.² This raises the question how the vision occurred. Unfortunately, the minutes do not provide any indication in this respect. The vision may have occurred in the process of discernment of various external and internal movements. Whatever happened in this process, the explicit references to Andrew Murray's "absolute dedication to and intimate alliance with God", and his "awareness of the need of the world" suggest that the decision to start a centre for spirituality is related to temporal, worldly needs rather than the desire for some kind of detached interiority, disengaged from the external world.³ In this respect it is not a far stretch to link the AMCS with the call for missional transformation by the General Synod of the DRC in its 2013 *Framework document on the missional nature and calling of the Dutch Reformed Church*. The decision of the Synod of the Western Cape may therefore be understood within the context of change in post-1994 South Africa (cf. Botha and Forster 2017).

Marais succinctly describes the changing situation with the example of Parow, a northern suburb of Cape Town, which evolved as a growing community with mixed colours and cultures while the membership of DRC congregations declined to less than a third of the numbers in the eighties (Marais 2017:71). In some remote communities of the Western Cape, the colour lines⁴ may be more geographically evident than in Parow. The challenges for the DRC, however, are similar. How do you find your way in the democratic South Africa as a Church that was planted in the wake of the Dutch East Indies Company, entangled with British colonialization, involved in apartheid, and now being in another social, political, and economic configuration while remaining an integral part of

2 Quoted from the Synod's decision 2016/16 [Translation by the author]. The original Afrikaans text is as follows: "... om 'n missionale spiritualiteit te ontwikkel wat voortbou op die lewe en werk van Andrew Murray vanuit die gereformeerde identiteit van die NG Kerk".

3 This distinction is from Philip Sheldrake (Sheldrake 2010:1).

4 Racial boundaries have various forms. The term "colour line" emphasises one particular obstacle for the DRC to become more inclusive in terms of race, which is the geographical separation of white, black, and coloured residents that is still visible in some communities.

the democratic South Africa? In many conversations with DRC ministers, a deep concern with the difficulty to become more diverse was evident. In the same article Marais also draws attention to “... the loss of political and cultural power in society – the so-called post-Christendom time” (Marais 2017:73). In this context, he raises the question for the DRC “How do we remove the deeply engrained desire for power?” (Marais 2017:73). As Marais observes, this question is closely related to the legacy of inequality and the current challenges of combating poverty and injustice, as well as healing and restoring trust (Marais 2017:74). I align with Marais’ observation: “I also do not know what the next step must be” (Marais 2017:76). In this connection he draws attention to discernment as one of the key capacities in missional leadership (Marais 2017:75). From his understanding of the missional movement, I have retained that there is a shift from an outward orientation of DRC congregations, beyond the frontiers of South Africa, to an inward orientation, aware of the boundaries in the local communities. This re-orientation toward the local communities is directed further inwards by inviting ministers and members of congregations to being in silence – to let God take the lead. It is precisely this movement that is reflected in the AMCS as a community of silence, solitude, and prayer. While personal and communitarian prayer is undisputedly a key element of the Reformed tradition, I suggest that the AMCS represents the new inward orientation of the DRC in a way that reminds of the contemplative traditions in Christianity.

Because of my Roman Catholic background, I was inclined to think of the AMCS as a school of spirituality in the Reformed tradition.⁵ Upon first thought, it seemed to fit with the fact that, historically, contemplative traditions have evolved in schools of spirituality. However, it soon became clear to me that a contemplative practice was far from being accomplished in the AMCS. Nevertheless, it seemed worthwhile to pursue the idea of the AMCS as a school of spirituality, because they play an important role

5 Waaijman explains that schools of spirituality are usually formed when an individual with an authentic experience of God gathers disciples. However, he considers that the emphasis on a single person as the founder of a school only partially reflects what actually happens in the formation process of such schools and he draws attention to periods which were characterised by “collective spiritual movements” (Waaijman 2003:119–120).

in the dynamic of renewal and conversion which is a constant need of the Church. This will be elaborated in paragraph 3.

At the outset of this study of spirituality, I must be explicit about my own understanding of spirituality. In terms of spirituality as an academic discipline, I align with Frohlich Frohlich, (2001) who argues that "... 'lived spirituality' is, and must remain, the key point of engagement for any study of spirituality" (Frohlich 2001:68). However, she argues that this needs to be complemented by systematic critical reflection on the experiences that one has, individually and communally, if only to avoid that "... fragmentation and relativism appear to reign unchecked, and we are left with no evident grounds for spiritual integration, discernment, or community" (Frohlich 2001:68). This notion of spirituality as a discipline, involving experience and systematic critical reflection has been characteristic of the contemplative traditions in Roman Catholicism, and I will carry it forward in this study of the AMCS. Implicit in this understanding of spirituality is that it is a way of learning. We will see that the way of learning is bound up with the particular way of following Christ that is embodied in a school of spirituality. In this connection, I suggest that the historical roots of the AMCS may be found in a movement within the Reformed tradition which is known as the *Réveil*.⁶ As Brümmer (Brümmer 2015) explains, *Réveil* is the common denominator for a number of revival movements that appeared in several European countries in the first half of the 19th century which shared

... 'n afkeer van die rasionalisme van die Verligting, 'n diepgevoelde persoonlike ervaring van gemeenskap met God, en van daaruit 'n sterk beywering vir die uitbreiding van Gods koninkryk in die samenlewing en die wêreld. ... Dit het in die *Réveil* veral gegaan om

6 In this connection Hijweege draws attention to the role of so-called "conventikels" in Protestant pietism: gatherings of ordinary but pious Church members in small groups (Hijweege, 2004:307). During his theological studies in Utrecht Andrew Murray participated in what appears to have been such a group, *Secor Dabar*, which operated in the spirit of the *Réveil* (Brümmer 2015:23). Therefore, the *Réveil* is part of "[d]ie besondere spiritualiteitstradisie en nalatenskap van Andrew Murray met die oocus op gebed, roeping en diens" that the executive committee referred to in its decision to proceed with the Andrew Murray Centre for Spirituality.

'n aktiewe lewe vanuit die “love affair” en nie om die verdediging van die “theory” nie⁷ (Brümmer 2015:21).

The question that will guide this paper is how the AMCS can find its own way of learning as distinct from the learning in seminaries and local communities of the DRC.

This article commences with an insider’s perspective of the AMCS, followed by an explanation of why I came to think of the AMCS as a school of spirituality within the DRC. Next, schools of spirituality will be presented as one of the main forms of spirituality and an inherent part of the renewal process in the Christian tradition. This will be illustrated with the example of Bernard of Clairvaux. With this example in mind, I will explore the importance of a rule of discipline for the process of renewal within an existing order. Finally, by way of conclusion, I will offer some practical suggestions for the AMCS.

An insider’s perspective

It makes a difference whether one is looking at a mountain from a distance or hiking on its slopes. This is the difference between the outsider’s and insider’s perspectives.⁸ By starting with the insider’s perspective, I underline that the study of spirituality is “self-implicating”. As Frohlich says: “What we study, how we study, what we learn, is rooted in our own spiritual living” (Frohlich 2001:68). I have learned about the AMCS as a hiker gets to know a mountain.

I arrived in Wellington shortly before the opening conference 24–26 February 2019. I found myself taking in the beauty of the house and the

7 English: a repugnance of the rationalism of Enlightenment, a deep-felt personal experience of communion with God, and henceforth a strong engagement with the expansion of God’s kingdom in society and the world. [...] What mattered most in the Réveil was an active life grounded in the “love affair” rather than the defence of the “theory” (Translation by the author).

8 This is the main distinction that Waaijman (2003) makes in his categorisation of disciplines which are engaged in the study of what he calls “lived spirituality” (Waaijman 2003:367). From a constructivist perspective my position as a researcher may be characterised as an active participant and co-creator of the interpretive experience (cf. Swinton & Mowat 2006:35).

grounds, the people, the lectures, the chapel services. After the opening conference, silence fell over the house. In the first few weeks I was the only resident. I was immediately engaged, not only as researcher but also as brother in faith. This position has characterised my way of learning. A few significant experiences will suffice as markers for my insider's perspective.

The opening conference introduced me to the legacy of Andrew Murray. I was immediately captured by what I learned about his life and work. My interest in Murray was enhanced by the fact that I was living in the former Mission Training Institute that he had established in 1877, right next to the house where he had spent the last 35 years of his life. My first step after the opening conference was to read the biography of Andrew Murray by Du Plessis (Du Plessis 1919). I was impressed with the missionary movement that had emerged from the Missionary Training Institute. Its impact became tangible when I met a minister from Owerri (Nigeria), not far from where I had lived in my childhood. I sensed that Wellington, at the border of the then Cape Colony yet connected by rail to Cape Town, must have been a privileged place for Murray to keep looking beyond the mountains towards the vast expanse of Africa. The biographical observation that he was perceived as a mystic⁹ (which was not necessarily a sign of admiration at the time) set me off into his *Versamelde Werke* (Collected Works). I started to find out for myself what brand of mysticism this might be and how it related to Reformed theology. Wondering about the name that Andrew Murray had given to his house, "Clairvaux", I went to the DRC Archives in search for any reference to the famous Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux in Murray's work.

After the opening conference I started to observe the daily times for prayer that are part of the Christian tradition, for which I initially used the *Liturgy of the Hours* and the lectionary of the Roman Catholic Church that I also

9 Despite the large body of modern writing on the subject, mysticism is notoriously difficult to define (Sheldrake 2010:107; see also Du Plessis 1919:450). The *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* starts to say that mysticism is what lies beyond the schemas of ordinary experience (vol. X, col. 1893). Sheldrake criticises the focus on mysticism simply as a category of religious experience, which results, amongst other problems, in separating mysticism from theology (Sheldrake 2010:107). He argues that the main point to emphasise is that Christian mysticism is rooted in the baptismal call of all Christians to enter ever more fully into the "mystery" of God through exposure to, and response to, the scriptures, liturgy, and sacraments (Sheldrake 2010:109).

used at home.¹⁰ With the arrival of the Chapel Master, I discovered another way of conducting the chapel service. The change was first of all in the Scriptural readings based on the *Leesrooster vir lidmate* – an adapted version of the Revised Common Lectionary. I came to appreciate the *Leesrooster* for pursuing the meditation on the Sunday readings for the whole week. The arrival of the first groups (mainly ministers and social workers) in the AMCS, including representatives of different church traditions, had an impact on the climate of silence in the house. We were clearly in the process of finding our way of praying together.

In line with Andrew Murray’s writing about *die binnekamer*,¹¹ I had become sensitive to the climate of silence and solitude. I had approached the chapel as a place of silence, where one could put oneself in the presence of God. The view of the Hawequa mountains through the large chapel window fitted in a wooden cross was enough to command reverence. When groups started to arrive, I observed that some group members continued talking as they approached the chapel and even went on to greet newcomers inside the chapel. At times when groups were invited to become silent, I observed that some people would complain about chattering children of the neighbouring school or water of the fountain splashing in the basin in front of the chapel. It dawned on me that the chapel master was struggling with her role as distinct from the minister of a local community. How do you let God work directly with His creatures?

As groups would come and go, I wondered what actually constituted the “community of silence, solitude and prayer” of the AMCS. It seemed more like a fluid community. At a personal level, the sense of community was most alive during the days that I spent together with the chapel master or when another researcher would join the AMCS for a couple of weeks. The concept of a fluid community started to make sense, however, when I started to travel outside Wellington to speak to people who are part of the DRC or used to be part of it.

10 The Christian tradition follows the Jewish practice of division of the day in terms of fixed times of prayer at regular intervals, as evidenced in Exodus 29:38–39 (bringing an offer in the morning and evening) and Psalm 119:164 (praying seven times a day).

11 The *binnekamer* refers to Jesus’ admonition when you pray to go into your room and close the door. (Mc. 6, 6) I have retained the Afrikaans word, because it captures in a telling image the notion of interiority.

I was fortunate that the entire liturgical season of Lent fell in the period of my residence. This circumstance turned out to play an important role in my ability to connect with the DRC. My diary shows how this connection was established on the third day of my residence: “The conference title is *Rooted in Christ*. Today’s morning prayer refers to the image of the vine – no coincidence!” The image of the vine from John 15:1–8 returned throughout my stay, in my personal prayer, in the chapel services and in my research of Andrew Murray.

On Sundays, I went to the local Roman Catholic parish. I was delighted to be welcomed in St. Charles Lwanga Church in Mbekweni, which is one of three churches of the Paarl parish. One of the guards of Samuel Campus who lives in Mbekweni made me realise that I did something out of the ordinary by going to worship in Mbekweni. For me, it was a way to cross the colour line and to connect with the lives of black people whom I saw every day working on the campus where the AMCS is housed. That is how I learned that some workers had no idea that they were actually constructing a centre of spirituality.

From my experience at the AMCS, it is clear that I expected a life of silence, solitude, and prayer such as I knew from monastic communities in Roman Catholicism. I found myself struggling with the absence of a community and with the abundance of words that affected the climate of silence. I was reassured by reading Andrew Murray’s *Die Môre-uur* (Murray 1943:19–23). It was this text that gave me a sense of the importance of personal attachment to Christ, which Brümmer compares to a love affair (Brümmer 2015:23–25). It resonated with the theme of the opening conference and with the meditations during Lent. In the meantime, I saw various groups of ministers and social workers arriving and leaving. If the AMCS was serious about this love affair, then there needed to be more than a fully booked agenda with groups. Also, there was a disturbingly familiar colour line separating those inside the house and those outside on the campus, which reminded me of my childhood in an oil company compound in Nigeria.

Institutional spirituality as a motor of renewal

As I have explained in the introduction, I was inclined to think of the AMCS as a school of spirituality in the Reformed tradition. Although I realised that the AMCS was starting more or less from scratch, I decided to pursue the idea of the AMCS as a school. My main argument is that schools of spirituality provide an interesting frame of reference because of the dynamic of renewal. This dynamic will be explained through Waaijman's distinction of three basic forms of spirituality: *lay* spirituality, *institutional* spirituality, and spirituality in the *margins* (Waaijman 2003:13–14). For the purpose of this chapter, I focus on two criteria, namely “life sphere” and “ground material” (Waaijman 2003:15).

	Lay spirituality	Institutional spirituality	Spirituality in the margins
Life sphere	Family	Abbey, congregation	Martyr, eremite, beggar, homeless, dissident, and all others who do not follow the institutional pattern
Ground material	Life course	Way of life	Waiting, openness

Most readers will be familiar with “family” as their life sphere. It involves growing up, either in wealth or poverty, in health or sickness, going to school, working for a livelihood, or being provided for by others, having friends, perhaps marrying, and raising children, and dying. For Christians it also involves belonging to a church and adhering to certain religious practices.

In contrast, institutional spirituality involves choosing a way of life that is markedly different from the family. In the Catholic tradition, such a way of life was expressed in monastic communities, congregations, or associations. There are various forms, some of which require celibacy, while others are compatible with marriage. Such ways of life are not to be viewed as a particular system of belief, nor as a specific religion. In the Christian tradition, all schools of spirituality are a particular way of

following Christ (Sheldrake 2010:5). For example, the Benedictine school focuses on obedience, the Franciscan school on poverty. This discipleship involves a process of learning. The process of learning in any particular school is facilitated by observing a rule of discipline. The most influential of these is the *Rule of Benedict*, which is a synthesis between the eremitic ideal of the early Desert Fathers and the koinonia ideal of Basil and Augustine (4th century). It reflects Benedict's long experience with monastic life. In general terms, a rule of discipline serves human growth. But observing such a rule does not come easy. This brings us to the emergence of the third form of spirituality.

Throughout history it appears that a monastic community, congregation, or association remains a human institution that is subject to the dynamics of human relations, including ambition, desire, fear, pride, and power. Therefore, it may go astray. In other words, it is in constant need of reformation. The need for reformation is usually voiced by monks who feel that something is wrong in the community. As long as the community listens to such criticism, and responds to it, the result that may be expected is internal reformation. However, when there is no satisfactory response, it is to be expected that monks or nuns will move away from their original community to live what Waaijman (2003) calls *spirituality in the margins*.

The strength and beauty of Waaijman's model are that it incorporates the internal and external criticism that is inherent in any human institution. The true loyalty of the monks is to the way of life they have embraced in order to follow Christ. Inherent of this model, therefore, is the dynamic of renewal. An example from the Benedictine school of spirituality will show how this principle is at work.

Bernard of Clairvaux, a reformation story¹²

In the 11th century, there were serious issues about the interpretation of the *Rule of Benedict*. The Benedictine abbey of Cluny (France) was at the centre stage, but more than 1 000 other abbeys in Western and Eastern

12 In rendering this story, I intend to illustrate the role of schools of spirituality in the dynamic of renewal. I have chosen a well-known example that started with an internal conflict of the monks of the Benedictine abbey of Cluny (France). For the purpose of this article, I will draw on a single source. Except as otherwise indicated, all further references in this paragraph are to the relevant page(s) in Aerden 2012). For a historical

Europe were involved. Together they formed a monastic family under the authority of the abbot of Cluny. This structure served well to remain independent from the feudal powers of the time (one of the reasons for the decline of monastic life). The downside, of course, was that the autonomy of individual abbeys was undermined (Waaijman 2003:8–19). Along with some other issues, the governance structure was the subject of increasing internal criticism. From the 11th century onward, many monks were increasingly fed up with the inherent conflicts of the possession of land, the excessive income of abbeys from tithes and donations, and the exuberant liturgy where their wealth was displayed. The dissatisfaction with their worldly existence led many monks to leave their abbey in search of an authentic Christian life. This indicates that the internal criticism had not produced the necessary reforms. Aerden explains that eremitism, in Western monastic life, has always been a movement that reveals a desire for authenticity (Aerden 2012:24). The monastic institutions of the time were increasingly considered as fake, he writes, and it was clear to all their contemporaries that the movement of monks away from their abbeys was a straight provocation of the monastic establishment (Aerden 2012:24–25).

Interestingly, the resurgence of eremitism is related to the rediscovery of the Gospel (Aerden 2012:24). It is a period of social and cultural transformation, with itinerant teachers, circulating ideas, people looking for a teacher and sharing experiences. What they found, more than anything else, was poverty, for which Aerden refers to Mark 10:21 (Aerden 2012:24). Not only did people read the Gospel afresh, but they also practised it with a daring naivete: “Where can I experience such an ideal?”. The answer was not in institutions, but in the woods and mountains that served as the desert. The changing mentality flowed from a growing awareness of individuality, and it was the start of subjectively experienced faith in the Western world (Aerden 2012:28). Among the many narratives of personal experience in this period, Bernard of Clairvaux was outstanding in how he talked about events in his life and how he experienced them (Aerden 2012:28).

Bernard entered in the abbey of Cîteaux in 1112, together with 30 relatives and friends. Cîteaux had been founded in 1098 by a group of men who had

view of the monastic reformation that issued from the conflict in Cluny see Franzen 1986:176-193.

left Cluny for the solitude of Cîteaux, where they could live in accordance with their vows by following the *Rule of Benedict* (Aerden 2012:29). Clearly, the foundation of Cîteaux sprang from the desire for a strict observance of the *Rule*. Bernard proved to be a natural leader. In 1115 he became abbot of Clairvaux, an offspring of Cîteaux. From Clairvaux sprang other abbeys again; when Bernard died in 1153 there was a total of at least 65 offspring. The abbeys that sprang from Cîteaux naturally formed a family known as the Cistercian Order. Their interpretation of the *Rule* led them to reject the monastic hierarchy that was characteristic of the Cluny family and to restore the autonomy of each abbey while remaining in loving union. The governance structure was adapted to this end by a system of filiation (mother-daughter), the custom of visitation of the daughters by the abbot of the mother abbey, and the institution of a general chapter as unifying structure (Aerden 2012:20).

The word “chapter” warrants some explanation. It refers to the custom in Benedictine abbeys of reading a chapter from the *Rule* every morning. After the lecture, the abbot gives a commentary on the chapter. The abbot’s job is not so much to interpret the *Rule* but to “re-read the life of the community in the light of the Rule” (Jedrzejczak 2006:15). In this way, the *Rule* is an agent in interpreting events in the community and the lives of each of the monks. Hence, the chapter signifies that the community lets itself be guided by the *Rule*. The room where the community assembled for the reading from the chapter was called the Chapter room. The key events of the community, such as the entry of novices and the election of the abbot, took place in the chapter room. It was also the place where decisions were made for the proper running of the abbey.¹³ The *general chapter* that serves as a unifying structure for the family of Cistercian abbeys has the same function as the chapter has for an individual abbey, that is, to create union in diversity.

This example of the dynamic of renewal in the Benedictine school of spirituality shows the importance of taking one’s orientation from a rule of discipline. As Jedrzejczak explains, deep listening to the *Rule of Benedict* allows the community and each of the monks to “... let themselves

13 The Dutch expression “een stem in het kapittel hebben” refers to this Cistercian practice of consultation when making decisions that affect the whole community.

be interrogated, corrected, shaken, by this strange, yet familiar look” (Jedrzejczak 2006:16). This way of approaching a rule of discipline is not very different from approaching the through the *Lectio Divina*, which assumes that the meaning of the text stands or falls with the person of the reader.¹⁴ (Reedijk 2003:17) This method of reading allows the reader to be transformed by the text. In this respect the disposition of the reader is essential, which means that there is an indissoluble connection between one’s way of life and the way one reads a text.¹⁵

The way of learning of the AMCS

The Reformed Churches have never had a place for monastic life. Andrew Murray, who had a keen interest in mystical texts, wrote three pages about monasticism, showing that he was aware of the constant need for reformation of monastic life, but not of the dynamic of renewal in monastic communities.¹⁶ He starts with the merits of a life of poverty, celibacy, and obedience under a fixed rule of discipline in the first centuries of Church history. He observes that the system was gradually being perfected in the fourth century, with the result that “... gradually in the West the cloister became not only a refuge for the weak, but a school for the strong, where they might learn to exercise influence in training the neighbouring population.” He acknowledges Benedict as a reformer of monastic life in the sixth century. Furthermore, he notes that, in the eighth century, “the honour in which the cloister was held ... became its danger.” Then he skips some 800 years of monastic life to end with the observation that a committee of cardinals had advised the Pope in 1538 to abolish all religious orders.

14 Lectio is not a reading such as other ways of reading. [...] The lectio divina is entirely concerned with the way in which those who are engaged with the Word of God position themselves in order to read, to taste, and to practice it. In contrast with exegesis, hermeneutics or the theological or homiletic handling of Scripture it refers to the practice of reading the Word of God in a graceful and undisturbed way, with a certain intellectual effort, which leads to prayer (*Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. IX, col. 470).

15 This is illustrated by Hofmeyr’s distinction of childhood and servanthood as analogies for understanding the relation between God and human beings (cf. Brümmer 2015:30).

16 These handwritten pages are kept in the DRC Archives under record number PPV 1435/9.

My research in the DRC Archives did not yield any evidence of Murray giving more thought to monastic life, despite of his reading such mystics as Francis of Assisi, Catharine of Siena, and Teresa of Avila who all belonged to religious orders. It may well be the case that Murray was more interested in the experiences of these mystics than in their particular way of following Christ and their rule of discipline.

De Villiers (De Villiers 2015) observes that Murray read the mystics with great attention, making notes, and underlining what was important to him. He writes that even Murray's bare reading of texts reflects a mystical attitude with which he enters and even loses himself in the content of his books (De Villiers 2015:646). This way of reading reminds of a stream in the Reformed tradition that is known as *bevindelijkheid*.¹⁷ The scope of this article does not allow to explore differences and similarities between *bevindelijkheid* and *Lectio Divina*.¹⁸

Since monastic life is not a model of following Christ that fits with the Reformed tradition, it may seem consequent to discard rules of discipline for religious orders as irrelevant for the AMCS. However, institutional spirituality is broader than monastic life.¹⁹ In this paragraph, I intend to draw some lessons from such rules of discipline to answer the question of how the AMCS can find its own way of learning as distinct from the learning in seminaries and local communities of the DRC. In the search

17 *Bevindelijkheid* is difficult to translate into English. From a psychological perspective, Hijweege describes *bevindelijkheid* as a stream in the Reformed tradition which is characterised by appropriation and deepening of the professed faith: "Bevindelijken nemen geen genoegen met een verstandelijk beamen van geloofsdogma's. Ze verlangen naar een persoonlijk geloof waarin geloofsuitspraken doorleefd en toegeëigend worden" (Hijweege 2004:13–14). Following this description, *bevindelijkheid* may be tentatively translated as "experiential".

18 From a hermeneutical perspective, Reedijk explains *bevindelijkheid* as personally experienced knowledge of faith that is closely connected to one's individual way in life. It is comparable with the *lectio divina* insofar as the Word of God fills the concrete life of a concrete reader (Reedijk 2003:218).

19 Within Roman Catholicism such lay movements as Chemin Neuf and Sant'Egidio tend towards institutional spirituality. Even the Jesuit Order is not a monastic community in the strict sense. In fact, Ignatius of Loyola and his first companions, when they sought papal approval, refused to be subjected to one of the four monastic Rules that had been imposed by the 4th Council of Lateran in 1214 and the Council of Lyons in 1274 in order to remain together while being at the worldwide service for the more urgent and universal human needs (Ganss 1970:21; see also De Jongh 2011:190–212). In an oecumenical context, the Taizé Community is an example of institutional spirituality.

for one's own way of learning I see a parallel with the former Missionary Training Institute, which served the missionary movement at the time. As I said before, the geographical location of Wellington must have been a privileged place for Murray to respond to the needs of DRC families who had moved beyond the borders of the Colony and to stimulate the missionary movement. In my view the DRC made an important statement by accommodating the AMCS in the same building that once housed the Missionary Training Institute. As I have explained in the introduction, I see a continuity between the re-orientation of the missional movement to the local communities and ministers and members of congregations being in silence to let God take the lead. The location of the AMCS is ideally suited to pursue its own way of learning. However, in order to serve its purpose in the renewal of the DRC's participation in the *missio Dei*²⁰, the AMCS will have to nurture the bonds with local communities.

This brings me to the two dimensions in the basic forms of spirituality: life sphere and ground material (Waaajman 2003:15). From the perspective of life sphere I started to think further about the community of silence, solitude, and prayer as a fluid community. In the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I found some examples of fluid communities. He considered that Christians should not dwell in the safe shelter of monastic life, but amid their enemies. Therefore, he argues,

... in the period between the death of Christ and the day of judgment, when Christians are allowed to live here in visible community with other Christians, we have merely a gracious anticipation of the end time ... Therefore, let those who until now have had the privilege of living a Christian life together with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of their hearts (Bonhoeffer 2015:2–4).

Among the examples of Christian communities that Bonhoeffer gives, apart from the family and the community that is united in the Sunday liturgy, are ministers who spend some time living together in preparation of their office as well as Christians in the community who desire to come

20 For the understanding of *missio Dei* see the 2013 *Framework document on the missional nature and calling of the Dutch Reformed Church*.

together under the Word with other Christians in periods of rest from their work (Bonhoeffer 2015:4). Similarly, the AMCS could be a place where DRC ministers and members from various local communities come together for a few days in silence, solitude, and prayer. In line with the legacy of Andrew Murray, these days will be experienced as a privileged time to dwell in the presence of God. The welcome leaflet that visitors of the AMCS find in their room expresses it as follows: “It is our prayer that you will remember your stay as an intimate connecting time with God.” In so far as this time is lived in community for the duration of their residence, it may be viewed as the gracious gift preceding the day of judgment that Bonhoeffer had in mind.

This brings me to the second dimension in Waaijman’s basic forms of spirituality, that is, ground material. The question is how the legacy of Andrew Murray is translated into the way of life in the AMCS. Brümmer explains that Murray considered the personal intercourse with Christ and the personal experience of his great love as the core of the Christian faith (Brümmer 2015:25). He adds that Murray stands in a long line of Christian mystics such as Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi. I suggest that Bernard of Clairvaux merits special attention because Murray named the house where he spent the last 25 years of his life “Clairvaux”. Given the esteem in which he was held by the Reformers, the former abbot of Orval, a second-generation offspring of Clairvaux, introduces Bernard of Clairvaux as a truly oecumenical author (Van Hecke 2001:180). This is illustrated by the number of *loci* where Luther cites Bernard of Clairvaux, which exceeds 500 (Bell 1989:337). Van Hecke further suggests that Bernard of Clairvaux’s interest in spiritual experience makes him particularly relevant for our time. Bernard of Clairvaux is characterised as a spiritual teacher who introduces us in the love of God (Van Hecke 2001:183). This corresponds with De Villiers’ suggestion that Bernard of Clairvaux’s work resonated with the importance that Murray attached to the personal experience of God’s love:

Die intimiteit van die verhouding word veral deur die liefde uitgedruk. Murray beklemtoon ontsag voor die Heilige, maar soos Brümmer (2013:54–56) ook uitgewys het, is daar by hom ’n sterk fokus op die liefde van en vir God. Die intieme gemeenskap met God het ’n liefdevolle karakter (Murray 1893:xv). Daarom skryf Murray verskeie boeke oor die liefde. Hierin volg hy in die voetspore van

Bernard van Clairvaux, bekend as die mistikus van die liefde²¹ (De Villiers 2015:650).

The images that Bernard of Clairvaux uses to analyse the various forms of love, such as the slave and the son (cf. Van Hecke 2001:183), remind of Hofmeyr's metaphors of servant and child.²² According to Aerden the entire spiritual teaching of Bernard of Clairvaux may be summarised as *ordinatio caritatis*, which translates as “putting order in love” (Aerden 2012:59–60). The Cistercian Order, like the Benedictine Order, is considered as a school of love.

These considerations about community and the personal experience of God's love may be thought of as two spiritual corner stones of the AMCS. Firstly, the experience of God's love has the potential to mark the AMCS as a particular way of following Christ (similar to obedience as the Benedictine way of following Christ or poverty as the Franciscan way of following Christ). In this connection Hofmeyr's “spirituality of childhood” provides the theological grounding for the way of the AMCS (cf. Brümmer 2015:29–39). Secondly, as a fluid community, the AMCS will be firmly anchored in the DRC which is essential to realise its potential for renewal within the existing order.

Conclusion

Based on these first principles, the AMCS will have to discover its own way of learning. Within the scope of this article, I can only give four indications of how this process of discovery may be organised.

The AMCS as a fluid community within the DRC calls for attention to the question how the contemplative practice of the AMCS contributes to deepening and renewing the DRC's participation in the *missio Dei*. This

21 English: The intimacy of the relation is expressed, above all, through love. Murray underlines awe for the Holy One, but there is a strong focus on the love of and for God, as Brümmer has also argued. The intimate communion with God has a loving character. This is why Murray writes several books on love. In this he follows in the footsteps of Bernard of Clairvaux, who is known as the mystic of love. [Translation by the author.]

22 See the chapter on Hofmeyr and the spirituality of childhood in Brümmer 2015:29–53.

is a matter of discernment for *Communitas*.²³ With the example of the *chapter* of a Cistercian abbey in mind, I suggest that discovering the way of learning of the AMCS is another matter of discernment. Individuals and groups who have been participants in the AMCS need to be involved in this process of discovery. Therefore, the chapel master is best situated to guide this process. Since groups may have their own leader or facilitator during their time in the AMCS, their role in discovering the way of learning requires special attention (especially in view of shared awareness of the contrast between the way of learning of the AMCS and the way of learning in the seminaries and local communities of the DRC).

Discovering the way of learning of the AMCS starts with “lived spirituality.” If the particular way of following Christ is the experience of God’s love, then that experience must be “lived” with all its ups and downs. In terms of Waaijman (Waaijman 2003), this constitutes the ground material of the AMCS. De Villiers explains well what it is that must be “lived”: “Andrew Murray clearly does not mean by communion mere worshipping of God, but a state in which there is a real feeling of His presence” (quoted in De Villiers 2015:649).²⁴ An essential aspect of the way of learning, therefore, is awareness. Learning this means not so much being attentive to the Word of God in the Scriptures (although that is not excluded) as being attentive to God’s presence in the reality of daily life. It encompasses virtually every aspect and element in one’s life, including desires, concerns, failures, attachments, relationships, colour lines, and so forth. The basic disposition to experience God’s love (or to let oneself be found by God) is to be present in the here and now without judgment. This disposition can be exercised in many ways, and all participants should be encouraged to find their own way. The AMCS should allow God to work directly with His creatures rather than preach about His work (although that is not excluded). Being present in the here and now also regards the practice of prayer, as Murray has eloquently explained in his chapter on the morning hour.²⁵ For some

23 *Communitas* is a task force (*diensgroep*) of the Synod of the Western Cape in conjunction with the Uniting Reformed Churches in Southern Africa, charged with accompaniment of their congregations and parishes.

24 This explanation corresponds with the description of Christian mystics as “those who believe in and practice their faith with particular intensity” (Sheldrake 2010:108).

25 See also Brümmer 1994.

participants silence and solitude may not come easy, if only because it has not been part of the culture in the DRC. Therefore, part of the engagement with participants is to let them taste silence and solitude in such a way that they experience a growing desire to spend time in their *binnekamer*. Some time ago, I read about prayer as “a long, loving look at the real” (Martin 2012:114). The chapel of the AMCS is fitted to sit in silence, putting oneself in the presence of God, and look with Him at the events in one’s life and community. In this connection the AMCS should nurture a climate of silence and solitude in the chapel.

Attentiveness to how God proceeds with both individual participants and overall groups. In the context of spirituality as a discipline, this means that one attends with as much authenticity as one can muster to the truth of one’s own experience, both individually and as a group (Frohlich 2001:68). Frohlich suggests “critical interiority” as the methodological principle of the discipline of spirituality.²⁶ The key point of engagement with participants is their *binnekamer* combined with systematic critical reflection on their experience, for which the Bible is the primary point of reference. This should also be key for groups with their own leader or facilitators. In my view, the chapel master is best situated to ensure that this engagement with participants is fostered in group facilitators. Further the “lived engagement” of group facilitators should also be the subject of systematic critical reflection. How the methodological principle of “critical interiority” is translated into a method is a matter of experimentation.²⁷ A sound example in the Christian tradition may be found in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola and the literature on spiritual guidance.

My last indication regards the role of the Chapel master with respect to discovering the way of learning of the AMCS. There is a lot to be discovered on the particular way of following Christ that the AMCS embodies. How do you let God work with His creatures? How do you foster the disposition of awareness? How do you nurture a climate of silence and solitude? What is helpful for participants to attend to the truth of their own experience

26 Frohlich, 2007:77-81.

27 In a recent article Frohlich refers to the procedures and skills for systematically accessing lived experience and validating it in a way that is academically credible. See Frohlich, 2020: 31-44.

without prejudice? How do you share your experience with others? How do you bring your experiences in the privileged period at the AMCS relate to your family and local community? As yet, there is no rule of discipline which can serve as a guide for the process of learning that is bound up with the particular way of following Christ at the AMCS. Therefore, I suggest that the main task of the chapel master is to write such a document. Following the example of Ignatius of Loyola, writing such a document *follows* the praxis of the AMCS. In this connection it may be helpful to think of this document as an explanation of the way of proceeding in the AMCS. The basis for this task is in the chapel master's loving engagement with each group's learning process, as far as possible.

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