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**DISTINCTIVE TRAITS OF MARIANIST
SPIRITUALITY:
MARY, MISSION, COMMUNITY**

*Thomas A. Thompson, S.M.**

Marianist spirituality is rooted in the apostolic and Marian charism of its founder, William Joseph Chaminade. The lifetime of William Joseph Chaminade (1761-1850), spent almost entirely in Bordeaux and its environs, spans the great political upheavals which occurred in Europe—the French Revolution, the Empire, and the Restoration. With the outbreak of revolution, he left the *collège-séminaire* of St. Charles (Mussidan) and went to Bordeaux where he engaged in a clandestine ministry, until forced into exile in Saragossa, Spain, 1797. There, at the shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar both his apostolic and Marian dedication were nourished. Upon his return to Bordeaux in 1800, he established the Sodality (*congrégation*), which had existed there previously. From the Sodality developed what today are called the Marianist Lay Communites,¹ and the two religious congregations of Marianists: the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, founded with Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon (1816), and the Society of Mary (1817).² The religious congregations and the Sodality were bonded by the same spirit and mission.

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¹Recognized by the Pontifical Council for Laity on March 25, 2000, as “an international private association of the faithful.”

²Chaminade’s biography can be found in Vincent Gizard, *Petite vie de Guillaume-Joseph Chamindé: fondateur de la Famille Marianiste* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1995); Eng. trans., *Blessed William Joseph Chamindé: Founder of the Marianist Family* (Dayton, Ohio: North American Center for Marianist Studies, 2000).

The Sodality fostered many apostolic works and lives of dedicated service; the Cardinal Archbishop of Bordeaux testified in 1869 that “if we seek out the beginnings of all our works in the city of Bordeaux, the name of Father Chaminade is inscribed at the origins of each.”³

Mission and Mary in the Post-Tridentine Church

Throughout Chaminade’s long ministry and many apostolic works, traits inherited from the post-Tridentine Church formed and nourished his apostolic spirit, especially his sense of mission and his confidence in the patronage and assistance of the Virgin Mary. Although the Council of Trent said nothing about mission, the post-Tridentine Church witnessed an outburst of missionary activity (one historian termed it a *Missionskirche*⁴). The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the period of exploration and colonization of America and parts of Asia; this “first evangelization” (contrasted with the *new* evangelization) was spearheaded largely by the religious orders, especially the Franciscans and Jesuits. After the Napoleonic wars, in the period called by some the Catholic Restoration, Europe witnessed a renewed interest in the foreign missions, manifested in the new forms of missionary organizations and associations of lay people who supported the missions through their prayer and contributions. Pauline Jaricot founded the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyons, France, 1822.

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, the missionary impulse was coupled with the spirit of pastoral reform emanating from Trent, especially directed to education of the clergy and the renewal of parochial life. In this spirit, the leaders of the French School—St. Vincent de Paul, Fr. Jean-Jacques Olier, St. John Eudes, St. Louis Grignon de Montfort—had promoted seminary education and parish missions. This spirit of pastoral reform was present at the *collège-séminaire* of St. Charles, Mussidan, where Chaminade spent his formative and early-ministry years. Directed by a group of diocesan priests

³Cited in J.-B. Armbruster, *La chapelle de la Madeleine: un sanctuaire à Bordeaux, 1688-1988* (Bordeaux: Communauté marianiste, 1988), 32.

⁴Hubert Jedin’s term. Cf. John W. O’Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 66.

who followed an Ignatian-inspired rule of life, the college was named in honor of the patron of Catholic Reform, St. Charles Borromeo, and the teachers, influenced by Vincent de Paul's notion of an institution as a "permanent mission," educated seminarians and imparted to them a sense of mission and dedication to the Church.⁵

The apostolic spirit of the Society of Jesus influenced Chaminade's sense of mission. His older brother, Jean-Baptiste, was a Jesuit, and, after the 1773 suppression of the Society of Jesus, he came to Mussidan and influenced William Joseph. The Jesuits had made great contributions to the Church in the post-Tridentine era with their missions in the new world, in Protestant territories, and by their opposition to Jansenism and Gallicanism. Traces of the Jesuit influence can be seen in Chaminade's steadfast allegiance to the Holy See; his ministry of reconciling clerics who had subscribed to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy; his insistence on complete availability for the mission—going even, if necessary, "to the ends of the earth"; his call for zeal for the glory of God and the Immaculate Virgin Mary. The vacuum which resulted from the suppression of the Society of Jesus caused Chaminade and others to consider establishing a Society of Mary which would offer to the Church in the troubled times of the revolution the same apostolic dynamism which Jesuits had offered at an earlier period.⁶ He would later write that as "a justly renowned order has taken the name and standard of Jesus Christ, so we have taken the name and standard of Mary and are ready to go wherever she calls. . . ."⁷

The figure of Mary, prominent in post-Tridentine Catholicism, conveyed a great confidence in her power over evil and her assistance to the Church. When Pius V approved the rosary in 1569, he noted that the "Virgin Mary alone had crushed all

⁵Philippe Pierrel, *Sur les chemins de la mission: G. Joseph Chaminade, fondateur des Marianistes* (Paris: Residence Chaminade, 1981), 28-29.

⁶During the exile in Saragossa, several emigrés appeared interested in a project of starting a Society of Mary, a project frequently associated with Jean Claude Couveille (Pierrel, *Sur les chemins*, 57).

⁷G. J. Chaminade, *Écrits marials*, ed. J.-B. Armbruster (2 vols.; Fribourg, Suisse: Séminaire Marianiste, 1966), 2:74.

heresies and the head of the serpent," and that where Dominic and his sons promoted this prayer, "the darkness of heresy receded and the light of faith reappeared."⁸ Two images of the Virgin Mary, prominent in popular devotion in the post-Tridentine Church, reflected this confidence in Mary's power: *Auxilium Christianorum* and Mary's Immaculate Conception. The victories of the Christian forces at Lepanto, 1570, and at Vienna, 1663, were attributed to Mary, *Auxilium Christianorum*. After Lepanto, Pius V added the *Auxilium Christianorum* to the Litany of Loreto and instituted the feast of Our Lady of Victory, later changed to Our Lady of the Rosary.⁹ On his return to Rome from exile on May 24, 1815, Pius VII inserted *Auxilium Christianorum* into the liturgical calendar of the papal states. (Later, *Auxilium Christianorum* was the feast chosen to commemorate the founding of the Marianist Sisters.)

The second image, the Immaculate Conception, was portrayed as Mary's victory over evil. Genesis 3:15, a key text related to the Immaculate Conception, was interpreted to mean that it was Mary "who would crush the head of the serpent." In perhaps his most significant instruction to his followers, the Letter of 1839, Chaminade wrote, "All the ages of the Church have been marked by the combats and the glorious triumphs of the August Mary. Since the Lord has decreed the enmity between her and the serpent (Gen. 3.15), she has conquered the world and the forces of hell. All the heresies, the Church tells us, have receded before the Holy Virgin Mary, and little by little she has reduced them to silence."¹⁰ On February 2, 1801, Chaminade founded the Bordeaux Sodality of the Immaculate Conception, in the hope, as he later confided, that it would be "in all humility, the heel of the woman." (On that same day, independently, Jean-Baptiste Bourdier-Delpuits established in Paris the Sodality of Mary, *Auxilium Christianorum*.¹¹)

⁸Pius V, 17 September 1569, *Consueverunt* (in *Le saint rosaire: les enseignements pontificaux et conciliaires* [Paris: Desclée, 1960], append. I, p. 4).

⁹*Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, 13:960.

¹⁰*Écrits marials*, 2:41.

¹¹Geoffroy de Grandmaison, *La Congrégation: 1801-1830* (Paris: Plon et Nourrit, 1890), 9. By an extraordinary coincidence, Father Delpuits also started his Sodality in

The strong sense of mission was coupled with the conviction (found in ecclesial documents until Vatican II) that the "world" was alien to the Church and to its mission of salvation. This outlook was confirmed by the excesses of the French Revolution, especially the radical phase which alienated even the moderates. The post-revolutionary period witnessed the attempt to sunder the relations between the Church of France and the Holy See. For Chaminade, the "new way of thinking" proposed by the *philosophes* and *libertins* brought great harm to the Church and individual Christians. The Enlightenment form of religion—Deism—acknowledged a god, but left little room for a concept of divine revelation and the person of Jesus Christ, and its exaltation of liberty contributed to an atmosphere of indifference to the Christian message. "In our own day the great prevailing heresy is religious indifference, which spreads by numbing souls in a stupor of selfishness and the mire of passions. . . . the divine torch of faith is growing dim and flickering out in the very heartland of Christendom."¹²

Chaminade saw his mission to be a restoration of the faith to the post-revolutionary generation, influenced by the Enlightenment and by the revolution's motto—"liberty, equality, fraternity." A return to the church of the *ancien régime*, whose privileged status had alienated many, would not attain the goal, nor could the newly-established parishes respond to this need. To deal with the new situation, "new institutions, new methods, and a new type of mission" were required. "No longer could nor would the old methods satisfactorily solve present problems. The world could no longer return to its former ways. The same lever had to be applied, but on different fulcrums."¹³ Only communities of men and women, freely witnessing that the Gospel could be lived in its entirety, would be convincing. Such communities, of men and women, from different economic and

Paris with six students, 2 February 1801. "The person who writes the history of the restoration of good works after the Revolution should write this date in capitals."

¹²*Écrits marials*, 2:73.

¹³G. J. Chaminade, *The Spirit of Our Foundation: According to the Writings of Father Chaminade and of Our First Members in the Society* (4 vols.; Dayton, Ohio: St. Mary's Convent, 1911-1920, 1977), 3:212.

social classes, would evangelize through attraction and assimilation. In 1838, he wrote to the pope, "To construct a strong dam against a flowing torrent of evil, Heaven inspired me, at the beginning of this century . . . to enliven and rekindle on all sides the divine torch of faith by showing everywhere to an astonished world imposing masses of Catholic Christians of every age, sex, and state of life, who, belonging to special associations, would practice our holy religion without human respect, in all the purity of its dogmas and its morality."¹⁴

Whether dealing with groups of lay people, with religious or priests, the spirit and the method of apostolic work which he bequeathed to these diverse groups was similar. In the Marianist tradition, a few phrases have summarized Chaminade's vision: his communities were to be similar to a family, characterized by a strong faith (*fortes in fide*), similar to the communities of the primitive Church (*cor unum et anima una*), interdependent yet accommodating different states of life (*union without confusion*). To his communities, he communicated a missionary zeal and the conviction that apostolic work was a participation in the mission of the Virgin Mary (*Maria duce*).

Chaminade's Communities

a) Ecclesial and Apostolic

The Sodality and the religious congregations were to be true ecclesial and apostolic communities, participating in the mission of the Church and reflecting its structure. Upon his return from exile to Bordeaux, 1800, Chaminade requested from the Holy See, through the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, the title of Missionary Apostolic (the same title which he later requested for all who would follow him as superior-general of the Society of Mary). By this recognition, he was authorized to "erect" anew the Sodality which had existed in Bordeaux before the revolution. The Sodality was, in Chaminade's words, "a society of fervent Christians . . . who, in imitation of the early Christians, tend through their frequent association to have 'one heart and one soul' and to form one

¹⁴Letter of September 16, 1838 (included in the *Rule of the Life of the Society of Mary*, 1983).

family, not only as children of God, brothers of Jesus Christ and members of his mystical body, but also as children of Mary, dedicated to her in a special way, especially to her Immaculate Conception.”¹⁵ He encouraged well-disposed individuals to come out of their isolation into associations of similar-minded people. “Let Christians form themselves in community and from their midst, they will shine forth as a sort of light which will make them the object of general attention.”¹⁶

Chaminade was convinced that communities, similar to those of the early Church, could attract people to the Christian message: “The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32). He favored the Pauline image of the Church as the “mystical Body of Christ,” an ecclesiology unusual in the nineteenth century. He spoke of the *real* union between the members of the Church, based on the sharing of the life of Christ. The Church is “a union by which all the living members of the Church share whatever they have and by which the riches, strength, and health of one become by charity the (supernatural) riches, strength, and health of another . . . a union which makes the living members of the Church not only members of Jesus Christ, but in a very true sense, Jesus Christ Himself.”¹⁷ The union among members was based also on the *reality* of Mary’s maternity: she was mother of Christ and of the members of Christ’s mystical body. “Mary has really conceived the true body of Our Savior by the Holy Ghost; she has also conceived His Mystical Body, which is the society of the saints and of all the faithful.”¹⁸

The Sodality and later the religious congregations were to be an image of the Church by including all classes. The sodalities of the past were directed to the elite members of society

¹⁵*Écrits marials*, 2:318.

¹⁶Henry Rousseau, *William Joseph Chaminade: Founder of the Society of Mary* (Dayton, Ohio: Brothers of Mary, 1914), 131.

¹⁷Thomas A. Stanley, S.M., *The Mystical Body of Christ according to the Writings of Father William Joseph Chaminade: A Study of His Spiritual Doctrine* (Fribourg: St. Paul’s, 1952), 97.

¹⁸Stanley, *The Mystical Body of Christ*, 112 (Retreat of 1827: notes by Chevaux).

who were then to influence others. But, both because of its ecclesial nature and the age's desire for equality, the new Sodality was to include members from all states-of-life and differing social classes.¹⁹ All were to enjoy the same rights as members. Lay people were recognized and valued, not only for their services, such as religious instruction, but also, more significantly, because, through their presence, they could influence sectors and milieux not open to traditional religious approaches.²⁰

Each member, of whatever age or state of life, was to be an "active member of the mission."²¹ There were not to be a few leaders and many followers. Within the one Sodality, there would be a system of offices, divisions, and works, making possible the participation of all. There were also several branches: young men, young women; older men, older women, fathers of families; educators; working people. Each branch sponsored prayer services, study groups, recreational activities. The works emanating from the Sodality were diverse: there was an early preference for education, but there were also programs to visit the hospitals and prisons, assist those in need, and even a program to promote the reading of good books.

b) Communities of Faith

Established primarily for the restoration of faith, the communities were to have and give witness to a deep spirit of faith. Chaminade frequently cited the Council of Trent's text that "faith was the beginning, the foundation, and the root of all justification"; it was also, as Chaminade noted, "the root of all virtues." Prayer was "an exercise in the life of faith." To live the events of daily life in the light of faith required the development of the *interior spirit*, which Chaminade described as "attention to the presence of God and to his mysteries, con-

¹⁹This comprehensive way of representing the Church is reflected in the Marianist concept of "mixed composition," that is, "priests and lay religious form a single family. . . the members are of varied background and training. All have the same rights and duties as religious" (*Rule of Life of the Society of Mary*, #1, 12).

²⁰Cf. Pierrel, *Sur les chemins*, 41.

²¹*Écrits marials*, 2:12.

templated in the light of faith, with all the attention of the heart.”²² “Faith of the heart” went beyond the intellectual assent and involved a personal appropriation of the revealed truth: To believe in God “means not only to believe that there is a God; it means above all that one loves and hopes in God.”²³ Throughout his life, he proposed the articles of the Creed, as explained in the Catechism of the Council of Trent, as the basis for his instruction on faith. He stressed the significance of baptism, the sacrament which initiates the life of faith and involves a program of self-renunciation so that the life of Christ might be made manifest.

Chaminade’s insistence on faith was directed to the individual’s prayer, but it was at the same time the most powerful asset in the mission. The mission required that all be penetrated with the truths of the faith. All the members of his religious congregations were to take the vow of teaching the faith and Christian practice, so that all, even those not directly involved in teaching, could be conscious of the primary purpose of their work.²⁴ In the face of indifference and skepticism, what was needed were examples of lived faith. “God has called us not only to sanctify ourselves, but to raise up the faith in France, in Europe, and in all the world. . . .”²⁵ The mission was clear: “We all have the same goal, the same plan, that of working to sustain and spread the faith with all our strength, each one at the post assigned to him. To do this, we must always remain united.”²⁶

The Virgin Mary played a special role in acquiring the spirit of faith. Mary continues her role of mother by forming and educating her children in the image of her firstborn. She also provides the example of living faith. “How admirable was the faith

²²G. J. Chaminade, *Écrits d'oraison* (Fribourg: Séminaire Marianiste, 1969), 382, 399, 373.

²³*Écrits de direction* (3 vols.; Fribourg: Séminaire Marianiste, 1956), 3:4.

²⁴Jean-Baptiste Armbruster, *L'état religieux marianiste: étude et commentaire de la Lettre de 24 août 1839* (Paris: Marianistes, 1994), 296-299.

²⁵*Écrits martials*, 2:75.

²⁶*Spirit of Our Foundation*, 1:55.

of Mary, who believed the mysteries which were announced to her, and these mysteries were fulfilled in her. Their fulfillment was possible because of her faith."²⁷ Mary's faith and love were also the key to interpreting daily events and developments in society: "It was the faith of Mary which would illumine and guide hearts to discern what is true in the great progress which was being made in the sciences of our day."²⁸

c) Communities in Mission

The community's purpose was to be a leaven for the "multiplication of Christians." All were to consider themselves "missionaries," with the commission to make others "missionaries," and there was to be a permanent missionary dimension to the community. This distinctive feature was found in the Sodality: "In the older sodalities, there was scarcely any other purpose in view than to sustain pious Christians in the way of salvation by mutual edification. But in our day, in this period of renewal, Holy Mother the Church demands something more from her children. She wishes the concerted action of all to second the zeal of her ministers, and to labor at her restoration. This is the spirit which new sodalities inculcate. Each director is a persistent and active missionary, and each sodality a perpetual mission."²⁹ Teaching and other works of the apostolate were necessary as ways to "fulfill the mission, that is, to instill everywhere the spirit of faith and to multiply Christians."³⁰

Accompanying the missionary imperative was Chaminade's insistence on zeal, a characteristic not limited to the apostolate but more an approach to living the Christian life. Derived from the exhortation that "the letter kills but the spirit quickens," zeal was a type of enthusiasm, based on an interior appropriation of a religious commitment. It included a confidence that the apostolate was a participation in the mission of Mary. In 1834, he wrote, "True missionaries should not rely upon them-

²⁷*Écrits marials*, 2:635.

²⁸*Écrits marials*, 2:156.

²⁹*Spirit of Our Foundation*, 3, #235 (Answer to the criticism generally made against sodalities established on the model of those of Bordeaux).

³⁰*Écrits marials*, 2:53.

selves, upon their talents, or efforts, but putting all their confidence in the help of the grace of the mission and in the protection of the Blessed Virgin. . . .³¹ Modeled on the love in the heart of Mary, zeal was not overbearing, but tempered with the Marian quality of compassion.³² It also had an empathetic quality, conscious that to convert another's heart usually required establishing trust and friendship.³³

d) Consecrated to the Virgin Mary

Chaminade's notion of Marian consecration was drawn from the biblical notion of the alliance: "You have chosen the Lord that he might be your God; the Lord has chosen you, that you might be a people peculiarly his own" (Deut. 26:17-18). The alliance was a permanent union, resembling, in some respects, a marital union.³⁴ It was a reciprocal agreement: one in which an exchange occurred, and a new identity was acquired. In the alliance with Mary, the individual dedicates his/her self, actions and possessions, in a permanent way to the Virgin Mary. In turn, Mary accepts the individual, sharing with him/her her prayer, faith, love, mission, and all that she has.³⁵

There were two dimensions to the alliance: it was a dedication to the Virgin Mary but also a commitment to the community which was totally devoted to Mary. The earliest forms of consecration included a renewal of baptismal commitments, a promise to devote oneself to Mary, to have confidence in her as the Mother of all people, and to love Mary "in proportion to the love which was hers." Except for a visible reminder of consecration, no new practices or prayers were required. One was to participate in the ordinary devotions and practices of the Christian life and those practiced within the Sodality, and to strive for holiness of life.³⁶

But the alliance was not isolated or private: it occurred within the community and was related to membership within

³¹*Écrits marials*, 2:53

³²*Écrits marials*, 2:610.

³³*Écrits marials*, 2:55.

³⁴*Écrits marials*, 2:899.

³⁵*Écrits marials*, 2:395; 2:752-753.

³⁶*Écrits marials*, 2:33.

the community. As a result, one assumed duties and responsibility within the community dedicated to Mary.³⁷ "All the rules and practices obtaining in this society, the general and individual duties, the spirit of the apostolate existing in the sodality, all flow from consecration to Mary and are its natural consequence."³⁸ These two dimensions were later expressed in the Marianist vow of stability, originally defined as a vow which, in addition to being a promise of perseverance, was primarily a vow which "permanently and irrevocably constitutes the member in the state of servant of Mary."³⁹

Sharing the Mission of Mary's Motherhood

Chaminade was a pastoral director, an initiator of apostolic works. His Marian writings—found principally in letters and notes for sermons and conferences—are not theoretical treatises, but ways of presenting the person and mission of Mary to awaken and nourish the faith. His Marian writings contain more biblical references than one would expect from an early nineteenth-century writer, and they rely on several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors, together with some patristic texts, principally from Augustine, Ambrose, and Bernard.⁴⁰ There are references to the images of Mary in popular devotion, but the core writings view Mary within the context of Christianity's central truths—the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Church. In contrast to a later nineteenth-century tendency to extol Mary's unique privileges in a way that elevated her beyond imitation, Chaminade presented an image of Mary related to us—*Maria pro nobis*. The traits of Mary—her faith, love, and cooperation; her motherhood and mission—were all reflected in the life and mission of Chaminade's communities.

a) Mary's participation in the mysteries of salvation was made possible through her choice by God, and by her active faith and love: "All these mysteries of love were not accomplished in Mary without her active participation. They took

³⁷*Écrits marials*, 1:339.

³⁸*Spirit of Our Foundation*, 1, #92.

³⁹*Constitutions of Society of Mary*, 1837, #19.

⁴⁰A survey of the sources for Chaminade's Marian writings is found in *Écrits marials*, 1:94-116.

place in her only after she had pronounced the Fiat that brought happiness to heaven and earth. It was her admirable faith that effectively disposed her to receive all the favors of the Most High."⁴¹ Mary was not a passive instrument; she was called to *cooperate* in God's plan of redemptive love, and this cooperation was accepted by God as a contribution to the work of salvation: "By her consent to the Incarnation of the Word, the Blessed Virgin contributed most powerfully and effectively to the work of our Redemption and by this very consent, she devoted herself so completely to our salvation, that it may be asserted that she bore all men in her womb as a true mother does her children."⁴²

b) Mary's association with Christ was not limited to the events of the Incarnation: "Christ, who was born of Mary by the Holy Spirit, associated Mary in all his works and mysteries."⁴³ Chaminade outlined the phases of Mary's spiritual maternity. At the Annunciation, Mary conceived Christ physically, and, at the same time, through her faith and love, she conceived, along with Christ, the members of Christ's body. "In conceiving the Savior in her womb, she understood that she conceived the whole Christ, both his physical and his mystical body. . . . By conceiving the Savior in her virginal womb, she conceived spiritually—through her love and faith—all Christians, members of the Church and of Jesus."⁴⁴ At Calvary, Mary shared in Christ's offering so that all might have life. In addressing her as "Woman," Christ confirmed her in the role of the New Eve, and Christ's words, "Behold your Son," and Mary's acceptance of John, indicated her acceptance of the responsibility of forming all her children in the image of her firstborn.⁴⁵

c) The final phase of Mary's motherhood is her continuing relation with the Church and with the multitude of believers. Mary's apostolic mission is a continuation of her motherhood. More than any other nineteenth-century writer or ecclesial

⁴¹*Écrits marials*, 2:635

⁴²*Écrits marials*, 2:662.

⁴³*Écrits marials*, 2:576.

⁴⁴*Écrits marials*, 2:482.

⁴⁵*Écrits marials*, 1:184; 2:471; 2:475.

document, Chaminade spoke of Mary as *mother*: mother of God and mother of Christ; but also, and significantly, the mother of all who are born in Christ; mother of the Church; mother of Christians, mother of all people, *our* mother.⁴⁶ Members of the French School generally used the term *servant* of Mary. For Chaminade, the preferred term was *children* of Mary—sons, daughters, brothers, sisters (the words are in the plural)—and, it is for that reason, that he would have preferred the term family for his religious organization.⁴⁷

Mary continues to fulfill her responsibilities to her children through her nurturing love; her mission is to assist all her children to grow into the image of Christ, her firstborn.⁴⁸ As at Cana, she says to each, “Do whatever he tells you.” Those consecrated to Mary enter in the mission which is none other than that of the Lord. In the Letter of 1839, Chaminade wrote, Mary “enrolls her children in her militia and consecrates us as apostles. . . . Ours is indeed a grand work, a magnificent work, and if it is universal in scope, it is because we are missionaries of Mary, who says to us, ‘Do whatever He tells you.’ Yes, we are all missionaries and to each one of us the Blessed Virgin gives the mandate to work at the salvation of our brethren in the world.”⁴⁹

Chaminade channeled a dynamic sense of mission and the Church’s great confidence in Mary’s assistance into communities of faith and mission, intended to evangelize the generation influenced by the Enlightenment and the revolution, who would be convinced not by words but by fraternal associations freely witnessing to the Gospel message. While firmly rooted in the sacramental and hierarchical dimension of the Church, he emphasized the horizontal bond of union among members,

⁴⁶Similarly, St. Thérèse of Lisieux said: “We know very well that the Blessed Virgin is Queen of heaven and earth, but she is more Mother than Queen” (*Derniers entretiens*, 23, 8.7).

⁴⁷*Écrits marials*, 2:318.

⁴⁸*Écrits marials*, 2:493–510.

⁴⁹*Écrits marials*, 2:82.

rooted in the Mystical Body of Christ and Mary's motherhood. His communities were to reflect Mary's faith and love, and her maternal qualities of welcoming, accompanying, and nurturing, while at the same time sending the members forth to participate in Mary's apostolic mission, which was to bring all people to the knowledge and love of Christ, her son, the savior of the world.

Further Developments: Retrieval of Chaminade's Notion of the Apostolic Mission

This final section will deal with some developments within the Society of Mary after the death of its founder, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade. In a description of the half century after the founder's death (1850-1901), Fr. Emil Neubert, S.M., referred to a "partial eclipse of our Marian devotion."⁵⁰ Among the reasons contributing to this diminution were the "strained relationship" between the founder and the superior general who followed him, and the controversy in the 1860s over categories of membership. In addition, the society's growing involvement with schools lessened the time available for the theological formation imparted to its members. Fr. Neubert also spoke of a "weakening in knowledge and enthusiasm" for the person of the founder and his writings. The significant Letter of 1839 in which Chaminade developed his distinctive notion of the Society's participation in Mary's apostolic mission was virtually unknown for the half century after his death.

Some retrieval of the thought of Chaminade, occurred during the long tenure of Fr. Joseph Simler (1875-1903) as superior-general of the Society of Mary. In the 1870s, he "discovered" the writings of Fr. Chaminade in the attic of the superior general's residence and began a biography of Chaminade (completed with the assistance of Fr. Charles Klobb) which was published thirty years later. Fr. Simler was largely responsible for the

⁵⁰Emil Neubert, S.M., *Our Gift from God* (Dayton, Ohio: Marianist Publications, 1962), 106.

Constitutions of 1891 which proposed “filial piety,” Chaminade’s teaching on Christ’s love for his mother, as the Society’s distinctive feature: Marianists were to imitate, make their own, Christ’s love for his Mother. The 1891 Constitutions stated that one entered the Society to strive for evangelical perfection, which was “conformity with Jesus Christ,” and to work at the “salvation of souls,” with imitation of the filial piety of Christ for his Mother as the characteristic virtue of the members (art. 3). Since the two objects of the Society—zeal for the salvation of souls and filial piety towards the Virgin Mary—are among the most characteristic features of the Divine Model: “The Society has then in reality, but one object in view—the most faithful imitation of Jesus Christ, Son of God, become Son of Mary for the salvation of mankind” (art. 6). Stability, the fourth vow pronounced by members of the Society, was a vow to persevere in the Society, but the deeper intent was to constitute the person “permanently and irrevocably in the state of a servant of Mary, of her to whom the Society is especially consecrated.” The vow of stability was, in reality, “a consecration to the Blessed Virgin, with the pious design of making her known and of perpetuating love and devotion to her” (art. 55). These lapidary phrases of the 1891 Constitutions, especially articles 6 and 55, provide a good description of Marianist devotion to Mary during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. The Constitutions of 1891, however, lacked reference to Chaminade’s teaching on Mary’s apostolic mission, and its identification of consecration to Mary with perseverance in the Society of Mary imparted a “mellow” aspect to Marian devotion,⁵¹ rather than one associated with Mary’s apostolic mission.

Vatican II’s *Perfectae Caritatis*, directed that the renewal of the religious life should occur through a twofold *ressourcement*: a return to the Gospel, and to the “founder’s spirit and special aims,” the spiritual patrimony of the institute (#2). Among the Marianists, this recovery of the “founder’s spirit and special aims” had begun in the early twentieth century

⁵¹Lawrence J. Cada, *A Short History of Marianist Spirituality: Modern Theology and Marianist Spirituality* (Madrid: Imprenta SM, 2000), 87.

with the studies of Fr. Charles Klobb, continued with doctoral dissertations,⁵² and the publication of Chaminade's writings.⁵³

Part of this *ressourcement* was the work of General Chapters of the Society to revise its foundation document, a process begun in 1961 and concluded with the new *Rule of Life* and its approbation by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in 1983.

The new *Rule of Life* "recovers" aspects of Chaminade's vision, especially those found in the Letter of 1839, such as the Society's complete dedication to Mary, the centrality of faith—as found in Mary and in the life of the individual religious—and the continuing motherhood of Mary as the basis for her apostolic mission. "By the gift of faith, the Virgin Mary totally opened herself to the mission the Father gave her in the plan of salvation. Jesus was formed in her by the Holy Spirit . . . (art.5). In imitation of Mary, the "religious vocation is a life of faith" (art. 3); "We seek to become men of faith. . . we dedicate ourselves to her so that the Holy Spirit in whose action she cooperates with a mother's love may form us more fully to the image of her Son" (art. 7). "By our alliance with Mary, we seek to assist her in her mission of forming in faith a multitude of brothers for her first-born Son" (art. 8).

The references to the qualities of the Virgin Mary and her spirit are not limited to one section or chapter of the *Rule of Life*; rather they are found throughout the document—from the Society's basic identity to religious vows, prayer, community, and apostolic mission.⁵⁴ Mary is presented as the model of "true Christian life," and Marianists follow her example of faith, poverty of spirit, and attentiveness to the Lord (art. 8).

⁵²Especially significant were Thomas Stanley's *The Mystical Body of Christ according to the Writings of Father William Joseph Chaminade* (Fribourg, 1952); William J. Cole's *The Spiritual Maternity of Mary according to the Writings of Father William Joseph Chaminade: A Study of His Spiritual Doctrine* (Cincinnati: Kaye-Schooley & Assoc., 1958).

⁵³A convenient bibliography is given in Cada, *A Short History of Marianist Spirituality*, 131-139.

⁵⁴Cf. Lorenzo Amigo, "Mary in the Marianist Rule of Life," in *Marianist Resources Commission Bulletin*, 14:1 (February, 1983): 9-29.

Mary is the guide in prayer: she was “continually attentive to the Lord, contemplating his words and actions in her heart” (arts. 6, 57). In apostolic work, Marianists seek “to grow in her [Mary’s] virtues of courageous faith and docility to the Spirit, in her human sensitivity and openness” (art. 65). She is also presented as the model of those leading the vowed life; she is the “chaste virgin,” and the model of evangelical poverty. The Marianist community aims to be an “image of the first community of Jesus’ disciples, united with Mary and filled with the Holy Spirit” (art.34). The Rule begins with the words, “The Society of Mary . . . is dedicated to Mary” (art. 1); the last words are “The spirit of the Society is the spirit of Mary” (art. 101).