Charism as Mission: A Marianist Model of Ecclesiology

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FROM MONOGRAM TO MISSION

A SPECIAL CAUSE OR MISSION

Entrusted By Our Lady To Some Communities

The Oblate Madonna

Maria Immaculata Oblates of Mary Immaculate
Holy Card c.1950
CHARISM AS MISSION — A MARIANIST MODEL OF ECCLESIOLOGY

Much of what we call ecclesiology is in fact the history of trial and error in the pursuit of the Kingdom of God in this world. But there is more. Far from being purely clinical perception and assessment of things past and present, ecclesiology is a real life story, that of Jesus and those who attempt to follow him. Jesus is a person who really lived; the Church is the story of people who live their lives patterned on Jesus' person and work. The deeply existential and provisional character of Church, and the reflection about Church, cannot be downplayed or overlooked. In the course of history, this has led to antagonistic views and ways of living Church, some of which favored dissolution of social structures, others the hardening of institutional reality and domestication of the Spirit. However, the complexity of life and the freedom of the Spirit cannot be banned. This makes ecclesiology a frustrating enterprise; it is, in all likelihood, mission impossible rather than foregone conclusion, in spite of the Church's ontological rootedness in the mystery of the triune God. Ecclesiology will be fruitful, if it explores the past in search of the future by way of an adequate understanding of the present.

I. The Century of the Church

If the 20th century is the century of the Church (O. Dibelius), it is also in a special way the century of the bi-nome: mystery and historical reality. History and mystery are constant realities of the Church, and the self-understanding of the Church articulates itself either in contrasting and opposing the two or in the attempt of bringing mystery and historical reality to a dialectical unity and paradoxical synthesis.

Descending and ascending ecclesiology as we find them in Ch. Journet and Y. Congar highlight the contrast between the mystery and the historical reality of the Church. In Journet it is construed from above based on dogma rather than history. For Congar and his ascending ecclesiology, what counts is the distinction between world and Church, between history of salvation and secular

2 Names, movements and models mentioned in this section are part of a more extensive presentation by the author in: J. Roten, “Community and Faith; A Marianist Model of Ecclesiology,” Rome 2001.
history. The ecclesiologies of de Lubac, Rahner and Balthasar have intensely dealt with the paradoxical nature of the Church. Choosing different points of departure and themes, the three theologians were of one mind and intent to safeguard the unity of the Church’s mystery dimension and its historical reality.

When Church discovers itself no longer as monolithic reality but as a vulnerable social body of members and powers to be, reflection tends to become more critical. Comparing itself to other social realities, ecclesiological discourse centers on matters like identity, freedom and solidarity. Such were the programs of theologians like E. Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng and L. Boff. The work of these theologians will serve the Church as a constant reminder that eschatological synthesis, harmony between Church and world, the complementarity of Catholicism (Christianity) and other world religions, and the unity between magisterium and charism have to undergo and suffer the normally painful historical process of incarnation.

Ecclesiological reflection since Vatican II has literally exploded. One of its novelties was the formation of ecclesiological models from Church as sacrament to feminist and post-modern models of the Church. Ecclesiological models present the advantage of organizing the thought of each author or movement around some dominant or salient features. The major disadvantage lies in the reductionist tendency of their ecclesiology. The very plurality of these models reveals the inability of any given one to exhaust the mystery of the Church.

Among the most prominent changes in the social character of the Church of the latter part of last century, we have to mention the self-assertion of laity. It found its expression in a multiplicity of movements, some of them power and pressure groups, others of specific ecclesial and apostolic orientation as well as more amorphous groupings of spiritual or political endeavor. The best among these movements are not only centers of evangelization but also active organizations in promoting human development.

This was only one way (ad intra) to retrieve the truly Catholic character of the Church. The other one, accentuating Catholicity ad extra refers to the de-Europeanization of the Church and its ecclesiologies, and the growing presence, self-assertion and numerical importance of the so-called “third Church” in the concert of the ecclesia ecclesiarium. Their contribution to the Church’s sense of identity constitutes an authentic spiritual and human enrichment. The retrieval of Catholicity as understood here is due mainly to ecclesiologies from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Among the many gifts of these ecclesiologies we have the Asian sense of spirituality and service, the African charism of life and community, and the Latin American call for freedom and justice.

Thus, it is important to see advantages and disadvantages of each one of the positions studied and take into consideration their complementarity, wherever possible.

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II. Toward a New Self-understanding of Church

When individual theologians or schools of theology reflect on the Church we call the result ecclesiology, but when the Church itself (council, synod, ordinary magisterium) does the same we speak of self-understanding. For this past century we count at least four major efforts of Church authority reflecting upon and reassessing Church identity. Not all of these efforts had the same importance and scope. However, they are interrelated and denote a specific thrust and related developments. Influenced by theologians, some of whom we mentioned, and relentlessly questioned in its identity by the “signs of times,” magisterial ecclesiology of the 20th century has moved in leaps and bounds as never before.

1. Church as prolongation of Christ

Reflection on the Church as Mystical body made it possible for Pius XII to produce his 1943 encyclical Mystici corporis Christi the most comprehensive official Catholic pronouncement on the Church prior to Vatican II. The encyclical is generally attributed to S. Tromp as its primary writer, but owes much to the historical studies of E. Mersch. Drawing on the first schema of Vatican I and on the encyclicals of Leo XIII, the encyclical was by no means a repudiation of previous official teaching, but in many ways it was a welcome advance beyond the more juridical ecclesiologies of the manuals. The Church, according to this view is a prolongation of Christ, who acts upon it from within rather than as an external efficient cause.

While espousing the image of the Mystical Body as the noblest description of the Church, the encyclical warned against unhealthy exaggerations. The pope pointed out that the union between Christ and the Church, while more than moral or juridical, does not eliminate the distinction of persons between Christ and the members of the Body. Nor does mystical mean invisible. Like several popes before him, Pius XII insisted that the Church could not be a Body unless it was visible.

In the passage for which Mystici corporis is principally remembered, the pope taught that the Mystical Body is identical with the Roman Catholic Church. According to Mystici corporis, no one could be truly (reapose) a member of the Mystical Body without being a member of the Roman Catholic Church. It was possible, however, for non-Catholic Christians to be in a certain manner united to the Body. If they were living by the grace of Christ and were in good

3 Pius XII, Mystici Corporis (6-29-1943), AAS 35 (July 20, 1943) 193-248.
4 E. Mersch, La théologie du corps mystique (Paris-Bruxelles: Desclée de Brouwer, 1933).

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faith, they could be attached in desire and resolution (*inscio quodam desiderio ac voto*) to the Mystical Body.

Having recourse to a notion as arcane as the *Mystical Body* does not appear like much progress. However, it constitutes a breaking point with neo-scholastic method, and a welcome emphasis of the spiritual nature of Church. So is the explicit focus on the christocentric foundation of the Church and its understanding as prolongation of Christ.

2. *Rediscovery of the People of God*

The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (1964)⁵ is a multi-layered document. In an attempt to systematize teachings of the past and present, it proposes a shift in emphasis. May we be aware that this document is unquestionably the most systematic and comprehensive exposition on the Church to date. It is also the result of a tremendous collective effort involving mentalities of the whole Church and their contrasting experience.

In *Lumen Gentium* the theme of the Church as an organized society or institution is clearly subordinated to those of the Church as mystery, sacrament, and communion of grace. Yet the image of People of God, which holds a major position in the Constitution of the Church, is developed in such a way as to imply institutional and hierarchical structures. The hierarchy, without detriment to its authority, is viewed as a service to the whole People of God. The bishops are seen as a collegiate body, sharing with the pope a responsibility for the total apostolate of the Church. Yet the pope is acknowledged as having discretionary power to act independently (*seorsim*, according to the interpretation given in the *Notapraevia explicated*). Regional and local Churches are seen as having a distinctive character, adapted to their cultural milieu. Episcopal conferences are given a new canonical and theological status.

Where Pius XII had said that the Mystical Body and the Roman Catholic Church were one and the same thing, Vatican II contented itself with saying that the Church of Christ “subsists in” the Roman Catholic Church—an expression deliberately chosen to allow for the ecclesial reality of other Christian communities. At various points the council seemed to imply that non-Catholic Christians are members of the Body of Christ, and thus of the Church. Vatican II, while looking optimistically on the possibilities of salvation for non-Christians, did not commit itself to any particular explanation. The assumption

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seems to be that the Church plays an instrumental role in the salvation of everyone who is saved.

The indispensable pendant to this document is *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), the Church’s positively and even optimistically stated understanding of human reality and world. The community of the faithful is part of this world and called to discover the signs of God’s presence and purpose in history: “The people of God and the human race ... are of service to each other. Thus the Church’s mission is seen to be a religious one and by that very fact an outstandingly human one.”

This new self-understanding of being Church made explicit reference of the marian dimension of Church, highlighting thereby the strong personalist and communitarian nature of its being.

3. *Ecclesiology of Communion*

The rich complexity of Vatican II’s vision of the Church led to partisan interpretations, opposing at times hierarchic and democratic views. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops (1985) was called to review these interpretations in order to clarify their content and appease their tenants. Clarification was achieved, and the central and fundamental idea of the Council on Church defined as ecclesiology of communion.

The Synod document states the complex meaning of *communio*. It has a trinitarian foundation: “communion with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit,” and is established in baptism and present primarily in Word and Sacraments. *Communio* has far reaching consequences for the Church’s self-understanding:

- It is actualized in the Eucharist, source and apex of Christian communion;
- Ecclesiology of communion is foundation of order in the Church and determines the rapport between unity and pluriformity of its life;
- It provides the sacramental foundation of collegiality;
- *Communio* ecclesiology invites participation and co-responsibility at all levels.

The marian dimension of communio is referred to in John Paul II’s homily at the close of the Synod. He refers to Mary as the Church’s prototype, model and figure.

To counteract the hermeneutics of discontinuity and some of their more radical consequences the Congregation for the Faith has pinpointed recent-

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6 GS 11.
8 “Closing address to the Synod and Homily during the Synod’s Ecumenical Service” by Pope John Paul II, doc, cit., 451-453; 453/454.
ly inadequate understandings of communion (Letter to the Bishops, 28 May 1992). It deplored the insufficient integration of the concepts of communion with those of People of God and Body of Christ, or between Church as communion and Church as sacrament. The letter sets out by clarifying the notion of communion in order to apply it subsequently to the relationship between the universal Church and the particular Churches (§2), and to the meaning of Eucharistic ecclesiology and its relationship with Peter (§3); it further states the rapport between unity and diversity in ecclesial usal communion (§4) and touches briefly on communion and ecumenism (§5).

4. Universal Sacrament of Salvation

The ecclesiology of Vatican II is characterized as communion ecclesiology, and the 1985 Synod of Bishops has underlined and corroborated this view of the Church. The central and fundamental idea of koinonia is flanked by two complementary models: the sacrament-model and the servant-model. The communion of the Church is nourished in word and liturgy, and these in turn are rooted in Christ’s mysterious presence (sacramental model). This sacred character of the Church counterbalances the sociological reality, but it is no alibi for lack of concrete mission to the world in support of the inalienable rights of the human person (servant model). The notion of communion is thus centered on the Church’s divine origin. Simultaneously, the historical configuration and challenge constitute an integral part of communion.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church recapitulates these ideas in structured form, situating them in the existential context of our profession of faith. Living in history, the Church unfolds its mystery as People of God, Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit, in keeping with the trinitarian foundation of Communion.

5. The Mary-Church Relationship

Recent developments in mariology and ecclesiology highlight the Mary-Church relationship and its importance for communio ecclesiology. John Paul II writes: “In her new motherhood in the Spirit, Mary embraces each and every one in the Church, and embraces each and every one through the Church. In this sense Mary, Mother of the Church, is also the Church’s model.” The intense personalist terminology used by the pope connects the Mary-Church relation-

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10 LG 48.
11 CCC 781-810.
12 RM 47.
ship with communio ecclesiology. Indeed, communio ecclesiology is difficult to envisage without a personalist relationship between Mary and the Church, flowing from her union with Christ, and pointedly articulated in Paul VTs proclamation of Mary, Mother of the Church\textsuperscript{13}. \textit{Signum Magnum},\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Marialis cultus}\textsuperscript{15} and \textit{Redemptoris Mater}\textsuperscript{16} reiterate and deepen the teaching of Vatican II which in turn, is reassumed in the Catechism. Here, Mary, the spotless Bride, is the example of the Church’s holiness. In this the marian dimension of the Church precedes its petrine character.\textsuperscript{17} The Catechism further presents Mary as the \textit{exemplary realization} of the Church, her eschatological icon and preeminent sign of hope.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, Mary typifies on a personal level the meaning and the reality of communio ecclesiology.

III. Marianist Ecclesiology in the Making

How does the SM compare to contemporary ecclesiology? Is our form of life a relic of the past or do we measure up to the new self-understanding of Church that emerged from Vatican II? Should we even inquire about a Marianist ecclesiology or is the very term \textit{ecclesiology} too big a shoe to fit? Contemporary ecclesiology has opened up avenues which invite exploration of ecclesial micro-systems, indeed, ascending ecclesiology takes its impetus from the ecclesial experience of local churches. We are church within the Church, not only a piece of the puzzle, but \textit{pars pro toto}, we share in the fullness of being Church of Jesus Christ.

Marianist ecclesiology is in the making. It takes part in the historic nature of the Church. Simultaneously, it helps Church to become and be fashioned. This is not the place to advocate a process model of Church, but there is much to be said in favor of Church being an event whose process constitutes an important part of its historical reality. We find some of this reflected in the introductory pages of our \textit{Rule of Life} (1983) which defines our being Church in the present. The interpretation of our foundational charism in “Our Origins” avoids ontologism and juridical categories. Instead, it tells the (short) story of our past in the present, bringing the past into the present while interpreting it for our time. The text - called \textit{Our Origins} - speaks for itself, for its authors and especially for the power of the original Marianist inspiration:

\textsuperscript{13} Paul VI, Discourse, November 21, 1964; See CCC 963.
\textsuperscript{14} SM 1.
\textsuperscript{15} MC 28.
\textsuperscript{16} RM 24,25, among others.
\textsuperscript{17} CCC 773.
\textsuperscript{18} CCC 967, 972.
Community life in the spirit of the Gospel has always been an effective method of implanting personal faith and a growthful environment for fulfilling its demands. Such was the experience of the group of apostles, called together by Jesus as they followed him closely and learned by his example and teaching. Such was the experience of the early Church, united with Mary in prayer and expectation of the Holy Spirit. Such was the experience of the first community of Jerusalem, which shared everything in common, and had but one heart and one soul. Inspired by God's spirit, Father Chaminade understood the rich creative possibilities of a Christian community for apostolic service. Such a community could bear the witness of a people of saints, showing that the Gospel could still be lived in all the force of its letter and spirit. A Christian community could attract others by its very way of life and raise up new Christians and new missionaries, thus giving life in turn to still other communities. A community could thus become the great means to re-Christianize the world. It was this insight that gave rise to the first groups of men and women founded by Father Chaminade as sodalists.\(^{19}\)

Our particular Marianist ecclesiology holds in the first sentence of the living testament I just mentioned: “Community life in the Spirit of the Gospel has always been an effective method of implanting personal faith and a growthful environment for fulfilling its demands.” This statement articulates four essential aspects of our ecclesiology:

1) The ecclesial reality of community life,
2) its realization in the Spirit of the Gospel, and
3) its instrumentality as “effective method” to achieve the goal of
4) implanting personal faith in an environment conducive to growth in the Spirit.

This formulation is no mere declaration of intent. It does not stand isolated but states a fact based in experience and tradition. Community life in the Spirit of the Gospel has always been effective: such was the experience of the group of apostles who followed Jesus. Such was the experience of the early Church united with Mary, and that of subsequent ages of the Church. Father Chaminade made the same experience, since he “understood the rich creative possibilities of a Christian community for apostolic service.” It is at this point that we sense the intent of the authors of the 1983 Rule of Life. The legacy of the past is not dead. It lives on in all those who pledge allegiance to this book or rule of life. Thus, ecclesiology is always in the making, basically because Church is simultaneously “mystery” and “historic subject.” Church is the carrier of over-abundant life in earthen vessels facing an ongoing and double challenge which holds in this question: How do we demonstrate the fullness of the mystery in the finiteness and relativity of the historic subject?

Like any other ecclesiology, Marianist ecclesiology labors in paradoxical categories. Its particular dialectic develops from two closely related realities: community and faith. We would like to propose a Marianist ecclesiology understood as *model* and defined as *community of faith*.

**IV. Christocentric Foundation**

All sound ecclesiology is grounded in Jesus Christ for he is the sacrament of the trinitarian God in this world, and because the Church is the sacrament of Jesus Christ in history. As individuals and communities we live this christocentrism by “following Jesus Christ,” “conforming” ourselves to him and “participating in his life.” Being Church we *become* Church through the sharing in the sacramentality of Jesus Christ as embodied in the Church.

Chaminade contrasted the rationalistic humanism of French Enlightenment theories with a Christocentric worldview that highlighted the unity of faith and reason. His *Weltanschauung* had a double focus: It was theocentric as well as anthropocentric, and is united and embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. Chaminade’s Christocentric humanism is based on the reality of God incarnate involved personally in human history. It opposes the deist concept of an impersonal “Prime Cause” and its related mechanistic organization of world and human nature. God is not only omnipotent; he is omnipresent as creator, redeemer and sanctifier. God’s active presence in history finds its ultimate expression in Jesus Christ. In him, the whole Trinity shows concern for each human being. Son of God, Christ reveals himself to the world as Son of Mary. He reached humanity and each one of us through Mary, and it is as Son of Mary that Christ unites the whole human race to himself and to the Father. Son of God and Son of Mary: this expression summarizes for Chaminade in personalist terms the ultimate synthesis of heaven and earth. It is said that Chaminade was greatly influenced by the notion “Son of the Father” (French School and Jesuits) but added himself “Son of Mary” as a sure means to achieve the ultimate Father-Son relationship. A. Windisch remarks: “With this Marian aspect added, he was able to present a much more concrete ideal, highlight important personal and social features, and indicate an easy method of progression in the imitation of the God-Man Christ.”

Chaminade’s Christocentrism finds its practical expression in the term or phrase, “The Spirit of Christ.” This term was used frequently by the repre-

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21 *ED II*, 3-36, 29-50.
22 *ED I*, 308, 164.
sentatives of the French School of Spirituality. Chaminade equates it with the spiritual life, for "spiritual life is the very life of Jesus Christ." A true religious, then, is "another Christ." Chaminade's explanation of the "Spirit of Christ" is simple and practical: "The Spirit of Jesus Christ, the life of Jesus Christ is the manner of life that Jesus Christ observed. And the principle that sustained Jesus Christ and that acted in Him to lead Him to follow this manner of life is the Holy Spirit who inspired in Him this way of life." Thus, Christocentrism leads naturally to the Holy Spirit, who enlightens, governs, and enlivens the Church and every Christian, because he "is in the Church and in the Christian what the soul is in the body." Chaminade's Christocentrism is reflected in the Marianist tradition of the spiritual life, the understanding of community and apostolic activity.

1. Following, Conformity and Participation

Following Christ as proposed in the Gospel is the ultimate norm and the supreme rule of all religious institutes. In Marianist life we commit ourselves "to follow in a special way Jesus Christ, Son of God, become Son of Mary for the salvation of all." The expression in a special way avoids all comparison of superiority with regard to other states of life and underlines the specificity of following in Marianist religious life. The expression Son of God, become Son of Mary, so meaningful in our tradition, validates the two natures indissolubly united in the one person of Christ. Not only the two natures, but his unique way of life as Son of God and Son of Mary. As such Jesus gives concrete expression to his divine Sonship and filial piety, and invites all people to become other sons of God and sons of Mary. We want to follow Jesus' way of life, and we commit ourselves as he did to concrete persons and especially to the poor. This style of life constitutes the ultimate norm and the supreme rule of Christian existence since it is patterned on the existence or life style of Christ.

We are able to follow Jesus Christ because God is revealed in him, who is the "Word made flesh," and because "by faith we accept this revelation and give ourselves fully to the Lord." In his life and teaching, Jesus reveals to us the value of the evangelical counsels; consequently, "through our vows we take

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26 Instruction pour le confirmation, Notes for instructions: cahier gris, no. 5 (Rome: Archives of the Society of Mary, Box 9), 51
27 RL 2.
28 RL 47.
up a way of life like that of Jesus and Mary.”

“Christ, the fulfillment of the whole of the Scriptures, speaks to us everywhere in the sacred text;” because of that, “we remember the Lord’s warning to remain vigilant.”

Along with following, the Rule of Life several times mentions conformity with Christ as the end of our life. “Our goal is to be transformed into his likeness.” Persevering dedication to prayer...brings us closer to our goal, conformity with Jesus Christ.” The term conformity seems to insist on participation in the intimate life of Jesus Christ. Faith and Baptism make it begin in us, and “each time we take part in the Eucharist, we give thanks to the Father in union with Christ.” The liturgy is Christ’s prayer, and “present in word and sacrament, Christ unites us with his perfect praise of the Father.” In celebrating the sacrament of anointing “we ask the Lord to help [the religious] accept the mystery of suffering and find hope through the cross of Jesus.”

The theme of participation, primarily interior, in the mysteries of Christ finds resonance in several articles of the Rule of Life. These mysteries are germane to the principal events in the Lord’s life; grace unites us to the interior dispositions with which Jesus lived. Throughout the liturgical year we celebrate his mysteries, which become a source of private and common prayer. In union with Mary “we meditate on the mysteries of Christ, who was born and lived, died and rose for the salvation of the world and the glory of His Father.”

2. A Christocentric Community

The Lord is present in the Marianist community. Not only is he present in the reservation of the Eucharist, which becomes a privileged place for community prayer, but because he himself said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” This presence is not limited to

29 RL 16.
30 RL 54.
31 RL 11.
32 RL 2.
33 RL 58.
34 RL 3.
35 RL 50.
36 RL 49.
37 RL 53.
38 RL 49.
39 RL 4.2.
40 RL 57.
41 RL 4.3.
42 RL 37.
liturgy and prayer. It encompasses all facets of religious life. "It is Christ, present among us, who gives inspiration and strength to community life." The Spirit of Christ is dynamic and constructive but it also leads to reconciliation and healing. "Reconciliation, mutual help to overcome weakness and failings, and the acceptance of others in spite of differences are special signs of the presence of Christ among us." The presence of Jesus among us leads to the discovery and apprenticeship of fraternity and service. "Jesus came to serve and not to be served; in him we are all brothers." In this same presence we recognize the importance of fraternal existence: "We manifest our love for the Lord by giving a preferential place to love for our fellow brothers." Thus, a Christocentric community has familial character: "We form a new family, based on the Gospel of the Lord." This presence of Christ in the community is related to the action of the Spirit. "The Marianist community aims to be an image of the first community of Jesus' disciples, united with Mary and filled with the Holy Spirit." The Spirit of Christ manifests itself in the Holy Spirit and its many gifts: "The one Spirit is manifest in a variety of complementary gifts and ministries" in such a way that each one can use his gift to build up the body of Christ. "When each member is faithful to the Spirit, the community as a whole grows into the full stature of Christ."

3. A Christocentric Apostolate

If our personal and community life is centered in Jesus Christ, our apostolate consists in giving witness of him, of preaching and sharing his spirit. "Thus [living in a faith-community with one heart and one soul] we hope to bear witness to the presence of Christ," of making him present, of announcing him, whatever the nature of our working in his name may be. "In every culture, there are groups and strata of people to whom Christ has not been preached. ... The vast world of labor (mass media, organizations of social and cultural improvement, continuing education, and scientific research) must like-

43 RL 37.  
44 RL 3.11.  
45 RL 44.  
46 RL 21.  
47 RL 35.  
48 RL 34.  
49 RL 12.  
50 RL 41.  
51 RL 9.  
52 RL 69.
wise be penetrated with the message of Christ." The ultimate goal of these activities is the redemption of all in Christ.

Our apostolic objective is "to assist [Mary] in her mission of forming in faith a multitude of brothers for her first-born Son." We want "to bring to the world the liberation of Jesus Christ," so that Christ can take full possession of our lives, and through us reach out to others. This commitment can be fulfilled as well through our daily work, in prayer and suffering, for "whatever our service, we know that the saving grace of Christ has no limits." Finally, "our vocation is a fellowship with the Lord and his Mother for the sake of mission."

Most references given here are from the Rule of Life (1983). They are in tune with the thought of Father Chaminade who perceived Marianist life as a following of Jesus Christ and a means to arrive at the most perfect resemblance to him. "Follow and imitate him, Chaminade says, go to him, follow in his footsteps, and you will never go astray." We are called to participate in the life of Christ thanks to the Holy Spirit and by means of faith. Religious life, community and apostolate are marked by this christocentrism. However, christocentrism in Marianist life has a note that is unmistakably Marian. Mary cooperates with the Spirit in our spiritual formation. This thought is dear to Chaminade: It is through Mary that we obtain "ever more conformity with Jesus Christ by the Spirit of Jesus Christ." The maternal role of Mary is an integral part of Marianist christocentrism. Mary's "entire ambition is - according to Chaminade - that all the children which her charity has brought forth after him, be so united to him, that with him they form but one Son, one and the same Jesus Christ." Grounded in the French School of Spirituality, Chaminadian christocentrism must be understood as living the mysteries or inner states of Christ and as participation in the Mystical Body. It is in this context that Mary assumes the role of New Eve, symbol of Christian renewal.

53 RL 5.22.
54 RL 64.
55 RL 6.
56 RL 11.
57 RL 23, 56.
58 RL 70.
59 RL 6.9.
60 Spirit 1, 441, 600.
61 Spirit 1, 440, 598.
62 Ibid.
V. Charism as Mission

It is against the christocentric backdrop of our foundation that we need to examine the charism of the Society of Mary. The source of charism is the Spirit. It is a gratuitous and dynamic gift of grace engaging the person who receives it in the work of the Spirit. Charisms are practical in nature, they are useful for the ecclesial community, "ordered as they are to the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity and to the needs of the world."63 This and the fact that charism are not peripheral, but seize the whole person makes the charism to be an essentially relational reality.64 Charisms, then, have a triple function:

1) They have a transforming effect on the person who is their recipient;
2) Charisms necessarily bear witness to the nature of the Church, and
3) They represent the various ways in which the Spirit functions within the community for the community’s service to the world.65

It is our opinion that the essential charism of the Society of Mary is a sense of mission. As such it belongs to the foundational Christian experience and conviction that Christ was sent by the Father on a mission to draw all human beings by the power of his love into union with himself and with the Father. Concomitantly, it came to signify, according to the language of the New Testament, a call from God to a human being to proclaim the divine plan as revealed in Jesus. In Marianist tradition the word mission is more than an abstract idea. It connotes inspiration and motivation, a sense of freedom from fear and narrow human concern, but also the sense of urgency typical of the disciple whose life is dominated by a special missionary grace.

1. A Personal Charism: Missionary Apostolic

The Marianist charism of mission is embodied in the person and life of Father Chaminade. It developed in time through personal experience and education, as did the idea of permanent mission,66 the emphasis on union with

63 Christifideles laici, 24.
64 D.J. Murphy, "Prophecy as Charism, "in Mother of the Sacred Pages. Essays and Articles in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm., on the occasion of his 80th birthday, eds. K. J. Egan, C. E. Morrison (Washington, D.C.: The Carmelite Institute, 1997), 319.
65 D.J. Murphy, "Prophecy as Charism," 319-320.
66 "His complete dedication to the work was his way of being a Missionary Apostolic and of creating a permanent mission, for that is his expression to characterize the various classes of the Bordeaux sodality: "The Sodality is a Permanent Mission." (V. Vasey, Chaminade – Another Portrait (Dayton, OH, Marianist Resources Commission, 1987), 109. [Hereafter: Another Portrait]
Rome as means of reforming the Church\textsuperscript{67}, the experience of the apostolic potential of large youth movements, the internalization of the christocentric doctrine of the French School of Spirituality (conformity with Christ and his mysteries), and, of course, the role of Mary in the apostolic mission. The personal and ecclesial character of Chaminade’s charism is best expressed and ratified by the Church in the title of \textit{Missionary Apostolic}.

Politically, Chaminade was a royalist, religiously he felt and acted as an ardent and loving son of the Church. “He saw his entire being, his activity in the dynamism of the Church’s life. He could not conceive any foundation isolated from the Church in the slightest degree.”\textsuperscript{68} Since he was convinced that he had a special mission to accomplish in the Church, and since exceptional powers were needed for this mission, he asked Rome for the title of \textit{Missionary Apostolic}, which he obtained through a decree on March 28, 1801.\textsuperscript{69} The title of Missionary Apostolic was of little juridical or canonical meaning and support. Its true significance was that of a pastoral or missionary bond between the Holy See and the person mandated. It emphasized submission to the pope and more important, the fact of being entrusted with a special apostolic mission. As Chaminade wrote to the priests of the Society in 1840: “It was then necessary that the first superior...should be more specially pledged to the Sovereign Pontiff and receive from him the sacred character of the mission which he exercises in his own right, and by those under him in the Church of God.”\textsuperscript{70}

This title established his place in the Church while allowing him ample room to exercise his specific mission. Father Chaminade later reaffirmed in a letter to Count de Noailles in 1830, the motive behind this request which he made to Rome. “It is now some years since God deigned to inspire me with the desire of working for the maintenance of religion in our unhappy country. To be able to do it more efficaciously, I asked for the faculties of a Missionary Apostolic and obtained them”.\textsuperscript{71}

Thanks to his title, Father Chaminade fulfilled his mission as the initiator or founder of new religious movements. Looking back on his return from exile in 1800 he wrote to Adele de Trenquelleon in 1814: “Fourteen years ago, I re-

\textsuperscript{67} Lettres IV, Lettre to Pope Gregory XVI, September 16, 1838, no. 1076, p. 374: “To oppose a dike against the torrents of evil, heaven inspired me at the beginning of this century to solicit from the Holy See letters of a Missionary apostolic in order to vivify and rekindle everywhere the divine tone of faith in presenting everywhere to the world imposing groups of Catholic Christians of every age, sex, and condition!”

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Another Portrait}, 158.

\textsuperscript{69} See P. Pierrel, \textit{Missionary Journey}, 25ff.

\textsuperscript{70} Letters V, No. 1193 to the priests of the Society, March 8, 1840, 126.

\textsuperscript{71} Letters II, 2, 523, Mary 14, 1830, 364.
entered France as Missionary Apostolic to all our unhappy land, nevertheless under the authority of the Ordinaries of various places. I did not know any better way to exercise my functions than by establishing a sodality like those now existing.”72 The prerogatives of this title allowed him “to exercise a special new apostolate, independent of the parochial ministry, and to venture even beyond diocesan boundaries, meaning that he was responsible directly not to a bishop, but to the prince of bishops, the pope.”73

2. A Shared Charism: Missionaries of Mary

In his conception of mission, Chaminade considered himself and his followers as missionaries of Mary. He envisaged a community of people motivated by missionary zeal aimed at rescuing Bordeaux and France from religious indifference and hostility, and committed to the religious regeneration of “our beautiful homeland.” He was determined to battle the secularism of his time (libertinism and philosophism) by organizing Christian communities which would spread and involve large masses of lay people. His assessment of the contemporary spiritual situation was indeed bleak. Public opinion and schools had been taken over by “philosophy and Protestantism:” “They have endeavored to spread in all minds, above all in children and youth, license of thought, which is worse than that of the heart inseparable from it.”74 Thus, Chaminade felt compelled by heavenly inspiration to oppose “a dike against the torrents of evil” in order to “rekindle everywhere the divine torch of faith.” Endowed with the title of Missionary Apostolic he was going to present “everywhere to the world imposing groups of Catholic Christians of every age, sex, and condition.”75

Chaminade’s concept of mission did not focus in the first place on individuals as on the courage, zeal, and attractive influence of communities of faith. From his days in Mussidan, Chaminade was convinced that Mary Immaculate had a central role to play in this endeavor. It has been suggested that Chaminade’s militant, or better, apostolic Marian doctrine was influenced by Bernard Dariès. Indeed, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception has a prominent place in Chaminade’s thought. However, she is the patroness of the Sodalities not so much because the Immaculate Conception is a privilege of Mary, but “because it is the sign of her personal and apostolic triumph.”76 Faith in divine revelation, loyalty to the Holy See, and confidence in her ultimate victory

72 Letters I, to de Trenquelléon, October 8, 1814, no. 52, 87-88.
74 Letters IV, to Pope Gregory XVI, September 16, 1838, no. 1076, 375.
75 Id., 374.
76 Another Portrait, 203.
were connected with Mary’s name and devotion to her. The marian imprint or mark is capital for an accurate understanding of Marianist mission.

Chaminade believed that the graces God had given Mary led her to a life of absolute attachment to Jesus and to full union with him in his mission to establish the Reign of God on earth. When Jesus, in the pursuit of his mission, devoted himself to forming the members of the community gathered around him, Mary’s love for him made her his most perceptive and devoted collaborator. The apostolic and redemptive dimension of Mary’s association with her Son became a source of constant inspiration and challenge for the apostolate and the spiritual life in the Society of Mary and the whole Marianist Family. All of his religious foundations are dedicated to the Mission of Mary, and thus their members become Missionaries of Mary in the work of salvation. The Society of Mary is an “association of Mary’s children” devoted to Mary’s interests, that is to her ambition “to make all these children one in Him” who is the “Sacred Heart, her adorable Son, her firstborn, our elder Brother.” Chaminade stressed the radical character of this association with Mary: “Without any human regret, they enter into this association to sustain those interests, first in themselves and then in all with whom they come into contact.”

Father Chaminade believed that this role of Mary in the life of Jesus and in that of the early Church was a continuous one, valid for all time. The mission of Mary was of particular import in his age, which he regarded as an apocalyptic battlefield, perhaps a final confrontation of good and evil. The design of God was a single one and it involved Mary in a central role. Father Chaminade conceived the place of himself and his disciples as serving under the standard of Mary in the great religious combats of his day.

In tune with Mary’s all-encompassing invitation: “Do whatever he tells you,” mission was understood to be universal in scope, organization, and means.

3. Praxis-orientated Ecclesiology

Charism as mission constitutes the dynamic principle and organizing power of Marianist ecclesiology. Chaminade’s aim at establishing a dynamic and apostolic movement to evangelize and re-establish Christianity has a definitely praxis-oriented impact on Marianist ecclesiology.

As long as the sense of mission is alive and well in the Society of Mary, the Society will be alive and well, meaning that it is the concrete and practical un-

77 Direction 2, nos. 38-39, 53.
78 “In the Constitution he insisted upon the foundation of a universal group, addressing itself to a universal clientele by means that are all-inclusive, to produce a general formation in the Christian life.” (Another Portrait, 206).
derstanding of charism as mission that makes or breaks Marianist ecclesiology. Mission is a simple enough and flexible concept. Its challenge does not rest so much in the theoretical elaboration of its meaning as in the historical application and implications of its evangelical impetus. This observation leads to the following consequences for Marianist ecclesiology:

1) The sense of mission plays a life-giving and critical role in Marianist ecclesiology;
2) Mission ultimately determines the structural and organizational dimensions of Marianist ecclesiology;
3) At any time in the history of the Society of Mary there is need for retrieval and/or deepening and sharpening of our sense of mission based on historical circumstances;
4) The rightful understanding and implementation of mission creates a sense of solidarity and community as well as universality.

VI. The Marian "Realsymbol"

Ecclesiological discourse is frequently conducted in symbolic language. When *Lumen Gentium* speaks of the Church, it relies upon images drawn from Scripture. Images like building, fishing net, tillage or bride are stating God's property, and remind us that the Church is God's work and simultaneously, his gift to us. Other symbols are more abstract and convey the social and dynamic reality of church, such as for example, People of God, Communion of Saints or Mystical Body. Such images capture the imagination and pacify the intellect. They allow for a personal and communitarian commitment where both integration and individual differences are possible and find breathing space.

1. From Mystical Body to People of God

There is little doubt that the root-metaphor of Marianist ecclesiology in the past was that of the Mystical Body. Chaminade frequently presents the doctrine of the Mystical Body and its spiritual, communitarian and apostolic implications:

All the predestined, from the world's beginning, are to form but one body, called Christ's mystical body, whose head is Christ. Between brothers this is a communion of life, of motion, of spirit. It is the spirit of Christ that vivifies all the members of the mystical body of Christ. Our union exists in the names of Jesus and Mary. In their names we intend to multiply Christians. All those who join

79 LG 6.
80 LG 9.
81 LG 7.
us in this work will be led, directed by the same views, the same spirit. We shall all have the same interests....And for evermore let the love of Christ unite us!  

Chaminade's concept of the Church is twofold: down-to-earth and practical, materializing in what has been called the "Marianist Social System" (Windisch). At a deeper and more fundational level, Church for Chaminade is a real union, "a union more perfect than that of the human body" of its members and with Jesus Christ: "The Church-he says-is not a purely political body as other societies which are bound by a moral union and external bonds, that is, by the same laws and the same government. It is a nuptial body whose members are interiorly and really united by the same Spirit who forms in them a love and penchant for one another."  

But we find references to the Body of Christ in the Rule of Life (1983), too. Member of a community, each religious "shares his gift in building up the Body of Christ." This apostolic and communitarian orientation has a pendant and, indeed a foundation in the spiritual realm: "Sharing together the bread of life and the cup of salvation, we form a single body." If the goal of this interpretation of the Mystical Body-Theology is growth toward and into "the full stature of Christ," its principal means is the fidelity to the Spirit.  

However, the Rule of Life and its strong community-oriented theology and structure shows a more pervasive affinity with the recently rediscovered notion of People of God, even though as expression it is not more frequently mentioned than Body of Christ and Mystical Body. The mention of the People of God conveys solidarity with humankind: "the longing and searching of God's people," awareness of the historical character of the Church, and openness to the future as a fundamental way to engage in the ongoing process of salvation history.  

Both of these images converge in the description of Church as the sacrament of Christ. The sacrament of Christ is signified in the People of God as its visible and tangible reality, but its signifier is to be found in the Mystical Body, otherwise expressed in Lumen Gentium's notion of mysterium. Further,

82 LG 7.
83 Scil. The Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit.
84 "Sur l'amour de Dieu," Notes for instructions: cahier cartonné, no. 3. (Rome: Archives of the Society of Mary, Box 9), 57f.; see also Ecrits et Paroles 2 (Casale Monterrato: Ed. Piemme, 1999), 197f.).
85 RL 41.
86 RL 50.
87 Ibid.
88 RL 51.
89 Inspired by Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes the Catechism of the Catholic Church formulates like this: "As sacrament, the Church is Christ's instrument. She is taken up by
these two symbolizations of Church stress the inner (Mystical Body) and outer reality (People of God) of the Society of Mary.

It might be added that the Rule of Life does not attempt to harmonize the two images. They are juxtaposed rather than interdependent. However, there is a common trait in both of them. Mystical Body and People of God are both explained in relation to Mary. She, Mary, contrasts the longing and searching of God’s people because she is “the first among those who believe in Jesus Christ and the first to be saved from evil and death.” Our charism is a “gift of God for his people,” and it has the “spirit of Mary as its source.” The reference to Mary is even stronger in the Body-analogy. In fact, the doctrine of the Body of Christ in Chaminade’s writings relates frequently to the maternal relationship between Mary and the faithful.

May it suffice to remind us that according to Chaminade she “conceives it, she gives it birth, and she forms it until it shall reach its fullness of age.” Since all the mysteries of Christ are to be reproduced in his Church, it is “conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary” as Jesus was. Thus, Mary “acts in our regard as she acted toward Jesus Christ.” Christ is inseparable from his Body, the Church. Thus, to be mother of the Head is to be mother of the Body, that is, mother of the members of the Church at the Incarnation, and especially at Calvary: “Now the whole spiritual being, this Mystical Body of Christ, this only son of God, was conceived in Mary’s being of grace at the foot of the cross.” The graces destined to form the members of the Mystical Body are “qualities from her maternal love.”

2. The Marian “Realsymbol”

Not only in the case of these Church symbols but in many other instances of Marianist organization and life does the Rule of Life make explicit reference to Mary. Indeed, article 1, which defines the Society of Mary, affirms that this religious congregation is “dedicated to Mary.” In the last article of Book One

him also as the instrument for the salvation of all,’ ‘the universal sacrament of salvation,’ by which Christ is ‘at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God’s love for men.’” See CCC 776, referring to LG 9, 48; GS 45.

90 RL 7.
91 RL 5.4.
94 Ibid.
95 We are following here K. Rahner’s understanding of Realsymbol as it was interpreted by Balthasar and adapted by this author.
we read that “the spirit of the Society is the spirit of Mary.”\(^96\) Other references with the same or a similar thrust can be mentioned.

In article 14 of our *Rule of Life* we read that the Society of Mary belongs to Mary since it is a family dedicated to her. Consequently, to collaborate with the Society is the same as collaborating with Mary.\(^97\) Marianist vocation is considered under the aspect of a covenant with Jesus Christ and his Mother oriented toward the fulfillment of a single mission.\(^98\) When speaking about sharing our charism, the Rule specifies that the spirit of Mary is the source of the charism of the Institute, for no religious order or congregation can exist without a special charism given to the founder by God.\(^99\)

It is abundantly clear from the writings of Chaminade that the intuition of Mary's apostolic mission in the history of salvation is primary and foundational for an accurate understanding of the Marianist charism. This conviction has been a constant in the Marianist tradition. It is emphasized and formulated as a charter in the famous letter of the Founder to the retreat masters of August 24, 1839:

All religious orders, you will say, have rendered honor to Mary in a special way, and they glory in belonging to her. I reply that we are indeed far from pretending that the right to honor Mary is exclusively ours. Such a claim would undoubtedly be ridiculous, for who has ever been able to love the Son without also loving the mother, and who has ever dared to seek evangelical perfection while excluding all special honor to Mary from their consecration to Jesus. But what I regard as a really distinctive trait of our two orders, and what seems to me to be without precedent in all the religious orders I know, is the fact, to recall it once again, that we embrace the religious life in the name and for the glory of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and for the sake of devoting ourselves to her, that is to say, our bodies and all that we possess, in order to make her known, loved, and served. For we are thoroughly convinced that we shall never bring people back to Jesus except through his most holy mother, since we believe, in union with the saintly doctors of the Church, that she is the only source of hope for us, *Tota ratio spei nostrae*, our Mother, our refuge, our help, our strength, and our life.\(^100\)

The practical consequences of this description of Marianist identity is fourfold. It leads the members to consecrate themselves to Mary. They will regard themselves as her children and Mary as their mother. Most important, they "form themselves in the womb of her maternal tenderness to be like Jesus Christ...to live the life of Jesus Christ under the auspices of and guidance of

\(^96\) RL 114.
\(^97\) RL 15.
\(^98\) RL 6.9.
\(^99\) RL 5.4.
\(^100\) Retraites I, nos 61-63, 176.
Mary." Fourth, the members will undertake all their works "in entire confidence in the protection of the August Name of Mary" and for her glory. The true secret of success for Chaminade "is to interest the Blessed Virgin in everything, to give her the glory of everything in the view and sentiments of Jesus Christ." 101

This is not the place to expound the traditional Marian doctrine of the Society of Mary. Suffice it to say that Mary is the "real symbol" (Realsymbol) of Marianist ecclesiology; ultimately, because she represents for us what we call "realized Church." 102 Church and Kingdom find their highest realization in Mary. The often frustrating, painful and sometimes tragically guilty distance between the Pilgrim Church and the Kingdom of Heaven is already transcended in her. 103 We draw from this that the Mother of Jesus "is the image and beginning of the Church as she is to be perfected in the world to come." 104

There exists a tradition in the Church which tends to personalize the understanding of it and its self-understanding. The Church sees itself as the feminine figure of Ecclesia facing Christ. This typological reading of the Church invites a personalist ecclesiology often used in the past as object of prayer and meditation. With Ambrose, Mary begins to assume this role. She is in his view, the personal and concrete prototype of the Church understood as virgin, spouse and mother, the wholesome and unscathed center of the Church, in other words her personified "real symbol." This reading of Church in and through the person of Mary allows for and promotes not only a personal or personalist understanding of the Church but also a personal identification with it. The identification it suggests has a strong experiential character: it asks for dedication and commitment but, in turn, promises a loving relationship. Personalist ecclesiology achieves practical realization in the anima ecclesiastica (Origen) of its members: participating in the personhood of the Church, and emulating its personality the individual believer becomes person in Christ.

This vision of the Church has its drawbacks. It sometimes exacerbates the conflict between the concrete reality of the Church and its spiritual nature shrouded in mystery. It may tend to overlook the necessary distinction between credo in Deum and credo ecclesiam, downplaying thereby the fact that God's presence is active in the Church. This notwithstanding and conscious of Mary's dominant role in the Marianist history and spirituality, we would like to suggest that Mary is the "real symbol" (Realsymbol) of Marianist ecclesiology. This is not to mean that Marianist ecclesiology is exclusively or even

101 Direction 2, no. 350, 180.
102 Or, as mentioned by the CCC 972, the "eschatological icon of the Church."
103 LG 65.
104 LG 68.
essentially Marian. The primary constitutive element of our self-understanding as Church is mission as charism and its ongoing and collective interpretation in time. It is around the term and reality of mission that the Society of Mary constitutes itself. Mary is the one who symbolizes this reality.

1. Source of Charism

Even recent documents, as we saw, regard Mary as the source of our charism. More specifically, our charism has the spirit of Mary as its source. What is meant by the "spirit of Mary"? We speak of the spirit of a person when aiming to establish a difference between the historical reality of a person and the exemplary and therefore (quasi-) universal significance of his or her being and action. Applied to Mary, this means that what she did, and, up to a point how she did it, is worth reproducing and re-enacting in the hope of similar results. In this sense, Mary finds herself in an ante factum position with regard to our ecclesiology. Her disposition, reaction, and commitment to the call from God has exemplary value for us. Her behavior represents, so-to-speak, a personalized blueprint for our ecclesiology.

2. Actualizing Dynamism

This blueprint is not couched on paper but lives on as genetic code in Mary, the "eschatological icon." Being "actualized Church," Mary has actualizing power on our behalf. Promised woman sharing in all of Christ's mysteries, Mary continues to share them with us. We might see in Mary's mission a concomitant dynamism which accompanies our charism understood as mission. Inspired and challenged by this actualizing dynamism, our self-understanding of being Church evolves and grows toward its eschatological destination. Forming part with the Pilgrim Church we also take part in its marian dynamic.

3. Constitutional Bond

Between beginning (source of charism) and end (Mary as actualized and thus actualizing Church) there lies the historical situation of the Society of Mary which belongs to Mary. Our time is marian time. We belong to her through our vow of stability. The retreat masters of 1839 were to implement the letter and spirit of the famous letter of August 24, 1839, which some consider to be the best document we have on Marianist stability. The retreat directory would explain to the members of the Society "the wonder of their consecration to Mary." In the language of the time, Marianists were Mary's

105 RL 5.4.
children, her missionaries, and her collaborators to such a degree that they
could not aspire to anything more in any other religious institute. As Chami-
nade mentions in a different context, “When we make the vow of stability, we
do not make directly a vow of consecration to the Most Blessed Virgin; but
it is included indirectly since we commit ourselves to remain permanently...
in a Society that is entirely devoted to her.”107 This belonging is considered by
the members of the Society of Mary as the “true value” of their vocation and
strengthens their resolve to practice generous fidelity.

4. Formative Presence

The reality of Mary’s hold on the Society of Mary, in the sense of “Real-
symbol,” is further deepened and strengthened through her mission of forma-
tion of its members. The “precious gift” we have received in Mary108 only fee-
bly echoes the recommendation of the Founder that we always consider Mary
as our mother: “This order takes the name Society of Mary (that of Family
would better express its nature), because all those who belong or will belong to
it in the future must,

1. consecrate themselves to Mary;
2. regard her as their mother and look upon themselves as her children;
3. form themselves in the bosom of her maternal tenderness to a resemblance to
Jesus Christ.”109

Father Chaminade saw in the spiritual maternity as it is alluded to in
point three above, a summary of all that Our Lady is and does in cooperating
in the salvation of the human race.

These four modes of Mary’s presence to the Society of Mary characterize
what we mean by Realsymbol. Mary is the inspirator and guardian of our ec-
clesiology. The four aspects of her role developed here show clearly that Mari-
anist ecclesiology presents an evident marian modality. Modality in its generic
meaning is what links esse and agere. Modality points to a modus essendi which
translates into a corresponding or congruent modus agendi. As “real symbol”
Mary fashions our mode or way of being and patterns our behavior and ac-
tion. Being “real symbol” her character as model is exemplary, her role on our
behalf effective, the type of relationship she has with us associative, and her
influence formative-affective.

107 Spirit, 1, 100, 129.
109 MW 2, 668, 259s.
VII. Dependence and Interdependence

As we consider the Society of Mary in its social nature and dimensions, it appears that this religious congregation has been shaped and is continuously shaped in dependence and interdependence with two other social bodies. We are talking about the Church and the Family of Mary. Spelled out in somewhat simplifying categories we could say that our preferred way in seeking God leads to the Church, sacrament of Jesus Christ, whereas our outreach to the world involves as preferential option the extension of the Family of Mary and our identification with it. For both types of relationships we notice a de facto dependence and interdependence. The give-and-take that thus ensues is not only (and hopefully) fruitful for all parties, it also recognizes a long and fruitful common history of dependence and interdependence.

It should be remembered here that Chaminade was gifted with a pronounced social sensitivity. He strongly opposed the concept of an isolated “original man” who engaged in a “social contract.” Likewise, he rejected mechanistic and biological views of society advocating either individualism or collectivism. Chaminade adhered to the classical scholastic theory, which holds that individual and society are twin-born, and upholds the inherent values of “both the person and the society in a type of correlative and inseparable dyarchy.”

To highlight this indissoluble rapport, Chaminade used examples such as the family, the image of Jesus Christ as historical reality and mystical body, and the various modes of existence of the triune God. It is important to grasp the place and impact of the social dimension on Chaminade’s thinking, for it is closely linked to his views on community and Church. According to Chaminade the whole social order, its structures and relations, would have to be renewed in the spirit of the Christian message so as to allow each human person to live a life conformed to the reality of the Mystical Body of Christ. It is by means of our “organic Christian social order in miniature” (Windisch) that Chaminade brought individuals and groups together “to present everywhere to an astonished world, imposing masses of Catholic Christians of all ages, of both sexes, and of every walk of life, who united in special associations would practice the Catholic faith.”

1. Sentire cum Ecclesia

The Society of Mary has a solid ecclesial tradition which finds its roots in the founder’s humble love for the Church. For Chaminade the Spirit of God will

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111 Windisch, 86.
112 Lettres IV, 1076, 74.
animate human activity and his apostolic works only in so far as they are recognized by the Church and remain united to it. His life and work were marked by the dynamism of the Church's life. "He could not conceive of any foundation isolated from the Church in the slightest degree." To be invested with the authority and the mandate from the Church was essential for the life and success of the self-understanding he had as missionary apostolic: "The Society of Mary is one of the works of the Church, where the Spirit of God resides. If the Spirit of God is not within me personally, because of my unworthiness, it is in me as the superior of a Society received favorably in the Church by its bishops, by the Sovereign Pontiff himself." It is thanks to this deep sense of being in and through the Church of the founder that Marianists can say that they "represent the Church." This is the perspective adopted by Lumen Gentium. Each Christian is called to be a living and active member of the Church's progress, its continuing sanctification, and its mission of salvation. Members of the Church, we are ultimately called by the Lord himself. He marks us with the indelible mark of his love (baptism) and confirms us as full-fledged members of his Church (confirmation).

The Rule of Life describes our relationship with the Church as both dependence and interdependence. This is summarized in the lapidary sentence: "We work as members of the Church and share in its mission." Dependence is clearly pointed out in the first half of the statement: "We work as members of the Church." The Society of Mary is a social reality which was approved by and receives its continued legitimization from the Church. Its way of life – life according to the evangelical counsels – is the property of the Church and constitutes one of the core elements of its being the sacrament of Jesus Christ in this world. As members – individually as well as collectively – we are a part of the Church with other parts and thus subordinate to a greater whole. All of these forms of dependence suggest obedience and service as stipulated by the very purpose of our existence as Society of Mary: We profess the evangelical counsels and place ourselves "at the service of the Church." However, our integration into the Church goes much deeper: "We share in its mission." Mission reflects the very core of our charism and thus our raison d'être. Likewise, mission defines life and existence of the Church. She is the sacrament of the person of Christ made mission. There exists a fundamental unity and com-

113 Another Portrait, 158.
114 Letters II, 625, May 21, 1832.
115 RL 3.12.
116 LG 33.
117 RL 66.
118 RL 1.
munion between the mission of the Church and that of the Society of Mary. Marianists partake of the christocentrism embodied in the Church through the celebration of the Eucharist and the proclamation of the Word of Life. These basic modalities of our sharing in the Church’s mission not only determine our way of being (celebration of Eucharist) and doing (proclamation of the Word), they also signal and manifest – in both dependence and interdependence – the meaning and reality of shared mission.

Dependence on and interdependence with the Church transcend juridical categories. Our Rule of Life speaks of an existential and empathic attachment to the Church: “With heart and mind we enter into its life and teaching and we collaborate fully with the entire ecclesial community.” Such bonding involves the whole person, individually and collectively. There is even a subtle undertone there which says: desire, we desire to espouse the Church’s life and view. We lovingly contemplate and explore its complex reality and manifold projects in order to make them a matter of the heart, our heart. This is what the tradition of the Church called sentire cum Ecclesia. It reflects the attitudes of those who link their destiny with that of the Church, knowing that it is in and through her that we will be able to follow, Jesus, the way, the truth and the life. This loving obedience is typified in Mary’s yes. As in Mary’s yes, there can be no facile complacency for those who live by this ecclesial sensitivity. We are not speaking of abstract realities and platonic spiritualism. The Rule of Life stresses full collaboration with the entire ecclesial community, stressing thereby that no true “sentire” can exist lest it be fashioned and purified in trial and hardship (“agere”).

2. Sensus fidelium

Sentire cum Ecclesia finds a natural pendant or complement in the expression sensus fidelium. When speaking of sensus fidelium we do not invoke a notion invented (if ever!) or explicitely thematized in our tradition. However, as Marianists we know and cherish the equivalent of its social embodiment. What is meant is the Family of Mary. Indeed, there exists an intimate connection between what the Family of Mary means to us Marianists and the significance of sensus fidelium.

The Rule of Life enumerates among the reasons for the foundation of the Society of Mary the creation and promotion of “a more comprehensive community of Christians of all states of life” united in the Marianist Spirit. It mentions the “complementary roles” of these groups of the Family of Mary, and

119 RL 66.
120 RL 1.1.
urges greater consciousness of our common commitment to the mission of the Church.\textsuperscript{121} Thus, what links the Society of Mary to the Family of Mary is our common origin and common mission. The Society of Mary aims “to attract Christians to form communities consciously committed to living the Marianist spirit,”\textsuperscript{122} and offers its services and ministries to this end. The Rule of Life goes a step further and situates the Society of Mary in the Family of Mary. This position allows us “to attain a better understanding of ourselves as religious.”\textsuperscript{123}

What does this have to do with the sensus fidelium? Vatican II connects its statement concerning the sense of faith (sensus fidelium) directly with the function of the Holy Spirit in the Church.\textsuperscript{124} The living stream, which permeates the community of Christ is grace. This innermost living power of the Church tolerates no separation between hierarchy and faithful. Similarly, the communion of all applies also to the specific sensorium called sense of faith, which is spiritual instinct, faithful power of discernment, created by a living faith becoming fruitful in love as a result of the “conspiration” of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit. The relationship between the teaching authority of the Church and the sensus fidelium is therefore to be thought of as an organized alternating relation, a relatedness of two different capacities which, in working together, make real a differentiated and thus higher order and unity. The alternating relationship presents itself as a “conspiratio” of both organs, as “a twofold and yet single witness:” both organs clarify and complement each other and may never be separated from each other.\textsuperscript{125}

The sensus fidelium is a nuanced capacity to be fully Church, and can be described as the total sense of the faithful. It is a living capacity which can only be built up and preserved in the fulfillment of life. In short, the sensus fidelium is the fruit of a total human attitude of faith. The living and unbreakable relationship with the Family of Mary heightens and deepens our sense of faith.

1. It is, in the first place, the living memory of a shared mission and common inspiration.
2. It helps to develop in the members of the Society a more acute “lay” sensitivity, meaning higher and more unprotected exposure to the realities of this world, more immediate contact with the needy, but also a quality of faith seasoned in a more direct experience of the God-world relationship. In and

\textsuperscript{121} RL 1.2.
\textsuperscript{122} RL 1.3.
\textsuperscript{123} RL 1.2.
\textsuperscript{124} LG 12.
\textsuperscript{125} Newman, On Consulting the Faithful, 71.
through this sensitivity we reach a higher understanding of ourselves as a faith community engaged in permanent mission.

3. Although inseparable from Sentire cum Ecclesia, the sensus fidelium offers complementarity in accentuating the sense of faith of the people, that is, a sort of instinct (phronema) deep in the soul of the mystical body of Christ, frequently present in the simple believer as direction of the Holy Spirit and sensitivity to error.

It would have been possible to formulate the creative and determining influence of Church and Family of Mary in social or structural terms. Instead, we chose to have recourse to the more dynamic principles of Sentire cum Ecclesia and sensus fidelium in order to highlight again our self-understanding in mission.

VIII. Community of Faith as Marianist Model of Ecclesiology

Based on what precedes, it would be useful to reread and mediate on the following statement of our purpose. "Our goal — says the The Rule of Life — is to be transformed into his (scil. Christ’s) likeness and to work for the coming of his kingdom." Transformation into the likeness of Christ and contribution or active commitment to the coming of his kingdom pinpoints a twofold dynamism which is incarnational as well as eschatological. To be transformed into Christ is to make him visible and present in this world, a transformation which can be achieved only at the time of his second coming. We are in our being and very flesh icons of the future total Christ. Incomplete, our likeness with Christ is promise of completion. In similar fashion, the Kingdom we are working for is made visible and present in and through our growing likeness with him, understood as a complementary realization of individual and collective vocations. The double dynamism of Incarnation and Eschatology constitutes the veritable motor of Marianist ecclesiology. It shapes and gives life to what we call a Marianist model of ecclesiology, and which we would like to describe as community of faith.

The main characteristic of this model lies in the intimate connection of faith and community. Faith is the very reason for community in the Society of Mary, and in turn marks its structure and organization. On the other hand, community is not only a necessary support for each individual member but gives life in faith a special meaning, a special spiritual as well as apostolic configuration. In essence, the community of faith is called to be the living embodiment of charism as mission, a living icon of Mary.
1. *Fortes in fide*

According to Chaminade, faith is a quality of being which permeates life, and, reaching to the core of the human personality, leads us to think, choose and move in the light of God's word and his spirit: "The faith which would not enlighten our mind would not give us the light of justice, which is a divine life."\(^{127}\) Faith is encompassing the whole person, its innermost reality as well as its way of being and acting.

.1 The Spirit of Faith

Spirit of Faith says *habitus*, attitude, disposition. For Chaminade it is the very atmosphere in which we live, walking in the presence of God:\(^{128}\) "The spirit of faith, in which you are always to make progress, will be in you your regulator in all and for all."\(^{129}\) This wholesome disposition is to permeate our action: "Act in such a way that all your actions, little by little and without worry, become works of faith."\(^{130}\) And how is such living faith to be understood?

.2 Faith of the Heart

St. Paul's expression "faith of the heart"\(^{131}\) is directly related to the principal goal of Christian existence, which is conformity with Jesus Christ.\(^{132}\) Faith of the heart should lead us and those we form to conversion of heart.\(^{133}\) For Chaminade it was "a great gift of God," one that will always prompt us to pray, "Lord, increase our faith."\(^{134}\) What faith of the heart adds to the spirit of faith is a special human quality: faith is embraced and given free access to the deepest recesses of our being. It is recognized as the highest good of the Christian pilgrim, and empowers him to be light (hope) and energy (love) for others. In more personalist categories: Faith of the heart is synonymous of true and total acceptance of Jesus savior, brother and friend, who draws and empowers us to make his life and message the ultimate criteria of our existence. "God reveals himself in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. By faith we accept this revelation and give ourselves ful-

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127 Letters, 661, Jan. 23, 1833, 3/1, 141.
128 Genesis 17:1.
129 Letters, 915, 16 Dec. 1836, 4.58.
130 Letters, 1111, Jan. 17, 1839, 4.349.
131 Romans. 10:9-10.
132 RL 58.
133 RL 72.
134 Letters, 611, Jan. 23, 1833, 3/1, 140.
ly to the Lord." The synthesis of Spirit and heart, of *spirit of faith* and *faith of heart* is achieved, as much as it can be humanly achieved, when we give ourselves fully to the Lord.

.3 The "Political" Dimension of Faith

The participation in Christ's life is habitually expressed as life of grace which is essentially a life of faith, hope, and charity. Why then the insistence on faith almost to the extent of neglecting hope and charity? This has much to do with the history of the Society of Mary, and has a very definite "political" dimension. Chaminade's missionary charism is influenced by 19th century Restoration, a religious mentality intent on opposing modernity hostile to Church and religion. Faced with the dire necessity of preventing further destruction, this mentality is guided by survival instinct and adopts a militant stance in the face of "philosophism" (naturalism and rationalism). Faith, then, is more than a theological virtue and spiritual attitude. It is a rallying point for the faithful remnant, the battle cry of those who believe that God has chosen them to fight "new wars" (*nova bella*). Criterion of distinction between world and God, *sensorium* of the discovery of God's manifold presence in the world, source of discernment in the midst of an addictive world, faith in the Marianist tradition conveys holy aggressiveness and puts its members on the cutting edge of Church and world.

With Chaminade we believe that lived and living faith is the precious guarantee of Christian freedom. Faith stirs up a personal and communitarian response of conversion and commitment to the message of Jesus, for — as often repeated by Chaminade — "the just person will live by faith." This makes allusion to the justice of the God-fearing faithful, but it also refers to the justice that comes with the effort to make of this world not only a better place to live, but one where the likeness with Jesus Christ is ever better perceived and lived. Faith is the principal criterion of action: It permits those who suffer to accept their situation, "knowing that they share in the salvation of the world by union with the suffering Christ." Again, it is faith that leads the Marianist (and the apostles he forms) "to unity with those who struggle for justice, freedom, and

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135 RL 47.
136 RL 62.
137 Hebrews 10:38.
138 RL 3.6.
dignity." Faith marks our relation to authority, and guides us “to share in the experiences of the poor as they struggle for dignity and freedom.”

In conclusion, the motto *fortes in fide* covers all of these dimensions:

1. Faith is first and foremost a habit of the heart (faith of the heart), which informs and inspires mind and resolve (spirit of faith).
2. to determine and guide our action (“political” dimension).

According to Chaminade, “faith has three characteristics: It is the first among the virtues; it is the support and foundation of all virtue; it is the producer of all virtues in us.”

2. “The Man who never dies”

We explicitly encourage each other: *Fortes in fide!* This is an allusion to the communitarian nature of our faith-centered religious mentality and lifestyle. Faith and community are related. Faith is pervasive. Penetrating all levels and modes of human existence, it makes them fruitful with the seeds of transcendence.

1. The Communitarian Dimension of Faith

It should not be overlooked, however, that faith is foremost a “social reality.” It is so as to its origin. As theological virtue, faith is one aspect of trinitarian self-giving. As grace gratuitously given, it is the fruit of the mutual and substantial love that united the three persons of the Godhead. This gift of faith is received in the first place by the Church for its members. It is received by the community for each one of its members only to enhance, enrich, and build up the total body of Christ. It permeates the world community, making it “catholic,” meaning that faith is given, received, and given again to awaken the world to its true but hidden identity as God’s creation redeemed in Jesus Christ. Therefore, individualism will kill faith because it detracts it from its authentic meaning and thrust. The “man who never dies” can only mean a

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139 RL 72.
140 RL 46.
141 RL 5.20.
143 Spirit 1, 208-230, 262-287.
144 RL 63.
community of faith whose ultimate goal is to be transformed by the Spirit of Christ into ever greater Christ-likeness. It will never die if it lives on in the “new earth,” raising ever new sons and daughters of the Church, and thus emulates the eternal love of Father, Son and Spirit. Heir to a rich Christian tradition, the Marianist community strives to be an image of the first community of Jesus’ disciples, united to Mary, and filled with the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁵

Marianist community is a community of faith. Its ecclesiology can be identified as community of faith because these two interdependent realities: community and faith determine how we live, pray, and work.

.2 The Incarnational Dimension

The Rule of Life is centered in community and captures all essential aspects of Marianist life in categories of community. Thus, community structures life, prayer, and work in a way which highlights the profoundly incarnational character of our tradition. Community structure is in the service of faith, and what could be better explained in terms of incarnation than faith?

(1) A Reflection of Social Reality

The essential characteristic of the societal makeup of this religious congregation was traditionally described as “mixed composition.” From the time of its foundation, the Society of Mary has understood mixed composition in a broad sense to mean a community of persons from “every state and condition of life.” We have here an allusion to the three categories of priests, teaching brothers, and working brothers.¹⁴⁶ Without this makeup the Society loses its reason to exist.¹⁴⁷ It is patterned on the sodalities which were organized according to the classical formulation, union without confusion. The Church, not alone the Society at large, serves as model of “mixed composition.” To renew within the world the spectacle of the early Church, Chaminade repeated often: “In what concerns organization and government, I have always in mind approaching as much as possible the organization and government of the Catholic Church.”¹⁴⁸ Aside from being in the line of the great Benedictine tradition, mixed composition was also meant to be an effective apostolic instrument.

Thanks to its mixed composition, the Society of Mary not only reflects ecclesial and social reality but will be able to answer more readily and specifically to its needs. In Chaminade’s own words: “[I]n consideration of the needs of the present age and of religion they (the three classes) run towards the etern-

¹⁴⁵ RL 9, 12, 34.
¹⁴⁶ Spirit 1, 453; 2, 1.
¹⁴⁷ Spirit 4, 12.
¹⁴⁸ Letters, 557, Nov. 6, 1830, 2/2, 414.
nal crown by different ways, that is by employing different means, according to their age, condition, and talent; all have in view their own sanctification and salvation of their neighbor.” At the same time, Chaminade stresses the famous union without confusion: “It is the same body; they are linked together in the same works.”

(2) A Leadership of Service

Wise organization and appropriate regulation are not ends in themselves: “In a Society, all must be coordinated to its spirit and its ends.” And since this spirit is that of the “man who never dies,” leadership and administration are in the service of continuity. The Rule of Life lists these characteristics of authority at all levels: “The exercise of authority is a service characterized by the sense of responsibility, participation, subsidiarity, and accountability.” The reference to service is evidently an allusion to the self-understanding of Church authority. It highlights in particular the subordination, although clearly defined and structured, of authority, organization, and administration to the overriding sense of mission and its incarnational orientation. The practical wisdom of Marianist organization – its specific, concrete and local character – is stressed in the description of service as responsibility, participation, subsidiarity, and accountability. In recent times, decentralization and subsidiarity, in particular, as well as animation have sharpened the sense of incarnation.

In the words of the 1976 General Chapter:

One of the most important persons in the exercise of animation is the community director. He is the guide of the community in its search for truth and the common good, not merely a coordinator or facilitator of community processes. But the principal guarantee of his leadership is not his position but his human contacts, his concern, and his respect for the person, in other words, his availability.

This understanding of leadership as service is an essential element of the way in which Marianists implement their “sense of mission.” Apostolic organizations in the Marianist spirit are service organizations. “The whole purpose of the Marianist organizations of service then is simply to help non-members create their own organizations of Christian life.” The understanding of authority and mission as service has definite Marian undertones. In tune with Bossuet

150 Ibid.
152 RL 7.2.
153 New Call, 119, 57.
and anticipating Vatican II — Chaminade loved to speak of Mary's maternal love. For him, Mary's mission is essentially "maternal work," the expression of her maternal charity and, by the same token, mediation and service. 155

(3) A Structure of Formation

One of the most unique features of Marianist life and organization is the organizational structure of the three offices. The three offices are directly related to the very purpose of the Society which in 1839 was defined as follows:

The object (of the Institute) is to place and maintain in common life under the protection of Mary, a fitting number of persons who are sincerely religious and who have the firm purpose, first of all, to tend to perfection together; secondly, to attract into the ways of salvation, according to the order of their vocation, persons engaged in the world; thirdly, to maintain itself in its primitive regularity by means of wise precautions, notwithstanding some inevitable relations with the world. 156

The Three Offices are thus organically linked to the three purposes of the Institute and the Society of Mary. Rooted in Chaminade's conviction that all Christians are to be Christ at their proper moment and place in this world, the offices of Zeal, Instruction, and Temporalities enable the religious individually and corporately to participate in the threefold functions of Christ — to teach, to govern, and to sanctify — and in the threefold role of prophet, king, and priest. Since the offices embrace all the means used to attain the end, conformity with Christ understood actively and passively, they at once keep the end constantly in view and provide practical means by which the end may be reached.

It must be mentioned here that no ecclesiological model will survive without the support of individuals intent on "putting off the old man and putting on the new man" (St. Paul). If Church is the sacrament of Christ, so in turn its members must be "other Christs." The Three Offices would be a useless device if it were not animated by the spirit of Christ, which is a spirit of evangelical progress and perfection. Spiritual progress and perfection require a method of asceticism which we call "System of Marianist virtues" or the "Marianist System of Asceticism." Chaminade's method of asceticism was to have a pronounced social dimension, and was "to function as a complementary part of the administrative system in the overall Marianist organizational plan." 157

155 Direction 2, no. 7, 33; Écrits 2, no. 55 (1), 33.
156 Grand Institut, 1/1.
157 A. Windisch, The Marianist Social System, 178. For more specific developments see the same, 180-193.
The incarnational dimension of our ecclesiology understood as community of faith heightens the sense of immediacy and permanence of our mission. Again, it stresses also our shared identity with Church and humanity.

3 A Dimension of Communion

We stated in the first part of this presentation the major characteristics of *communio* ecclesiology. Similar or identical elements can be found in Marianist history, in particular in the 1983 *Rule of Life*. We are not primarily talking of structural elements, but of the common bond that unites people and leads them in mission. Communion is warranted by faith understood as social dimension, even more important, it is embodied in the *community* of faith. A community of faith contributes toward affective maturity – in the measure of Christ – of each of its members.\(^{158}\) It expresses in multiple ways the imperative of Christian love, and stipulates a bond of *caritas* as unequivocal and attractive sign of evangelical identity.\(^{159}\) Lived in truth, the community of faith – according to the *Rule of Life* – becomes a place of spiritual freedom as well as a platform for the liberation of individuals and groups.\(^{160}\) All of these elements converge toward and are rooted in christocentrism.

1. Structural Elements of Communion

The essential organizational structures of Marianist life present features which invite and even demand communication. This is true for the exercise of leadership understood as service. It holds true also for the structure of the *Three Offices*, if duly implemented. In both cases, the deeply spiritual and personalist nature of our ecclesiology is apparent. In recent years the spirit of communion was expressed – not invented! – in categories of *dialogue* and participation. Frequently used in Marianist documents and in public discourse among members, it will not escape attention that these two vehicles of communication are complementary and feed on each other. Dialogue prepares participation, and clarifies its meaning. The *Rule of Life* reflects in numerous instances the dialogical character of our life and its various expressions. They can be situated at any and all of the “organizational” levels of the Society of Mary:

1. Dialogue at the highest level: listening to God and our answer in faith (prayer, meditation, vows);\(^{161}\)
2. Dialogue with one another for life, prayer, and work;\(^{162}\)

\(^{158}\) RL 18.
\(^{159}\) RL 37, 38.
\(^{160}\) RL 11.
\(^{161}\) RL 54, 2, 3, 8, 21.
\(^{162}\) RL 9, 3.7.
(3) Dialogue with the world, where true dialogue combines courageous faith and docility to the Spirit with human sensitivity and openness.  

Participation, on the other hand, complements dialogue and makes it fruitful through sharing and collaboration. Participation expresses a sense of belonging shared with others in joy and gratitude, but it usually transcends this meaning toward a common action as described in the Rule of Life: The active collaboration of all members, as much as possible, in planning, making, executing, and evaluating decisions." Evidently, the classical instrument of participation in Marianist life are the Three Offices. They are "an instrument ... promoting the participation of all in our common responsibilities."

(2) The Spirit of Communion

The spirit of communion is love. Dialogue and participation remain empty if they are not filled with love. Friendship can be one of the forms of love which animates our structures, insofar as it contributes to "inner peace and to emotional maturity," fosters community life, and offers mutual support.

More frequently, the common bond of love of those who form community of faith is mentioned with its classical appellation as Family Spirit. Family spirit exists and evolves around a center of inner cohesion and unity which transcends the bonds of blood and gravitates toward union in vocation and mission. Although accompanied by marks of mutual respect and affection, family spirit is not primarily inner-directed. It constitutes a force of attraction that draws people into its fold, not to a place of rest and recreation but into a community of faith eager to share in its mission. This is why priests and lay religious "form a single family." The Rule of Life goes even further and states: "We form a new family, based on the gospel of the Lord. We aim to make family spirit the distinctive mark of our communities." Along with the unquestioned theological value of this Marianist characteristic virtue goes a realistic and balanced acceptance of ourselves and our history, as well as a generous and joyful commitment to the Church.

The spirit of communion could best be summarized as faith that is inspired by love and inspires love. Chaminade valued what was truly human and loved with a human heart. This attitude has marked our lifestyle, and has inspired our efforts of evangelization with a sound humanism. It is – as so many

163 RL 65.
164 RL 7.4.
165 RL 106.
166 RL 2.4.
167 RL 1.
168 RL 35.
aspects of our life – marked with the example of the radical dedication of Mary and colored with the passion of her loving self-giving.

4 A Dimension of Service

If we had to define Marianist ecclesiology according to Dulles' models of the Church we would opt for the servant model over and against the herald model. The Society of Mary finds itself in the category of the servant model for a number of reasons. Marked by the history of its apostolic endeavors, the Society of Mary rarely engaged in what could be called the primary announcement of the Word as we find it in preaching and various other forms of direct evangelization. The collective apostolic habitus thus created, predisposes us toward a servant function. Marianists are predominantly helpers, companions, "midwives," facilitators, and – in general – professionals of indirect evangelization. This is closely related to the nature of our principal apostolic activity in the past, namely teaching and other educational endeavors. For these types of activities, it becomes necessary to meet people where they are, to walk with them in patient endurance, to be active in being as much as in doing, and to be content with sowing without being able to reap. This type of apostolate is best served by a community of faith. Indeed, it is the kind of evangelizing activity that flows naturally from an ecclesiological model defined as community of faith. Community alone is able to ensure the long haul; only faith is strong enough to survive on the pilgrimage to the end of time.

Thus, we can make out three types of servant functions in the present but which were fashioned already in the past: witness, service, and formation (education).

(1) Witness

Witness refers to quality and being. We give witness to what we are, believe in, do, and expect. More important, "we hope to bear witness to the presence of Christ"\(^{169}\) as community. We are asked to make our presence to the world as "faithful witness."\(^{170}\) How do we give witness? Primarily as religious, bearing witness to the primacy of the Kingdom through the evangelical counsels. Witness – by preference – is given in union with Mary.\(^{171}\) Strong emphasis is placed on witness that speaks to the world and promotes justice, brother-

\(^{169}\) RL 9.
\(^{170}\) RL 11.
\(^{171}\) RL 65.

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hood, serenity, and fidelity, hope, shared faith, and sensitivity toward the poor.

(2) Service

Service may suggest subordination and menial work. In fact, this type of action-orientation is patterned on Mary. Motivation for service in love comes from our consecration to Mary who placed herself irreversibly in the service of her Son. Similarly, our service goes in the first place to the Church. Indeed, full claim is made on the person consecrated to God for the service of the people of God. A religious community does not work to increase its own property and goods, but rather to be able to better serve the poor and the needy.

(3) Formation in Faith

Still another and essential form of Marianist apostolic endeavor can be described as formation. This type of missionary concern is most germane with the purpose of the Society of Mary, its Christocentrism and Marian characteristics. Just as we are called to be transformed into Christ’s life, and to cooperate with Mother Mary so that she “may form us more fully to the image of her son,” so we make formation in faith the “primary objective” of our apostolate. We make alliance with Mary, and seek to assist her “in her mission of forming in faith a multitude of brothers for her first born Son.” Formation in faith touches upon the whole person. It has a centripetal character (identification with Christ) as well as a centrifugal significance (mission of forming others in faith). Both of these central attitudes are indispensable for a true Marianist apostolate, for education as well as for our commitment to justice and peace.

.5 The Eschatological Dimension

172 RL 5.17.
173 RL 3.5.
174 RL 17.
175 RL 67.
176 RL 2.7.
177 RL 15.
178 RL 1.75.
179 RL 2.2.
180 RL 2.6, 109.
181 RL 2.11.
182 RL 6.
183 RL 7.1 and 5.1.
184 RL 6.
The missionary charism which fashioned Marianist tradition is not only incarnationally demanding, it is driven and directed by what we would like to call the eschatological dynamism. Translating this theological principle into sociological categories we could describe it as Realutopia. In human activity, there will always exist a fundamental discrepancy between intent and possibility and its concrete realization in history; there is always greater potential, desire, and energy than specific possibilities to concretize them. This discrepancy is cause for frustration. In turn, eschatological dynamism helps us to situate the incarnational dimension of Marianist ecclesiology within the dynamic field of “realized eschatology,” meaning the risen and glorified Christ. Salvation history occurs and evolves within what we call the cycle of trinitarian love: It take its origin in God and leads back to it, elevating creation to the state of “New Creation” thanks to Incarnation and Redemption. Thus, Marianist sense of mission, and any concrete mission in course, becomes a moment in time measured by eternity. Marianist ecclesiology accepts this uncomfortable situation as challenge and opportunity for growth in the likeness of Christ and the eschatological icon of Church, Mary. Eschatological dynamism is an indispensable disposition and habitus for the critical assessment of all so called secularized meta-narratives, whatever their thrust and breadth.

The encouragement to grow comes with the call to holiness and perfection. The Society of Mary wants to raise its members “individually and collectively to the highest perfection,” or in more recent terminology wants them to “strive for the fullness of charity.” The Society of Mary offers its members a method of spiritual growth called direction. Important principles of this method follow the dialectic of incarnation and eschatology. They are based on the transforming presence of Jesus’ virtues and works in our life. Transformation is gradual and progressive. It comes from within, is Mary’s way, and includes both dying and coming to new life. Assuming the virtues of Jesus will lead us to a new self, but no virtue is complete until it is expressed in service. As we know, living the virtues of Jesus and doing his works is always a collaborative effort between God and the human person. As Marianists we hold that the work of God is accomplished in us by the Holy Spirit through Mary our mother. Our effort is helped by instruction, mental prayer, and examen. The spiritual life as described here gains from the eschatological tension between the full stature of Christ, individually speaking as well as collectively, and our poor efforts to grow in his likeness.

185 MD 3, 303, 117.
186 RL 1.
The eschatological dimension of Marianist ecclesiology has its roots in the high goals and in the relentless dynamism of its mission charism. Our fundamental reason of existence is that of the Church, but the fundamental reason of existence of the Church is related to the Kingdom. All meaning of mission is derived from the Reign of God. The Reign of God must be our constant point of reference, presented and celebrated by the Church in the Eucharist. If the Eucharist is "the center, the fount, and the high point of the whole Christian life," Marianist community in turn is built up in the Eucharist.187 Celebrating the Eucharist we celebrate the Kingdom, which is fulfilled reality in Christ and promise of things to come for the faithful. Thus, the community of faith – as we define Marianist ecclesiology – understood both as eschatological dynamism and incarnational challenge is a powerful but partial prefiguration of Church evolving painfully but faithfully toward its final destination as Kingdom of God. Only a community of faith will be able to sustain the beautiful and demanding tension present in its mission charism, for it assumes it in faith and makes it fructify as community.

187 "The life and mission of our community find their source and summit in the liturgy." (RL 49).