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THE SODALITY—MARIAN DEVOTION AND CATHOLIC ACTION

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

In some Catholic centers—perhaps not so much now as in the decades immediately following Vatican II—activities related to Marian devotion seemed apart from the peace and justice movements which emanated from the council. Is there a chasm between those devoted to Marian devotion and those promoting peace and justice movements? Yet, a most Marian organization, the Sodality of Our Lady, was noted both for its Marian devotion and also for its involvement and dedication to apostolic activity. Marian devotion and apostolic activity were integral features of the character of the sodalities—those directed by both the Jesuits and the Marianists. From the 1920s to the 1950s, Catholic Action was a movement strongly encouraged by Pius XI and Pius XII, and, in the mind of the popes, the sodalities of Our Lady were ideal settings for Catholic Action. Yet, there was frequently a hesitancy, a fear that the Sodalties of Our Lady would lose their character if they became too involved in Catholic Action. What was also needed was a broad theological vision which presented an image of the Virgin Mary that would encourage both Marian dedication and apostolic action.

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I. Sodality Origins

A. The Jesuit Sodality

The Jesuit Sodality was not part of the original vision of the Jesuit founders—Ignatius, Francis Xavier, Peter Claver. Although Third Orders, confraternities, congregations, and sodalities were part of medieval Catholicism, the vision of Ignatius was that members of the Society of Jesus not be committed to any activity which would limit their apostolic availability. The Jesuit Sodality came about through the initiative of a Jesuit scholastic (not yet ordained), John Leunis, then teaching at the Roman College. In 1563, he gathered a group of students who wished to lead a more intense Christian life by frequenting the sacraments, by daily prayer, by association with other similar-minded individuals, into an organization under the patronage of the Virgin Mary.¹ The sodality established by John Leunis was known as the *Prima Primaria*² (eventually recognized as “the Mother and the Head of all the Sodalities of the World”). John Leunis moved to France, and the work at the Roman College came to the attention of the popes. In 1584, Gregory XII extended canonical recognition to the Sodality and granted indulgences to the participants, and to the Father General of the Society of Jesus (at the time, Claudio Aquaviva) was granted the power to erect and to affiliate other sodalities to the *Prima Primaria*. (Into the twentieth century, all sodalities were affiliated with the *Prima Primaria*.)

The principal document of the Sodality was the Common Rule (which would have three editions: 1587, 1855, and 1910).

¹ John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 196-199: “The choice of the patron reflected the strong Marian element in Leunis's personal piety, but it was also probably considered appropriate for the age of the members” (198). Cf. Richard L. Rooney, S.J., “The Sodalities of Our Lady,” in *Mariology*, ed. J. B. Carol, 3 vols. (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1955), 3:241-256; Émile Villaret, *Abridged History of the Sodalities of Our Lady* (St. Louis: The Queen's Work, 1956); and Elder Mullan, S.J., *The Sodality of Our Lady Studied in the Documents* (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1912).

² *Prima Primaria* was the term used to designate the senior class (those over 21) in the educational system of the time, with the next class, known as the *Secunda Primaria* (ages 14-21) and *Tertia Primaria* (those under 14). Mullan, *The Sodality*, 2.

The Virgin Mary was to be the principal patron of the sodality (a provision later confirmed in Benedict XIV's Golden Bull of 1748), with other saints recognized as secondary patrons. The Common Rule was a set of "bylaws" dealing with juridical, procedural, and organizational matters, such as the power to begin a sodality (within the Jesuit colleges and houses), rules concerning the celebration of feasts Our Lady, rules for private conduct.³ The provisions of the Common Rule were formulated in view of sodalities which existed in Jesuits schools. Adaptations were made in succeeding centuries to accommodate adult sodalities and those established by dioceses.

Consecration to Mary was not present at the beginning of the Sodality, but it developed over the centuries. The Common Rule contained two formulas of dedication to the Virgin Mary, one attributed to St. John Berchmans and the other to Saint Francis de Sales. Consecration to Mary was related to membership in the Sodality. Among the common practices were the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin or the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception. There was no one special image or practice associated with the Sodality, nor was the Virgin Mary specifically related to the apostolate of the sodalists.

Sodalities were established in the principal cities of Europe. There were sodalities for sailors, civic officials, merchants, students—some numbering 5,000 and 6,000 members. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the sodalists were associated in the struggles with the enemies of the Church: they constituted "the establishment of a network of powerful Marian congregations in parts of Europe affected by the Reformation."⁴ As Pius XII would note, sodalists "defended Christianity's frontiers, under the leadership of Sobieski, Charles of Lorraine, Eugene of Savoy, all of whom were members of the Sodality, just as were the thousands of their soldiers."⁵ There

³ Mullan, *The Sodality*, 9.

⁴ Louis Châtellier, *The Europe of the Devout: The Catholic Reformation and the Formation of a New Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9.

⁵ Pius XII, "Address to the Marian Sodality," January 21, 1945, in *The Tablet*, Jan./Feb. 1945.

were numerous testimonies on the beneficial presence of the Sodality within communities and towns.⁶

The sodalities were identified with the causes undertaken by the Jesuits, especially their opposition to the Jansenists (in France) and their promotion of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The forces hostile to the Jesuits were also hostile to the sodalities. In July 21, 1773, in the decree *Dominus ac Redemptor*, Clement XIV suppressed the Society of Jesus and deprived its superiors of all power.⁷ The decree of suppression did not include the Sodality at the Roman College, and the power to aggregate and affiliate was granted to bishops by a special indult.⁸

After the French Revolution and the restoration of peace under the first consulate of Napoleon, the Sodality was re-established in France. On February 2, 1801, Canon Bourdier Delpuits, a former Jesuit, established the sodality named *Santa Maria Auxilium Christianorum* with six medical students. On the same day, Father William Joseph Chaminade established the sodality in Bordeaux. In the words of Émile Villaret, the historian of the sodalities: "The two sodalities of Paris and Bordeaux are surely the most famous in the history of the rebirth of the Marian Sodalities in France."⁹

Both the Sodality at Paris and at Bordeaux were suspected of political activity. In 1809, after Napoleon annexed Rome to his empire and removed Pius VII, sodalists in Paris made known the decree of excommunication of the emperor. Napoleon then ordered the surveillance of the sodalities. In Paris and Bordeaux, the papers of the sodalities were seized, and the

⁶ Cardinal de Bausset of France summed up the Sodalities: "Men still remember that in the principal commercial towns there was never more order and peace, more honesty in business, less bankruptcy and less depravity, than when the Sodalities existed. The Jesuits knew how to link the sodalities with all professions and with all classes and conditions" (A. Drive, S. J., *The Sodality of Our Lady: Historical Sketches* [New York, 1916], 26-37; 85-88).

⁷ Mullan, *The Sodality*, 110* (Document 43).

⁸ Clement XIV, November 14, 1773. Under this provision, in the next century, parish sodalities (including women's sodalities) were established by the diocesan bishops. Mullan, *The Sodality*, 110*-112*.

⁹ Villaret, *Abridged History*, 110.

sodalities were suppressed in France from 1809 to the fall of Napoleon and the Bourbon restoration of 1814.¹⁰

Adult sodalities evolved in the eighteenth and especially in the nineteenth centuries. They were organized according to social class or work structure—fathers of families, civil officials, teachers and academic personnel, working people (skilled and unskilled). Discussions would include ways to promote a Christian atmosphere in the family, in the workplace, and community. Sodalists undertook the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, social works, training programs, financial assistance to the needy. After the suppression of the Jesuits, a group from Rue du Bac in Paris promoted the “Children of Mary,” a sodality for women and girls which would be established in many parishes. Sodalities were also promoted by women religious: the Ursulines, the Sisters of Wisdom, the Sisters of Notre Dame. There was also a great increase in the number of parish sodalities. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, over 35,000 sodalities were affiliated with the *Prima Primaria*, and by the mid-twentieth century there were some 85,000 affiliated sodalities in over 1,300 dioceses.¹¹ Generally speaking, as the number increased and the sodalities became a “mass movement,” the level of fervor and apostolic action diminished. In many places, the sodality programs were reduced to practices, social gatherings, annual and symbolic events.

B. The Marianist Sodality

Upon his return from exile to Bordeaux in 1800, William Joseph Chaminade requested from the Holy See, through the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, the title of Missionary Apostolic. By this recognition, he was authorized to “erect” anew the sodality (*congrégacion*) which had existed in Bordeaux before the Revolution (erected for young artisans by Jesuits in 1689, and taken up by Capuchins in 1765).¹²

¹⁰ Geoffroy de Grandmaison, *La Congrégation (1801-1830)*, 2. ed. (Paris: Plon, 1890), 98-123.

¹¹ George E. Ganss, S.J., “The Christian Life Communities as Sprung from the Sodalities of Our Lady,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 7, no. 2 (March 1975): 45.

¹² Villaret, *Abridged History*, 109.

The Sodality was to be, in Chaminade's words, "a society of fervent Christians . . . who, in imitation of the early Christians, tend through their frequent association to have 'one heart and one soul' and to form one family, not only as children of God, brothers of Jesus Christ and members of his mystical body, but also as children of Mary, dedicated to her in a special way, especially to her Immaculate Conception."¹³ He encouraged well-disposed individuals to come out of their isolation into associations of similar-minded people: "Let Christians form themselves in community and, from their midst, they will shine forth as a sort of light which will make them the object of general attention."¹⁴

Chaminade founded two religious congregations: the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, founded with Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon (May 25, 1816), and the Society of Mary (October 3, 1817).¹⁵ The first members of the Society of Mary were all members of the Sodality, and the Sodality remained always the center of Fr. Chaminade's life and activities. At first, Chaminade did not propose any activity other than maintenance of the sodalities; the religious were to be always associated with the Sodality: "Experience has given us to understand that for a Sodality director . . . a person is needed who does not die, that is, a society of men who will give themselves to good for this work, who will fulfill it in the maturity of their years after being trained in it under holy obedience, and will transmit from one to another the same spirit and the same means."¹⁶

¹³ W. J. Chaminade, *Écrits marials*, 2 vols. (Fribourg: Seminarie Marianiste, 1966), 2:318.

¹⁴ Henry Rousseau, *William Joseph Chaminade: Founder of the Society of Mary* (Dayton, OH: Brothers of Mary, 1914), 131; also, Thomas A. Thompson, S.M., "Distinctive Traits of Marianist Spirituality: Mary, Mission, Community," *Marian Studies* 54 (2003): 57-74.

¹⁵ Another Chaminade biography can be found in Vincent Gizard, *Petite vie de Guillaume-Joseph Chaminde: Fondateur de la Famille Marianiste* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1995); Eng. trans. *Blessed William Joseph Chaminde: Founder of the Marianist Family*, trans. Arthur Cherrier, ed. Thomas A. Thompson (Dayton, Ohio: North American Center for Marianist Studies, 2000).

¹⁶ *The Spirit of Our Foundation: according to the Writings of Father Chaminade and of Our First Members in the Society* (4 vols.; Dayton, OH: St. Mary's Convent, 1911-1920, 1977), 3:93.

Chaminade's apostolic vision was based on St. Paul's concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, an ecclesiology not usual in the post-Reformation era. Chaminade spoke of the *real* union between the members of the Church, based on their sharing the life of Christ. The Church is "a union by which all the living members of the Church share whatever they have and by which the riches, strength, and health of one becomes by charity the (supernatural) riches, strength, and health of another . . . a union which makes the living members of the Church not only members of Jesus Christ, but in a very true sense, Jesus Christ Himself."¹⁷ For Chaminade, the union among members was strengthened by the *reality* of Mary's maternity: she was mother of Christ and of the members of Christ's mystical body. "Mary has really conceived the true body of Our Savior by the Holy Ghost; she has also conceived His Mystical Body, which is the society of the saints and of all the faithful."¹⁸

Marian devotion and consecration were related to mission. The community's purpose was to be a leaven for the "multiplication of Christians." All sodalists were to consider themselves "missionaries," with the commission to make others "missionaries," and there was to be a permanent missionary dimension to the community.

In the older sodalities, there was scarcely any other purpose in view than to sustain pious Christians in the way of salvation by mutual edification. But in our day, in this period of renewal, Holy Mother the Church demands something more from her children. She wishes the concerted action of all to second the zeal of her ministers, and to labor at her restoration. This is the spirit which new Sodalities inculcate. Each director is a persistent and active missionary, and each Sodality a perpetual mission.¹⁹

The earliest disciples of Father Chaminade testified that Marian devotion, the apostolic spirit, and the sense of mission

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

¹⁸ Stanley, *The Mystical Body of Christ*, 112.

¹⁹ *Spirit of Our Foundation*, 3:112.

were integral to the sodality. "In our sodalities, above all, filial piety towards the Blessed Virgin Mary ought assuredly be the moving principle of an enlightened and active Christ life, but besides that—as a first fruit of this Christian life—it ought to engender a genuine spirit of proselytism; this is the characteristic trait of the sodalities established by Father Chaminade."²⁰ Documents at the end of the nineteenth century reminded the religious that "... the Sodalities of Bordeaux, became powerful centers of social and religious action; may ours aspire to something higher than simply pious reunions around an altar to Mary."²¹

The Sodality fostered many apostolic works and lives of dedicated service; the Cardinal Archbishop of Bordeaux testified in 1869 that "if we seek out the beginnings of all our works in the city of Bordeaux, the name of Father Chaminade is inscribed at the origins of each."²² However, Chaminade's vision of integrating Marian devotion and apostolic action was lost shortly after his death and only recovered in the mid-twentieth century.

II. Catholic Action: Origins and Nature

A. The Popes' Call to Catholic Action

Pius XI (1922-1939) instituted the feast of Christ the King as a continuation of a long-term program, initiated by Pius X, of "restoring all things in Christ." In view of the rise of totalitarian regimes in the 1920s, the feast of Christ the King was a way of affirming the primacy of the spiritual and religious realm over the all-encompassing demands of totalitarian governments. Pius XI noted that the enemies of the Church "become bolder in their attacks," while good people were "reluctant to engage in conflict or oppose but a weak resistance." He hoped that the faithful would "fight courageously under the banner of Christ

²⁰ *Spirit of Our Foundation*, 3:91.

²¹ *Spirit of Our Foundation*, 3:96.

²² Cited in J. B. Armbruster, *La chapelle de la Madeleine: Un sanctuaire à Bordeaux, 1688-1988* (Bordeaux: Communauté marianiste, [1988]), 32.

their King," to win over bitter and estranged hearts and valiantly defend the rights of the Church.²³

In 1921, Pius XI began speaking of "Catholic Action," a term which he and his successor, Pius XII, would develop throughout their papacies. Catholic Action and social justice were the new phrases in the Catholic vocabulary. Catholic Action was defined as "the participation or the collaboration of the laity in the mission of the Church confided to the hierarchy." It was "a *social* apostolate inasmuch as its object is to spread the Kingdom of Jesus Christ not only among individuals but also in the family and in society."²⁴ Catholic Action required "formation," that is, programs of training to prepare members to participate in the mission of the Church. Formation could take the form of study-circles, conferences, lectures, courses and other activities undertaken to propose and promote a Christian solution of the social problems. As Pius XII would later write, "the adversaries of the Church make use of organization with new and bold methods," so organization should constitute a formal component of Catholic Action, the means through which the entire world will be drawn to a "full and integral Catholicism."²⁵

Pius XI spoke of "social justice" as an integral part of the Church's "social apostolate." Social justice involved assuring that, in the distribution of goods, every person would have a fair share. "The huge disparity between the few exceedingly rich and the unnumbered propertyless must be effectively called back to and brought into conformity with the norms of the common good; that is social justice."²⁶ The Church's mission was not simply dealing with individuals but also with the institutions. Guided by social justice, the social apostolate dealt with the institutions which make up society. It strove to make justice and charity the directive guiding conduct in

²³ Encyclical, *Quas Primas* (1925), no. 24.

²⁴ Encyclicals: *Ubi Arcano* (1921), nos. 58-60; *Divini Redemptoris* (1937), nos. 63-64.

²⁵ Arthur Alonso, O.P., *Catholic Action and the Laity* (St. Louis: Herder, 1961), 133; Exhortation of Pius XII to ACI [Azione Cattolica Italiana] (January 25, 1950).

²⁶ Encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), no. 58.

family life, in industry, the professions, business, labor, in race relations, in international relations, etcetera.

The call of both Pius XI and Pius XII for participation in Catholic Action was repeated and insistent—one which could not be neglected or left aside. Pius XI became known as the “Pope of Catholic Action,” and he himself remarked that “It is good that everyone knows that Catholic Action is as dear to Us as the pupil of Our eyes.”²⁷ As early as 1924, the challenge was addressed to all Catholics: “All must cooperate in Catholic action, even if they can do so only to a small degree.”²⁸ A doctoral dissertation entitled “The Moral Obligation to Participate in Catholic Action” was submitted to the Faculty of the Catholic University of America (1958), directed by Fr. Francis J. Connell, C.Ss.R.²⁹

In Europe, Catholic Action was identified with large significant social movements already in place and promoted by the Church, such as the Christian trade unions and the youth movement. Different forms developed, dependent upon the country’s political culture. The two best known were the Christian Trade Unionists in Belgium, founded by Canon Joseph Cardijn, and the Young Christian Workers in France (JOC—*Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique*), with its program of analysis and action: “See, Judge, Act.” In Italy, there was *Azione Cattolica*, a non-political lay organization under the bishops of Italy. These programs and organizations were large, well-organized, usually sponsored and supported by churches of Europe.

The call to Catholic Action was understood in the United States in a different way. The Church in the United States did not have the tradition of political and social involvement that existed in Italy, Belgium, and France. Catholic Action in the United States became a call to the laity to participate in the mission of the Church,³⁰ to give expression to the Church’s

²⁷ Alonso, *Catholic Action and the Laity*, 119.

²⁸ *Restoring All Things: A Guide to Catholic Action*, ed. by John Fitzsimmons and Paul McGuire (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1938), ix.

²⁹ John Francis Murphy, “The Moral Obligation of the Individual to Participate in Catholic Action” (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1958).

³⁰ William Ferree, S.M., *Introduction to Catholic Action* (Washington, DC: The Youth Department, N.C.W.C., 1942).

teaching on the political and economic structure of a Christian social order. In the United States, the 1940s and 1950s witnessed many significant initiatives undertaken by the laity. New life was given to parish societies, such as the Holy Name Society, St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Knights of Columbus. New groups were established: the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO, founded by Bishop Bernard Sheil), the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists (ACTU), the Legion of Decency, the Christian Family Movement (CFM), the Catholic Rural Life Movement, the Grail (a movement initiated by a women's secular institute in Loveland, OH). Notable were Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, for their Houses of Hospitality and *The Catholic Worker*. "All these groups saw themselves as playing their own particular role in promoting what was called Catholic Action," remarks James M. O'Toole in "The Church of Catholic Action," a chapter in his recent history of American Catholicism.³¹

B. The Popes on Catholic Action and the Sodality

What then would be the relation between Catholic Action, usually perceived as broad social movements, and the Sodality of Our Lady? In the mind of Pius XI and especially of Pius XII, not only were the two eminently compatible, but they could also complement each other: the sodality, as it existed, would be the ideal setting for Catholic Action. In 1942, Pius XII spoke of "Catholic Action as forming the character of the Marian sodalities."³²

On September 27, 1948, Pius XII, who had been a sodalist at the Roman College, issued the Apostolic Constitution *Bis Saeculari* (on the two-hundredth anniversary of Benedict XIV's Golden Bull). *Bis Saeculari*, later referred to as "the charter of the sodalities," would become the most influential document in the history of the Sodality. In the first section, the pope

³¹ James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), 46.

³² Letter to Sebastião Cardinal Leme da Silveira Cintra, Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, January 21, 1942.

referred to the sodalities as “among the most powerful spiritual groups defending, propagating and fighting for Catholicism” (2). The Sodality was commended for its structure and organization, for its works of mercy, religious instruction, and for using its influence “to stop bad plays and films and to protect the Christian morals of people subjected to a flood of evil books and periodicals” (11).

The four essential qualities of the sodality were reviewed: 1) a vital interior life, involving daily meditation and examination of conscience, in conformity with the Spiritual Exercises (“to fan the flames of divine love in Sodalists of Our Lady and to nourish and strengthen the interior life” [6]); 2) consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary (i.e., the surrender of oneself completely and forever to the protection of Mary); 3) a universal apostolate (“laboring for the common good of the Church . . . fully trained propagators of the Kingdom of Christ” [20]); and 4) cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy (in the spirit of the Ignatian “rules for thinking with the Church”—*sentire cum ecclesiam*).

A major portion of *Bis Saeculari* dealt with the relation between Catholic Action and the Sodality. “The structure and the peculiar character of the Sodalities of Our Lady are not an obstacle whatever to their being called with the fullest right ‘Catholic Action under the auspices and inspiration of the Blessed Virgin Mary’” (22). Many sodalists, it was noted, had taken up this work and rendered such great service that they deserved to be called outstanding pioneers of Catholic Action. The purpose of Catholic Action was not to destroy, absorb or dominate other religious organizations. Rather, its role was “to join them together in friendly cooperation and by a complete harmony of mind and heart and action to make the growth of one become the profit of the others” (23).³³ The ease with which participants in Catholic Action could do this depended on “how sincerely they banish all arguing about priority” (25). In brief, “the Sodalities of Our Lady in their Rules, nature, purpose, undertakings, and their accomplishments definitely fulfill every characteristic and requirement of Catholic Action”

³³ A citation from Pius XI’s talk to the French Catholic Action, May 20, 1931.

(21). Sodalities were to be considered on the same level as other associations dedicated to Catholic Action and to “federate” themselves with larger movements.

In 1948, in an address to the sodalists of Spain, Pius XII spoke of his satisfaction with the Spanish Sodality for its affiliation and collaboration with *Action Catholique*, with the assurance that the sodality could retain its structure and proper characteristics, “but in some way be related to the spirit of the great Catholic Action movement without individual membership.” He said that this “first step” toward reconciling and bridging the chasm that has existed between Marian and social justice movements is “psychological affiliation.”³⁴ A related suggestion was that the very structure and spirit of Marian groups be strengthened, so that they would not lose their identity as they entered into contact with other groups.

III. The Sodalities and Catholic Action

A. The Jesuits

In the early twentieth century, both the Jesuits and the Marianists had thriving sodalities in their high schools and colleges. There were also numerous diocesan sodalities associated with schools and parishes. In 1913, the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus started a National Sodality Office and, in 1922, the Jesuit Father General, Wladimir Ledóchowski, established the Central Secretariat whose purpose was “to sustain and help the sodalities directed by Jesuits, and by others who might wish to have recourse to them.”³⁵ The American office was headed by Fr. Edward Garesche, S.J., assisted by Daniel A. Lord, S.J. (at the time a Jesuit seminarian), who succeeded Fr. Garesche in 1925. Both Jesuits were zealous, indefatigable, as they found themselves with thousands of parish sodalities looking for direction. (According to Fr. Lord, when the Father

³⁴ Letter to Marian Congregations in Spain, August 26, 1946, in *Actes Pontificaux*, no. 18, 9-10.

³⁵ Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., “Christian Life Communities for Jesuit University Students?,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 36, no. 1 (Spring, 2004): 18.

General of the Society established the Central Secretariat, he gave one sole instruction: "Help any group or society which asks you for help.")³⁶

The Queen's Work, the Sodality periodical, began in May, 1914; its circulation eventually rose to 85,000 subscribers. The programs presented were an "intensely spiritual but pleasantly active Catholicism." Another periodical—*Action*—was started for adults. Also published were *The Faculty Moderator* and *The Director's Service*, offered monthly to directors and guides of youth.³⁷ During the 1920s through the 1940s, the staff of the Central Sodality Office in St. Louis had six full-time Jesuits and forty lay associates and clerks, who devoted full and laborious days to supplying the sodalities throughout the country with whatever they needed. A quarter of a million pieces of sodality literature were distributed gratis every year.

Daniel Lord, talented and energetic, had been involved in revising the Motion Picture Production Code (1930) and was an early promoter of the "Knights and Handmaids of the Blessed Sacrament." A gifted communicator, it is estimated that he penned an average of twenty thousand words per month over the course of his thirty-five-year ministry, totaling at least eight million words. By the time of his death, Lord had written ninety books, nearly three hundred pamphlets and countless articles. Over twenty-five million copies of his works were circulating by the 1960s, making Fr. Lord known among most American Catholics educated in the first half of the twentieth century.³⁸

When Fr. Garesche and Lord started in 1913, their impressions of the existing parish sodalities were not unlike those of Chaminade as he encountered the sodalities in Bordeaux in the early 1800s. Garesche lamented "the extremely discouraging condition in the sodalities themselves. All the activities of the

³⁶ Daniel Lord, "Sodality Moves Apace with Needs of the Times: Its Slogan for Centuries: 'To Christ through Mary,'" *America* (September 23, 1939): 559.

³⁷ Richard L. Rooney, S.J., "The Sodality of Our Lady," in *Mariology*, ed. J. B. Carol, 3 vols. (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1955-61), 3:241-256.

³⁸ David Endres, "Dan Lord, Hollywood Priest," *America* (December 12, 2005): 20-21.

sodalities were confined, in most places, to attendance at meetings where some prayers and the Office of the Blessed Virgin were recited, and to monthly communion.”³⁹ In 1939, Fr. Lord wrote that there were over twelve thousand active sodalities in the United States, making it the largest Catholic organization, and they appeared to have had an apostolic awakening. He also related his early impressions of the Sodality. “Frankly, I will admit that there was a time when the Sodality had for its patron Saint the Sleeping Beauty, and when its activities consisted, beyond the all important task of frequent communion, in social life and athletic contests. St. Aloysius Sodality walloped St. Martin of Tours with considerable regularity. St. Agnes played hostess at a tea and card party to St. Agatha and the Visitation.”⁴⁰

Neither Lord nor Garesche saw any problem with integrating Catholic Action into the Sodality. Both saw the Sodality as open and flexible, adaptable: “There is no reason why Catholic Action should remain a vague and indefinite thing, much praised but little practiced, if it is entrusted to the hands of well-trained sodalists in well-organized Sodalities.”⁴¹ In 1931, the National Office began the annual Summer School of Catholic Action. These programs were held in downtown hotels in the major American cities. During one full week, conferences were given by Jesuits and social activities were organized. *The Blue Book of the Summer School of Catholic Action*⁴² contained notes from the conferences. The topics included the Eucharist, the Virgin Mary, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the personal and social consequences of the Mystical Body. There were also talks on human rights, respect for women, combating racial prejudice and workshops on parliamentary procedure, on conducting elections, on the “Jocist Method: Observe, judge, act.” Posters spoke of “Re-establishing

³⁹ Rooney, “The Sodalities of Our Lady,” in *Mariology*, ed. J. B. Carol, 3:251.

⁴⁰ Lord, “Sodality Moves Apace with Needs of the Times,” 558-560, esp. 558.

⁴¹ Daniel Lord, “Sodalities in America and Catholic Action,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 22, no. 86 (January 1933): 270.

⁴² E.g., *Blue Book of the Summer School of Catholic Action* (St. Louis: The Queen’s Work, 1944).

all things in Christ." One from 1935 declared "War Threatening / Democracy Totters / Communism Mounts—What is Your Answer?"⁴³ One estimate is that in twenty-one years, there were over 300,000 participants in these programs.

B. The Marianists

The Marianists of the same period did not have a Fr. Garesche or a Fr. Lord. They were certainly aware of the papal exhortations on the compatibility between the Sodality and Catholic Action, but they believed that there were at least two issues which had to be considered. First, the Jesuit Sodality was not identified with the founding purposes of the Society of Jesus, whereas the Society of Mary (Marianists) developed from the Sodality and always considered itself integrally associated with the Sodality. The first members of the Society of Mary had been members of the Sodality. The Constitutions of 1839 stated: "Whereas the Sodalities of the Virgin Immaculate for young men and young women, have given birth respectively to the Society of Mary and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, the religious everywhere manifest the greatest interest in their foundation and support." The question, then, was how this "work of predilection" devoted to Marian devotion could be converted into a Catholic Action group.

A second reason for a hesitancy to embrace the program of Catholic Action was derived from the language and spirituality transmitted in many ascetical and Marian treatises from earlier periods. A dichotomy existed between Catholic Action—with its emphasis on action, organization, and social involvement—and the manuals of ascetical life which spoke of cultivating the interior life and keeping oneself free from the world. Every religious had a copy of *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, with its opening section "The Imitation of Christ and Contempt for the Vanities of the World." Another well-known and highly regarded work was Dom Chautard's *The Soul of the Apostolate* which spoke about the primacy of the "interior life," with the counsel of not "plunging headlong into Catholic

⁴³ Sister Mary Florence, S.L., *The Sodality Movement in the United States, 1926-1936* (St. Louis: The Queen's Work, 1939), 155.

Action from mere zest for activity.”⁴⁴ And, although Chaminade spoke much of participating in Mary’s apostolic mission, at the time, the language of Marian devotion and consecration was usually expressed in terms of personal salvation.⁴⁵

In their universities and schools, awareness of the apostolate was certainly part of the Marianist sodalities of the 1940s and 1950s. One director wrote, “The Sodality is not a refuge for pious souls seeking personal spiritual advancement . . . It is rather a Marian militia.”⁴⁶ The focus and object of the Sodality’s apostolic work was the school itself. “Each school under the direction of the Society of Mary must become a training ground for apostles, a family dedicated to Mary, and as perfect a Marian family as possible.”⁴⁷ A Marianist Brother in the 1950s described the Sodality as an “elite organization of student leaders who are consecrated to Mary and who work effectively to make the school a perfect Marian family. Its function is to organize all of the school into the Marian ideal, using all of the activities, curricular and extracurricular, and creating others when needed.”⁴⁸ Using the Jocist approach of “see, judge, act,” the sodalists would promote an atmosphere of honesty, respect, charity, and a spirit of faith. Occasionally, the sodality would promote a religious program or conduct “crusades” against objectionable movies and books. Much was said about the spiritual formation, Marian consecration, and the responsibility of the laity as part of Catholic Action. The social dimension of Marian consecration was “to build up the Sodality as a perfect Marian family.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Dom J. B. Chautard, *The Soul of the Apostolate* (Trappist, KY: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1946). 186.

⁴⁵ Generally speaking, until John Paul II’s *Vita Consecrata* (1996), the word “consecration” usually connoted a “setting apart” for a special witness or service. *Vita Consecrata* tells us that “the sense of mission is at the very heart of every form of consecrated life” (VC 25).

⁴⁶ John G. Dickson, S.M., “Why a Sodality Issue of the *Marianist*?,” *The Marianist* (September 1959): 1.

⁴⁷ John J. Dickson, S.M., “This Is the Marianist Sodality,” *The Marianist* (January 1957): 14.

⁴⁸ Elmer Dunskey, S.M., “This Is the Moderator,” *The Marianist* (September 1959): 26-29 (esp. 26).

⁴⁹ Dickson, “Why a Sodality Issue of the *Marianist*?,” 2.

In 1936, Fr. François-Joseph Kiefer, the Marianist superior-general, communicated to the members a letter from Cardinal Pacelli (later Pius XII) sent to all the superiors of teaching orders, stating that Pius XI, in his address to the bishops of Brazil, had expressed the desire that the cooperation of religious congregations with Catholic Action be stronger and more extensive than that of all other groups: "Formation in the spirit of the apostolate proper to Catholic Action is an essential element of education in the times in which we live."⁵⁰

The relation between the Sodality and Catholic Action was considered at two international governance meetings of the Society of Mary—the General Chapters of 1939 and 1951. In a major statute, the Chapter of 1939 spoke of the imperative of Catholic Action, while at the same time recalling the tradition and place of the sodality within the Society of Mary:

Docile to the prescriptions of the Holy See and of their excellencies, the bishops, concerning Catholic-Action, the members of the chapter are happy to note both the efforts made to found and to develop specific youth organizations as well as the results. With all its power, the chapter encourages the creation of centers of Catholic Action, especially in our larger schools . . . But the chapter recalls that the Marian Sodality, work of predilection in the Society of Mary, in virtue of the role assigned to it by the Holy See, is normally destined to furnish to specific movements leaders carefully trained to a more profound interior life and to an active apostolate, drawn at the wellspring of filial devotion towards the Blessed Virgin, Queen of Apostles.

The commentary noted that most of the members were educators in primary or secondary schools: they were encouraged to prepare and orient the students representing different classes of society for special training in preparation for participation in Catholic Action.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Circular of Fr. Kiefer (April 3, 1936), citing Pius XI's Letter to the Bishops of Brazil ("La collaboration des Congrégations religieuses à l'Action Catholique," in Émile Guerry, *L'Action Catholique* [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1936], #159-160.

⁵¹ Society of Mary (Marianists), Acts of the General Chapter of 1939 (Circular, no. 23, [November 31, 1939]).

The question was again considered at the Marianist General Chapter of 1951, where several motions were presented related to Catholic Action and the Sodality. The chapter alluded to the quandary which some religious faced. "Since Pius XI gave the strict definition of Catholic Action as 'the participation and collaboration of the laity with the apostolic hierarchy,' not a few of our religious have become confused, and consider that pronouncement as the death-knell of the Sodality. . . . The Chapter, prompted by several motions to this effect, wishes every Marianist not yet thoroughly acquainted with the document *Bis Saeculari*, to study it carefully and to apply its lessons practically in the conduct of our Sodalities." It also urged all religious teachers to spend time dedicated to "inspiring students with a deeper insight into the love and grandeur of their Mother and Queen."⁵²

A specific question usually dealt with the relation between the Sodality and Catholic Action within the structure of an educational institution. One solution was a fusion of Catholic Action and the Sodality, with the Sodality caring for the spiritual and Marian formation, while Catholic Action organized the apostolate. There was also the question of whether the structure and activities of Catholic Action cells should be determined by a central diocesan office of Catholic Action or by the sodality moderators. In a publication for sodality moderators, under the title "Possible Solutions of the Catholic-Action Problem," the following structure was proposed: establish "a work recognized as a movement of Catholic Action already as established in the country or the diocese, but then perfected and enriched by being constituted as an army in Mary's service."⁵³

⁵² Society of Mary (Marianists), Acts of the General Chapter of 1951 (Circular, no. 18 [September 15, 1931]).

⁵³ *Marian Catholic Action: A Project* (Dayton, OH: National Commission on Catholic Action Study, 1947), 40-67. [This was an English translation of "Action Catholique Notre-Dame" by Fr. Émile Neubert, S.M., and fruit of discussions held by Marianist seminarians with the intention of producing a handbook for Marianist Sodality directors.]

IV. Catholic Action and Marian Devotion: Toward Integration

As Marianists and other religious educators struggled with the organizational challenge of whether to maintain as separate or to join together Catholic Action and the Sodality, not much assistance was being provided by theologians or mariologists of the period. For many, it was hard to find some common theological ground between traditional Marian devotion and Catholic Action. In 1941, Fr. Edwin Leimkuhler, S.M., began a little publication at the University of Dayton of reprints of significant articles on Catholic Action. Of more than 160 issues of *Catholic Action Reprints*—only two made reference to a possible relation between the Virgin Mary and Catholic Action. Similarly, the Mariological Society of American was founded in 1949, and, during its first decade, the programs were devoted, with very few exceptions, to the major Marian doctrines—in accord with the concept of “Mariology” as it was then understood.

In 1943, Pius XII issued the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*. Here the Church was identified as the Mystical Body, in which the members were related to Christ, the Head of the Church, but also related to each other within the Body of Christ. The members of this body:

... are linked together in such a way as to help one another. And as in the body when one member suffers, all the other members share its pain, and the healthy members come to the assistance of the ailing, so in the Church the individual members do not live for themselves alone, but also help their fellows, and all work in mutual collaboration for the common comfort and for the more perfect building up of the whole Body (no. 15).

For many, this concept of the Church was a spiritual awakening. Many of the Catholic Action initiatives drew sustenance and motivation from the concept of Church as the Mystical Body. For the American liturgical movement, “the liturgy was the Mystical Body at prayer, and Catholic Action was the Mystical Body at work.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Virgil Michel: “The very foundation, sustenance and principle of Catholic Action is the liturgical life of the Mystical Body of Christ”; “Catholic Action was the ‘Mystical Body at work’”—cited by Martin Zielinski, “The Liturgy and Catholic Action,” *Chicago*

At the same time as the Church as the Mystical Body was becoming known, the patristic *ressourcement* occurring in Europe recovered the relation between Mary and the Church. In 1951, this discovery was described as a “comet in the Mariological sky” by Alois Müller, when he completed a dissertation at the University of Fribourg on the unity between Mary and the Church as found in patristic sources.⁵⁵ In the introduction, he stated that the very title of his work would be incomprehensible to mariologists and could not fit into any current treatise. But, in the early Church, Mariology and ecclesiology were synonymous: Mary’s motherhood is not separate from, or parallel to, that of the Church, but identical with it. Similar studies were presented by Otto Semmelroth and Hugo Rahner.⁵⁶

The theme of the third meeting of the Mariological Society (1952) was “The Spiritual Maternity of the Virgin Mary.” Along with presentations on the nature, the scriptural foundations, the teaching of the magisterium on the Spiritual Maternity, one presentation was given which related Mary’s Spiritual Maternity to the Mystical Body and provided a way of bringing together Marian devotion and Catholic Action. The presentation, entitled “The Place of Our Lady in the Mystical Body,” was given by Cyril Vollert, S.J., known also for his significant contributions to ecclesiology:

If Mary is to occupy in Catholic life the eminent place that is her due and if Catholics are to accord that place to her with all their hearts, she must be situated in the rich doctrine of the mystical body of Christ. That

Studies, 48, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 258-276. See also Keith F. Pecklers, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America: 1926-1955* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 29-34.

⁵⁵ Alois Müller, “Ecclesia-Mater: Die Einheit Marias und der Kirche” (Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1951). Müller spoke of the Mary-Church comparison as a “comet in the Mariological sky.” Similarly, Gerard Philips wrote that the comparison “arose in contemporary theology in a manner as unexpected as it is dazzling” (Gerard Philips, cited in Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery* [Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1969], 56).

⁵⁶ Otto Semmelroth, *Urbild der Kirche: organischer Aufbau der Mariengeheimnisses* (Würzburg: Echter, 1950); Eng. trans. *Mary, Archetype of the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963). Hugo Rahner, *Maria und die Kirche* (Innsbruck: Marianischer Verlag, 1951); Eng. trans. *Our Lady and the Church* (New York: Pantheon, 1961).

devotedness to the Blessed Virgin may be something more than personal piety, that it may be a powerful drive in our lives of militant Catholic Action, we must aspire to a keener perception of the absolutely unique position she has in the Church. By stressing the social aspect of Mary's eminence, we shall appreciate more adequately her importance in Catholic dogma and theology, and consequently we shall discern more distinctly the place she ought to have in our spiritual life and our apostolate: hers is the first place after that of her Son.⁵⁷

The International Mariological Congress of 1958 focused on "Mary and the Church." As part of the congress, Fr. Carlo Balić, O.F.M., its organizer and rector of the Pontifical Marian Academy, confided the section "Maria et Apostolatus" to the Americans, possibly because of their reputation for religious "action."⁵⁸ The representative from the Mariological Society was Fr. Armand J. Robichaud, S.M.,⁵⁹ who, in a long well-developed article, employed the Scholastic notion of causality to explain the relation between Mary and Catholic Action: Mary was the efficient and the exemplary cause of Catholic Action.

Also at that 1958 international congress, Fr. James McQuade, S.J., from the Sodality Central Office in St. Louis, presented "Sodalities of Our Lady (Marian Congregations) and the Marian Apostolate," in which he developed some of the themes found in Fr. Vollert's 1952 article. McQuade began with a clear explanation of Catholic Action and social justice:

... it is not enough to work for the victims of society. We must do that, but we must do more. We much work on society itself that it may not create

⁵⁷ Cyril Vollert, S.J., "The Place of Our Lady in the Mystical Body," *Marian Studies* 3 (1952): 174-196 (174).

⁵⁸ *Maria et ecclesia : acta Congressus Mariologici Mariani in civitate Lourdes anno 1958 celebrati*, 16 vols. (Rome: Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1959-1968). In his introduction to vol. 11 (*Maria et Apostolatus Ecclesiae*): [v]-viii, Fr. Balić spoke of confiding the section of Mary and the Apostolate to representatives from the United States (i.e., the Catholic University, the Mariological Society of America, and the Franciscan Marian Commission): "quae omnes in Statibus Foederatis Americae Septemtrionalis suam actuositatem evolvunt."

⁵⁹ Armand J. Robichaud, S.M., "Mary and Catholic Action," in *Maria et Ecclesia*, 11:37-76.

victims, we must seek to reform those institutions, those customs, those common viewpoints, those accepted practices and attitudes, those stable modes of action performed by groups as groups, those accepted standards and circumstances of living which make the good life difficult.⁶⁰

McQuade's presentation continued, showing the deep relation—the identity—of Mary's motherhood with the mission of the Church:

Mary is mother of the Church because she truly gave to the Church the life of grace

All the work of the apostolate—the making all men Christians and all Christians saints—is the work of Mary

The lay apostle finds in Mary's motherhood a deep significance for his own relationship with other souls. . . .

For the new members, for the weak members, for the members who wander a little, the lay apostle with the help of divine grace humbly and courageously assumes the role of elder brother or sister in the family of that one mother. . . . At every moment they are helping her raise her family for God. Her family is the Church with all its members. . . .

. . . No matter what he is called upon to do by his vocation to the lay apostolate, be it to make all men Christians or to make all Christians saints, Mary and her motherhood is at the heart of it all.⁶¹

Pius XI referred to the faith of the workers who participated in the mission of the Church, that is, who were involved in Catholic Action. But how does this revival of faith come about? For Fr. Dominique-Marie Chenu, O.P., this consciousness was present in the hearts of young workers because of their awareness of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. "Neither the definition of Catholic Action, nor its structure, nor its elements, nor its spirit is really intelligible except in terms of that Communion of Saints which we profess in the Creed. . . . Catholic Action has its foundation, its deepest reason, in the communion of the Mystical Body. Catholic Action is the means

⁶⁰ James J. McQuade, "Sodalities of Our Lady (Marian Congregations) and the Marian Apostolate," in *Maria et Ecclesia*, 11:77-90 (esp. 87).

⁶¹ McQuade, "Sodalities of Our Lady," 88-90.

whereby the Mystical Body attains its fullness in the social life of individuals.”⁶²

On November 1, 1950, Pius XII defined the dogma of the Assumption of Our Lady. The Assumption was the pinnacle, the crown of all the privileges of our Blessed Mother: “having overcome death so that she might be taken up body and soul to the glory of heaven where, as Queen, she sits in splendor at the right hand of her Son, the immortal King of the Ages.” On that same day, in his remarks, he said, “We never grow weary of recalling that nothing must ever prevail on the fact and the knowledge of our being all sons and daughters of one and the same mother, Mary, who dwells in heaven. She is the bond of union of the Mystical Body of Christ, that new Eve, the new mother of the living, who wishes to lead all to the truth and the grace of her divine son.”⁶³

⁶² D.-M. Chenu, “Catholic Action and the Mystical Body,” in *Restoring All Things: A Guide to Catholic Action* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1938), 8-13.

⁶³ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 42 (1950): 781.