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Consecration to Mary in the Society of Mary

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I. CONSECRATION TO MARY IN GENERAL

Before discussing consecration to Mary in the Society of Mary, we have to treat consecration to Mary in general.

There are many definitions given of consecration to Mary. One which seems to be all-inclusive is given by the Spanish theologian Fr. Aldama:

[Consecration] is a personal, universal and perpetual surrender made directly to Mary in recognition of her rights over us, in a genuine spirit of hyperdulia.¹

This definition, of course, presupposes the priority of a consecration to God Himself, without which consecration to Mary or any other creature would not make sense. Actually, in the history of consecration from the beginning, whether in ancient cults or in Jewish religion, two elements are always found: a passing out of common and profane usage, called by the theologians mancipatio, or a passing into the domain of the sacred or the service of God, called by them dedicatio.² One of the most authoritative French works on the subject speaks of a consecrated person being "removed from profane use and intended for divine worship."³ Etymologically, the authors agree with Fr. Cueva, who speaks of consecration as making something sacred or in

some way divine.\(^4\) He goes on to say that every consecration is isolation from the profane and dedication to God's worship. A more profound investigation of the meaning of consecration is given in a work by Bro. John Totten, S.M.\(^5\)

Speaking specifically on the consecration to Mary, Fr. Alonso sees the theological value of consecration in "its ultimate relation to God."\(^6\) Fr. Karl Rahner, recently deceased, probably the leading Catholic theologian of our age, claimed that "in its fullest sense it [the act of consecration to Mary] is a specific way of receiving the whole of Christianity."\(^7\) Fr. Paul Landolfi, S.M., sees in consecration "a self-offering" (a dedication to Mary).\(^8\) Our present Holy Father, John Paul II, claims that consecration to Mary is an association of the faithful devotee of Mary with the very consecration that Christ made of Himself to the Father. The Pope maintains this in his latest act of consecration to Mary:

> Behold, as we stand before you, Mother of Christ... we desire... to unite ourselves with the consecration which, for love of us, your Son made of himself to the Father: "For their sake," He said, "I consecrate myself that they also may be consecrated in the truth."\(^9\)

Some Marianist theologians, along with Fr. George Montague, S.M., see a relationship between the objective (constitutive) and subjective (progressive) consecration to Mary:

> The English language has come up with two terms, "consecrate" and "sanctify." The former is ordinarily associated uniquely with the constitutive aspect. This is unfortunate, for it sells short the richness of both the Greek and the Hebrew verbs in which no distinction is made, but the same verb may stand for "consecrate" and "sanctify." Consecration, Paul would then tell us, is a constitutive act that by its very nature engages a process of sanctification to its very consummation (II Thess. 5:23; II Cor. 7:1). Thus these two aspects, the constitutive and the progressive, the

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\(^4\) Cueva, "Vow of Stability," p. 3.

\(^5\) J. Totten, "Theological Foundation of Consecration: Baptismal Consecration," pp. 11-32, in Consecration (Fribourg, [1963]).


\(^8\) Paul Landolfi, S.M., "Marianist Vow of Stability" (mimeographed course notes, 23 pp.; Rose Hill Novitiate, March 1968; copy in Society of Mary Archives, Province of Cincinnati), p. 17.

\(^9\) John Paul II, "Entrusted to Mary: Letter... to all the bishops of the Church, together with an Act of Consecration (December 8, 1983)," The Pope Speaks 29, 2 (1984):144.
consecration and its fulfillment are not two separate entities, but both are the effect of the one gift of the Spirit… 10

Fr. Vincent Vasey, S.M., essentially agrees with Fr. Montague but sometimes sees a practical conflict between objective and subjective consecration, and he claims that it is difficult in practice to reconcile the two. But it is a “work of grace.” 11

Finally, the author of the article on personal consecration in the New Catholic Encyclopedia makes a distinction between consecrating oneself to God and to any one of the saints; but among the saints he distinguishes Mary from all the others. He claims that consecration to any saint, except Mary, means nothing “more than an act of special homage to one’s heavenly protector.” 12 However, consecration to Mary has a more profound meaning, because her position in the economy of salvation is inseparable from that of her Son. He says very expressly:

Her desires and wants are His, and she is in a unique position to unite Christians fully, quickly, and effectively to Christ, so that dedication to her is in fact dedication to Christ. 13

Among many others, Fr. Montague stresses the fact that the act of consecration has to be Christocentric. It is not surprising, of course, that there is a solicitude among all the writers on a Marian act of consecration to connect a Marian act of consecration with Jesus Christ her Son. They do insist, as the Church of Vatican II does, on the inseparable connection of Mary with Christ. 14

The Bible teaches us to refer all things to Christ and to realize that we are his property. As Fr. Beni says, “Now the cult of Mary is only a means whereby one reaches Christ with greater ease, through Mary, and the Father, through Christ.” 15 No wonder Paul VI called Marian consecration “the noblest act of cult.” 16

Article 57 of the Marianist Rule stresses the close union between Christ and Mary in her life of prayer and recalls to Marianists that “we unite ourselves to her to meditate on the mysteries of Christ… We renew each day our consecration to Mary; we

13 Ibid.
16 Ibid., quoting Pope Paul VI.
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honor her in showing our filial piety to her and put our joy into celebrating her feasts.”

Fr. Cueva, in giving some precisions on his own ideas of consecration to Mary, says that, in fact, it is an entire consecration to the service of Christ; it implies the recognition of the influence of Mary on our divine life and, consequently, our dependence on her.17

Fr. Joseph Lebon, to respond to the objection of those who say that God is the sole dispenser of all his goods, replies that Mary is not a goddess, but “she is with Christ”.18 The argument has a certain validity, for, to speak strictly, consecration can only have God for object. God alone has the right to a total consecration to His service. That being so, we still allow ourselves to make a distinction in regard to Mary. The theologian, Fr. Lohkamp, O.F.M., advances the argument that it is different in the case of Mary, because “the importance of her role in Christian spirituality is such that the formulas of dedication to her appear to have a more profound meaning [than the consecration to any other saint]. Her place in the economy of salvation is inseparable from that of her Son.”19 This indissolubility and the christocentricity of devotion to Mary permit us to consecrate ourselves to her.

Those who are for the term “consecration to Mary” take care to show that this consecration is not an attack on the consecration to God, but that rather it reinforces this consecration. “When one consecrates himself to Mary, ... the purpose is to help towards perfection, by placing oneself in a special relationship to her, for it is by her intercession that we have a special participation in the Divine Holiness.”20

St. Thomas Aquinas insists on the fact that “devotion to the saints of God [and of Mary in particular] does not terminate in them, but passes on to God, insofar as we honor God in His servants.”21

The possibility of a real, true consecration to Mary is based on the Church’s approval and even encouragement, because the Church is convinced that consecration to Mary does not include an act of latria (worship of God), and its ultimate end is always God. It is convinced that consecration to Mary is always made to God or Christ through Mary as an intermediary, and that consecration to Mary is a means of

21 Summa Theologica, I-IIae, question 82, art. 2.
more fully carrying out consecration to God. Mary's association in the consecration to God Himself or to Christ is based on her part in the redemption, her association with God's work. One theologian says that in reality "one consecrates himself to her [Mary] in order to consecrate himself to God. We devote ourselves to God through Mary, because vows are made to God alone." It is a sentiment shared by many theologians, that consecration to Mary is also consecration to Jesus and, as Cardinal Carberry maintains, primarily to Jesus. The cardinal says that where consecration is sincere and lived, "one finds himself thinking in terms of Jesus, while Mary seems to disappear in the background," which, he claims, is what she wants. "Consecration to Mary's immaculate heart," he maintains; "truly means consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus." To sum it all up, I cannot help but agree with Fr. Karl Rahner, who claims that a consecration to Mary touches the deepest foundation of our faith:

In the last analysis, this Consecration to Mary, which, when subjectively expressed, makes real the function of Mary in the history of salvation, is from its very object an act of faith, hope and charity in God, and thus a consecration to God Himself.

II. French Predecessors of Father Chaminade, and, in Particular, St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort

Again, before discussing consecration to Mary in the Society of Mary (Marianists), I must treat, even if ever so briefly, the members of the French school of theology, to which Fr. Chaminade belonged.

Cardinal de Bérulle is widely recognized as the founder of this school. He had a vow of servitude to Jesus and Mary. One of his successors, St. John Eudes, spoke of consecration to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. And an eighteenth-century successor, St. Louis Grignion de Montfort, wrote convincingly about consecrating oneself to Mary as completely as possible in a treatise on true devotion to the Virgin

22 Cueva, "Vow of Stability," p. 4.
23 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
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Mary. He wished all his followers "to belong wholly to Jesus through her." 28 Even though he was personally unacquainted with the work of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort, Fr. Chaminade seems to have been influenced by his doctrine which was part of the French school of theology. Fr. Henri Lebon, S. M., quotes Grignion de Montfort:

As the essential of this devotion [meaning the consecration to Mary in the doctrine of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort] consists in the dispositions which it ought to cultivate and perfect, it will not be equally understood by every one. Some will stop at what is exterior in it, and will go no further, and these will be the greatest number. Some, a small number, will enter into its inward spirit, but will mount only one step. Who will mount the second step? Who will get as far as the third? Lastly, who will so advance as to make this devotion his habitual state? 29

What Fr. Lebon, a Marianist, seems to be implying by this citation of the Saint is that Fr. Chaminade's doctrine is a logical consequence of the doctrine of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort on total consecration, because, as we shall see in the second part of this work, what makes the Marianist consecration distinctive is really the totality of what is given to the Blessed Virgin Mary (See pp. 525 f. below).

The best authority on St. Louis Grignion de Montfort's consecration to Mary is, of course, the Saint himself, who explains that total consecration follows upon a formal and active recognition of the role that Mary plays in human life. This recognition entails for him the renewal of baptismal promises. 30

It is of the very essence of the Montfortian consecration that the "consecration of oneself to Jesus Christ's infinite wisdom through the hands of Mary" constitutes its most vital part. 31 The very essence of the Marian consecration, as taught by Montfort, is to give oneself entirely to Mary, in order to belong to Jesus Christ through her. Grignion de Montfort is quite specific when he mentions what should be given to Mary; this includes: 1) the body, and all senses and members; 2) the soul and all its powers; 3) all external goods, present and future; 4) all internal and spiritual goods, i.e., our merits, our virtues, good works present and future. In short, everything we have and are by nature and by grace. Its aim is really singular: to belong to Jesus Christ through Mary. The Saint is very practical. He suggests an external act of

29 H. Lebon, The Vow of Stability, p. 21, citing Grignion de Montfort.
consecration which ought to inaugurate a total life of consecration to Mary. Second­ly, a life totally inspired by an absolute dependence on Mary, and through her intercession, on Jesus. 32 Cardinal Carberry, who is a devotee of St. Grignion de Montfort, insists that the Montfortian consecration is a total gift of oneself, not just in regard to what is given, but also for how long it is given. It is not a mere forma­lity, but involves effective action, a deliberate choice of one’s will. He insists that service is a test of what the Saint calls true devotion. 33 The Saint actually gave a formula for making this act of consecration which Cardinal Carberry once quoted in his weekly column in the St. Louis Review. It goes as follows:

I, [N.], a faithless sinner, renew and ratify today in thy hands, O Immaculate Mother, the vows of my baptism. I renounce forever Satan, his pomp, and his works; and I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ... 34

A major part of the act of consecration which St. Louis Grignion de Montfort preached was called “the holy slavery,” because the act of submission to the Virgin Mary was complete, total. The expression itself, however, is used by few of the followers of the Saint, and with good reason. Still, the word slave, harsh as it sounds to modern ears, “is the right word to describe perfect disponibility. In the juridical meaning of Roman Law, it means someone who works and earns for another, bereft of property rights and possibility of gain, someone who... is at the beck and call of his master.” 35

To sum up, I would say that the characteristics of the Montfortian Act of Consecration to Mary are the following: 1) totality, both extensive and intensive, 2) the ratification of baptism, and 3) a personal decision. 36 It was particularly its relationship to one’s original baptism that St. Louis Grignion de Montfort, a missionary, stressed. He saw that every ulterior consecration to Mary presupposes a first and fundamental consecration and ought to be considered a means in respect to an end. 37 The foundation of this consecration was seen as the association of Mary with Christ.

33 Carberry, “Listening,” p. 3.
34 Ibid., citing Grignon de Montfort.
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the Redeemer. The Saint also stressed Mary’s spiritual maternity and her queenship as foundations of any act of consecration to her.

Undoubtedly, the Vatican Council II fully approved of the doctrine that St. Louis Grignion de Montfort posed as the basis of his act of total consecration. It is a well-known fact that the present Pope himself is a devotee of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort. One of the members of the religious order of the Montfortians praised its founder very highly when he said, "It seems to me that the best comment on the Marian text to the Council [Vatican Council II] is found in the doctrine of St. Louis Mary Grignion de Montfort." Yes, this Saint was truly a predecessor of Fr. William Joseph Chaminade, who, as we shall see, bequeathed to his followers a total consecration to Mary, even by a special vow. One of Fr. Chaminade’s devotees in the Society of Mary has compared the doctrine of Grignon de Montfort and Chaminade in their general characteristics. He says that, whereas Grignon de Montfort stresses the sovereign domain of Mary and "the slavery of love," which leads to the personal sanctity of the Christian as his very first objective, Chaminade stresses the filial love of Mary, gives his consecration to her the form of a religious vow, and makes the apostolate the first aim of this act of consecration.

As can be easily imagined, Montfort’s act of consecration is not without its difficulties. We have already considered one of these difficulties when we mentioned the "holy slavery." It is to be noted that the Saint referred to "the holy slavery of love"; he added "of love" as a clarifying factor of this slavery. Its significance is simply a recognition of Mary’s maternal dominion over us, with the corresponding totality of love and dependence upon her. I might mention other difficulties. One of them is that the doctrine itself is difficult. A Monfortian theologian admits that it is, and that few accede to the fullness of the doctrine of their founder. St. Louis Grignion de Montfort himself answers the difficulty by asking the question: "Who will seize this doctrine in a stable manner?" and then giving the answer, "he to whom the Spirit of God reveals this secret." A second difficulty is that the doctrine is "complicated." "Why not Christ alone?" the objector asks. And the answer that

38 Pompei, "Fondamenti teologici," pp. 51-55; cf. also Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Church, nos. 52 and 54.
40 Cited by Ghidotti, "La Consacrazione," p. 159; see n. 12.
42 It is better, of course, in our modern times, not to insist on this terminology, but even now its profound meaning cannot be eliminated without the risk of losing the significance of the Montfortian consecration.
43 Ghidotti, "La Consacrazione," p. 158.
44 Ibid., p. 159.
the Monfortian theologian gives is that Mary leads us more surely, more swiftly, to Christ; he says that personal experience testifies to this, as well as the experience of the Church herself. A final difficulty is that the doctrine is demanding. But, if Mary is involved with Christ in the work of salvation—as the saints and members of the French school believe she is—it is not extravagant in its demands.

III. CONSECRATION TO MARY IN THE SOCIETY OF MARY (MARIANISTS)

There is no doubt that consecration to Mary is the salient characteristic of the Society of Mary. From the very beginning, its founder, Fr. Chaminade, laid down consecration to Mary as one of the fundamental principles of the Society: "... all its actual and future members propose: 1. To consecrate themselves to Mary..." He connected the religious profession in the Society of Mary with an act of consecration to Mary:

The religious profession must be considered a sort of consecration by which the religious is reserved exclusively for a holy use, namely, the glory of God and of His Blessed Mother.

The very nature of the Society required this consecration to Mary, according to Fr. Chaminade. This was recognized in a papal letter to then Superior General, Fr. Juergens, written in 1949:

Inspired by God he [Fr. Chaminade] founded two ... religious societies, one for men, the other for women, which he wanted specially dedicated to the Virgin Mother of God,...

The consecration to Mary by Marianist religious is made in a religious institute approved by the Church. Consequently, the very consecration to Mary, which is at the heart of the Society of Mary, is accepted by the Church.

46 Ibid., pp. 158-159.
48 S.F., 1:6-7, no. 4; 1:125, no. 93.
50 Cueva, "Vow of Stability," p. 5.
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The other Marianist religious order which he founded, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, was also entirely consecrated to Mary. And in the Sodality, which was a forerunner of both religious institutes, Fr. Chaminade employed the idea of entire consecration to Mary, long before he founded his religious institutes. He said of the members of his Sodality:

The members publicly profess this devotion [to the Blessed Virgin Mary] and promise the fulfillment of the consequent duties by their act of consecration, which is nothing else but a profession of this purpose.

For Fr. Chaminade, all the rules, practices, general and special duties, the very proselytizing spirit of the Sodality, flow from this consecration and are merely its outcome. For Fr. Chaminade, there was an intimate connection between the Sodality and the future religious societies which he was to found. The religious state formed in the Sodality was for him simply a more perfect way of actualizing the full extent of consecration to Mary. This special branch of the Sodality was especially dear to him, because of its special consecration to Mary. He called it the "state" (the state of religious living in the world):

The very religious state formed in the sodality is but a perfected manner of carrying to a limit the consecration to the Blessed Virgin.

Thus we have the wording of the first vows of these secular religious:

"Almighty and eternal God, full of confidence in Thy infinite goodness and in the protection of Mary whom you have given to me as mother, I consecrate myself more completely than ever to Thy service and worship, and vow and promise, etc."

It is an established fact that both religious institutes, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (1816) and the Society of Mary (1817), sprang from the Sodality and were the logical outcome of the consecration to Mary made in the Sodality. The very first members of the Society of Mary "established themselves in the religious life of the Society because their religious life was essentially Marian."
This Marian consecration finds its fullest expression in the vow of religion known as Stability. It is quite evident that the founder of the Marianists, Fr. Chaminade, and all his followers gave a special meaning to this vow. Fr. Chaminade was well aware of the ordinary sense of this vow. He always taught that a vow of Stability, whether professed or not, found its way into all religious professions. He was well aware, too, of the ordinary meaning given to Stability (in place, monastery), but he always maintained that there was something special about the vow of Stability in the Society of Mary, namely, that it expressed the Marianists' entire consecration to Mary. He wrote in a letter which described the spirit of the Society:

But I maintain that we are united to Mary by our vow of stability in a more special manner than other religious; we have an additional claim, and a remarkably strong one, to her preference. She adopts us, then, with more privileges; she delights in receiving our special promise to be forever faithful and devoted to her; and she enrolls us in her militia and consecrates us as her apostles.

Although it can be maintained that the vow of Stability is not a vow of consecration strictly speaking, it is such a vow indirectly, by specifying and confirming the consecration already enclosed in the religious profession. For Marianists, the vow of Stability does not create consecration, but stresses and manifests it. Only in this sense do Marianists speak of a special vow of consecration to Mary. As Fr. Chaminade himself maintained, strictly speaking, religious are held by this vow of Stability only to remain in their state; but, psychologically, the vow of Stability is "ordered to the characteristic activity of the order"—consecration to Mary.

It may be objected that the word itself—stability—seems inadequate to express consecration to Mary, for, etymologically, there is no Marian meaning in the word (but only perseverance in place or in a society, etc.). For Marianists, it is Marian, because their perseverance is in an essentially Marian institute. It is undoubtedly true—as a follower of Fr. Chaminade, Fr. Lebon, pointed out in his treatment on this vow that Fr. Chaminade saw in the vow of Stability a perfect exemplification of a dictum of the French School concerning Mary, which was made explicit by Grignion de Montfort: "Mary exists only in reference to God."

59 Ibid., pp. 28-29.
60 Ibid., p. 24.
61 This is probably the reason that the Church herself allowed Marianists to keep this vow, but did suggest that the name of the vow be changed. See Cueva, "Vow of Stability," p. 8.
62 Grignion de Montfort (Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, VI), cited in H. Lebon, The Vow of Stability, p. 20. Still, Fr. Lebon would not go so far as to say that the vow of
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It is historically certain that the idea that religious profession in the Society of Mary is a total consecration to Mary was in the mind of Fr. Chaminade from the very beginning. This is so because those who profess the vow of Stability in the Society are specially consecrated to Mary, because the Society of Mary is essentially Marian—constitutionally so. In other words, Fr. Chaminade would insist that the Society of Mary is not consecrated to Mary because of the vow of Stability; but the vow of Stability is made because of the consecration to Mary of the entire Society and all its members. As Fr. Chaminade himself expressed it in a letter (24 August 1839) describing the spirit of the Society:

We have committed ourselves by a special vow, the vow of stability, to help her with all our strength up to the end of our lives... 

Fr. Chaminade was aware of the distinction between the strict obligation of the vow of Stability and the spirit; but he always insisted upon the latter. He knew that the vow was fulfilled by the very fact of staying or persevering in the Society, but he never stopped there. In his letter on the vow of Stability, he draws as a conclusion that what is special in the vow of Stability is the consecration to Mary, the very reason for persevering in the Society of Mary. “We are in a special manner the auxiliaries and instruments of the Blessed Virgin in the great work of moral reform...” This doctrine of Fr. Chaminade on the spirit of the vow of Stability found its way into an official document, the Constitutions of 1839:

By the vow of stability, the member intends constituting himself permanently and irrevocably in a state of servant of Mary. This vow is in reality a devotedness to the Blessed Virgin with the filial design of spreading her knowledge and perpetuating her love and her cult as much as possible, by one’s self and by others, in whatever circumstances of life he may be.

So it is easily seen that Stability, by which one expresses one’s consecration to Mary in the Society of Mary, is an integral part of the Marianist religious profession. It is really the soul or spirit of religious profession, as Fr. Henri Lebon calls it. Stability was the raison d’être of religious profession in the Society of Mary. See, in the original language, his Le vœu de stabilité et la consécration à Marie dans la Société de Marie (Marianistes) (Nivelles: L’Apôtre de Marie, 1924), p. 8: “en un certain sens...”

66 Ibid.
67 Article 19; this document is also published in LaSp, pp. 34-57.
nists embrace religious life out of devotion to Mary. Borrowing from and adding to Dom Marmion, Fr. Lebon writes:

Our entire life, considered as a whole and in all its details, receives the stamp of our religious profession, which is a true holocaust offered to God by Mary's hands. The superiority of this act of consecration to Mary is well brought out by Fr. Lebon, when he reminds us that every other act of consecration in the Christian life does not change the state of life of the faithful who are inspired by grace to make an act of consecration. He tells us that a consecrated soul is a person dedicated to the divine cult "by a public rite and in the name of Holy Church."70

I can perhaps sum up everything in the words of Fr. Verrier, S.M.,

...it is not the vow of stability which gives Marianist religious life its completely unique Marian stamp, but it is the completely unique Marian stamp of Marianist religious life which gives the vow of stability or perseverance a stabilizing power which it does not have in other orders in which it is professed or implicitly accepted.71

This meaning of Stability as an expression of our consecration to Mary was the doctrine of the Marianists and of their founder from the very beginning.72

In one of the first retreats preached by Fr. Chaminade, he is quoted as saying: "The vow of Stability is all for the glory of Mary; we make it to give ourselves to Mary for life and irrevocably."73 A few years later, Fr. Chaminade, writing to one of his first followers, Fr. Lalanne, who was then working on the Constitutions of 1828, proposed the following text:

The vow of stability ... constitutes a separate vow simply to emphasize our devotion to the Blessed Virgin and to give perpetuity to our devotedness in her service.74

Again, in another retreat, years later, Fr. Chaminade said very simply and explicitly that Stability "is an offering of ourselves to Mary."75 This doctrine is confirmed

69 Ibid., p. 26. (Note: n. 1 on p. 26 is incorrect; actual reference is to Christ, the Ideal of the Monk, Ch. VI, section IV.)
70 Ibid., pp. 22-23, citing D. Pruemmer, Vade mecum, no. 445.
72 Bertrand Buby, S.M., Provincial Letter, no. 26 (Cincinnati Province of the Society of Mary, Dayton, Ohio, Sept. 12, 1984, 6 pp.), gives a very good history of the Vow of Stability in the Society of Mary from the very beginning.
73 S.F. 1:128, no. 99; citation is from Manuscript of Bordeaux (C), p. 28, the 17th and 19th instructions.
74 Ibid. Just two years later, around 1830, a true movement of consecration to Mary emerged in the Church and gradually became more and more advanced and profound among Catholics, until in our day there are now millions who consecrate themselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Cf. also, Pompei, "Fondamenti teologici," pp. 37-38.
75 S.F. 1:129, no. 99, found in Notes of Fr. Chevaux from a retreat preached by Fr. Chaminade in 1834.
officially by the Constitutions of 1839: "By the vow of stability the members purpose to declare themselves permanently and irrevocably servants of Mary."\(^{76}\)

Around this same time, Fr. Chaminade tried to handle the problem of whether the vow of Stability is actually a vow of consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is my impression that this attempt was misunderstood even by members of the Society of Mary. He is quoted by one of these early followers as saying: "The 'vow of consecration to the Blessed Virgin' is implied [in stability], since we bind ourselves ever to remain in a Society entirely devoted to her."\(^{77}\) The root meaning of the vow of Stability is given by Fr. Chaminade in his famous letter of August 24, 1839, to the preachers of the retreats that year. In it he formally discusses the vow of Stability and says:

...what I consider peculiar to our two institutes, and what appears to me without precedent among the known institutions, is that we embrace the religious state itself in her name and in her honor... This is our teaching concerning the vow of stability, our rallying cry, our distinctive trait.\(^{78}\)

This is a kind of spiritual testament which Fr. Verrier claims could have been entitled: "Letter on the True Spirit of the Society of Mary and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary."\(^{79}\) He asks the question: "What did Fr. Chaminade want to prevent or stop?" implying that there was another reason for writing the letter—to try to prevent withdrawals from the Society of Mary or the Daughters of Mary or transferrals to other orders under the pretext of going to a more perfect state. Fr. Verrier, following the lead of Fr. Chaminade, calls leaving the Society of Mary "religious apostasy" (which was "made so much easier by the fact that simple vows were ranked together with private vows").\(^{80}\) Why was Fr. Chaminade so strong in his enunciation? Fr. Verrier claims that it is because of the "Marian character of the vow of Stability"; the ideal of the Society of Mary and the Daughters of Mary could not be surpassed by any other ideal. And therefore, owing to the absence in the concrete of a superior ideal, the vow of Stability or perseverance in the Marianist religious life established a person in a final and absolute manner "as far as conscience was concerned."\(^{81}\) Fr. Verrier goes on to point out that "to grant this conclusion, it

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\(^{76}\) S.F. 1:129, no. 100, Articles 19.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., quoting a letter from Fr. Chaminade which Fr. Fontaine cited in his notes of the Retreat of 1837.

\(^{78}\) S.F. 1:131, no. 101. Fr. Verrier points out that this letter is in actuality a letter in which the founder "speaks his mind completely" about the Brothers of Mary and the Daughters of Mary.


\(^{80}\) Ibid.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., p. 32.
was necessary not to be limited to the *letter* of the Rules of the Institute. It was necessary to penetrate to the *spirit* which laid down these Rules.”

It seems to me that Fr. Chaminade would have no difficulty in applying to Marianist religious life what Fr. Beni said of Vatican Council II in regard to devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary:

>The novelty of the Council is that the unifying and transforming love which should lead us to be authentic copies of Mary (and therefore, Jesus) ought not to be realized any longer only *individually*, but *collectively*. "

After all that has been said, it is evident that Fr. Chaminade answers the difficulty which is in the minds of some of the members of religious orders, in particular Marian ones, and possibly even in the minds of some of the members of his own order. He brings up this objection himself: that every religious order honors Mary in a special manner and prides itself on belonging to her. He answers by saying that he would not deny that every religious order honors Mary in a special way, but he goes on to claim that his orders are “the only ones in which profession is constitutionally the effect of a desire to assist Mary and, as a result, the only ones in which concern for Mary’s interests is the determining cause and soul of apostolic religious life.”

Of course, all that has been said does not in any way minimize that element of consecration to Mary which is expressed by the theologian as *dedicatio*—giving oneself to God, through Mary—by emphasizing what has been called the *traditio*—giving oneself to the institute in which the vow of Stability is professed. Certainly the *dedicatio* and *traditio* are logically distinct but, in practice, they are inseparable, “since a person cannot bind himself to God by a public vow of religion without binding himself simultaneously to a particular institute.” One cannot consecrate oneself to God in the Marianist religious life without contracting an alliance with Mary. Marianist literature speaks about the consecration to Mary as a real alliance with her. Already in the *Manual of a Servant of Mary*, composed in 1804—thirteen years before the existence of the Society of Mary, this idea of alliance with Mary by an act of consecration, was stressed:

>A real alliance is formed between the Immaculate Virgin and the person consecrated to her service by the act of consecration. On the one hand, the august Mary takes under her powerful protection the faithful soul . . . and she receives it as her adopted

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83 Beni, “*Valore ecclesiale,*” p. 90.
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child. On the other, the new member of the family, contracts the sweetest and most amiable obligations with his august Mother.\textsuperscript{86}

Undoubtedly, the vow of Stability, whereby Marianists express their consecration to Mary, is an alliance with her.\textsuperscript{87} According to the literature, it is composed of two parts: we choose Mary and Mary chooses us. On our part, (1) we choose Mary as our Mother. "Could we choose a Mother more powerful, more tender, more truly our Mother?" (2) We bind ourselves to her to act as her child, "to love her, to honor her, to obey her, to assist her. Oh yes; especially to this last effect of filial love, assistance, active benevolence. We undertake to proclaim her glory everywhere."\textsuperscript{88} Furthermore, (3) "we form a society with Mary, acquiring rights upon her merits, her prayers, her protection, her glory and upon the unlimited benefactions she received unstintedly from her divine Son."\textsuperscript{89}

On the part of Mary, (1) she selects us from a great number to be part of her family, "her most cherished children"; (2) she binds herself to us; she makes us the promises "of a mother: to love us, to help us in need, to defend us"; and (3) "Mary forms an alliance with us, becoming a partaker of all our goods."\textsuperscript{90}

To some the name of the vow of Stability is unsatisfying. A change of name has been suggested by various authors, especially Marianists, but no new name has gained acceptance. A name which has been proposed is a vow of Perseverance, but it is inadmissible; Fr. Cueva reasons that in practice stability and perseverance are synonymous, but he finally comes to the conclusion that both expressions—stability and perseverance—while admissible are inadequate.\textsuperscript{91}

Along with many others, Fr. Cueva points out:

The most competent interpreters of our spirit [the Marianist spirit] unanimously recognize ... that the vow of stability does not make the Marian consecration but presupposes it. It merely expresses explicitly the Marian consecration already implied in the temporary profession.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{86} S.F. 3:144, no. 140, citing the \textit{Manual of a Servant of Mary}, composed by Fr. Chaminade.

\textsuperscript{87} The ring which members of the Society of Mary (gold) and the Daughters of Mary (Silver) have worn publicly since their beginnings is a sign of their Marianist alliance with Mary.

\textsuperscript{88} S.F. 1:127, no. 97, citing notes of Fr. Lalanne from the Retreat of 1819, preached by Fr. Chaminade. It is interesting to note that a year before, the gold ring (Society of Mary) was given as a sign of the religious’ entire consecration to Mary, as expressed by the Vow of Stability (Cf. S.F. 1:128, no. 98, n. 1). The year 1818, was the first full year of the Society’s existence, since it was founded in October 1817.

\textsuperscript{89} S.F. 1:127, no. 97.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{91} Cueva, "Vow of Stability," p. 8.

What Fr. Cueva says is undeniably true, but the consideration of stability as a vow of consecration also has a long history, undoubtedly complicated by some ambiguous expressions on the part of our founder. Fr. Lebon insisted:

In the mind of our Founder, our religious profession—even the first temporary profession—is already in itself a consecration to Mary. It is "for the glory of the most Holy Trinity and the honor of Mary" that we promise to God and "vow to keep poverty, chastity and obedience." 93

Fr. Lebon points out that the Founder in his notes on the Constitutions declared that the religious profession "ought to be looked upon as a kind of consecration by which the religious is destined solely for holy purposes, that is such as redound to the glory of God and his august Mother." 94 This is one of the Society's most official documents, in which the Founder was treating ex professo the vow of stability: "The religious profession should be regarded as a kind of consecration by which a religious is reserved for holy purposes and the glory of God and his holy Mother." 95

All the confusion about stability's being a vow of Marian consecration is resolved by the expressions direct and indirect. Actually, the Founder claims that only indirectly is the vow of stability an act of consecration to Mary. He says explicitly: "The vow of consecration to the Blessed Virgin is implied since we bind ourselves ever to remain in a society entirely devoted to her." 96 So we might conclude that Fr. Chaminade was not in favor of using the term "Vow of Marian Consecration," even though he was convinced that the vow of stability expressed our consecration to Mary.

One Marianist author seems to be in favor of the expression "Vow of Marian Apostolate" instead of Vow of Stability, because this perhaps best expresses the very nature of the vow. The vow of Stability, he claims, is devotedness to Mary, to help her in her apostolic mission; he adds that the change of name "limits the broader horizons of Marian consecration to the apostolic area." 97 Reading the signs of the times, Fr. Cueva seems to agree with Pope Pius XII, who insisted on the significance of a commitment to the apostolate which consecration to Mary implies. Cardinal Tisserant transmitted the thoughts of the Pope at Lourdes in September 1958:

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94 Ibid., pp. 23-24.
96 S.F. 1:129, no. 100; Fr. Fontaine took these notes directly from a letter from Fr. Chaminade which, unfortunately, has been lost.
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To consecrate oneself to Mary means to be ready as docile instruments in her hands, to assure, in dependence on her, the triumph of the Church ... for to Mary is it reserved to lead the Church to victory. 98

Undoubtedly, aware of Fr. Chaminade’s expression in his letter to the retreat masters of August 24, 1839, in which he said that Mary “enrolls us in her militia and consecrates us as her apostles,” 99 Fr. Lebon admits that “the end and ultimate reason of our consecration to Mary and of our vow of Stability ...” is the apostolate. He even speaks of a devotion of “struggle and combat.” Still, he does not speak of a vow of the Marian apostolate, although he does seem to favor it. 100

There seems to be an insistence at the present time on the apostolate. So it is not surprising that all devotions in the Church, and, maybe in a special way, consecration to Mary, should be directed to the apostolate.

... Renewed by a Christian ... this consecration, willed deliberately and personally, implies not only a sanctifying of one’s existence, but a willingness and an obligation ... to work with increased generosity for the advancement of the reign of Christ, with Mary and through Mary, Mother of the one and only Savior. 101

Fr. Lebon can even speak of the Marian character of our apostolate and the unlimited confidence we should have in it because it has such a character. 102

In the Spirit of Our Foundation, 103 the first effect of Marian consecration is a loving esteem of Mary’s prerogatives coupled with a faithful imitation of her virtues. To religious living in the world, Fr. Chaminade wrote:

Ever remember ... the import of your act of consecration: that to Mary is due a very special worship, proper to her only; that she is Mistress of the World, the Queen of Angels and of Men, the Dispensatrix of All Graces, the Ornament of Holy Church ... that by contracting with Mary an alliance as close as that between mother and child we have also, by the fact, contracted obligations. ... 104

This first effect is described as a high and loving esteem of Mary, from an admiration of her privileges, to be translated into love. It had to be directed to action, an actual imitation of the virtues of Mary.

102 H. Lebon, The Vow of Stability, p. 32f.
103 (S.F.) A special compilation and summary of the Marianist spirit, with sources especially from the early days of the institutes; in it a number of effects of Marian consecration are singled out.
104 S.F., 1:150, no. 117.
A genuine and sound devotion to the Blessed Virgin implies the imitation of her virtues ... if it [is to] be constant it will end in the imitation of her virtues and will become perfect.\textsuperscript{105}

The second effect pointed out in the \textit{Spirit of Our Foundation} is a great confidence in Mary, because of one's consecration to her, in important matters and especially in trials.\textsuperscript{106} In his private correspondence, as well as in his official work for the Society, Fr. Chaminade frequently returns to this idea of confidence. For example, he writes to one of his spiritual dirigées:

Let us expect every manner of success from the protection of Mary. Under her aegis, we have succeeded in other matters far more difficult.\textsuperscript{107}

In the retreat of 1822, to his Brothers, the Founder insisted on confidence in Mary's protection over ourselves, our institute. He claimed that one should always have a great and lively hope based "upon the sovereign power with which Mary is invested and upon her willingness to aid us, for she is our mother and has carried Mercy itself in her chaste womb."\textsuperscript{108} And to the founder of the American province of the Society, Fr. Chaminade wrote, "Let us ever turn toward our Guiding Star and we shall arrive safe in port."\textsuperscript{109}

The third effect is participation in the apostolate of Mary; it is described by the author of the \textit{Spirit of the Foundation} as "zeal for the works of God."\textsuperscript{110} He claims that this "zeal for the works of God" should be exercised with Mary and in her name, by Mary and under her auspices, for Mary and in her honor. He wrote of religious living in the world:

They will raise their hearts and minds to her, and, through her, to Jesus, her Adorable Son, Our Lord. They will accustom themselves, especially when beginning an action, and during the same, if rather prolonged, to offer it, as well as themselves, for the glory of Jesus Christ, by the hands of Mary, their Divine Mother.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{105} S.F. 2:156-57, no. 122, citing the \textit{Memoranda of Instructions on the Blessed Virgin} (to Sodalities), pp. 16, 20.

\textsuperscript{106} S.F. 1:161 f., no. 127 f. The author points out Fr. Chaminade's conduct in regard to the Daughters of Mary and how he loved to call Mary "protector of our Society." He further elaborates on the Founder's confidence in all his establishments, especially through the trials of 1830 and in the delicate negotiations with the government, as well as in the still more delicate dealings with the Holy See, about the work of the Society.

\textsuperscript{107} S.F. 1:161, no. 127, citing a letter to Miss Belloc, April, 1809.

\textsuperscript{108} S.F. 1:160-61, no. 126, citing Retreat of 1822, 8th Instruction, MS. of Bordeaux.

\textsuperscript{109} S.F. 1:167, no. 130, citing a letter to Fr. Leo Meyer, Nov. 25, 1838.

\textsuperscript{110} S.F. 1:171-72, nos. 130-31.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Ibid.}, citing Pamphlet J.
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In a letter to a French nobleman, Fr. Chaminade expressed the fact that we work through Mary or by Mary: "We never go to battle but under the banner of the august Mother of God." 112

For Fr. Chaminade, indirect labor for Mary's glory, while laboring under her banner, is not sufficient. He claims that our desire must be for Mary's glory, that is, to reveal to the world her greatness, to diffuse everywhere the knowledge and love of Mary. For him, a distinguishing trait of our zeal had to be the utilization of "the knowledge and love of Mary for the conquest of souls." 113 He claimed that, we must have "a great and ardent longing to behold her honored, loved, and served throughout the world." 114 Fr. Chaminade made working for Mary's glory, for her honor, a principle of the Society of Mary:

The religious profession should be regarded as a kind of unction by which the religious is destined solely for holy usage and for the glory of the Savior and His august Mother. 115

Generations before but along with the present pope, Fr. Chaminade was convinced that the roots of Marian consecration ought to be found in the Christian consecration itself, that is, in the primary consecration to Christ and to Mary by the baptismal vows. John Paul II has written:

Through the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, religious consecrate themselves to God, personally ratifying and confirming all the commitments of their Baptism. But even more important is the divine action, the fact that God consecrates them to the glory of his Son, and he does this through the mediation of his Church, acting in the power of his Spirit. 116

Following Saint Paul, Fr. Chaminade was convinced that baptism gave "new existence to Christians." 117 With the Fathers of the Church he saw in the emission of vows "a second baptism," and a baptism which "procures a more complete remission of punishment than does the ordinary plenary indulgence." 118 Father Chaminade points out that the Fathers of the Church called religious profession a second baptism, because by it religious divested themselves entirely of "the old man." He further

112 S.F. 1:177, no. 139, citing his letter to the Duke of Montmorency, April 18, 1825.
113 S.F. 1:180, no. 141, citing his letter to Mother Xavier, Oct. 5, 1839.
114 Ibid., citing Retreat of 1822, 18th Instruction, MS. of Bordeaux.
115 S.F. 2:14, no. 470, citing handwritten notes on the Constitutions.
116 John Paul II, "On Religious Life" (excerpts from a discourse to American Bishops in Rome during their ad limina visit to Rome in 1983), Family 4, no. 10 (Oct. 27, 1984): 1. Family is a publication of and for the Cincinnati Province of the Society of Mary.
118 S.F. 2:16, no. 472, citing the Retreat of 1822, last conference, MS. of Bordeaux.
observed that several of the Fathers declared that the merits of religious profession are the same as those of martyrdom.\textsuperscript{119}

Pope Paul VI claimed that “the profession of the evangelical vows is connected with the consecration proper to Baptism. It is, as it were, an act of personal consecration which completes the former.”\textsuperscript{120} He says that it brings “to full development the consecration received in holy Baptism.”\textsuperscript{121} No wonder modern authors speak about baptism as a “fundamental consecration” and insist that “through it the baptized person, by a title distinct from that of creation, belongs and is consecrated to God.”\textsuperscript{122} When we discuss baptism, we are really discussing Christ’s own way of initial consecration, and we are delving into the deepest mysteries of our faith. As Fr. Paul Landolfi, S.M., writes:

In the New Testament the consecration of the Christian in Baptism results from the sacrificial consecration of Christ on the Cross. We are plunged into Christ’s death and rising and take on a new existence: consecration is, therefore, constitutive. We are constituted in a new state of existence.\textsuperscript{123}

Christian life is really nothing else but a progressive laying hold of and appropriation of what was rendered accessible by baptism.\textsuperscript{124} It is always possible, as Fr. Vincent Vasey observed, to make this consecration “more explicit and profound,” but it will always remain true, that “the separation from worldly things and the dedication of a person to God is accomplished in baptism.”\textsuperscript{125} As Fr. Chaminade proclaimed, “By the religious profession the religious no longer belongs to himself and is offered entirely to God; thus all acts in the religious life are acts of religion belonging to God.”\textsuperscript{126} Truly, persons belong entirely to God by reason of their baptism.

We can see that even if the consecration to Mary as expressed in the vows of religion, according to Fr. Chaminade, is not a sacramental consecration, it is surely

\textsuperscript{119} S.F. 2:15, no. 470, citing Society of Mary, Principles of its Constitution and its Regulations.
\textsuperscript{120} Paul VI, “The Religious Life Today” (May 23, 1964), The Pope Speaks 9, 4 (Spring-Summer 1964):398; cf. Lumen gentium, no. 44.
\textsuperscript{121} Paul VI, “The Sister and Her Life of Service” (address to 14th General Assembly of the Union of Major Superiors of Italy, May 16, 1966), The Pope Speaks 11, 2 (Spring 1966): 110. Vatican Council II stresses the same idea. Cf. Lumen gentium, nos. 36 and 44; the Decree on the Missions, no. 18; Gaudium et spes, no. 14.
\textsuperscript{122} Lohkamp, “Consecration, personal,” p. 209.
\textsuperscript{123} Landolfi, “Marianist Vow,” p. 17.
\textsuperscript{125} Vasey, “Le bapteme,” p. 8.
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based on one-on baptism—which is sacramental. So this consecration, freely accepted and lived, is no doubt ascetic, as Fr. Chaminade points out, but is also fundamentally sacramental. It involves the whole person and the whole of one's life. To sum everything up, we might say that the climax of consecration to Mary is reached in a public vow. While we admit that if consecration is going to be genuine, it must be and is an act of latria, since it has the divine person as its term, still we admit the legitimacy of consecration to Mary, which always leads to her Son Jesus Christ as the Lord and God of Mary and of all persons consecrated to God through her.