

peating the full detail of that familiar narrative, we can all recall his departure from Mussidan, his adventures as an underground priest in Bordeaux, his exile in Saragossa, and his return to Bordeaux to found the Sodality in 1800. That crucial decade is the one in which the large matrix of the Modern Era contracted into a crucible within which the first historical manifestation of Marianist spirituality was forged. That decade was for Father Chaminade the time when the blunt and brutal reality of Modernity came crashing into his life. The experience inspired him with the resolve to found the Marianist Family.

He returned to France filled with a sense of mission. For the rest of his life he consistently and repeatedly claimed that God had inspired him to act in response to the times, to the changes that were being wrought in the Church and the world by Modernity. He felt called to launch a series of foundations that would enable Christians to live and believe in this new Modern world – a series of foundations with a mission, a set of appropriate apostolic means and methods, and a spirituality suited to the times. Today we call those foundations the Marianist Family. From the start, Marianist spirituality has been a Modern spirituality.

We now turn our attention to this first manifestation of Marianist spirituality.

The Dawning of Marianist Spirituality

In the Beginning

In 1800, when Father Chaminade returned to France from exile in Saragossa, he founded the Bordeaux Sodality. This was the start of the Marianist Family and the *début* of Marianist spirituality. Father Lalanne has left us the following description of this auspicious event.

Churches were just beginning to re-open, but they were still devastated and deserted. Christians found themselves so scattered and isolated that, among those who had preserved a spark of faith in this large city, each of them looked on himself or herself as another Tobias going up to the temple and going there alone. From this situation to the foundation of a religious order there stretched an untraversable distance. However, no one knew the power of time and patience better than Father Chaminade. He often compared his way of proceeding to that of a quiet brook. When the brook meets an obstacle, it makes no effort to overcome it. The very obstacle which impedes the brook, makes it grow wider and deeper; soon the brook rises above its normal level, flows over the obstacle, and continues on its course. And so this wise and zealous missionary contented himself with renting a room in the heart of the city, on Rue Saint Siméon, which he transformed into an oratory. Word spread that he said Mass there and preached, too. Some of the faithful began to assemble. He noticed two men in his little congregation, who were still young, and

spoke to them at the end of Mass. On learning that they did not know each other, he invited them to come back and meet with him during the following week to get acquainted and to agree on certain common practices. After the two men accepted this good advice, he encouraged each of them to find a companion and bring him along to the next meeting. This they did. When they were four, it was a simple matter, using the same methods, to increase the number to eight; and in a short time he had twelve young men animated with the holiest of intentions. Starting with this number, which has mystical significance, Father Chaminade initiated a genuine apostolate and obtained such results that the small chapel could no longer hold his congregation.¹

This wonderful account has become part of Marianist lore.² Besides preserving for us the Founder's well-known comparison

¹ Excerpt from Father Lalanne's article "Société ou Institut de Marie" in the expanded re-edition of Pierre Hippolyte Hélyot's *Dictionnaire des ordres religieux* published in Paris by Migne in 1859. Quoted here with modifications of the English translation from the citation in SIMLER, *Chaminade*, p. 113.

² Father Joseph Verrier subjects this text to the historian's exacting scrutiny. He points out that Father Lalanne was notorious for frequent mistakes in historical details. In this instance, he was not an eyewitness to the events he is describing, and he was writing almost 60 years after they occurred. The Founder's first oratory was almost certainly on Rue Arnaud Miqueu, around the corner from the site on Rue Saint Siméon where the Sodality had its second home. We know today that the first twelve sodalists were not complete strangers to one another or to the Founder. Their names have come down to us, and it is certain that Father Chaminade was in contact with at least three of them before he departed for Spain in 1797. He probably knew several others among the first twelve and even more among the next 50 or 60 who joined the young men's section during the year 1801. However, we can agree with Father Verrier that Father Lalanne recounts the founding event with the confident voice of a gifted story teller and that his text, despite its inaccuracy and imaginative embellishment, has the stuff of legend. See *Jalons* 2, chap. 3, pp. 42-43, and notes 10-15, pp. 17-18.

According to Father Stefanelli, it is not possible to reconcile the documentary evidence concerning the location of the Sodality's first oratory. The oratory on Rue Arnaud Miqueu may have opened only after the one on Rue Saint Siméon. See Joseph STEFANELLI, SM, *Mille de Lamourous* (Dayton: NACMS, 1998), pp. 158-60.

of himself to a quiet brook, Father Lalanne's evocation draws our attention to the devastation of faith wrought by the Revolution. Clearly, Marianist beginnings were precipitated by powerful and far-reaching events of history. The text captures the awareness and sense of history that pervaded the world and experience of Father Chaminade and the first Marianists. The text also draws our attention to the basic strategy they adopted to deal with this new historical situation: to support one another in the faith through the formation of faith communities.

We can use this text as a convenient starting point for our description of the first historical manifestation of Marianist spirituality during the years between 1800 and 1850. This section will treat three main themes: in addition to considering the sense of history and the role of faith communities which are pointed out in the above text, we will examine the place of Mary in Marianist spirituality during this seminal important half century. We will not stick to that order strictly in our considerations. The first Marianists tended to speak about all these themes in connection with one another and in connection with the great mysteries of Jesus Christ, the Incarnation and Calvary.

The Early Marianists' Sense of History

Father Chaminade and the first Marianists did not have the same historical perspective which we do at the end of the 20th century. For example, they would not have given the word *modern* the specialized meaning it has in our century's history textbooks when they treat "the Modern Era." Unlike the usage we have adopted in this paper when we speak of Marianist spirituality being a Modern Spirituality (with a capital "M"), Father Chaminade used the word simply to mean his time or his century.³

³ In Article 339 of the 1839 Constitutions, for example, he writes, "What con-

But even if the perspective and terminology of the first Marianists is different from ours, they had their own perspective on the same historical reality with a terminology and conceptual frame which we are capable of penetrating and which gives us precious and valuable insights into our Marianist spirituality.

The split between the secular and the sacred which pervades late Modernity and which we accept as an inescapable dimension of our life today had barely begun in Father Chaminade's time. He was aware of adumbrations of this split between the secular and the sacred, but it never was an element of his own life or thought. He did not understand history as secular history or the world as a secular world where one could freely and easily prescind from God and the holy. Faith, God, Christ, Mary, the Scriptures, the Powers of Evil, God's Providence, the Church – all were present explicitly or implicitly whenever he talked about history or his times.

For example, who of us does not readily recall the vivid imagery with which Father Chaminade traces Mary's role in crushing the serpent's head or overcoming heresies down through the centuries and specifically in the 19th century?

All periods in the Church's history are marked with the struggles and glorious victories of the August Mary. Ever since the Lord put enmity between her and the serpent (Gn 3:15), she has constantly overcome the world and hell. All heresies, the Church tells us, have conceded defeat before the Blessed Virgin; and bit by bit she has reduced them to the silence of oblivion.

In our own day the great prevailing heresy is reli-

quests *modern* philosophism has made in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The faith is weakened, its flame has been extinguished in a great number of individuals and even in entire social bodies. The principles of religion are forever changing more and more. How little Christian education there is! The rising generation can find so few teachers devoted to forming the mind and heart to Christianity! What remedies are there to oppose so many evils? (emphasis added)"

gious indifference, which spreads by numbing souls in a stupor of selfishness and a mire of passions. The depths of the abyss belch forth huge clouds of black and pestilential smoke (Rv 9:2) that threaten to engulf the whole earth in a murky night, devoid of every good, fraught with every evil, and impenetrable so to say to the life giving rays of the Sun of Justice. And so, the divine torch of faith is growing dim and flickering out in the very heart of Christendom. Virtue is becoming more and more rare and is disappearing, while vices are unleashed with frightful fury. We seem to be nearing that prophesied time of a general defection and an all but universal apostasy (2 Th 2:3-12).

This picture of our times, so sadly accurate, does not by any means discourage us. Mary's power stands undiminished. It is our firm belief that she will overcome this heresy as she did all the others, for she is today, as she always has been, the incomparable Woman, the promised Woman who is to crush the serpent's head. Jesus Christ, by always addressing her with this great name, teaches us that she is the hope, joy, and life of the Church and the terror of hell. To her, therefore, is reserved a mighty victory in our day. Hers will be the glory of saving the faith from the shipwreck with which it is threatened.⁴

It would be a mistake to dismiss the high drama of this and similar passages from the Letter to the Retreat Masters of 1839 as little more than the florid excess of Narcisse Roussel's rhetorical style. The ideas in these paragraphs are thoroughly Chaminadean and Marianist, and their faith-filled historical perspective is a characteristic of the earliest manifestation of Marianist spirituality. The first Marianists repeated these ideas and pondered

⁴ *Lettres* 5, to the Retreat Masters, August 24, 1839, no. 1163, p.73. Also in MO, Document 7, p. 47. Also in MW 2, 73-74, pp. 33-34.

their implications many times during the pivotal years between 1800 and 1850.

The specific idea of Mary overcoming all heresies is near the center of the early Marianist vision of Mary's mission to which we Marianists still dedicate ourselves today. Following the lead of writers of the Catholic Reformation, Father Chaminade identifies the Woman who has overcome all heresies with the New Eve, the promised Woman of Genesis 3:15 who will crush the serpent's head. These two figures of Mary had not been identified up to the 13th century. The idea of Mary being the New Eve or promised Woman of Genesis was proposed by Saint Irenaeus and the Fathers. On the other hand, the idea of Mary overcoming all heresies comes from the liturgical antiphon "Rejoice, Virgin Mary," which appeared in the 8th century but can be traced to patristic interpretations of the Gospel of Luke.⁵ Father Chaminade is already writing about Mary overcoming all heresies in his notes before 1809.⁶ He repeats this theme many times in his correspondence and conferences, and in 1844 he directed Father Fontaine to write the following in *Our Knowledge of Mary*.

⁵ Like other authors of the 17th and 18th centuries, Father Chaminade thought the idea of Mary conquering all heresies could be traced to a General Council, usually the 4th Council of Chalcedon and once even to the notorious Council of Constance (see MW 2, §§ 321, 477, 811, pp. 111, 184, 318). In fact, the text comes from the 7th antiphon in the 3rd nocturne of the old common of the Blessed Virgin. Father Armbruster discusses the antiphon in *Devotion to Mary*, and an English translation of the antiphon is found in the notes (pp. 16-17, and notes 32 and 33, pp. 40-41). See also Father Armbruster's longer discussion of the antiphon in *L'État religieux marianiste: Étude et commentaire de la Lettre dy 24 août 1839* (Paris: Marianistes - rue de la Santé, 1989), pp. 117-22 and Document 16, "L'antienne Rejois-tois, Vierge Marie," pp. 361-68. The original Latin text of the antiphon and a French translation are given on p. 361.

⁶ Notes on Devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the text "Of her was born Jesus" (Mt 1:16), Gray Cahier No. 1, in MW 1, § 37, p. 39.

Indeed, Providence seems to wish to demonstrate in these final times how much Mary means to a Christian, for all benefits and graces are being given at the invocation of her name and in answer to practices of devotion in her honor. ... As queen of heaven and earth she has long held in her hand the scepter of mercy that her Son confided to her, but never has the necessity and power of her mediation appeared more evident; never perhaps has she shown herself so obviously the Woman whom God promised would crush the head of the infernal serpent. Religious indifference may vainly attack her; she will gain the victory as she has already gained it over all heresies.⁷

Just like the Letter to the Retreat Masters of 1839, this paragraph links the idea of Mary's overcoming all heresies to her crushing the serpent's head. In fact, this image of the serpent's head being crushed by Mary's heel traces an even longer, broader trajectory in Father Chaminade's life. It shows up in Mussidan in the thinking of Father Chaminade's fascinating student, Bernard Dariès, who dreamed of founding a Society of Mary modeled on the suppressed Society of Jesus whose members would invite everyone to consecrate themselves to Mary and thus constitute a People of the Blessed Virgin who in these final times would crush more victoriously than ever before the head of the ancient serpent.⁸ Like his contemporaries, Father Chaminade followed the Vulgate translation of Genesis 3:15. It was Mary's heel, not the heel of her Son, that crushed the head of the ancient serpent. We all recall the scene of the Founder going to visit the

⁷ *Our Knowledge of Mary*, chapter 1, "Importance and Advantages of Knowing the Blessed Virgin", in MW 2, § 435, p. 164.

⁸ Dariès died in 1800, too soon to become a Marianist, but his dreams were strikingly similar to those of the first Marianists. See Jean Baptiste ARMBRUSTER, SM, *To Know, to Love, to Serve Mary with William Joseph Chaminade*, MRC Monograph Series Doc. 32 (Dayton, MRC, November 1986), pp. 4-6.

novices at Sainte Anne's Novitiate in his extreme old age. "He thrilled at the chant of the Magnificat, and after the office someone would lead him to the foot of the statue of Mary Immaculate at the end of a row of linden trees. There he would place his trembling hand on the foot of the Virgin and on the head of the serpent with an energetic gesture which he thus interpreted one day: 'In spite of all, she has crushed your head and will crush it always!'"⁹

Another aspect of the early Marianist sense of history can be detected in these and similar passages. This has to do with the occasional references to "these final centuries," to "the end times," to the "final victories reserved for Mary" in our times. For example, here is what Father Chaminade wrote to Canon Valentini in 1839.

We believe that to the August Mother of God, who alone, according to the Church itself, has overcome all heresies, a great victory and a splendid triumph have been reserved in our time over the combined efforts of modern philosophism, of the religious indifference which results from it, and of hell itself which has vomited them forth from the depths of the abyss.¹⁰

Or again, Father Chaminade said the following to Father Lalanne in 1817 about the prospect of founding the Society of Mary.

Let us form a religious association by the profession of the three vows of religion, but as far as possible without a name, without a habit, and without a special civil status. *Nova bella elegit Dominus*. Let us put everything under the protection of Mary Immaculate, to whom her di-

⁹ SIMLER, *Chaminade*, p. 532.

¹⁰ *Lettres* 5, pp. 124-25, October 31, 1839, to Canon Salvatore Valentini. Also in MW 2, § 86, p. 41.

vine Son has reserved the final victories over hell: *et ipsa conteret caput tuum*. "Let us be, my son", he said, "let us be, in our humility, the heel of the Woman!"¹¹

These references to the "end times" are not for Father Chaminade allusions to the imminent end of the world. They are simply references to his time or his century, in which, according to his reading of Providence, Mary was playing a new and heightened role. It is true that some of his contemporaries sensed portents of the imminent end of the world in these Marian developments. Father Chaminade was not one of them.¹²

Religious Indifference

The generalization that can be made about the historical consciousness of Father Chaminade and the first Marianists is that they had a Marian sense of history or a Marian reading of history. This faith-filled awareness must not be misconstrued as an a-historical or non-historical consciousness. The first Marianists resembled us in that they were just as aware within their historical consciousness of a historical world or of historical reality as we are aware of a historical world or a historical reality within ours. However, that world was not a secular or secularized world. It was a world rife with realities of faith. That world was changing. It was drastically and shockingly different from the historical world of a century earlier. But the world of a century

¹¹ SIMLER, *Chaminade*, p. 262. *Nova bella elegit Dominus* (The Lord has chosen new wars) Judges 5:8 (Vulgate). *Et ipsa conteret caput tuum* (And she will crush your head) Genesis 3:15 (Vulgate).

¹² See the analysis of Jean Baptiste ARMBRUSTER, "Marie dans les derniers temps chez le Père G.-Joseph Chaminade", in *Marie et la fin des temps*, vol. 3 (approche historico-théologique), *Études mariales: Bulletin de la Société française d'études mariales* 43rd year (Paris: Éditions de l'O.E.I.L., 1987), pp. 67-81. See also Father Armbruster's remarks on the "end times" in *Devotion to Mary*, p. 15.

earlier was not a secular or secularized world, either. The historical world which preceded the Revolution was one in which only the vague whiff of doubts hinted that something new and disturbing was astir in the religious air. The historical world which followed the Revolution was one in which that tiny whiff had enlarged into the great clouds of black and pestilential smoke that were belching forth from the abyss of hell and filling the sky with the murky darkness of evil. A torrent of unbelief had ripped across France, "this unfortunate land," and the faith itself was threatened with shipwreck.

The concrete events and experiences in the lives of the first Marianists to which they gave their Marian and faith-filled interpretation are the same "historical" events we study when we look back today with our secularized sense of history. They had lived through the Revolution personally or they were in direct contact with persons who had. They made the same kinds of efforts we make to grasp the causes of these cataclysmic events and happenings. Just as we find roots of those events in the Enlightenment and the thinking of the philosophes, so did they. In the Bordeaux Sodality, there was a regular program of instructions on current events and the social forces at work in their time. We know, for example, that Pierre Pierre, the commissioner of Napoleon's secret police in Bordeaux, had informers planted at meetings of the Sodality to report on any politically dangerous activities that might be taking place. Here is an example of a report he filed at the end of 1802.

The Sodality dedicated to the cult of Mary under the direction of Chaminade increases each day the number of its members. Frequent lectures take place there, and they exhume in an offensive manner the memories of Voltaire, d'Alembert, Diderot, and those they dub *philosophes*.¹³

¹³ *Jalons* 2, chap. 10, p. 196, note 58, p. 62. Also cited in VASEY, *Another Portrait*, p. 102. Also cited in WINDISCH, *Marianist Social System*, p. 61, note 2.

In fact, the analysis of Father Chaminade and the first Marianists of the historical roots of "religious indifference" resembles the analysis we make today, even with our secularized sense of history. This name "religious indifference" was quite commonly used by Catholics of the first half of the 19th century to refer to the early manifestation of a phenomenon which has grown and developed steadily since then. Some fairly well known figures of that day discussed this phenomenon of religious indifference. Archbishop d'Aviau wrote pastoral letters to his flock about religious indifference. Félicité de Lamennais wrote a book about it. And when Pope Gregory XVI wrote *Mirari vos* to condemn the thinking of de Lamennais' newspaper *L'Avenir* he mentioned religious indifference as one of the root causes of the erroneous thinking. The Pope went so far as calling religious indifference a "heresy" and claimed that Mary will defeat this modern heresy as she has defeated those of the past.¹⁴

Since then this phenomenon has continued and developed, but its name has changed. During the course of the 19th century, it came to be called liberalism and later secularism. It signified the steadily expanding separation of secular aspects of political and cultural reality from its religious or sacred aspects. Amidst the larger premises of the Modern Era, the autonomy of the secular order was being emphasized, promoted, and advocated as an authentic development of human progress. Sometimes this process took a militantly anti-religious turn, and it was in this anti-religious form that Chaminade and the first Marianists usually viewed it as a manifestation of heresy and evil within their faith-filled, Marian sense of history.

Throughout the 19th century, the Church's predominant and usual response to religious indifference, liberalism, and secularism was one of resistance and hostility. The phenomenon figured

¹⁴ See the discussion of *Mirari vos* and a comparison of its ideas with those of the Letter to the Retreat Masters of 1839 in Armbruster, *L'État religieux marianiste*, pp. 132-33.

prominently in several "errors of the century" listed in the Syllabus of Errors of Pope Pius IX. When Pope Pius X condemned the Sillon Movement, which advocated republican government based on principles of Christian democracy and the autonomy of the secular order, critics of the Movement accused its adherents of being tainted by Modernism, the heresy of heresies, the heresy which combined the errors of all heresies. This Church resistance to Modernity lasted almost unchanged well into our own century up to the time of the Second Vatican Council. There, for the first time, a break in the prevailing stance of the Church occurred with a clear, official recognition that there might be something good and worthwhile about the Modern Era and the Modern world. In particular, secularism was not characterized as an unmitigated evil. It was a misguided exaggeration of the larger development of secularization and secularizing processes which were at times beneficial and which valued the world as an authentically good reality created by God and given to us as a gift.

When we look back today at the Marianist response to this Modern phenomenon which has gone by the various names of religious indifference, secularism, and secularization, we need to bear in mind that the phenomenon has been going on for several centuries and that from our origins we have been reacting and responding to this fundamentally Modern reality. When the Church finally relented and began to have a cautiously favorable attitude toward the Modern world some 35 years ago, we Marianists seemed ready to go along because we had for a long time anticipated this openness to whatever goodness Modernity might have to offer even while we maintained the vigilance and guarded caution of our foundation period.

Faith and Mary: Remedies for Religious Indifference

Back at the start of Marianist history, we already seemed to take a more measured and gentle approach in our resistance to the

heresy of religious indifference. With our Marian sense of history, we believed that Providence stood ready to provide a remedy for this new historical development, this new "heresy." It was a remedy that was both old and new. The remedy was faith, a weapon that appeared weak in the eyes of the world. But for God, faith is and always has been strong. This is the message of Father Chaminade's conference on the text *Nova bella elegit Dominus* during the Society of Mary's memorable foundational retreat of 1818.

Perhaps someone will find that the weapon of faith, especially against the world where the enemies of God are so numerous and so powerful, is a rather weak one. Let that person learn that God does not fight like humanity does. The Lord likes to vanquish his enemies by means which, to them, seem most feeble and contemptible, and this when they use against him their most powerful weapons.¹⁵

And for the first Marianists, the clearest manifestation of this paradoxical strength of faith was the example of the gentle power of Mary, who did not fear the wiles and lies of the ancient serpent, who in her faith was so radically free of sin and the power of sin that she was not deceived or taken in by the beguiling glamor of evil and all its pomps. By uniting themselves to her mission as she faced the ancient enemy, the first Marianists sensed they were somehow giving themselves to an effort that had mysterious but concrete possibilities of being accomplished

¹⁵ Father Lalanne's notes to the 11th instruction of the Retreat of 1818. WMP, § 222, pp. 210-211. Also in *Spirit* 1, § 243, pp. 324-25. Also in *Jalons* 4, chapter 10, pp. 225-26. Also in William Joseph CHAMINADE, *Notes de retraites*, vol. 1 (Fribourg: Séminaire Marianiste, 1964), pp. 70-71. Also in *Écrits et paroles* 5, document 24, pp. 466-67. Father Joseph Verrier devotes chapters 9 and 10 of *Jalons* 4 (pp. 195-237) to the Retreat of 1818. Five documents of *Écrits et paroles* 5 (documents 24-28, pp. 439-500) are devoted to the Retreat.

even in the unprecedented historical circumstances that threatened the faith in the early 19th century. This mission of Mary had moreover the potential of drawing unexpected good consequences from the unpromising and seemingly evil historical circumstances.

If it is true that we must believe all the truths of faith with our hearts, even those which are most terrifying, with what deep and tender affection ought we to believe those truths that give us the Mother of Jesus Christ as our Mother, she who engendered us while she engendered Jesus Christ, because the life she gave her adorable Son was a life that exercised the greatest influence. ... All these mysteries of love were not accomplished in Mary without her active participation. They took place in her only after she had pronounced the Fiat that brought happiness to heaven and earth. It was her admirable faith that effectively disposed her to receive all the favors of the Most High. "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45).

How wonderful was the faith of the August Mary! She put faith in the mysteries revealed to her, and these mysteries were accomplished in her, and they were accomplished only because she believed. *Credidisti, perficientur*. Faith, accomplishment. What a lesson for us! These same mysteries are announced to us. They will be accomplished if we have faith; they will be accomplished, so to speak, in proportion to our faith. Our faith will make them substantial realities. This seems to be what St. Paul wishes to teach us when he says that faith is the substance of things to be hoped for (see Hb 11:1).¹⁶

The first Marianists, perceiving reality with this sort of Marian historical sense, felt called to join their efforts to those of Mary

¹⁶ MW 2, §§ 634-35, pp. 250-51.

in the accomplishment of her mission in the thick of the historical circumstances of their time. They were caught up into the spirit of Mary, that interior spirit that tapped into her mysteriously powerful yet gentle strength.

Although all religious orders have a common spirit, yet each order has a spirit of its own. This spirit results from divine inspiration, and it has been adapted to the circumstances and needs of each century. What serious reflections come to mind here concerning the Institute of Mary!

We are thoroughly convinced that God himself is responsible for the establishment the Institute of Mary. But if we reflect on the time of the foundation and on the objective he wants the Institute to aim at, we will become aware of its vast scope. Just look at the world; what awful darkness, what horrible depravity, what disheartening indifference to salvation! In past centuries, corruption had found its way only into the heart, but today both heart and mind are infected. A sick mind is incomparably more dangerous and incurable than a sick heart. It is in this situation, along with the generations that will succeed it, from ungodliness and irreverence, that God founds the Institute of Mary, that he gives it the spirit it needs, the interior spirit. God calls us not only to personal sanctification, but to revive the faith in France, in Europe, in the whole world, to preserve the present generation from error. What a noble, vast undertaking! What a holy and generous project! It is most appealing to the soul that seeks the glory of God and the salvation of humanity. And God has chosen us from among many others.

The spirit of the children of Mary is an interior spirit. In this community, the religious make of their souls temples of God. There each of them ... is constantly conscious of the presence of God, and converses gently and familiarly with him, because God has taken up his abode within each of them. Each of their hearts is a sanctuary

dedicated to Mary, a chapel from which fervent prayers rise to her. ... The spirit of the Institute is the spirit of Mary; this explains everything! It is essential therefore that we acquire the interior spirit. ...

The mother of God is the model of all religious virtues; her servants will find in her the source of that interior spirit which should characterize them. Let us put into practice the order she gave the servants of the bridegroom at Cana, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).¹⁷

It was in this setting and with this Marian, faith-filled sense of history that the first Marianists dedicated themselves to two programs or strategies of practical action to respond to what they perceived as new historical circumstances. Both programs or strategies were bound up with the particularities of these historical circumstances, with what we can call today the *problématique* of the Modern Era. The two programs were 1) forming faith communities in the movement of launching the Bordeaux Sodality and the original Marianist lay communities and 2) combatting the harmful and abetting the helpful in the new historical reality by joining the new movement of education and teaching. We will here examine the first strategy of forming faith communities. In the next section of this paper, we will turn to the second strategy of education and teaching.

Forming Faith Communities and Being Transformed into Christ

The "heresy" of religious indifference was a different kind of heresy, and the means of overcoming it was also different. In days of old, the Church often fought heresy with force and vio-

¹⁷ Retreat of 1821, 18th meditation. MW 2, §§ 763-66, 777, pp. 304-5, 307. Also in MO, document 4, pp. 33-35. Also in *Spirit* 1, § 179, pp. 234-35. Also in CHAMINADE, *Notes de retraites*, vol. 1, pp. 175-77. Also in SIMLER, *Chaminade*, p. 277.

lence. It sometimes happened that crusades were launched and wars were fought to kill heretics or to round them up and turn them over to civil authorities so they could be burned at the stake. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Church was hardly in a position to resort to these old methods, even if it had wanted to. The Church's political power had been drastically reduced in Europe, and throughout the century the remnant of that political power kept being whittled away further to almost nothing by the end of the century. Gone were the days when the Church could kill its enemies.

From the start, the program of the Bordeaux Sodality was a different sort of thing. It was built on the paradoxical awareness that gentleness is stronger than violence and force – that gentleness is not weakness. When Father Chaminade spoke of the Sodality to Adele, he pointed out that these new communities operated with a totally new dynamic, the dynamic of the contagion of goodness.¹⁸ Goodness has such beauty, he pointed out, that it is attractive and draws people. Virtue, he claimed, is contagious. This was the powerful strength that was at work in the new way of resisting "heresy." This was the way of Mary.

And what, one can ask, was so powerfully "beautiful" about these Sodality communities? Once, in 1806, Father Chaminade, attempted to answer this question in a talk he gave to the married men's section of the Bordeaux Sodality.¹⁹ He recalled the Old

¹⁸ "The Marian Sodality... of today is a Sodality of those who are guided. The former was a schooling in virtues, so to say, while today's is the rapid communication of virtue by the *contagion*, if we may use the term, of example" (emphasis added). *Lettres* 1, Chaminade to de Trenquelléon. March 19, 1817, no. 89, p. 156.

¹⁹ Father Chaminade's 1806 allocution to the *Pères de famille* consists of a series of comments on passages from the story of Balaam (chapters 23 and 24 of Numbers) and additional remarks on the nature of sodalities which compare the People of Israel with the entire organization of the Bordeaux Sodality. The full text of the allocution is found in *Écrits et paroles* 1, document 57, pp. 148-63.

Testament story of the prophet Balaam, called to pronounce a curse on the tents of Israel. When Balaam stood on the hillside and looked out across the encampment of the tents of Israel, his breath was taken away by the beauty of the sight. "How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob! How lovely your dwellings, Israel! ... A hero rises from your stock, he reigns over countless people" (Nb 24:5,7). Not only did Balaam not curse Israel, but he blessed it for its beauty and foresaw that out of Israel was going to come one who was most beautiful indeed. Out of Israel was going to come the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This, said Father Chaminade, is the reason the Sodality communities were beautiful. Mary was forming their members into her children, which meant they were being formed into the mystical body of Christ, who is indeed beautiful and attractive.

This was a wholly different dynamic, paradoxically different from the one that had at times operated in the Church's old ways of overcoming "heresy." It was the gentle but powerful way of Mary. These convictions were not mere spiritual poetry. By the time Father Chaminade reached the time of putting into words the deepest realities of Marianist spirituality that animated the first Marianist religious in the Constitutions of 1839, he focused on the fundamental truth that Christ associated Mary in all his mysteries and found this spiritual truth to lie at the heart of our devotion to Mary.

It is a revealed truth that Jesus Christ was born of Mary (Mt 1:16). It ought not to be a matter of little importance to a Director that the Holy Spirit has revealed this truth. All of us have been conceived in Mary; all of us must be born of Mary and formed by Mary to a resemblance with Jesus Christ, that each one of us may be another Jesus, Son of Mary, along with Jesus Christ.²⁰

²⁰ "Manual of Direction", Document K in Cahier D, MD 3, § 420, p. 145. Also in MW 2, § 678, p. 263. Also in *Spirit* 2, § 893, p. 472.

Mary was the first to be conceived in Jesus Christ according to the Spirit, as Jesus Christ himself was conceived according to nature in her virginal womb. Mary, that is, was formed interiorly to resemble Jesus Christ, her adorable Son, and was from then on associated in all his mysteries both in their exterior and interior aspects.²¹

In the final text of the Constitutions, he went on to proclaim that

The profession which the Society makes of being devoted to Mary, as its name indicates, does not detract from this truth: *Maria de qua natus est Jesus*.²² Nursed and reared by her, he did not separate himself from her during his entire mortal life; he was subject to her, and he associated her in all his labors, in all his sorrows, and in all his mysteries. Devotion to Mary is, therefore, the most salient point of the imitation of Jesus Christ, and in devoting itself to the imitation of this divine Model, under the beloved name of Mary, the Society intends to have each of its members reared by her, just as Jesus was

²¹ "Principles of Direction", Document L in Cahier D, MD 3, § 467, p. 156. Also in MW 2, § 681, pp. 263-64. These lines come from three paragraphs which Father Chaminade inserts into a longer passage he was copying or paraphrasing from chapter 1 of Father Olier's *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiennes*. It is a typical example of a practice of the Founder that Father Cole and Father Vasey have pointed out. Even though Father Chaminade held up Father Olier as a master of the spiritual life whose doctrine we Marianists were to follow and accept as our own, when it came to explaining Mary's role in the spiritual life, Father Olier never seems to have satisfied Father Chaminade. There are multiple instances where the Founder makes precisely the kind of insertion of his own Chaminadean ideas into a text of Olier as is the case with the above quotation. These insertions are almost always about Mary. This practice is all the more striking when we reflect on Father Olier's place in the French School as a prominent advocate of devotion to Mary. See Cole, *Spiritual Maternity*, pp. 322-23. See also Vasey, *Another Portrait*, pp. 199-200.

²² "Mary, of whom was born Jesus" (Mt 1:16).

reared in her care after having been formed in her virginal womb.²³

The imitation of Christ – the transformation of each Marianist into another Christ, into Jesus Christ, Son of Mary – lies at the heart of Marianist spirituality in its earliest historical manifestation during the years between 1800 and 1850.

The life and experience of the first Marianists during this 50-year period are of prime importance for us today. They play a paradigmatic role analogous to the one played for the whole Church by the Jerusalem community and the early Christian communities of the second half of the first century. At that time the apostles were still alive and proclaimed the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. The precious writings of the New Testament convey the first historical manifestation of Christian spirituality in the life and experience of the first Christians. Down through the Christian centuries, that experience has played and continues to play an emblematic role for the Church.

So, too, does the experience of the first Marianists hold up the new paradigm of living the Gospel communicated to them by Father Chaminade while he was still alive. This paradigm shows us Marianist spirituality as they experienced it. They heard Father Chaminade say that the Lord had chosen new wars, and they felt called to join Mary in her mission and to be transformed by her into Christ, her Son.

²³ Article 5, Constitutions of 1839. MW 2, § 576, p. 225. Father Armbruster points out that this article gives evidence of the development of the Founder's thought in the "impassioned search" he made "for ways to harmonize an old ideal in his life, the imitation of Jesus Christ, with a more recent discovery, the imitation above all of *Jesus, Son of Mary*." The progression of this discovery can be traced by comparing this article with the same article of the 1829 draft of the Constitutions, which calls devotion to Mary *one of the most salient points* of the imitation of Christ. In the final version these words become *the most salient point*. See ARMBRUSTER, *Devotion to Mary*, pp. 31-32, note 73.

Development of Marianist Spirituality After 1850

A Word on Sources

When we turn from an examination of the foundation period of Marianist spirituality (1800-50) to the study of its subsequent history and development (after 1850), we are immediately struck by the sharp drop in the number of works that have been produced by Marianist writers about the latter period. Many shelves and tiers of shelves in Marianist libraries are filled to overflowing with histories and analyses of the spirituality of the foundation period, but one single shelf would suffice to hold all the books and monographs that have been written to date on the history of Marianist spirituality after 1850. Most of these works are histories of our characteristic Marianist devotion to Mary over the years, or they are histories of Marian or Mariological studies by Marianists. None of them treats the broad history and development of Marianist spirituality as it has been conceived in the paper. Even this paper can be considered no more than a preliminary attempt to survey the terrain and cast a few *jalons*, as the French say, to mark out paths for possible future research. Marianist history, in general, is still an incomplete and underdeveloped area of research and study. When we narrow the focus to the history of Marianist spirituality, the number of sources reduces to a handful.

In view of this peculiar situation, I will start this examination of the history of Marianist spirituality after 1850 with a brief discussion of these few sources and an assessment of the current