

THE MARIAN ALLIANCE

by Michelle Héraud

[*Editor's note:* The Marianist world is joyously celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of our Blessed Founder, William Joseph Chaminade, born on April 8, 1761, in Périgueux, France. In many ways this year of celebration began on Chaminade Day (January 22, 2011), which is ironically the anniversary date of the Founder's death. It is important to note that this same date—January 22, 2011—also marks another important date, the 50th anniversary of the Alliance Mariale, one of the four branches of the Marianist Family. If you are not familiar with the Alliance Mariale, see the following article for an overview.]

Religious orders were banned in France when Father Chaminade first founded the Sodality in Bordeaux in the early 1800s. The Concordat signed in 1801 by Napoleon Bonaparte, the then First Consul, and Pope Pius VII acknowledged the existence of the secular clergy only. Not until the French Restoration—a rather more lenient regime—could the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate and the Society of Mary be officially born. As early as 1808, however, a few members of the Bordeaux congregation vowed privately—with the approval of the founding Father—to *live a religious state in the world*. In effect it filled the notion of a secular institute long before the concept actually came into official existence.

After the foundation of the two religious institutes, the so called “State” gradually went into oblivion, only to be revived some 150 years later as a subterranean river. In the wake of World War II, the idea of founding a Marianist secular institute cropped up again here and there. In the early 1960s, a group of young Marianist affiliates from France who shared the will to dedicate their lives to God by taking vows while living in the world got together and founded the Alliance Mariale. Thus was born the current organization, with the help of Fathers John-Baptist Armbruster and Noël Le Mire, and the support of both Superiors General, Paul Joseph Hoffer and Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament.

In ensuing years, the Alliance grew to become a formally structured organization. Today it is self-governed, with a General Directress for a five-year term, assisted by a council of four elected members. The Directress and the council have a priest advisor, who must be a Marianist chosen jointly by his provincial and by the council itself. As a Marianist priest, he is a witness to the Founder's charism and serves as a token of the ties that bind the organization together with the Marianist Family. The members, who are still few and far between, are to be found in France, Switzerland, Chile, and lately in Africa.

The secular character is the distinctive mark of the lives and activities of the members of the Alliance Mariale. Their dedication to God does not mean they should withdraw from the world—far from it—each of them, because she belongs to Jesus Christ, is requested to be present in the world every single day as a disciple of Christ the risen (Statutes, art 17). Such a presence in the heart of the world characterizes all secular institutes. Pope Pius XII, who officially recognized their existence in 1947, entrusted them with a specific mission: “to rechristianize the world from within.” Thus, “members of secular institutes must turn their whole lives . . . into apostolates. . . . They must be true and faithful apostles not just in the world but, as it were, from within, and therefore participate in all manner of professions, activities, forms, places and circumstances that suit their secular status” (Pius XII: *Primo feliciter*, 1984).

So it is that no common institutional mission is assigned to members of the Alliance Mariale. Each one lives out her mission in her own professional and family sphere, but always in accordance with her alliance with Mary and the Marianist charism. Such an apostolate is no different from that of any lay

Christian. And yet a lifelong commitment to God, owing to the radical choices it may involve, endows each member with a peculiar sort of strength and availability.

One last remark: The Alliance Mariale is an all-female group, as history would have it. But nothing precludes creating some day “the male branch of our organization,” as Adèle de Trenquelléon might have put it.