



*Circular  
of the  
Superior General  
No. 5*

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**KNOWING TO LOVE AND SERVE**

*FOLLOWING BLESSED FATHER CHAMINADE*

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André-Joseph Fétis, SM  
XV Superior General  
Missionary Apostolic  
Society of Mary  
(Marianists)

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# **KNOWING TO LOVE AND SERVE**

## **FOLLOWING BLESSED FATHER CHAMINADE**

### **CIRCULAR NO. 5**

We have just celebrated the 25th anniversary of the beatification of Blessed Chaminade, and the 265th anniversary of his birth. This is a good opportunity to draw closer to him and continue to be inspired by his message. How can we continue to receive from him, from his rich personality, his vast experience and the many gifts he himself received from God?

To know, to love, to serve: we all know this famous Marianist triad received from our Founder. From the pen of Father Chaminade, we know that it is particularly linked to the person of Mary: "to know, to love, to serve Mary," but also to the person of Christ: "to know, to love, to serve Jesus Christ." This triple appeal has three entry points. Father Chaminade does not propose three successive stages, but rather three interacting dynamics, each opening onto the other two and preparing for them. Each person can start with the call that suits him best and continue it in the order of his choice. My first choice was to focus this circular on this element of our charismatic tradition, focusing particularly on the first term of the triad: "to know," as the way to love and serve. Let me explain why.

We live in complex and very unstable times, difficult to analyze and with an uncertain future. Knowledge, its possibility, its credibility, its universality, is a particularly important challenge today. To truly know has become very complex and difficult. We are in the era of multiple, superabundant, evolving, "liquid" knowledge, ... Our time is sometimes described as the "post-truth" era. So, what can I know? How can I act and commit myself in a relevant way if I cannot know anything with certainty about the current reality, about the world, about others, and, as a believer, about God or Mary? What can I know and how? How can the relevance of this knowledge be verified? How can we escape manipulations or false "truths"? Is relativism now the new context for all personal or collective reflection or research?

These questions have long occupied philosophers, in various forms. They also occupy a notable place in our tradition. The example of Father Chaminade, who was also confronted with a complex period, can enlighten us. His approach, especially pragmatic and pastoral, helps us since these themes directly concern us all with great consequences for our life and our actions. That will therefore be the main context of this reflection.

A second personal choice was to broaden the field of reflection beyond the usual context of use of the expression "know, love, and serve" developed above all in relation to Mary and Jesus. I wish to highlight an important pastoral issue: we cannot bring the Gospel to a culture that we do not know or if we only perceive the outer appearance of things, people, events without touching their deeper reality. We cannot share our faith without relying on a core of knowledge recognized by the greatest number. Beyond the current upheavals, can we perceive something of the stability that God cannot fail to give to his action and his projects? And if we succeed, could this stability not be part of the answer to the challenges posed by an era as fluid as ours? Would it not then be a question not only of a point of support for our life and our action but also of a contribution of our religious life to our times? So, let us set out: how do we know in order to love and serve? What dialogue should be established between our Marianist tradition and the current reality?

## I. KNOW!

Know! To know in order to love and serve. Knowledge can, according to the intuition of Blessed Chaminade, give us access to love and service. It is therefore in itself a path of transformation of human existence. Man is distinguished, in particular, by his thirst for knowledge, understanding, explaining, justifying. So many signs attest to this from yesterday to today: libraries, encyclopedias of all kinds, databases, training and research centers, .... Our experience as educators reminds us every day that there is an unquenchable thirst for knowledge in the human heart.

In the French language, the active form of the verb “to know” [*connaître*] always requires a complement, an object. This grammatical peculiarity expresses the internal dynamism of the word and of the action: knowing leads us to something or someone to apprehend or discover. Far from being synonymous with passivity, the act of knowing always implies an opening and widening of horizons; it sets us on new paths.

### 1. WITH FATHER CHAMINADE, IN DIFFICULTY OR DOUBT, LOOK DEEPER!

In his time, and throughout his life, Father Chaminade practiced this method: he transmits it to us. To deepen a question, he adds to purely intellectual knowledge the dimension of interiority. This is a good path in all circumstances, but especially when everything seems so confused and obscure and solutions almost absent or very unlikely to succeed. In the darkness, do not curse the darkness but light a lamp! This lamp is the inner gaze that makes us scrutinize the facts in their depth, opening us to a new interpretation. Such knowledge finds its source particularly in God.

Our times raise a large number of questions and often offer a multitude of answers. The result is a sense of confusion and uncertainty. For that reason, I think it is especially important to follow this indication of our Founder. In the midst of the multiple responses, the interior lights bring an element of stability and clarity to the situation. The special grace of the saints and prophets is to point out a way that is almost invisible to others and that they have discerned because of that interior light that guides them. They encourage us to move forward without worrying about the future uncertainty of the path, but finding our strength in the inner lights given day by day, step by step. The saints, the prophets, all send us out into the deep: *Duc in altum*, wrote Pope John Paul II in his time to all believers,<sup>1</sup> taking up Christ's invitation to his disciples: "Put out into the deep and cast your nets for fishing" (Luke 5:4)!

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<sup>1</sup> This is the title of the Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II, published on the day of the Epiphany 2001, at the conclusion of the Holy Year of 2000. He writes, in the conclusion of the document: "Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work" (n. 58).

## 2. TODAY, LIKE OUR BLESSED FOUNDER, LET US SEEK MORE DEEPLY, AND LET US GO FORWARD!

### 2.1. Knowing Jesus Christ, knowing Mary

The science par excellence is the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and of God. As Saint John of the Cross puts it: "By giving us his Son as he did, who is his last and definitive Word, God has told us everything together and at once, and he has nothing more to say."<sup>2</sup> With respect for the autonomy of the different disciplines and their own ways of study and elaboration of knowledge, this supernatural knowledge illuminates and accompanies all other types of knowledge. Above all, it sheds light on what it is possible for us to know about God and the Christian life. In a homily, Father Chaminade also affirms this, commenting on the words of Christ, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6):

We know everything if we know Jesus Christ. Who else but Jesus Christ could reveal to us the mysteries of God? We will love God in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ... We will serve God in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ... To know, to love, and to serve God, our three duties, we fulfill through Jesus Christ; he is a luminous word, a fiery word, an active word... Jesus Christ is the truth that enlightens us. Jesus Christ is the life that animates us; Jesus Christ is the way we must follow. Jesus Christ is a word of truth that teaches us to **know** God; Jesus Christ is a word of life that makes us **love** God; Jesus Christ is a word of wisdom that directs all our actions to the **service** of God: [I am the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6)].<sup>3</sup>

He also writes: "Why did God create us and bring us into the world? It is to know, love, and serve God." One<sup>4</sup> of the possible responses to today's complexity is to develop that inner gaze that is made possible by the knowledge of God. Without depriving secular knowledge of its proper autonomy, that gaze places it in a broader context that helps to interpret it.

Mary lived her whole life in union with God, especially with her Son. She welcomed his Word, contemplated his gestures and actions. She is described as the one who "treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart," confronting in her heart the words of God and her experience of events (cf. Luke 2:19 and 2:51b). By singing the *Magnificat*, she expresses her understanding of God's action at the heart of human history. At the wedding at Cana, faced with the material difficulties of a family, she invites us to listen to her Son and to obey him. She shows that within her there is a permanent dialogue between events and her faith, nourished by her attention to God and her own Son. She helps us to a new understanding of reality, observed with the eyes of her Son and her own.

We too want to look at the world inspired by the gaze of God and Mary, with the desire to understand it better in order to love and serve it. The approach of our Founder can enlighten us.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Chap. XXII.

<sup>3</sup> CHAMINADE, Guillaume-Joseph, "From Jesus Christ, the Word of God to Men", *Chaminade Legacy* III.2 [9]. I myself have highlighted the words in bold.

<sup>4</sup> CHAMINADE, G.-J., *Retraite de 1824*, Chaminade Legacy VI.27, [40-41].

## **2.2. Father Chaminade in tune with his time (1761-1850)**

### *a. 1761 – 1850: a complex and constantly evolving era*

The era in which our Founder lived is no less complex than ours. The reign of King Louis XV (1715-1774), which marked his childhood and early education, was a period of strong evolution of minds under the influence of the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Reason became the primary instrument of knowledge and claimed its autonomy from religion. Critical thinking was increasing. Traditional structures, especially political and religious, were being challenged. Personal rights were valued and defended. Science was progressing and being disseminated beyond specialized circles. The king's personal interest in this area strongly encouraged all these phenomena. Agriculture developed and the first signs of industrialization appeared.

These developments, often positive, caused a lot of changes in mentalities and customs. In the previous century, the seventeenth, the Church in France experienced a period of great creativity and commitment, carried along by a cloud of great witnesses.<sup>5</sup> During the eighteenth century, although it continued on this path, the Church struggled to adapt to such developments and in fact, there were fewer exceptional figures to accompany that movement.

It was also a time of great political instability. During his long life, until the middle of the nineteenth century, Father Chaminade successively experienced seven types of government, some of those periods being subdivided into several even shorter phases.

Father Chaminade strongly perceived the complexity of his time, all the more so as he exercised increasing responsibilities in it. As a pastor, he had also to enlighten others in their journey. He realized that his disciples did not find their way easily either, and that some distanced themselves from him. In 1831, he wrote:

We are in the midst of so new a world! I am in France almost like someone in a foreign land. I seem not to know any longer what to say or do. For my part, I am waiting for events to come my way instead of going forward to meet them. I have no other policy than that of having daily recourse to the Blessed Virgin.<sup>6</sup>

### *b. Lucidity and action.*

But we also know another side of the personality of our Founder. Although suffering from the instability, contradictions and complexity of his time, Chaminade showed great strength, supported by a practical foresight that many might envy in him. That was enough for him to commit himself and move forward with determination and perseverance.

Father Baudrillart, a brilliant historian and intellectual – at the beginning of the twentieth century Rector of the Institut Catholique of Paris and who would later be named cardinal – was struck by this. In the preface to the biography of Father Chaminade by Fr. Henri Rousseau, he wrote:

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<sup>5</sup> To name but a few who are closest to us: Jeanne de Lestonnac (1556-1640), Francis de Sales (1567-1622), Jeanne de Chantal (1572-1641), Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), Marie de l'Incarnation (1599-1672), Jean Eudes (1601-1680), Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657), Marguerite-Marie Alacoque (1647-1690), Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651-1719), ... The French seventeenth century has sometimes been described as the "century of saints" or the "mystical century."

<sup>6</sup> CHAMINADE, Letter 575, of January 20, 1831, to J.-B. Lalanne.

That keen insight into the wants of the times which Father Chaminade possessed, and the practical conclusions which this intelligence helped him to reach. He had observed two things which many of his contemporaries had failed to see. The first was that ... the old hierarchical order in society had passed away without hope of return, and democracy was destined to grow .... The second was a tendency, more and more pronounced, of complete separation between the clergy and the laity.... Father Chaminade ... wanted his Sodality to be open to all classes of society on an equal footing, not even distinguishing clerical members from the lay.... He always remained faithful to his principles. In the constitution of his religious institutes, he acted upon this principle in its entirety and thus gave to the Society of Mary its principal mark of originality.<sup>7</sup>

Alfred Baudrillart admired the lucidity and pragmatism of our Founder. Thanks to his “knowledge of the times,” he was able to transform a difficulty into a source of creativity. These are the *nova bella* in which he invites us to follow him. Father Chaminade was always forward looking, with a pragmatic and constructive spirit. There was very little nostalgia in him, whereas he could have found so many reasons to indulge in it. Despite his attachment to the monarchy, he was not a restorer, while he was unquestionably an inventor, driven by his apostolic ardor. This denotes a great spirit of freedom: he lets God show him the way and follows him without looking back. The important thing for him is to do the good he can today. He listens, and when he has understood, he advances; if necessary, he adapts. We want to learn from our Founder his "knowledge of the times" which generates the practical initiatives that are needed today.

### **2.3. It's Our Turn: Understanding Our Time**

#### *a. New challenges*

We don't face the same challenges as did Blessed Chaminade. One of ours comes from the overabundance of information that makes it difficult to understand and prioritize truths. We are in the age of “liquid truth” which tends to consider all possibilities as equivalent, or in the era of post-truth. The evolutionary and ephemeral nature of knowledge makes it difficult for stable and universal truths to emerge. We are saturated with information, including false or manipulated news (“fake news”), and contradictory statements. Current technical means can give perfect credibility to facts that have never occurred to the point of broadcasting videos of speeches that have never been delivered by their apparent author. Lying sometimes seems to be only one strategy among others: what harm is there in resorting to it?

#### *b. "Liquid" knowledge, often elusive*

To describe the evolution of the status of knowledge in recent times, the philosopher Zygmunt Bauman compares the situation he experienced at the beginning of his studies, in the middle of the twentieth century, with that which existed at the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> BAUDRILLART, Alfred, "Introduction" in: ROUSSEAU, Henry, S.M., *William Joseph Chaminade, Founder of the Society of Mary*, [Dayton & Clayton: Brothers of Mary, 1914; trans. J.E. Garvin, S.M.] pp. XIX-XX.

<sup>8</sup> BAUMAN, Zygmunt, "Défis pour l'éducation dans la liquidité des temps modernes," in: *Diogenès* 2002/1, PUF, Paris, pp. 13-28. The numbers in the text refer to the pages of the article.

We believed that the world around us was immutable... We believed that everything we learned about the world had a good chance of serving us for the rest of our lives. We hoped that the time would never come when learning would look like a waste of time, let alone a recipe for failure to respond properly to life's challenges. ... The person could appropriate that knowledge as an enduring property (16-17).

In the "liquid" age of modernity (24), the ability to last long no longer speaks in favor of things. Things and links are meant to be used for a "set amount of time" only (19). In our volatile world, made up of instantaneous and erratic changes, ingrained habits, strong cognitive frameworks, and a preference for stable values, those ultimate goals of orthodox education have become handicaps. At least they have been rejected as such by the knowledge market (22).

In the midst of this worrying picture, however, one statement draws positive attention:

The men and women of the modern-liquid age ... want advisors who show how to move forward, rather than teachers who control always the one and only road, always congested, that is taken (25).

The current cult of "lifelong learning" focuses partly on the need to update professional information on the "state of the art" – but also to an equal, if not greater, extent on the growing conviction that the mine of personality is never exhausted and that spiritual masters, who know how to reach the still unexploited deposits, which the other guides have not been able to find or have ignored, are still to be found (25).

This perspective is questionable: who will be these "spiritual masters, who know how to reach the still unexploited deposits"? Why not want to be one of them? Can not the attitude and method of our Founder help us in this?

### *c. Inform oneself with lucidity and discernment*

The computer resources and the media that are developing there have profoundly changed our modes of information and knowledge. They open up great prospects but also present new challenges to which we must pay attention. The quality and veracity of the information received is essential to our life, our witness and our mission. To evangelize, we need to understand the world and analyze it in a meaningful way. To do this, we need to free ourselves from useless, partial or false information. Here are some attitudes that can help.

#### Take a step back from the information we receive.

Many media are oriented by the search for sensationalism or driven by mercantile or ideological concerns. The news or analyses we receive through these channels are often biased, incomplete and falsified, sometimes unintentionally or intentionally wrong: they seek the good of a specific group or to defend a particular vision; let us not be the naïve propagators of that. As religious or pastors and guides, we have the duty to take a step back and to rise up to see more clearly: is this news offered to me credible, is it based on verifiable facts, does it serve the good of all, does it promote unity and fraternity, does it provoke the desire to serve, to help, to commit, ...?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> One of these false pieces of information thrives in rich countries: immigrants cost the state and society. Economic analyses show the opposite.

To discard biased and partial ideological analyses.

The information we receive is very frequently marked by ideological preconceptions linked to philosophical, religious, ethnic or political theories. These preconceptions can distance us from reality and be a source of tension. They can even divide our communities into opposing opinion groups. The influence of these human theories must not surpass that of the Gospel in our communities. Is this still the case?

Seeking to understand.

In the face of information overload, we must sort, discern and deepen. We cannot be satisfied with superficial information often carried by the dominant currents of opinion. We are called to shed light on the complex situations of our time through relevant and reliable information about today's world and major contemporary issues. To do this, let us discern our sources of information very carefully and have a critical mind towards them. Let's discard what carries harmful ideas, sometimes hidden behind seemingly innocuous content. Let's avoid useless news with catchy titles but without real content. Let us compare sources of various origins and sensitivities. What do we read or watch? It would be good to talk about it regularly among our brothers, even with our spiritual guide. This vigilance is part of the prophetic mission of religious life: where are we?

*d. Like Chaminade, enlightening intelligence to transform life*

To enlighten others, we must resolutely place ourselves on the side of the light. Let us remember that one of the ambitions of Father Chaminade when he engaged us in education was to dispel the darkness of the spirit in young people, especially to make it possible for them to have access to the faith. Let's let him express it to us:

I favor very much the work for the teachers, both the retreats and their training at the seminary. This above all will make the Institute of Mary take great steps forward, provided it can become general. It will especially help the Institute realize the end with which God has inspired it, the regeneration of our unhappy country. The philosophic spirit is being introduced even into the tiny villages, corrupting young and old of all conditions and of both sexes, and this by the clever use of every kind of means. This is why we undertake different kinds of works and train or help to train subjects fully capable of sustaining and developing them.<sup>10</sup>

Let him have a clear idea, especially, of what is the end we propose to ourselves, that of multiplying Christians, of propagating everywhere the true principles of religion, of virtues, of the monarchy, and of lawfulness. If he wants to take notice of it, he will see that this work of the normal schools is directly in opposition to the road traced out by d'Alembert, to introduce, by means of schoolteachers, philosophism into places even the farthest away from the cities. Our teachers, no doubt, must be able to teach what we have just learned, but what can be made known about the method only by actual practice is the wise and enlightened zeal of the teachers in winning hearts to the practice of virtue and religion.<sup>11</sup>

Most Holy Father... Philosophy and Protestantism, favored in France by the ruling power, have taken hold of public opinion and of the schools, attempting to spread in all

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<sup>10</sup> CHAMINADE G.-J., Letter 296, June 11, 1824, to M. Breuillot, Director of the Seminary of Besançon.

<sup>11</sup> CHAMINADE G.-J., Letter 353, of June 28, 1825, to M. Caillet, Paris.

minds, especially during childhood and youth, this libertinism of thought, still more baneful than that of the heart from which it is inseparable. Moreover, who could even conceive of all the resulting evils?

I have believed before God, Most Holy Father, that it was necessary to found two new orders, the one of virgins and the other of young men, who would provide to the world by the fact of their good example that Christianity is not an outmoded institution. They would show that the Gospel is as practicable today as it was 1800 years ago; they would challenge the propaganda hidden under a thousand and one disguises; and they would take over the battleground of the schools by opening classes of all levels and subject matters...<sup>12</sup>

Today, do we know how to "compete with propaganda" for our communities and our works? Such a mission requires that we ourselves be lucid, enlightened by verified and reliable information that we can justify. This requires that we know how to extricate ourselves with vigilance from the harmful influences of today in order to resolutely opt for what is good.

### 3. $x = \sqrt[6]{a - 6v - 7 - x^5 + 11x^4 + 14x^3 + 10x^2 + 3x + 1} - 1$ . THE CONTRIBUTION OF SECULAR DISCIPLINES TO OUR MISSION

Our mission requires us to take an interest in secular knowledge as well. However, because we are small in number, we may be tempted to limit our study and action to the religious subjects that are considered to be the most important. In our initial or continuing education, the secular disciplines of the humanities, the arts, the sciences risk being neglected or forgotten. Young religious trained in these disciplines have become rarer, probably especially in the scientific field, but also in literature. This calls for vigilance and, when necessary, a personal or collective rebalancing in the formation policy of the Units.

Secular disciplines are necessary to us. They offer us, in their own field, adequate instruments for understanding reality. Each of these disciplines also has its own approach to verifying knowledge.

#### 3.1. Father Chaminade: a scientist

When you read the title of this section above (§ 3), you will probably have thought of an editing error or one of those fantasies that sometimes arise from computer software. It is in fact a quotation from Father Chaminade. Would you have imagined it? This is a fact rich in lessons.

Indeed, we have known for a long time that Father Chaminade had a particular interest in several secular disciplines and in particular in the scientific subjects that he studied and then taught: mathematics, physics and astronomy. His correspondence is interspersed with references to these fields and even to other disciplines. He then expresses himself with the authority of someone who knows what he is talking about.

The mathematical formula is taken from Father Chaminade's letter of February 26, 1788. It is one of the twelve letters of our Founder unearthed in 2020 by Fr. Eddie Alexandre in the Departmental Archives of Pas-de-Calais, along with forty-nine letters from his brothers Jean-Baptiste (2 letters) and Louis-Xavier (47 letters).<sup>13</sup> They therefore date from the Mussidan

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<sup>12</sup> CHAMINADE G.-J., Letter 1076, of September 16, 1838, to Pope Gregory XVI.

<sup>13</sup> CHAMINADE, Louis-Xavier, Guillaume-Joseph and Jean-Baptiste, *Letters from Mussidan to Ferdinand Dubois de Fosseux, Permanent Secretary of the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras (1786-1790)*, (Rome: La

period, when the three Chaminade brothers were members of the Saint Charles community. At that time, G.-Joseph was, among other things, bursar and teacher of philosophy, which then included physics, astronomy and mathematics, a subject for which he had a predilection. These new letters of the Chaminade brothers are all addressed to a scholar: Ferdinand Dubois de Fosseux. Since 1785, the latter had coordinated a learned society, an “Academy,” based in Arras, in the north of France, which brought together several hundred affiliates throughout France who exchanged on the most diverse subjects in order to contribute to the progress of the sciences, arts and letters.<sup>14</sup> He knew G.-Joseph and Louis-Xavier Chaminade within another learned society, that one in Paris, of which they were also members: the *Musée de Paris*.<sup>15</sup>

What are the twelve letters of the future founder,<sup>16</sup> staggered from November 1786 to December 1789, about? After a letter of contact (GJ 1),<sup>17</sup> there is talk of poetry (GJ 2); a new instrument in physics (the “phosphoric lighter”) or “the effects of electricity on the human body” (GJ 3); tides and weather forecasts (GJ 4); the color of ink (GJ 5); mathematical equations and lunar months (GJ 6 where our mathematical formula is found); an attempt to explain the skin color of blacks (GJ 7); of botany and a physical measuring device designed by G.-Joseph (GJ 8); the drawing of curves (GJ 10); of animals and the possibility of their having souls (GJ 11); of feelings in nature (GJ 12). Father Chaminade demonstrates a character curious about everything, open to modernity and discoveries; he is very attracted to science and its disclosures.

Another surprise: we discover that, during his years in Mussidan, Guillaume-Joseph frequently traveled to meet scholars or learn about recent discoveries. He wrote on August 13, 1787, that he was “back from the long journey that curiosity had made me undertake.”<sup>18</sup> He adds:

In my early youth, the desire to know also made me go on small trips, but I always bought my discoveries at some price. I am convinced, Sir, that there is no shorter way to form oneself and to learn, than to hasten the steps of one’s last experience. One knows men better when, after having studied them in the office, one mingles with them in a meeting; this is what I have tried to do everywhere I have been. I went to see what was most distinguished in all the kinds of merit.<sup>19</sup>

Louis-Xavier also testified to this when he wrote to M. de Fosseux about his brother: “Mr. Mathematician has been traveling for two months, touring France. The deepest sciences are the object of his works and his classes.”<sup>20</sup> In fact, that trip of the “mathematician” lasted a total of no less than four months.

In another letter, Guillaume-Joseph wants to share a “discovery he made in mathematics,” with an indication of how to “solve incommensurables.” He comments: “You may imagine, Sir, that you are dealing with some old professor of philosophy, but not at all; he is a young man in

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Gerbe, 2021), 304 pp. [English-language version underway at NACMS.] The letters are in the Departmental Archives of Pas-de-Calais, call number: 32 J 340.

<sup>14</sup> For more information on this subject, see the introduction to the volume of *Lettres de Mussidan...* by Fr. Eddie Alexandre, pp. 7-15.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. VERRIER Joseph, *Jalons d'histoire sur la route de Guillaume-Joseph Chaminade*, T. 1, 2nd ed., Bordeaux, 2007, pp. 64-66.

<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to know that several of the students of the Collège Saint-Charles themselves participated in the work of this academy by also sending literary or scientific works and reflections, under the watchful eyes of the Chaminade brothers.

<sup>17</sup> The numbering is that of the edition of *Lettres de Mussidan* by the AGMAR, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> CHAMINADE, Guillaume-Joseph, Letter GJ 3, in *Lettres de Mussidan*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> CHAMINADE, Louis-Xavier, letter of May 11, 1787, LX 5, in: *Lettres de Mussidan*, *op. cit.*, p.

his twenty-seventh year who still has a lot to learn, even though he has been learning all his life.”<sup>21</sup> He testifies to this continuous learning in another letter: “I leave with pleasure, Sir, the abstract calculations of Newton and the curious experiments of Nollet, which occupied part of the leisure time left to me by the vacations, to fly to the temple of metaphysics, interpreter of its oracles...”<sup>22</sup>

Father Lalanne, a good judge in the field, given his own very vast literary and scientific culture, rightly wrote: “M. Chaminade is not only a holy man but a scientist.”<sup>23</sup> He learned this through his long association with the Founder and the many technical tips he received from him about the teaching of various subjects, especially scientific ones.<sup>24</sup>

The letters of Louis-Xavier Chaminade show that a real emulation existed between the two brothers, even if Louis-Xavier was essentially focused on literary questions in which he excelled.<sup>25</sup> The establishment of Mussidan benefited from this contribution and, in fact, after a very difficult beginning, it prospered at the time of the Chaminade brothers.

### 3.2. Not only holy men, but also scholars.

We have much to learn from this period in the life of our future Founder. It was then that he laid the foundations of his personality and acquired the skills that would later serve him well in his task as Founder. The human instrument was ready, rich in experience and open to the reality of its time; it was enough for God to guide him on new paths.

How can we continue this today in the variety of situations of our time and our places of presence? Let us remember from this stage the importance of a thorough and solid secular formation, whether in the manual, technical, scientific or literary fields and whether it is initial or on-going formation. This formation gives us the tools for our action here and now, it also offers us a path of dialogue with our contemporaries. It avoids the risk of a superficial and naïve interpretation of today's realities.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout its history, the Society of Mary has shone in both secular and religious fields. We have had and we now have very good specialists in the humanities, arts and sciences, as well as in the technical fields. Those of today deserve our encouragement and those of yesterday our recognition. Some of our brothers are mentioned in non-Marianist publications for their contribution to culture, the arts or science. Some have also distinguished themselves through agriculture or technical disciplines.<sup>27</sup> Many have done so discreetly, without any particular

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<sup>21</sup> CHAMINADE, Guillaume-Joseph, Letter of February 26, 1788, GJ 6, in: *Lettres de Mussidan*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>22</sup> CHAMINADE, Guillaume-Joseph, Letter of December 17, 1788, GJ 12, in: *Lettres de Mussidan*, p. 183.

<sup>23</sup> VERRIER Joseph, *Jalons ...*, Tome 1, p. 100, note 91.

<sup>24</sup> We see this, for example, in Letter 495 of Father Chaminade, of December 30, 1829, where he gives Lalanne advice about the purchase of physics equipment for the establishment of Saint Remy. He concludes his remarks with a peremptory: “*Experto crede Roberto*”; “Roberto,” that's Chaminade.

<sup>25</sup> A curious detail catches our attention. Louis-Xavier had in his personal library the *Encyclopédie* published under the direction of Diderot and d'Alembert from 1751 to 1772, a work which, despite its scientific value, conveyed ideas in opposition to the positions of the Church of the time. This fact nevertheless denotes a concern in Louis-Xavier for understanding the culture of his time, especially since its purchase implied a considerable economic investment. (Cf. VERRIER Joseph, *Jalons ...*, T. 1, p. 125.)

<sup>26</sup> Let us also remember Pope Francis's *Letter on the Role of Literature in Formation*, of July 17, 2024. In it, he invites us to consider literature as a path of culture, personal maturation and spiritual growth.

<sup>27</sup> For science, we can mention in particular the famous mathematician Bro. Charles Biehler (1845-1906), considered one of the best of his time. In Japan, the Marianist Emile Heck (1866-1943) was in charge of opening

reputation, but by marking generations of young people or adults through their secular skills and the generosity of their service: they have enlightened those lives.

It is important that this tradition not stop. As I said in the introduction to this text, it would be very risky for us to limit ourselves to religious questions: this does not correspond to our tradition, which finds in the balance of the three offices an invitation to give full place to the three fields of knowledge and action. The invitation to vigilance is not only addressed to the entire congregation, but also to each one of us. To return to our initial triad, which has links with our three offices: we must not only love and serve; we must also know. Without this, we risk being capable only of an abstract love and an ill-adapted service. In fact, vocations to Marianist life were born not only in the chapel, but also in classrooms, workshops, offices and fields. I remember a young brother who said that he understood that God was calling him into the Society of Mary when he saw a brother on his tractor working the fields: what he considered to be two incompatible areas, suddenly became a single way to follow God and give one's life to him.

### **3.3. Brothers and priests together**

This question has many consequences for mixed composition. It is certain that “the domains of science and culture, in technical and manual labor” belong “especially,” in the words of Article 13 of our Rule, to the religious brothers. Collectively, we are all infinitely grateful to them for their great contribution to these specialties and for the openness to the world that they offer to the entire congregation. However, the word used by the Rule is “especially,” not “exclusively.” There are no borders between one and the other, but on the contrary reciprocal calls to take into account the field to which each one is specially dedicated. The same Article 13 also says that “The priests express this commitment in a variety of ways as well,” and it does not set strict limits to these means.

Father Chaminade and our tradition privilege areas of action that are more the responsibility of one than the other category, but this is not an exclusive limit, quite the contrary. According to this principle, those who dedicate themselves to secular fields must take an interest in religious fields and vice versa. When a priest, or a candidate for the priesthood, neglects secular matters, it does not help the mission and it does not promote the unity of vision of the congregation. It can also lead imperceptibly to a certain condescension towards those who work “only” in secular fields. A Marianist priest should always have a secular specialty, even if only in the form of a complementary or leisure activity, and he should give it up only for important reasons. Of course, in the same way, a brother should always cultivate religious questions with the greatest interest. It is important to note that, when, in Article 69, the Rule describes the three traditional areas of missionary activity of religious (faith, culture, manual or technical work), the Rule does not explicitly specify to whom each area belongs, even though we know this by tradition. This can be interpreted as a desire not to sectorize our mission but on the contrary to unite the three areas of interest not only collectively, but also personally.

It also happens that the increase in the proportion of religious brothers dedicated to pastoral care, or in the time that each one devotes to this activity, ends up making our presence in secular areas very slight or almost non-existent. We should ask ourselves about this trend. I believe

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the French literature section of the University of Tokyo; in gratitude, his bust was placed at the university. In agriculture, the brothers of the St-Remy farm continued to win national competitions in the livestock category. Current figures could be cited, of course!

that it is not really in line with our tradition and our way of evangelizing. A Society of Mary that would be composed only of catechists and chaplains would present only a reductive vision of Father Chaminade's project, of his founding intuition and of the mission that has been entrusted to us in the Church.<sup>28</sup>

As a congregation, let us make ourselves known in particular for our thirst for learning and the dissemination of knowledge in the most varied fields, always giving priority to the one in which each of us is specialized or is called to serve. Let us also take advantage of each other's wealth of knowledge as invitations to open ourselves to the world and to current realities.

### **3.4. With the laity**

Today, our partnership with the laity at the service of the Marianist mission highlights in a new way the secular areas in which the skills of the laity are particularly illustrated. For them, it is a privileged place of responsibility and action. We are called to recognize their capacity and to find new opportunities for mutual enrichment in our work with them. When our skills are shared on both sides, it generates great opportunities for collaboration and mutual enrichment; when a specialty is known to some, lay or religious, but not to others, it invites a fruitful and enriching collaboration. It is an opportunity to highlight the essential role of the laity in society and in the Church, especially because of their secular skills, and to encourage them to use and promote them in a Christian spirit. Our partnership makes it possible to highlight the way in which each vocation, secular or religious, integrates and expresses these know-hows according to whichever it is. This allows us to unite and, at the same time, to better distinguish what is specific to us and what differentiates us.

## **4. A DEEPER LOOK: NOT ONLY OF SCHOLARS BUT ALSO OF SAINTS**

Let us return to what was our starting point and to what constitutes, for a Christian, the knowledge par excellence: the knowledge of God and his plans and, by extension, the knowledge of reality according to the gaze of God himself. God, the origin and end of all knowledge.

### **4.1. By faith, broaden the horizon of knowledge and give it new motivations**

As Marianist religious, we attach great importance to secular knowledge and its transmission. But we are also aware that, if we combine it with the religious dimension, we broaden the context and the horizon of this knowledge. If this is done with respect for the autonomy of secular knowledge, the religious dimension enriches it with new perspectives and motivations.

This is our vocation and our own gift. Limiting ourselves to the secular dimension would keep us below our vocation and mission. Our Rule says that “our goal is to be transformed into his likeness and to work for the coming of his kingdom” (RL 2) or that “we are committed to the multiplication of Christians” (RL 63). “Our primary objective is formation in faith” (RL 71).

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<sup>28</sup> The Constitutions of 1839 express it: 266. “*The importance that the Society places upon Christian education does not make it neglect instruction; on the contrary, since education can be given only at the time of instruction, the Society takes all the more interest in the good running of its schools and in the perfection of its methods as it is the more [sic] desirous extending the benefits of Christian education to a very great number of subjects.*”

But the Rule adds: “in order to attain this objective, we work at the direct proclamation of the gospel and also at the enrichment of culture and the transformation of society in accord with the message of salvation” (RL 72). And when the Rule speaks of those who “work principally in the fields of education and culture,” it specifies: “to show that the human person can be fulfilled only in response to God's plan” (RL 69). The link and balance between culture and faith is constant.

#### **4.2. Our Founder calls us to do so**

Let us remember what Father Chaminade wrote in his letter of August 24, 1839, about the teaching brothers:

Yours to impress upon the teachers what a great mistake they would make if they were to limit their endeavors to instruction in human learning, if they were to put all their care and glory into the making of scholars and not of Christians, or into the gaining of a worldly reputation. Then they would be forgetting that they are missionaries of Mary and would descend from the high estate of apostles, in order to degrade themselves to the base level of those who work in the educational factories of our century.<sup>29</sup>

And we ourselves must not only be scholars, but also religious transformed by our personal and common search for God and by our relationship with Mary. This is what allows us to open paths between knowledge and faith. “... our state is of a supernatural order. If we teach the sciences and the arts, it is only to teach at the same time the science of salvation.”<sup>29</sup>

The text of the Constitutions of 1839 also affirms this:

22. The majority are devoted to the teaching of the humanities, the sciences and the arts, and they make of this teaching only a means for multiplying true Christians.<sup>30</sup>

We are therefore obliged to cultivate these two dimensions simultaneously: our secular knowledge that inserts us into culture and our religious knowledge that culminates in the knowledge of God and illuminates our motivation: to “work for the coming of [the] kingdom” of Christ (RL 2). Our own gift is to establish passages between these two domains.

#### **4.3. Religious knowledge is based on one's personal relationship with God**

To understand our time and to know and teach secular or religious subjects, it is necessary for us to study the subject seriously and to return to it throughout our lives. But, as far as the religious dimension is concerned, the study must also be combined with experience. True knowledge of God and of the faith cannot be achieved without a personal relationship with him, cultivated in daily life and especially in prayer.

A new vision is then given to us. This personal relationship then allows us to be enlightened by God's view of things, facts, events and thus to let our interpretation be nourished and influenced by this experience. Paul wrote to the Romans: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God: what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

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<sup>29</sup> CHAMINADE G.J., Letter 725, of February 7, 1834, to M. Chevaux.

<sup>30</sup> CHAMINADE G.-J., *Constitutions of 1839*, article 22 (*The Chaminade Legacy*, VII.28).

Our Rule tells us: “We strive to become men of faith and to ponder all things in the light of revelation” (RL 4). This union of the two activities, study and prayer life, allows us to acquire a deep look at all realities. This is one of the secrets of our apostolic influence.

“Whatever our tasks, we act in the name of Jesus announcing the redemption of all in Christ and the transformation of the world into his kingdom” (RL64). In this way, we can “show that the human person can be fulfilled only in response to God's plan” (RL 69).

#### 4.4. Inspired guides, often hidden

We heard Zygmunt Bauman's call to seek out “spiritual masters, who know how to reach the as yet untapped deposits, which other guides have not been able to find.”<sup>31</sup> In a thought that I would like to share here, Edith Stein does not contradict him; she writes, as Nazism continues to strengthen in Germany and in several European nations:

The more an age is plunged into the night of sin and estrangement from God, the more it needs prayerful people united with God. And God does not allow them to fail. From the darkest night advance the greatest prophets and saints. But for the most part this river of mystical life that is forming remains invisible. Certainly, the decisive turning points in world history are essentially conditioned by souls that no history textbook will talk about. And we ourselves will not know to whom we owe the decisive turning points in our personal lives until the Day when all that was hidden will be revealed.<sup>32</sup>

It is a striking commentary offered by a brilliant intellectual, a philosopher by training. It reminds us how important is the spiritual dimension of our action, even when it is completely hidden: human history must not lack these “prayers united to God.”

#### 4.5. For those who lead

The call for a deeper and inner reflection is also felt in the field of management or leadership. Our Founder is particularly demanding of the brothers who exercise this type of responsibility. He does not neglect the human knowledge necessary for this task, but he expects it to be supplemented by a deepened supernatural sense to guide action. He wrote to Father Chevaux, then Master of Novices at Saint-Rémy:

With reason, you complain to see the older boys get together during the recreations, not just to amuse themselves, etc., etc., and you ask me: “What is to be done?” Well, my dear son, how is it that you have not placed this same question before the Lord himself in prayer? How is it that, according to my letters, you have not repeated the question to each one of the teachers in particular or to all of them collectively? Most certainly, you would have had an answer.

He adds further on: “I should want that your direction be enlightened by the lights of faith.”<sup>33</sup> To Father Caillet, a few years earlier, he had said nothing different:

A work of God, a work in the supernatural order, must be carried out with the views and with the motives of the same order. I know this is your way of thinking, so I will not insist on this point however important it may be. But because of this, my dear Son, for you there is the happy obligation of asking the Lord unceasingly for an increase of faith and of accustoming yourself to act only in the spirit of faith. Soon,

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<sup>31</sup> BAUMAN Zygmunt, "Challenges for Education in the Liquidity of Modern Times", *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> STEIN, Edith, XI, 145, quoted by De Meester, Conrad, OCD, *Edith Stein*, 1998, p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> Chaminade G.-J., Letter 734 of April 14, 1834, to M. Chevaux.

then, this spirit of faith will become in you a spirit of confidence in God, a spirit of zeal, a spirit of strength and of generosity, ...<sup>34</sup>

Let us listen to him again, exhorting Father Chevaux:

Do you not see that we are really in a supernatural order, although it seems natural, and that precisely for that very reason, in this supernatural order, we all require that Jesus Christ be our strength and our light?<sup>35</sup>

For all those who exercise responsibility, particularly in leadership, there is a very clear call here. Let us follow him and have no doubt that the fruits will be felt. Letting ourselves be guided only by our own intelligence is not enough.

In the same way, the Church, the Society of Mary, the Marianist Family, or the place and work where we live and act cannot be known or evaluated simply from a human point of view and according to statistical or organizational data. These data are indispensable, but faith must play its full part so that a correct image of what we are and what we do appears.

Countless quotations from Father Chaminade could be mentioned on this subject. Let us welcome some of these invitations to transform our gaze through faith.

These two orders have taken as their distinctive name that of the august Mary. May they make it known, loved, and cherished in all the world! For I am intimately convinced that Our Lord has reserved to His holy Mother the glory of being the particular support of the Church in these latter days.<sup>36</sup>

If the Institute is the work of God, God will sustain it. We are wearing ourselves out with pains and labors only because we believe it to be the work of God.<sup>37</sup>

If the Society of Mary is not the work of God, there is, in reality, much to be feared: even if it were better organized, it would not maintain itself. If it is the work of God, all the outcries that can possibly be aroused against it will serve only to strengthen it.<sup>38</sup>

If fear, timidity, or even defiance come close to your heart, think of the special protection of the august Mary, which entirely surrounds you. If we act alone or according to our human views, we should tremble, but.... [it is not so].<sup>39</sup>

Religious simplicity consists in not associating human ideas with celestial views, or with a double life which betrays the complexity of these two poorly-matched ends.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Chaminade G.-J., Letter 271, of February 26, 1824, to M. Caillet.

<sup>35</sup> Letter 692, of June 17, 1833, to M. Chevaux.

I do not want to ignore another quotation taken from Circular Letter 834, of April 15, 1836, to the directors of Alsace which sheds light on the dialogue that takes place between intelligence and faith concerning a decision to be taken, here on “the cut and shape of the clothing”: “Each one of the Heads who will receive this Circular, signed by my hand, will read it attentively, consult his own heart—and above all, his reason, enlightened by the lights of faith—and let me know of his true sentiments, whether of complete and entire agreement or opposition....”

<sup>36</sup> CHAMINADE, G.-J., Letter 1076, September 16, 1836, to Pope Gregory XVI.

<sup>37</sup> CHAMINADE, G.-J., Letter 600, of September 22, 1831 to M. Lalanne. The whole letter delves into this theme.

<sup>38</sup> CHAMINADE, G.-J., Letter 1266, of July 8, 1842, to M. Perrodin.

<sup>39</sup> CHAMINADE, G.-J., Letter 309, of August 17, 1825, to M. Caillet.

<sup>40</sup> CHAMINADE, G.-J., Constitutions de 1839, article 213, *Chaminade Legacy* VII.28.

#### **4.6. Knowing like Jesus Christ and Mary**

Let us remember that “We are in the midst of so new a world! I am in France almost like one in a foreign land. I seem not to know any longer what to say or do,” Father Chaminade affirmed: “I have no other policy than that of having daily recourse to the Blessed Virgin.”<sup>41</sup>

This is what can conclude our reflection: in all the situations of our lives, to have recourse unceasingly to Mary and to Christ so that their gaze and understanding of facts, situations, and persons may influence and guide our own. Like them, let us unite knowledge, intelligence and faith.

Jesus never ceased to unite his mind with that of his Father and to act in communion with him to the point of being the perfect revelation of him in his actions as well as in his words. Mary meditated on events in her heart after listening to and praying the Word of God received in Scripture or in the words of her Son. She invites us to practice this type of dialogue.

Then we will be able to unite knowledge and faith in each other, as Fr. Chaminade puts it:

After faith has made considerable progress, we love to remain in the presence of God, and also in the presence of the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ. In some way, faith ties us to God; it places us in communication with God, our spirit with God’s Spirit, our heart with God’s heart. The lights of God’s Spirit pass into ours; we now see things only as God sees them; we judge as God judges. Little by little, all our prejudices are dispelled; we become wise with the very knowledge of God. This is, in fact, the knowledge of the saints. The knowledge communicated to us by faith is preferable to all human knowledge, to all natural and supernatural knowledge, to the knowledge of Adam in the earthy paradise, to the knowledge of the admirable wisdom of Solomon.<sup>42</sup>

## **II. KNOWING IN ORDER TO LOVE AND SERVE**

### **1. OUR CHOICE: STUDY AND PRAY**

Many of the challenges of our time concern knowledge and its connection to truth; they affect us directly. At present, enormous efforts and considerable material resources are used in the service of information or communication. It can be to defend them and make them accessible, it can also be to control, manipulate and put them, openly or not, at the service of personal or collective projects.

We believe, as Marianist religious, that our contribution to the Church and to society is in particular in the union of two realities: study, secular and religious, and prayer; intellectual knowledge united with the inner gaze that a solid spiritual life allows, each of these realities having to be completed and oriented by the other. Nourished by this dual approach, we can take a different and innovative look at the current reality and orient ourselves accordingly; And it also distances us from ignorance, from false interpretations, from the multiple forms of

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<sup>41</sup> CHAMINADE, G.-J., Letter 575, of January 20, 1831, to M. Lalanne.

<sup>42</sup> CHAMINADE, G.-J., "Mental Prayer of Faith and of the Presence of God," Note 4, *Chaminade Legacy* VI.80 [4-5].

manipulation of reality. This is only truly possible if we give full place to both the secular and the religious domains.

Bringing secular knowledge and faith into dialogue is an important aspect of our mission and of what we wish to offer to others. For this reason, everything we can do to ensure and develop both our knowledge, secular and religious, and our experience of faith, is a real service that we render today; this is why we also want to share it in our places of life and apostolate. This is a necessary condition for our religious life and for proposing the faith in today's world. We are called to scrutinize our time by looking at it simultaneously with the eyes of our intelligence and our faith; demanding of ourselves in our process of knowledge as well as in our journey of faith. This is particularly necessary to continue to offer a valuable service through education or any form of teaching.

In the first communities of the Society of Mary, there were always to be seven common rooms (sometimes six).<sup>43</sup> Among these were always an oratory, a study room, a reception room and a refectory. Of course, next to this sector dedicated to the community was also the apostolic work. This tradition is a beautiful expression of the points of insistence of our life and of the balances and interactions that must be established between them: prayer, study, fraternal life (internal and open to the outside) and apostolate. These are the pillars of our life. How do they harmonize in our Units, in our communities and in my own life? Are they all honored; does each of these sectors have its rightful place, the room or space dedicated to it? Let's not forget any of them and try to excel everywhere to live and offer the best through our mission. Let us give special prominence to knowledge, which is the gateway to reality and truth, and enables us to love and serve.

## **2. LOVE AND SERVE!**

### **2.1. Love!**

Don't just know: love! What you have discovered, love it and let it teach you to love. May your service also be inspired by love and the desire to love.<sup>44</sup> This is the call we receive from our tradition. By proposing not only to know but also to love, Fr. Chaminade does nothing other than remind us of the central role of charity in the Christian life, which cannot remain at the level of beautiful ideas. The Christian is called to love God and to love his neighbor as himself. Without this, knowledge would be sterile and even useless. Paul affirms this forcefully in his hymn to charity in the First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 13):

*<sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.*

*<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.*

*<sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part;*

*<sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.*

Thus, despite the great importance of having access to a deeper and more authentic knowledge of today's reality, guided and inspired by God's gaze and nourished by our faith, all this will

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. CHAMINADE, G.-J., Constitutions of 1839, Article 158.

<sup>44</sup> Article 362 of the Constitutions of 1839 makes the following observation concerning those who study: "Let each member try to preserve himself from the pride of knowledge, and let him be edifying through harmony and fraternal charity!" Let science not stand in the way of charity, on the contrary, let it serve it! A wise remark.

have been for naught if it is not inspired by love and if it is not translated into an effective commitment to charity.

The love taught by Christ directs us in two directions: love of God and love of neighbor as two realizations of the same call. He also directs us to Mary, since it is to her that we belong and that it is "Moved by Jesus' love for his Mother, we dedicate ourselves to her" (RL 6). The vow of stability expresses that and "In the spirit of this vow, we seek to make Mary known, loved and served" (RL 15).

Fraternal love is the place where the love received from God is realized. We want to follow Christ's commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34) and love like him, our brothers and sisters (cf. RL 21) and the poor, "sensitive to the sufferings and misery of others" (RL 27).

Fraternal life in community is the place where fraternal love is experienced and realized: "We give ourselves to community life in order to bear witness to God's love" (RL 34), in fact, "By this shall all know you are my disciples, that you love one another" (Jn 13:35; RL 37).

In the post-revolutionary era, in the midst of a fractured society and Church, Father Chaminade invited his disciples to embody this project of fraternity, inspired by the knowledge of the love of Christ and Mary.<sup>45</sup> He saw in the community a place of teaching the faith through theory and practice and a place of experience of fraternal charity and service where Christians of all ages, genders, conditions or professions mingle. Today, we are carrying this same project in a dramatically divided and polarized world where the struggles for power and the control of wealth are constantly exacerbated. Let us not wait any longer to live it to the fullest, it is urgent!

Let knowledge, then, lead us to love: because we are loved, love, and cause to be loved. Let us love Jesus and Mary, let us love with them and like them.

## 2.2. Serve!

A second aspect of our tradition that we cannot ignore is that knowledge and love must be translated into service. Service is the natural expression of love. Charity without deeds would be nothing but an abstract and illusory idea. To serve is to commit oneself by putting into practice what is known and loved.

Jesus himself, Love made flesh, "the way, the truth and the life," is "among you as one who serves." (Lk 22:27). He freely and voluntarily took "the form of a slave" (Phil 2:7). He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). At his Last Supper, he expresses the fullness of his love by a gesture of service by washing the feet of his disciples. He then said, "You also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:14-15).

Mary presents herself as the "Handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38a). At the wedding at Cana, she is the one who, having noticed the lack of wine, addresses the servants and says to them: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5b). She sees and understands the situation, she knows through an

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<sup>45</sup> He inserted in the Constitutions of 1839 this article: "131. The name of brother which the religious give to one another expresses only imperfectly the union and charity which should reign among them. The Holy Spirit testifies about the first Christians that 'they had but one heart and one soul.' The entire Rule of the religious on this point is contained in these words" (*Chaminade Legacy* VII.28).

external and internal gaze of faith. She acts out of compassion, expressing her love and desire to serve. Moved by faith, she calls out to her Son and then calls the servants to action, in a gesture of service and charity. It shows us how knowledge, human and spiritual, is translated into love and service. She calls on others to follow the same path. She also calls us to be servants, inspired by her invitation and by the words of her Son, loving and serving. The wedding servers do this and the glory of her Son is manifested and many believe in him. Knowing, loving and serving make this possible. Thus, a new community is born, a place of knowledge and witness, of fraternal and universal love and of service to our brothers and neighbors.

Contemplation of the Lord and his loving plan for the world moves us to share in his saving mission. [We become] aware of God's presence in our activities, in the events of each day, and especially in our neighbor. (RL 56)

Let us hope that many of us will advance on this path so that our presence can be, humbly, an encouragement to knowledge, love and service.

It is a journey of fulfilment of our vocation in order to "assist [Mary] in her mission of forming in faith a multitude of brothers for her first-born Son" (RL 6).



## APPENDIX

### **The End of a Person is to know, to love, and to glorify God**<sup>46</sup>

*All our happiness here below, therefore, is to know God, to love God, and to serve God. We see God by faith, truly and just as he is, not of course in an intuitive manner but, as the apostle says, as a mystery and in a mirror. The light of faith, infallible as that of glory, is essentially less luminous and less perfect. However, it enlightens the infinite perfection of our God enough to flood the pure heart with unspeakable delights and causes it to desire with all its strength the happy ending of its pilgrimage.... Therefore it is clear that **the end of a person is to know, to love, and to glorify God**... what is Christianity, if not the practice of the teachings of the faith?*<sup>47</sup>

*In the exercise of their duties, the Brothers consider themselves as ministers and cooperators of Jesus Christ, as servants and auxiliaries of Mary; for them education consists in forming **Jesus Christ** in souls, in **making him known, loved and served**.*<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> CHAMINADE G.-J., Method of Mental Prayer On the Creed, *Chaminade Legacy* VII.34 [3].

<sup>47</sup> Id., [2-3].

<sup>48</sup> Constitutions of 1891, art. 264.



I would like to conclude this letter by contemplating with you this superb work by Sister Caritas Müller, OP, Dominican nun of the convent of SS. *Peter and Paul* de Cazis in Switzerland: *Die Barmherzige Dreifaltigkeit, The Merciful Trinity*.<sup>49</sup> The work is made in ceramic.

In the center of the image is the suffering man. Around him, inclined towards him, is the Father, bearing the suffering body; at the bottom, Christ relieving the fatigues and wounds of his feet and from on high the Spirit descending on him to give him life in fullness.

This contemplation leads us to God himself, the three Persons united in the same love. The knowledge of the Tri-unity which is love and service, *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

It also reveals to us who man is, placed at the heart of the love of the three Persons. We are given to see his misery and his greatness reunited, the fruit of merciful love, offered and received, which restores and reveals his original beauty.

Such knowledge can only provoke love and service in us.

Jesus, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end.

<sup>14</sup> ... You also ought to wash one another's feet.

<sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you (John 13:1, 14b-15).

Rome, April 8, 2026  
265th birthday of Blessed G.-J. Chaminade

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<sup>49</sup> The Dominican nuns of the convent of SS. *Peter and Paul* in Cazis (CH) have very generously authorized the publication of this work. We would like to thank them very warmly. For more information about Sister Caritas: <https://kompatscher.eu/en/galerie-hofburg-artists/sr-caritas-mueller/>, or about the convent of Cazis (in German): <https://kloster-cazis.ch/>.



