

## Blessed William Joseph Chaminade: A man of justice

The ultimate goal of evangelization is the sanctification of people. It is not only a question of educating about the faith, but of educating men and women to live their faith. In other words, faith must be incarnated, leading to a real transformation of persons. The morality of the commandments alone is not enough for this; nor the way of imitation and communion with the life of the Christ of the Beatitudes. We must not neglect human virtues. We need to cultivate those "dispositions to do good" that are virtues in the most general sense of the word. Among these dispositions to do good, there is justice, which is: "the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the "virtue of religion." Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good".(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1807).

Chaminade's life was devoted to seeking and doing God's will, to which he always remained faithful [\[1\]](#). He was so convinced of the importance of fulfilling his duties to God that, despite the urgency and multitude of matters to be settled, he never sacrificed either his daily prayers or his annual retreat. He urged Marianist principals of schools not to neglect either community or personal prayer in the face of an excessive or urgent workload. On the contrary, the more important the work, the more necessary fidelity to prayer became. "The first duty of every Christian," he said, "and even more of every religious, is prayer and frequent recourse to God; everything else must come second." [\[2\]](#)

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[\[1\]](#) D. Antoine Enjugier, SM, *Positio*.1929, p. 825.

[\[2\]](#) Fr. Hippolyte Hérail , SM, *Positio*.1929, p. 827 ; Rev. Fr. François Roquefort, *Positio*.1929, p. 828.



**Prayer vigil, the day before the beatification of Father Chaminade,  
at the Santa Maria Institute, Rome.**

We now wish to emphasize the justice with which he governed the Society of Mary and treated the Marianist men and women religious. In this regard, Father Chaminade astonished all eyes by the evangelical fidelity and simplicity of his conduct. Throughout his life, Chaminade fulfilled his duties as a founder with excellence, against all odds and at the cost of the greatest sacrifices. As a founder, the Good Father considered himself responsible to the Church, the State and the Society of Mary for the mission he had received from God. His love for the Society led him to preserve it in the fervor of its beginnings and in the original principles of the institution, as God had inspired them, and as the Holy See recognized and praised them in the decree of praise of April 1839, promulgated by Pope Gregory XVI to the two Marianist religious institutes. This is why Chaminade insisted that Father Caillet fulfill his duties as Superior General. The correctness of the Good Father's position was recognized by Father Chevaux, who wrote to him on February 9, 1846, to acknowledge that "what you have asked of them, these gentlemen have promised, convinced that you were only demanding respect for the Constitutions. Having promised this to

God and Society, they are obliged to suppress such abuses and think that they can do nothing more than what they are trying to do [3]."

The Good Father always acted justly in his management of men and works, especially during the last years of his life, during the conflict with his Assistants. In the midst of so many suspicions, half-truths and accusations, the elderly priest remained transparent and trustworthy to all. Having nothing to hide and telling the truth, he wrote one day to the archbishop of Albi, on October 20, 1847, wishing to address a circular letter to the bishops in his defense: "Monsignor, if you still find it difficult to arrive at a decision [...] I shall distribute copies of the circular which I sent you [...]. I won't change a word." His conduct was so noble that, when he wrote to the bishops, he took care to enclose copies of the letters received from his adversaries. Fr. Georges Caillet, his successor at the head of the Society, forbade him to express himself on the dangers that threatened the Society of Mary. Thus, whenever Chaminade felt compelled to emphasize a negative aspect of the leadership, he did so in the presence of Father Caillet, in order to have the opportunity to defend himself. Chaminade explains that in all things he strove to act in accordance with truth, justice, and his conscience (as he states in a letter of November 23, 1845 to the bishop of Saint-Claude). He always acted faithfully according to his conscience as Founder and father of the Society of Mary, seeking the spiritual good of religious and their works. Telling the truth, for the good of the Society of Mary, was for him a moral imperative [4]. In this sense, his suffering can be considered a form of martyrdom of conscience, since he could not legally assert his rights or defend himself against the accusations made against him.

*His impartiality in the financial management of the Marianist sisters* was also recognized. To understand this, it is necessary to know that, from the foundation of the two congregations, the Founder administered the finances of the Society of Mary and the Daughters of Mary in his capacity as spiritual superior. The sisters submitted the acts of leadership of the General Council to the Founder for examination. However, in 1831, their financial situation became very difficult, to the point that they had to separate the finances of the Daughters of Mary and the Society of Mary. The way in which this problem was solved is a credit to Father Chaminade, who was admirable for his sense of justice, his loyalty and his sensitivity, as evidenced by this statement by the Superior, Mother Saint-Vincent (December 30, 1832): "I, the undersigned, after mature reflection, having noted that Father Chaminade, our Superior General, had, through generosity and

sensitivity, omitted to pay various sums that he had provided to our Institute, and the total amount of which would exceed that which he declared he owed us, I beg you to kindly authorize me to exempt the Society of Mary from the debt of 8,203 francs and 80 centimes." Years later, when the General Council made accusations against Father Chaminade, Mother Saint-Vincent again defended him, submitting the financial statements of the Daughters of Mary to the Bishop of Agen. Father Roussel had accused Father Chaminade of embezzling funds from the sisters' financial resources for the benefit of the Society of Mary. In response to this accusation, Mother Saint-Vincent indignantly affirmed that Father Chaminade's accounts had always been in order. In short, despite all the administrative problems that had arisen during his years as Superior General, Father Chaminade had always acted with precision and integrity; on the contrary, it was his opponents who, by their incompetence and imprudence, had provoked the financial mismanagement against which Chaminade had warned them [\[5\]](#).

Another example of the *Good Father's justice towards people* occurred in 1840, when two unfortunate religious left the Society, having contracted certain debts. Their superior, M. Clouzet, demanded the repayment of these debts on their departure; but the Good Father did not hesitate to advise him to let them go without demanding an account, for the good of the Church. Clouzet replied: "Where shall I find the money? Seven thousand five hundred francs for these two [former religious] is an enormous sum for our condition! In short, he wants me to pay, and I will pay with the Lord's help." [\[6\]](#).

But the most problematic case was the amicable financial agreement concluded with Mr. Auguste Brougnon-Perrière when he left the Society of Mary in 1832. When the Assistants asked the Good Father to resign from his position as Superior General in order to be able to contest this agreement – a decision that had given rise to the above-mentioned conflict – Chaminade agreed, and the courts therefore had to rule on the legitimacy of the agreement. In fact, the expertise of the lawyer Ravez, arbitrator between Auguste and the Society of Mary, in the arbitral award rendered in 1844, concludes that the agreement between Chaminade and M. Auguste was "an act of prudence and wisdom". [\[7\]](#)

Finally, some religious reproached him for not having been fair to the Society of Mary by not bequeathing his possessions to it. As the legal owner of his property, he was free to dispose of it by will; he therefore stipulated that they should be given to the poor of the hospital of Bordeaux, thus doing an act not only of justice,

but also of charity<sup>[8]</sup>. The justice of the actions of Blessed Chaminade was confirmed by the arbitral award of 1849 concerning the division of property between Chaminade and the Society of Mary. The arbitration was entrusted to Father Dulorié, a priest from Bordeaux and author of a treatise *On Justice*, who, in his decision, confirmed the loyalty, altruism and generosity of the Founder towards the Society of Mary.

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<sup>[3]</sup> Fr. Émile Biron, SM, *Positio*. 1929, pp. 807-808.

<sup>[4]</sup> Fr. Émile Biron, SM, *Positio*. 1929, pp. 806-807.

<sup>[5]</sup> Fr. Lebon, SM, *Positio*. 1929, pp. 801-802 ; Mme Marie Lucie Rousselot, *Positio*. 1929, p. 814.

<sup>[6]</sup> Fr. Lebon, SM, *Positio*. 1929, p. 803.

<sup>[7]</sup> Fr. Lebon, SM, *Positio*. 1929, p. 803; Fr. Henri Rousseau, SM, *Positio*. 1929, p. 926.

<sup>[8]</sup> Fr. Lebon, SM, *Positio*. 1929, p. 804; Fr. Eugène Scherrer, SM, *Positio*. 1929, p. 809.