



*Circular
of the
Superior General
#1*

**WHERE IS OUR FAITH,
OUR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST?**

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

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PREMISES

Dear Brothers,

This, my first circular, is a privileged moment of contact with each of you. Until now, I preferred to allow sufficient time for you to receive and apply the document published by the General Chapter of 2018, which offered to each one of you, and to each Unit, the fundamental orientations for energizing your life and mission. It was really quite necessary to begin by welcoming that opportunity; not to do so would be to condemn oneself to letting oneself be guided by routine, ignoring the calls of the Spirit. It is therefore my fervent hope that the Chapter document will remain at the center of our personal and community reflection and that those of you who have not yet sufficiently assimilated it will start to do so now.

Many elements of our life were highlighted in that last General Chapter. The first of these is the importance of the Marianist Family. The Chapter invites us to give it a greater place in our life and mission in order to think, live, and act as a Family. This is unquestionably what the Spirit is calling us to put into practice with all our energy.

Nevertheless, it is not specifically that theme that I would like to reflect upon now, but rather, about another that is at the root of our life, our mission, and our identity: faith. This topic was not at the forefront of the Chapter's reflection, but it presents an indispensable condition for the realization of our Marianist life and mission. The intensity and fertility of the latter are a direct consequence of our faith, in proportion to the exercise of this virtue. And that is why I wanted to start with it. Faith is, for the same reason, a condition for the implementation of the calls of the last Chapter; they can only really be welcomed and lived out if they are accompanied and supported by our life of faith.

The title I have chosen comes, as you will no doubt have recognized, from a famous letter of Father Chaminade addressed to Fr. Jean Chevaux¹ in February 1834. It is the second reading of the Office of Readings for January 22. Father Chevaux had written a letter to the Founder expressing his discouragement at the many difficulties he was encountering in his work at Saint-Remy. The complexity of that work was too often the result of the inexperience of the brothers, but also of the differences of opinion among those responsible for it. The task seemed superhuman. However, while he himself was confronted with the many difficulties facing the rest of the Society of Mary and had been exiled from Bordeaux as a refugee in Agen for the past four years, following the Revolution of 1830, Father Chaminade addressed a call of hope and encouragement to his disciple.

¹ Letter 725, February 7, 1834, to Fr. Jean Chevaux, Saint-Remy.

It is that same hope that we can have today. Confronted as we ourselves also are today by innumerable challenges, we can find in Chaminade's call an inspiration to face the present obstacles and to continue the work he has confided to us.

We know only too well the many difficulties that the Society of Mary is going through today:

Internal difficulties such as our decrease in numbers, our increasing age, the lack of vocations, or their fragility and low perseverance. We are also victims of infidelities, small or large, individual or collective, of inexperience, individualism, or attacks on our unity. We also suffer from a lack of material or human resources, especially of formators, superiors, or those in charge of works. . . .

In addition to those internal problems, there are also difficulties coming from the outside: the growing religious indifference of vast sectors of humanity, the almost universal decline in fertility and the weakening of families, the fragility of so many young people and even adults, the economic and political conflicts between States, the instability of a large number of countries, the loss of many ancient cultural traditions, the global drama of migration, the domination of material goods, flagrant and often growing injustices; the appearance of new diseases and the fears, rational or irrational, which they provoke. . . .

Such a picture can engender deep pessimism. In fact, that pessimism is a feeling that afflicts many persons on all continents. Our world is often sad, even if it usually tries to hide it. But that feeling also exists among us. Some brothers, some communities, or even some Units are affected by a pessimism, more or less radical, that seems to guide their interpretation of the world, the Church, and the Society of Mary. It also influences their actions, sometimes profoundly. "Where is your faith?" Father Chaminade would repeat.

Nevertheless, we must recognize that there is also reason for optimism today.

For internal reasons, first of all, because of the great generosity of so many brothers, from the youngest to the oldest, the perseverance of many, the missionary inventiveness of brothers or groups of brothers, the strengthening of the Marianist Family, the growing enthusiasm for the charism and our Founder, the desire of many for an authentic religious life, the continual gift of new vocations

And then for external reasons, in a growing desire for respect for creation or for a more universal justice, for the strengthening of fraternity and peace, and in countless known or hidden gestures that express it, in a sense of world solidarity linked particularly to the increase in communications

All these positive and negative situations are often in conflict and it is up to us, where we can, to stand on the side of all that is good, to make it known, to increase it, and to curb evil. In our humility let us be the heel of the woman, as Father Chaminade said.

But, on a much more profound level, our reasons for hope are based on the connection we can make between those positive facts and our faith in God's action and promises. If our optimism is linked only to events it will be changeable and uncertain, just as they are. As disciples of Father Chaminade, we are called to build on the rock of our faith in Jesus Christ. Our eyes of faith will allow us to make appropriate judgments about facts, events, people, and to find reasons to hope and above all to act.

That's the question behind this entire *Circular*. As he did yesterday for his beloved disciple Jean Chevaux, Blessed Chaminade asks to us today: "Where is your faith?" "Where is your faith when you pray? Where is it when you're working and stumbling over obstacles in your mission? Where is it when you look at the life of your community, of your Unit, of the whole Society of Mary, or even of the Church? Where is it when you look at the world and see so many human challenges, suffering, and structural obstacles? Where is it when you contemplate your own life or mission and its current fruits?"

"Where then is your faith, your faith in Jesus Christ?"

I am convinced that how objectively we answer this question will determine an important part of our present and future lives. Without faith, the balance between hopeful signs and disquieting ones will tip sharply to the negative side. Without faith, we have every reason to believe that the Society of Mary will con-

tinue to weaken and cannot but lose part of its *raison d'être* in the Church and in the world. Without faith, we lose the profound inspiration of what we are and do and, therefore, community and mission unity become difficult; this is one of the major reasons for the divisions and conflicts we experience today in the Society of Mary. Without faith, our obedience loses much of its *raison d'être* and motivation and the totality of our vows becomes, above all, a constraint without much justification. Without faith, the difficulties of the mission become a source of discouragement and sadness.

However, with faith and because of it, we are entitled to look at the present and the future with hope and peace, but also, and this is very important, we thereby open ourselves to a new interpretation of our situation and of God's calls. Far from closing in upon ourselves as pessimism does, faith, on the contrary, puts us back on the path of the mission, especially the one we are living today, *in mission with the Marianist Family*, to be *a man who does not die*.

Faith is not an exercise in blindness, a method for being happy in the midst of life's cataclysms, simply because we learn to ignore them; on the contrary, it is a path of commitment and of setting out on the road again and again, aware of weaknesses, certainly, but inspired by an unalterable interior certitude that we receive from God. Through faith everything is transfigured: what I am, what my brothers are, the situation of the Society of Mary, of the Church and of the world, the horizon of human activity and of the mission, . . . Difficulties are not forgotten, but faced with more courage, hope, patience, and humility.

As pilgrims of the 21st century, what direction do we want to give to our journey? Emmaus or Jerusalem? If towards Emmaus, then we are preparing for a gradual disappearance since our life will have lost its deep meaning; if towards Jerusalem, then life will grow in us and around us, however small our group may be, and that is what counts.

“Where is our faith, our faith in Jesus Christ?”

I would like to end this introduction by drawing inspiration from a well-known text by a bishop of Syria.² In his text, he speaks of the Holy Spirit, but this may well be applied to faith, and so I have adapted it:

Without faith,
God is far away,
Christ remains in the past,
the Gospel is a dead letter,
the Church simply an organization,
the Society of Mary a small group with no great future,
the community a straitjacket,
authority is domination,
the mission is propaganda,
worship an evocation
and acting in a Christian way a slave morality.

But enlightened by faith,
the cosmos is lifted up and groans in the birth of the Kingdom,
the risen Christ is here,
the Gospel is the power of life,
the Church means Trinitarian communion,
the Society of Mary spreads the benefits of Mary's maternal action,
the community is a space of life and freedom,
authority is a liberating service,
the mission is a Pentecost,
the liturgy is a memorial and an anticipation,
human action is deified.

² Bishop Ignatios of Latakia. This text is often attributed to other authors.

The purpose of this *Circular* is to remind us of the vital role of faith in our Marianist life and to help us move from the first situation to the second. In the course of this reflection, I have chosen to give a great place to the teaching of Blessed Father Chaminade. The various challenges he faced are very relevant today and they belong in their own right to our charism. It is quite easy to transpose what he tells us into our concrete reality today. Although many of you are indeed already familiar with several elements, they may still provide the subject of new reflections because of our current personal or collective situation. So I count on everyone to undertake these applications, personally or with his community.

First of all, we shall look at Father Chaminade as a witness of faith, then we will reflect on some of the major aspects of his teaching on this virtue, before going through some of the methods he has bequeathed to us to increase our own faith. I apologize to the reader for the length of this text; the breadth of the topic made it difficult for me to make it any shorter.

I. WHAT A MAN OF FAITH!

Speaking of St. Ignatius, one of his first companions, Fr. Jerome Nadal, wrote: "the whole life of the Society is contained in seed and prefigured in the story of Ignatius". The same can be said of Father Chaminade. His very life is a message and a teaching on faith.

1. A CONTROLLING DIMENSION OF HIS LIFE AND ACTION

In the biographies of our Founder, references to this virtue are numerous and quite rich in content. Thus Father Vincent Vasey, in *Chaminade: Another Portrait*, frames his presentation with two chapters devoted largely to Father Chaminade as a man of faith³. In the first, in which he describes "The Climate", he emphasizes how faith was for him a response to the challenges provoked by the thinkers of his time.

. . . Father Chaminade could be said to have come totally under the influence of *philosophisme* or the deist philosophy of the eighteenth century. Philosophism denied the supernatural; Chaminade affirmed holiness to be a life springing from faith of the heart in Christ. Philosophism exalted reason; Chaminade honored faith. [...] What Diderot proposed as thesis, Chaminade contradicted by his antithesis.⁴

In the same book, in the last chapter, a synthesis of his commentary on the life of the Founder, Father Vasey writes: "The center of [Father Chaminade's] life was faith. ... He saw faith not only as the source, root, and beginning of justification, but of all apostolate."⁵

Many other authors have commented on this attitude of the Founder. In addition to being the basis of an apostolic method, faith was for him the foundation of his experience of God and of his spiritual life. This virtue was so deeply rooted in him that all the accounts about him refer to it. Thus, the long section of *The Spirit of Our Foundation* devoted to the faith opens with a series of testimonies on this subject; here are two of them:

The spirit of faith, along with devotion to the Blessed Virgin, constituted his whole life.⁶

"One day when I [Bro. Joseph Meyer] was leaving the Faculty of Letters of Bordeaux, an old man who had assisted at the lecture, just given, stepped up to me, and said inquiringly: 'I presume you are a Brother of Mary? And I am a former Sodalist of your Founder, Father

³ VASEY, Vincent, *Chaminade. Another Portrait*, (Dayton: Marianist Resources Commission, 1987), pp. 366. The thirteenth and final chapter is entitled: "Chaminade, Man of Faith."

⁴ Vasey, 2-3.

⁵ Id., 302.

⁶ Recollections of Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament, Daughter of Mary, *SF I*, no. 188.

Chaminade. What a man of faith he was! When he spoke on the subject of faith, his resources were well nigh inexhaustible. Oh, what a man of faith!"⁷

2. THE MAN WHO TEACHES FAITH

This other aspect is noticeable from the first years of Blessed Chaminade's life. In his correspondence with Mlle. de Lamourous, before and during his exile in Spain, faith was a frequent topic. He wrote to her on May 27, 1796: "You will conclude your mental prayer by asking God to give you the grace to remain recollected all day and to act solely from motives of faith, etc."⁸ It was such advice that undoubtedly helped Venerable Marie Thérèse to live with such courage through the trials of the Terror. Her counsellor was just sharing his own experience with her.

His writings clearly show that faith was a preoccupation throughout his entire life. In 1992, Fr. Jean-Baptiste Armbruster published his *Ecrits sur la foi*, a book which, in the French edition, contains 610 pages, including 519 of the Founder's writings. These are spread out over all periods of Chaminade's life and touch on all the genres used by him: letters, conferences, preparatory notes, etc. In the introduction to the work, Father Armbruster writes:

All the testimonies agree to affirm how much Father G.-Joseph Chaminade (1761-1850) was a man of the Church who lived and propagated the faith. The texts in which he presents this theological virtue are so numerous that it was necessary to establish precise criteria for the choice of the texts selected and presented in this book.⁹

That is a fine description of the Blessed: "a man of the church who lived and propagated the faith."

3. THE MAN WHO ACTS BOLDLY

Father Chevaux testifies: "A God-fearing man, like the Good Father, weighs everything in the eyes of faith. His way of judging is to see things before God, and then to set them right in the eyes of men."¹⁰ It was this way of doing things that gave him so much audacity. When Chaminade saw clearly how to move forward, it seemed like nothing was going to stop him. For example, he did not hesitate to commit himself to the purchase of large properties without having the money. On this subject he commented to Fr. Lalanne: "I used to borrow, strengthened by my trust in Divine Providence, always calm in that same trust."¹¹ But in the same letter he says:

Without doubt, in the ordinary course of things, we do not act, nor should we act, as if counting on miracles. That would be tempting God. But when we labor at a work which is in the ordinary course of his providence and in the order of our state, it is surely permitted to us, if obstacles arise, to count on the special protection of God, which protection may well appear to us to be miraculous. We can count on this special protection, when what we are doing is specially asked of us by someone who does it with a perfect right to do so.

This distinction between the exceptional and the ordinary is obviously crucial. Faith is not an invitation to recklessness. Putting it into practice requires careful discernment.

Concerning the mission, Blessed Chaminade foresaw immense developments in his work. He announced to his disciples: "God calls us not only to sanctify ourselves but to raise up the faith in France, in Europe, in the whole world." This statement may seem to us to be simply a slight exaggeration, but we must re-

⁷ SF I, No. 186.

⁸ CHAMINADE, Letter 9 of May 27, 1796.

⁹ CHAMINADE G.-Joseph, *Ecrits sur la foi*, ARMBRUSTER, Jean-Baptiste (Ed.), (Paris: Marianistes, 1992), p. 7.

¹⁰ Letter from Father Chevaux to Bro. Dominique Clouzet, Bordeaux, 11 February 1845, quoted in: *G. J. Chaminade, Inquisitio Historica*, (Rome: 1970), p. 238.

¹¹ Letter 735, dated April 18, 1834, to Father Lalanne.

member that when he pronounced these words, during the retreat of 1821, there were only 20 religious at that time, 19 of whom were brothers and one priest.¹² A few years later, William Joseph planned to cover France with normal schools while there were still fewer than 50 religious. Unfortunately, the Revolution of 1830 came along and that beautiful plan collapsed. Chaminade did not look back, did not dream of a hypothetical return of a time of grace: he continued his work and advanced on the other paths that presented themselves to him.

One could see in these proclamations of the Founder simple exaggerations of enthusiasm. But we can also read in them the vision of a man who perceived God's desires and put all his strength into realizing them, without being discouraged by so many obstacles that continued to arise.

4. THE REALISTIC VISIONARY

That inner strength that Father Chaminade acquired by cultivating the faith attracted to him a large number of disciples. He appeared like a rock, an oak tree in the midst of the storm and the uncertain times in which he lived. A young man he accompanied in the post-revolutionary period would say of him: "I have found the priest for whom my heart was seeking. He is a saint, he is my guide, he shall be my model, for I too will be a priest; my resolution is more unshakeable than ever. However, I won't be one as soon as I wish: for these are difficult times."¹³ That interior strength made of William Joseph a sure guide who convinced by the force of his witness and his convictions.

The contrast is great evident in the attitude of two of his closest disciples. Jean-Baptiste Lalanne was an impetuous idealist who often found it hard to resist his sometimes brilliant, but sometimes very reckless impulses. On the other hand, the profound life of faith of Georges Caillet was frequently slowed down by a persnickety prudence. Father Chaminade's faith is audacious because it is based on solid discernment.

5. THE UNWAVERING GUIDE IN THE FACE OF HARDSHIP

In evoking our Founder, we can think of that beautiful image of the anchor which, in the iconography of the first centuries, evoked for Christians, above all hope, but also the stability that this virtue gives to faith: it is based on the promises that will be fully realized only in the hereafter but to which it is already anchored. The Roman catacombs abound with that expressive symbol.

In 1827, Father Chaminade wrote: "I believe that no matter how shaken he may feel, the Institute will stand firm, since God has inspired us to give it such a solid foundation of faith." His foundations were undergoing innumerable trials, but he retained his peace and trust. For example, when a fire destroyed a large part of the recently acquired buildings in Marast, near Besançon, he wrote:

You have learned no doubt of the great accident that has befallen Marast. The good God deigns to strew our labors with sorrows and tribulations, but may his holy name be blessed! In spite of the rage of the demons against the Society of Mary, it is not ceasing to make progress toward a real reform, and by that very fact to strengthen itself. Let us advance, my dear son, against wind and tide! Let us always look with confidence to our protecting Star, and we shall arrive at a safe harbor.¹⁴

Joseph Schellhorn, a renowned novice master, expressed his admiration for the Founder's attitude in the midst of the many difficulties of the early 1830s:

It was certainly most surprising to see Father Chaminade perfectly serene and confident. He was convinced that God would work a miracle, if necessary to rescue the work of Mary. In his vast correspondence of that period it is impossible to detect the least trace of

¹² See CADA, Lawrence J., SM, *Early members of the Society of Mary*, (Dayton: NACMS, 1999), pp. 550-552.

¹³ SIMLER Joseph, *William Joseph Chaminade, Founder of the Marianists*. [1901]. Translated by Joseph Roy. (Dayton: Marianist Resources Commission, 1986), 60.

¹⁴ Letter 1094 of November 25, 1838, to Fr. Leo Meyer.

discouragement. Though he suffered beyond endurance and trembled, "it was only for the souls of his faithless children, not for the Society of Mary."¹⁵

It even seemed that those obstacles would ultimately be an opportunity for the purification and then the strengthening of the congregation. As Father Chaminade himself expressed it: "The Revolution which has come will have served as the winnowing fan of the Lord. Only the good grain will remain."¹⁶

6. A LEGACY FOR OUR PATH

Contemplating our Founder as a man of faith is of great benefit to us and a profound source of inspiration. May we follow such an example and adapt it to our present circumstances!

Chaminade traces out the way for us when he summarizes the identity of the Marianist religious:

This holy state of religious life is simply a constant practice of faith, in all the circumstances of life and in activity of a person with respect to himself, towards his neighbors, and with regard to God. The religious is a person who, believing in God, in Jesus Christ, and in the future life, has resolved to perform henceforth only actions which are a direct and immediate consequence of faith. How easily and surely, then, does this state lead to salvation!¹⁷

That insistence explains the importance that this virtue has taken on in Marianist life, to the point of constituting our motto: *Fortes in fide!* The lives of many of our religious are the living commentary on it and a great quantity of writings are dedicated to it. In recent times, faith is implicitly mentioned in the title of the 2012 Chapter,¹⁸ and still very present in the 2018 Chapter document. So let us continue this journey in the footsteps of our Founder by observing different facets of the faith as he taught us.

II. A VIRTUE FOR ACTION AND LEADERSHIP

In this section I would like to describe several aspects of the practice of faith according to Father Chaminade. Each of them delineates a field of action for our present religious life.

Since it is not a simple repetition of the usual ideas on the subject, his teaching is of great interest to us. If we were to conduct a survey among informed Catholics about what faith evokes for them, we would undoubtedly find two strong ideas: faith is above all a matter of feeling and it is essentially an intimate and interior gift. However, our Founder's point of view is quite different from these two notions. For him, faith is much more related to the intellect than to feelings, and it is above all a virtue for action: it is the driving force behind that action and gives it its true perspective.

This way of presenting the faith is in line with the long litany of men of faith in Chapter 11 of the Letter to the Hebrews. Faith was for each of them an agent of transformation that opened new perspectives and provoked a new way of being or doing. The emblematic example is that of Abraham, who "by faith, ... obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out not knowing where he was going" (Heb 11:8 NRSV). Neither can we forget the faith of Mary "who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Lk 1:45 NRSV) and who, for that reason, set out immediately on a journey that gradually took her from act of faith to act of faith, to the foot of Calvary and to the heart of the community in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ SCHELLHORN Joseph], *Historical Sketch of the Society of Mary*, p. 47, (AGMAR 1910 8).

¹⁶ Letter 574, January 14, 1831. The expression will become more frequent after his resignation in 1841. The Revolution mentioned is that of 1830 which put an end to several important projects of the Founder.

¹⁷ Retreat of 1817, 2nd mental prayer: *CL V.20* [2].

¹⁸ Chaminade's letter to Pope Gregory XVI (1838) highlights the desire of the capitulants to "enliven and rekindle on all sides the divine torch of faith."

The faith taught by Father Chaminade is not primarily a matter of feelings, even if it touches the heart and solicits it. It cannot therefore be confused with piety: the latter precisely needs to be enlightened, nourished, and purified by faith, thus offering an authentic path of Christian life.

Furthermore, as Fr. Vincent Vasey points out, the faith which is, according to the theology of Saint Thomas, an intellectual virtue, is associated in Father Chaminade with the virtue of prudence, also an intellectual virtue. But while faith considers eternal truths, prudence governs the behavior to be adopted or decisions to be made in the midst of contingent events. For Father Chaminade, "grace ... produce[d] in him an outstanding example of a life ruled by faith and an extraordinary example of applying the truths of faith in concrete problems of life by the virtue of prudence."¹⁹ One of the most remarkable aspects of Father Chaminade's testimony and teaching lay in his ability to put faith at the service of action.

1. A PRACTICAL FAITH

"Practical faith" is an expression that was dear to the heart of Father Chaminade. It is not exclusive to him, but it occupies a particularly important place in his thinking. That highlights the specific element of his conception of faith. It is not an inner and hidden reality of an intimate nature: on the contrary, it is a virtue for action. It is intended to be translated into precise, visible, measurable actions. It is difficult to gauge a person's faith, but one can do it for their actions.

For Father Chaminade, the expression "practical faith" was particularly frequent during the years of the foundation of the Society of Mary, at the time of creating the particular lifestyle of this "new Order." During the foundation retreat in September-October 1817, each of the participants was invited to decide whether or not to begin this foundation and whether or not to enter it. It was then that Father Chaminade chose to speak, first of all, of faith (1st Meditation) and of "the necessity of practical faith for salvation" (2nd Meditation).²⁰ Let us read an excerpt from the 2nd Meditation as transcribed by Jean-Baptiste Lallanne; it explains Father Chaminade's thinking better than I could do and it plunges us into the heart of our charismatic origins:

"1st Rarity of practical faith. Few people in the world believe with a speculative faith; even fewer with a practical faith. How differently we would act if we would put our faith into practice, with respect both to mysteries and to morality. For example, what an idea of our greatness, if we believed in the Incarnation. What a horror of sin, if we believed in the Redemption. What respect for church buildings, if we believed in the real presence of Jesus in the most Blessed Sacrament. As to morality, with what dispositions we would approach the Sacrament of Penance, if we believed in what takes place between God and the sinner. How we would practice charity, if we had the practical faith of the precept our adorable Master has given us."²¹

Such a discourse excited the hearts of our first brothers in the Marianist life, since they decided, at the conclusion of that preaching, to found the Society of Mary, now convinced, like the Founder, that "the religious state is in a special way a state of faith."²² In the name of faith, they were taking a huge step forward.

Practical faith continued to occupy a significant place in Father Chaminade's teaching during the first years of the foundation, for example in the retreat of 1818 which concluded with the vows of the first brothers. And that enthusiasm did not wane; on the cover of his notebook, Jean-Baptiste Collineau wrote: "Laus Deo" (Praise be to God).

¹⁹ Vasey, *Chaminade. Another Portrait*, 301. :

²⁰ Lallanne's notes (CL V.20), we are fortunate to have, in addition to the notes of Fr. Lallanne (CL V.20), the preparation scheme of Father Chaminade himself (CL V.19) from which this quotation is taken.

²¹ Retreat of 1817, 2nd Meditation, CL V.20 [1]-[2].

²² Retreat of 1817, notes of Father Chaminade, CL V.19 [1]. This is the subtitle of the same Meditation that we have just read in the notes of young Lallanne.

Then the topic becomes more discreet until it almost disappears. It reappeared in force in 1844, this time in the correspondence of an 83-year-old man. What was at stake then was nothing less than the fidelity of the General Council to God's call. Father Chaminade, who had resigned from his role as Superior General in 1841, accused them of acting, no longer according to faith, but according to simple human reason often obscured by the absence of that supernatural light. For example, he wrote to Archbishop Donnet:

[I must] prevent the entry of false doctrine into the General Administration of the Society of Mary, an erroneous doctrine which would denature the spirit of practical faith. It is this spirit of practical faith which the Holy See endorsed when it approved the Society of Mary, Without this spirit, the Society can be of little use to the Church. The Society of Mary would degenerate very quickly if its General Administration were guided by another spirit (...)?²³

The Founder's insistence is impressive; this aspect was for him at the heart of the spirit of his work and justified its existence and the approval of the Church.

And so what about us? What about our faith: is it a practical faith? "Few people in the world believe with a speculative faith, let alone a practical faith." And we, since it is one of our own riches, do we wish to be of this small number? Faithful to that spirit, our *Rule* invites us to live the faith in our communities (RL 3), in the image of that of Jerusalem (RL 9). Faith is a source of commitment and solidarity (RL 72). We are called to prolong in our activity the faith of Mary (RL 65). All this points to a faith that is expressed not only in prayer, but also in life and action.

2. A FRESH LOOK

Article 4 of our Rule tells us: "We strive to become men of faith and to ponder all things in the light of revelation. By faith we see how God is at work in human history and in the events of our daily lives." One of the main fruits of faith will be the acquisition of this new outlook.

Without faith, we are guided only by the information we receive from our intelligence or from the feelings that accompany it. Intelligence opens vast horizons to us, but the deeper meaning of facts and realities can easily escape it. There is certainly an emotional intelligence, and current pedagogy has done well to give it a place that was probably too neglected until now. But emotions are very insufficient to enlighten us, they are fleeting, often difficult to analyze, and when they come to dominate they can even distort our perception of reality. It seems, however, that nowadays, more and more personal and collective opinions, and consequently decisions, find their source and justification in emotions. That situation sometimes becomes tyrannical and unreasonable. It is, then, urgent to restore the analytical coolness of intelligence to its rightful place. For the believer, faith will then play an invaluable role, opening him to an inner observation of reality and guiding him in his choices. It is a difficult and demanding art, but one of extreme importance and without doubt one of the greatest contributions of Christians to our world. When emotions are tempered by intelligence, itself enlightened by faith, the person finds a much greater balance and becomes much more stable in his behavior and choices.

Christ reproached His disciples for not knowing how to discern the deep meaning of events. "When it is evening, you say, 'it will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red. And threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times." (Mt 16:2-3). In a like manner, in Letter 725 (from which comes the title of this Circular), Chaminade reproached Father Chevaux for having forgotten the true meaning of his mission, for seeing only the outer rind of it:

The education of youth, whatever form it may take, is certainly not the end you must have proposed to yourself in consecrating yourselves entirely to God, under the protection of the

²³ Letter 1337, September 27, 1844, to Archbishop Donnet.

August Mary. Teaching is but a means to make use of to fulfill our mission, to introduce everywhere, so to say, the spirit of faith and of religion and to multiply Christians.

In the letter of August 24, 1839, he warned the brothers of the risk of behaving like “those who work in the educational factories of our century”:

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.

We need to learn to see with the eyes of faith in order to access the deep and real meaning of the facts. Father Chaminade advises us:

Acting in faith, practicing the faith, living by faith. This means considering all things which present themselves to us, whether natural and supernatural, in the knowledge God has of them and which God gives us by faith. Then, to examine and judge them according to this view in order to conform our lives to them.²⁴

Addressing the Christians of Rome last December 31, Pope Francis invited them to discover God everywhere, far beyond the churches:

“This presence [in the city, even in our city of Rome] must not be contrived but found, uncovered.” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 71). It is we who must ask God for the grace of new eyes capable of a “contemplative gaze, that is to say, a gaze of faith that discovers that God who dwells in his houses, in his streets, in his squares” (*ibid.*, no. 71). (...) I would like our view of the city of Rome to grasp things from God's point of view. (...) To have time for others, to dialogue, to recognize with a contemplative gaze the presence and action of God in their lives, to witness to the new life of the Gospel through deeds rather than words is truly a service of love that changes reality.

Let us ask for the grace to learn to open the eyes of faith: on the world, on the Church, on the Society of Mary, on its life and mission, on my community and my brothers.

3. A RESPONSE TO INDIFFERENCE

It is striking to note how Father Chaminade relates what he considers to be “the great reigning heresy . . . religious indifference” (Letter of August 24, 1839), and the privileged place he attributes to faith at the heart of the identity and action of religious men and women.

The situation in his country was a cause of great suffering for him. He often spoke of his “unfortunate homeland.”²⁵ The use of that term was not limited to the first few years after his return from exile; it continued, even when we would be more ready to think rather of improvements in the situation. The good done did not hide from him the immensity of what remained to be done and the danger that so many people still incurred when they distanced themselves from God. He also undoubtedly noted that the adherence to God of many believers was only superficial and did not touch the depths of the person, his desires, ideas, and decisions. It was then that Chaminade felt the urgency of a work completely inspired by faith as his own responsibility.

²⁴ Chaminade, *Instruction Notes*, loose sheets, “The Life of Faith”: CL II.56 [1a].

²⁵ He used, for example, that expression in Letter 52, to Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon in 1814, in a commentary on his actions since his return from exile. See also Letters 171 (1821), 198 (1822), 210 (1822), 234 (1823), 293 (1824), . . . 616 (1832), etc. . . .

During the retreat of 1821, not long after the foundation, he commented at the same time on the sad situation of France and on his admiration for the generosity of God who had raised up the Marianist religious congregations in response to that tragedy. Sorrow and enthusiasm were mingled.

We are firmly persuaded that God has raised up the Institute of Mary! But if we consider in what times God has established it, what end God wishes to propose to it, we will discover some very grand ideas. Let us cast a glance on our times. Good God, what frightful darkness, what horrifying depravity, what desolate indifference to salvation! In preceding centuries corruption had found its way only into the heart. But today the mind and the heart are gangrenous, and the illness of the mind is incomparably more dangerous and more incurable than that of the heart.

In this state of affairs, in these times of desolation when the generation only now coming to life and those which will follow risk being devoured by irreligion and impiety, God has founded the Institute of Mary and given it a fitting spirit. This spirit is the interior spirit.²⁶

This reflection is very instructive. We generally fail to consider the spiritual life as a part of the apostolic life, and yet that is what our Founder proposes to us. This gives another dimension to an activity that we perceive as being rather hidden, invisible, to the point that we are sometimes inclined to relativize its importance.

That was clearly not the opinion of our Founder. He wrote in 1831:

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. 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.²⁷

Or again, in 1838, to Pope Gregory XVI, summing up in one sentence almost forty years of activity:

In order to oppose a powerful dam to the torrent of evil, Heaven inspired me, at the beginning of this century, to ask the Holy See for letters patent as Apostolic Missionary, in order to enliven or rekindle everywhere the divine torch of faith. . . .

The divine inspiration of his work was a touchstone of Blessed Chaminade's vision. That is why he would not stop saying it, in season and out of season. That conviction of faith is the same foundation on which he wants us to build the Society of Mary and the Family of Mary today. Withdraw that conviction and there is left only a beautiful NGO without a great future. That certainty of the Founder cannot be ignored.²⁸ It follows that we have a particular duty to listen to God's expectations so that the work with which he associates us does not become ours alone. It is also up to us to find creative ways to respond to the current calls, especially to the multiple forms that the indifference of our time takes. Father Chaminade deeply regretted: "How little Christian education there is! The emerging generation finds so few teachers who are committed to forming the mind and heart for Christianity! What remedies to oppose to so many evils?"²⁹

²⁶ Retreat of 1821, 18th Meditation, *CL VI.19* [62-63].

²⁷ Letter 575, dated Thursday, January 20, 1831, to Father Lalanne.

²⁸ Klobb, preaching the *Retreat at Fayt*, which was a dazzling synthesis of the charismatic work of Father Chaminade, entitled his first conference: The "Society of Mary, a Work of God," with three sections: 1. Repeated Affirmations of the Founder; 2. Unshakeable Affirmation of the Founder Showed; 3. The History of the Society of Mary Is Our Guarantee of It." See KLOBB Charles, *The Spirit of the Society. Retreat of Fayt*, (Rome: 2012) [Translated by J. Stefanelli from *La Gerbe*, vol. 9, 1999, pp. 8-12].

²⁹ *Constitutions of 1839*, art. 339.

In contrast to this concern, in another article (art. 361) it states: ". . . to primary teaching, the class of lettered laymen . . . is charged with bringing to more than three fourths of the population the principles of faith along with human knowledge. Oh, what good a religious teacher, truly animated with the zeal of his state, is able to do!

The severity of Father Chaminade's discourse on his time may annoy us. He was certainly marked by the times, but let us be attentive to the deep missionary ardor that dwelt in his heart and which motivated these exclamations of pain: the language is antique, but the questioning is very current. Let us rejoice to see his action, always positive, his patience, his perseverance, his desire to always go forward without looking back. Father Chaminade was a man of the *Ancien Régime* who committed himself resolutely and without nostalgia to modern times.

Today, let us too be men of faith devoured by the desire not to let anyone miss the opportunity to meet God. May our creativity help us to make our lives and activities an adequate response to the new indifference of our times.

4. REKINDLING THE TORCH OF FAITH EVERYWHERE: THE VOW OF TEACHING THE FAITH

A direct consequence of what we have just meditated on is offered to us in the vow of teaching the faith. The latter was present from the origins of the Society of Mary, and continued there explicitly for four decades, with some variations in its formulation. During his perpetual vows in 1818, Jean Lalanne (*sic*) promised to "work . . . at the teaching of Christian practices and the Catholic faith."³⁰ The vow disappeared in 1865, when the Society of Mary was recognized by the Holy See.³¹ It was suppressed for two reasons: because the Congregation of Bishops and Religious wished to reduce the number of additional vows pronounced at that time in many congregations, and because the officials there believed that the object of that vow was already assured by the description of the privileged apostolate of the Society.

What is important to deduce from the 1865 decision is that, even if this vow was formally suppressed, it was with the idea that its spirit would endure without modification in the life and objectives of the congregation. We no longer pronounce it formally, but its spirit remains. For this reason, let us not forget this original heritage so very dear to our Founder. It would be very important and instructive to study the current extensions of this vow in our mission. I shall now confine myself to mentioning just a few aspects of it, very briefly.

We know that the letter of August 24, 1839, devotes a large section, the third and last of the text, to this vow. It bears the title: "What else the two Orders of Mary have as special and exclusively theirs in the works common to other Institutes." Here is what Father Chaminade tells us about this vow:

- each new order has received from God a mission appropriate for its time (he gives examples);
- "we have been called by Mary herself to help her with all our strength in her struggle against the great heresy of our times";
- hence the call from Mary saying: "Do whatever he tells you"; she invites us not to exclude any work or any recipient, but to give preference to the poor and the young.

The vow of teaching was therefore a missionary vow, with a Marian spirit, committing us to teach the Christian faith and morals to the greatest number as a remedy for indifference.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is what we continue to do today, even without this vow. But it is important to remember this original idea in order to continue to keep its spirit and consciously translate it into our action. Being aware of this is a strong support. The spirit of this vow allows us to say that our mission:

- finds its source in our privileged bond with Mary, Mother of Christ, and with Jesus, Son of God who became the son of Mary for the salvation of mankind;

³⁰ See *CL V.28*, p. 522.

³¹ "Making the vow of teaching must be removed from the Constitutions. It will suffice that the members have as their purpose to instruct youth according to the method expressed in the Constitutions": 16th animadversion, of June 17, 1865. Cf. DÉLAS, Jean-Claude, *History of the Constitutions of the Society of Mary*, Monograph Series Document No. 19, (Dayton: Marianist Resources Commission, April 1975), 115.

- It is a response to the sufferings of our times, especially with regard to faith;
- It gives a special place to young people and the poor;
- It has a tendency towards universality.

Two consequences follow from this last point:

- Enhanced adaptability: we are not bound to a single missionary means or an exclusive type of recipient.
- Multiplication: we prefer to choose the apostolic means that reach the greatest number.

However, these aspects are moderated by other traditional elements in the Society of Mary. One is the importance of the person-to-person relationship (for example, there is a practice, probably never codified, that advised limiting the growth of an institution to the borderline point where the director could still know the name of each student). Another moderating element is community: not to strain the unity of the community by the multiplicity of apostolates or their exaggerated extension.

I would like to add that adaptability and universality are extended and expressed in missionary availability. Let us recall the famous Article 244 of the *Constitutions of 1839*: "What he does today, what he will do tomorrow, in what place he will pass his life, and how long it will last, nowise disquiet him; indifferent for all the rest, he has only one thing at heart -- it is to do always and everywhere God's will and pleasure." It is not difficult to understand that without this availability, universality is a decoy. However, every superior knows how difficult this availability is today! Universality must not be limited by our lack of availability, but neither can it be dispersed in a multiplicity of individual personal projects. Let's think about this carefully because the consequences are very great.

Coming from these reflections, and contemplating our current situation, it is good to ask ourselves a few questions:

- What priority is given to the teaching of faith in our activity? Just how and with what means are we working on it? Are those means adapted to our time, to our context, and to the persons we are addressing? Do they allow an authentic experience of faith and a personal encounter with Christ? When there is religious pluralism, will each one find an opportunity to deepen his or her religious experience?³²
- How can we create the conditions for the possibility of faith? What specific capacities do we need to develop in order to allow each one to have a real possibility of accessing faith: attention, silence, listening, concentration, interiority . . .? Do our educational and our pastoral care touch intelligence, sensitivity, and faith as well?³³
- In a Church called to be "out into the world," how can we reach out to those who are far from the Church and offer to them also a possible access to faith?
- To meet these challenges, do we need to adapt certain aspects of our mission?

Let us also be encouraged by our Founder:

It is a great consolation for a religious to know that the fruits of all his efforts, of his labors and of his economy are employed in works, all of which concur in establishing the kingdom of Jesus Christ by propagating the faith."³⁴

³² Cf. XXXIV^o General Chapter (2012): no. 33 calls us to reflect on our faith proposal in a context of "religious diversity." This is in fact a situation that is becoming more and more frequent.

³³ The balance between faith, reason, and affectivity is an important criterion for pastoral ministry. Addressing the intelligence or faith in a way that does not affect the person's feelings will lead to rather diminished results. But addressing affectivity to the detriment of faith and reason is an open door to manipulation. In terms of human or spiritual accompaniment, the consequences of such failures can be very serious.

³⁴ *Constitutions of 1839*, art. 371. The preceding articles have explained that all the brothers contribute to this result, including the working brothers; we can also include the elderly or sick brothers.

5. COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

We read in our *Rule*, Article 3: "We come together to form communities of faith, and we aim to share the same faith with our brothers and sisters." The two dimensions of faith, lived and proclaimed, are intrinsically linked to the community. The *Rule* then goes on to expand on this statement. Chapter 4 of the *Rule* is entitled: "A Community of Faith" and Chapter 5, "A Community in Mission." The latter opens with Article 63, which reads: "We are committed to the multiplication of Christians, forming persons and communities in a lived faith expressed in service to the needs of the times." This personal and community proclamation finds its culmination when it generates other communities, themselves ready to live and proclaim the faith.

The two aspects: living the faith and spreading the faith are linked, like a diastole-systole movement. It is simple logic to think that one must live what one proclaims. From the very beginning Father Chaminade had attributed "two main objects" to our congregation: "1. With the grace of God, to raise each of its members to religious perfection; 2. . . . to labor in the world at the salvation of souls" ³⁵ More broadly, he invited communities, both lay and religious, to be centers of evangelical life in order "to prove by the fact that today, as in the primitive Church, the Gospel can be practiced in all the rigor of the spirit and of the letter." ³⁶

Living the gospel and witnessing to it is nearly one and the same reality: living the faith and witnessing to it, especially through community. This is a way of thinking about the mission dear to Blessed Chaminade; for him, the individual is admired but considered as an isolated case, while the community convinces. Faithful to this conviction, our *Rule* states:

The community itself is a primary instrument to fulfill our mission. We know that the quality of our life has greater impact than our words. Therefore, together we seek ways to bear a living witness to our shared faith (RL 67).

It couldn't be clearer. The consequences are far-reaching. Faith is the profound inspiration that unites and transfigures the life and mission of the community. Without it we have no reason to exist or work with each other and differences of opinion or personalities will take over. This is one of the frequent causes of conflict between brothers, between brothers and superiors, between brothers and those in charge of works. When these tensions arise, let us not forget to have recourse to faith without limiting ourselves to the equally necessary techniques of human management. Listening to or observing some of these situations, I cannot silence within myself the question: but where is our faith? According to the call of the Gospel: "For if you love those who love you... if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (Mt 5:46a, 47).

Today it is evident that we need to extend all this reflection to the entire Marianist Family. We are called to live the faith together in order to witness to it together. What is said in Article 67 is true for the whole Family. The document published by the World Council of the Marianist Family in 2013 on "The Common Mission" states:

In a synthetic way we could say that our "common mission" is precisely to constitute ourselves and to live as a Family, in fraternal communion, within the diversity and plurality of our vocations and ministries. (...) from the joyful and encouraging experience of our fraternal communion, according to the plan of our Founders, our presence and action as a Family in the Church and in the world have as their fundamental objective to witness to this faith, the faith of Mary, to transmit it and to form to the faith those around us, with particular attention to youth.

³⁵ *Constitutions of 1839*, art. 1.

³⁶ Letter 388, dated February 15, 1826, to Father Noailles. The same text is quoted in the Chapter document of 2018 in No. 5.

This text is taken up again as an inspiring element in the Introduction to the Chapter document of 2018, in No. 4, entitled "The Common Mission of the Marianist Family."

I would also like to mention the beautiful text written by the Marianist Lay Communities at their international gathering in Philadelphia in 2001:

We are a community of faith. 1.6. We consider the community as a sacrament of God's presence and as a place where faith and love are manifested among the members.

We are a community that builds communities. 3.1. The privileged axis of our action for evangelization and for a real social transformation is to invite and help others to live their faith in community.

The General Chapter of 2018 reminds us that "our way of being prophets is, above all, as a community of witnesses who must bring to the world a parable of the Kingdom" (7). The Family is a place for sharing experiences of faith (16), prayer, formation, celebration, and mission, "building an inclusive community that is visible and attractive to those around us" (24).

Where is our community faith lived and proclaimed?

6. FAITH AND LEADERSHIP

If the spirit of faith is to animate all members, it is particularly important that it stimulate those who have responsibility for leadership. Father Chaminade insisted on that repeatedly; he saw it as an indispensable condition for the life of the congregation. He wrote, for example, to Fr. Lalanne:

The Society of Mary will attain the end and purpose of its institution only insofar as its Superiors – at least – will conduct themselves according to the spirit of faith.³⁷

That is necessary so that those in charge can be enlightened by this inner light, but also because their example stimulates the whole.

You yourself, my dear son, work at the practice of what you will teach, for the example of the first Head has a very great influence on all the members.³⁸

He never ceased exhorting superiors to cultivate this virtue. From among his many messages on this theme, let's listen to two of them:

A work of God, a work in the supernatural order, must be driven by views, by motives of the same order. I know this is your way of thinking, so I will not insist on it, no matter how important it may be. But from there for you, my dear Son, arises the happy obligation to ask the Lord unceasingly for an increase in faith, and to accustom yourselves to act only in the spirit of faith. Soon then, this spirit of faith will be in you a spirit of trust in God, a spirit of zeal, a spirit of strength and generosity, etc., and you will soon be able to see that this spirit of faith will be in you. . . . If you conduct yourself according to this rule, if you put your glory and your hope, not in human wisdom, but in the views of faith in Jesus Christ, our divine master, his peace and mercy will rest with us.³⁹

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?⁴⁰

One of the most profound causes of the conflict that opposed Father Chaminade to the General Council after his resignation in 1841 was on this theme. Father Vasey writes: "The most threatening and debilitat-

³⁷ Letter 1047 of May 1, 1838, to Father Lalanne.

³⁸ Letter 1117, February 12, 1839, to Brother Clouzet.

³⁹ Letter 271, February 26, 1824, to Father Caillet.

⁴⁰ Letter 692, June 17, 1833, to Father Chevaux.

ing of abuses he cried out against, the one which called forth his loudest protests, was the government of the Society by principles other than those of faith.”⁴¹ The Founder believed that:

The spirit of the three Orders⁴² is the spirit of faith in Jesus Christ, God-Man, applied especially to the government of the three Orders approved in this sense by the Holy See. They would be deformed by a General Administration which would rely heavily on reason in its government, without regard to the intuitions which it received from faith.”⁴³

Or again:

I am convinced that the Society of Mary will not do any real good for religion unless faith directs the exterior means used by reason.⁴⁴

More exactly, he considered that that condition was no longer being observed. He expressed it forcefully:

I see the Society headed for destruction; it has been corrupted; it is no longer the Society which was approved by the Holy See. What people can say against me—and a great deal has been said—is unimportant, provided my three Orders do not lose the spirit of practical faith.⁴⁵

[I must] prevent the entry of false doctrine into the General Administration of the Society of Mary, an erroneous doctrine which would denature the spirit of practical faith. It is this spirit of practical faith which the Holy See endorsed when it approved the Society of Mary. Without this spirit, the Society can be of little use to the Church. The Society of Mary would degenerate very quickly if its General Administration were guided by another spirit The Christian, the religious, and with all the more reason a member of the Society of Mary, are in a supernatural state; doubtless they are obliged to guide themselves by reason, but reason illumined by the far superior light of faith. . . .

That a religious, a member of the Society of Mary, could think and act in accordance with such a system [according to reason alone]! What an iniquity! Has the opposition not been following this system for almost four years?⁴⁶

The Founder's concern to defend faith as an indispensable inspiration for leadership deserves special attention today. The many challenges we face make it particularly necessary. The task is difficult and we must constantly consult God, listen to the calls received from the world and the Church, and above all discern what needs to be done. As all the preliminary inquiries prior to the appointment of a new Superior of a Unit reveal, he is called in a special way by the brothers to be a man of faith. He is therefore asked to cultivate his faith as an essential part of his response to the call addressed to him. Far from diverting him from his responsibilities, it will allow him to exercise them more in accordance with God's will.

The *Rule* tells us that “in exercising authority, Marianist superiors call on motivations of faith” (RL 46). “The Superior General . . . must constantly seek from God the wisdom, the mercy, and the strength that are necessary for his office.” (RL 7.44). More than any other, superiors are called to “become men of faith and to ponder all things in the light of revelation,” men who through “faith [can] see how God is at work in human history and in the events of our daily lives.” (RL 4). Without that, how can we do God's work? On this appreciation of the role of faith in leadership depends part of the vitality of each Unit and, consequently, of the whole Society of Mary.

It is for each of us, superiors, to ask ourselves: “Where is my faith?”

⁴¹ VASEY, *Chaminade. Another Portrait*, 302-303.

⁴² These "three Orders" are the Society of Mary, the Daughters of Mary, and the latter's Third Order Regular, born in Auch in 1836.

⁴³ Letter 1313 of August 18, 1844, to Father Caillet.

⁴⁴ Letter 1333, September 25, 1844, to Bishop Mathieu.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Letter 1337, September 27, 1844, to Archbishop Donnet. The term "opposition" refers to the then General Council.

III. STRENGTHENING THE INNER MAN: "INCREASE OUR FAITH!"

Since faith is so important in our life and activity, it is appropriate to remind ourselves of the principal ways in which we are invited to develop it according to our Marianist tradition.

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN LIVES BY FAITH

That is a statement that often comes up in the writings of Father Chaminade.⁴⁷ For him, the righteous man is also the saint. This sanctity is manifested in particular by the fullness of faith, by the fact that faith involves his whole being: his thoughts, since he opens his mind to the knowledge of God; his feelings, since he loves God; his decisions, since, because of what he understands and what he loves, he will commit all his will and action to the service of God. The expression, "the righteous man lives by faith" comes from the Greek version of the prophet Habakkuk (Ha 2:4 gr); it is used most often by Father Chaminade in reference to the Letter to the Romans (1:7), but also to its use in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38.

If the saint - who is certainly, in his thinking, also a missionary - is characterized by faith, how can this fullness of faith be achieved? Our Founder, always very practical, not only indicated the goal, he also taught the way of the journey.

Here I will describe five moments of this journey: instruction, the development of faith in the presence of God; acts of faith; prayer - a little more developed because of its importance - and formation in the life of faith.

1. UNDERSTANDING IN ORDER TO BELIEVE: RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

The steps described now are predominantly spiritual, but the intellectual dimension nevertheless has an important place in this itinerary. Father Chaminade was convinced that one of the great obstacles to faith was religious ignorance. How can we believe what we don't know or understand? That would be obscurantism or manipulation. Conversely, religious study contributes to the growth of faith. This explains the importance of instruction in his work, from the foundation of lay groups and then in the successive stages marked by other foundations or apostolic initiatives.

Ignorance being one of the main enemies of the spiritual growth of young people and adults, religious teachings were at the heart of the life of the Sodality of the Immaculate in Bordeaux. Every Sunday there was a time for formation. The homilies that Father Chaminade himself gave in the morning at Mass and in the evening during the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, were consistent. The preparation of topics by the members themselves enabled them to learn how to present the content of their faith clearly and to know how to publicly defend its validity. Because these sessions were public, they had a formative, apostolic, and even missionary impact beyond the members.

One of the instructions, undated⁴⁸, given by the Founder to the laity deals with this subject: how study allows "strengthening ourselves in faith" and even "working at expanding your faith." With pastoral realism, the conference concludes: "Studying our religion and gaining pure thoughts from the reading of good

⁴⁷ See, for example, Letter 134, dated February 18, 1820, to Mother de Trenquelléon :

"I am not sufficiently informed to know whether they based their decision upon very natural and human reasons or only upon principles of faith and in its light. In communities it is a great evil when the heads make more of the judgments of natural and too human prudence than of the decisions of supernatural and entirely divine prudence. Let us never forget this beautiful saying: *The just man lives by faith.*"

⁴⁸ "Conferences on Faith," *CL III.154*, pp. 425-426.

books -this is where we must begin. Having the knowledge of every truth followed by the practice of that truth, is where we must finish.”

Let us also remember that the commitment to education will have as its objective to prevent young people from contaminating ideas that deny them access to faith. Father Chaminade summed up to Pope Gregory XVI, in 1838, the reason for the commitment of his foundations to education:

I have believed before God . . . that it was necessary to found two new orders . . . who 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 subjects, especially for those classes of people most numerous and most abandoned.”⁴⁹

A prospectus composed in 1829 for the Ecole Normale de Saint-Remy, specifies, among the objectives of that institution:

4th. Religious instruction is not neglected. Besides the letter of the Catechism that is made to be learned and understood, the young people are given quite extensive and precise notions about the history of religion and its proofs, to do away with the prejudices of ignorance and to prevent the errors so often associated with ill-instructed minds.⁵⁰

We know that, according to our *Rule*, "our primary objective is formation in faith" (RL 71) and that "For us, education is a privileged means of formation in faith. Through this means, we aim to sow, cultivate, and strengthen the Christian spirit and help it flourish in the human race." (RL 74). That is why "The apostolate of education is a privileged means for the Society of Mary to carry out its mission." (RL 5.10).

It begins with our attention to our own formation that will enable us to achieve such goals, giving witness to an enlightened and integrated faith. We know the importance of initial or continuing formation, but also how difficult it is to devote the necessary time to it. Seen from the point of view of faith and its apostolic impact, this challenge takes on a new light. Study allows us to continue to strengthen our faith by giving it a clear and solid intellectual basis: for ourselves too, ignorance or imprecision are obstacles to be overcome. The covenant between faith and reason is a fundamental apostolic requirement. The ideas and thinking of our time require sufficient study to discern the good, to welcome it, and the bad, to set it aside, with full knowledge of the facts. Many widely reported errors are based on erroneous foundations or unsubstantiated reasoning, and their success often stems from the failure of many to point out their logical inconsistencies. As much as we have to admit a legitimate diversity of opinions, it is not fair to let ideas circulate without a proven intellectual basis, especially when they motivate some of the laws that are binding on all.

Another great challenge today is to know how to free ourselves from what is useless. We are inundated with information, much of which is of very poor quality. The result can be a saturation of our intelligence that leaves no room for serious reflection or study. This is a problem we have to face. Our formation cannot be limited to the consultation of blogs or superficial articles, or be based on television programs. Do I still have time to read, to think, to study? If I don't have such time anymore, what's blocking me? If it's missionary activity, that's not so bad, but, sometimes, aren't there many other reasons that are much more superficial? It always strikes me when I see the library abandoned and neglected in our communities, unused and with no recent additions. If it's because we all access publications in digital form, no problem, but is that the case? And what about the intellectual and even economic capital that a library represents? This is a point that the Office of Education of each Unit and each community must look into carefully.

The Internet can be a wonderful tool for communication, information, or even formation. However, it must also be recognized that the information circulating on many Internet pages can easily capture attention and direct it to topics that are not very deep but which have significant economic benefits for the owners of the pages. Is this what should guide my life, my thinking, my choices, my values? Won't the

⁴⁹ Letter 1076, of September 16, 1838, to Pope Gregory XVI.

⁵⁰ Cf. CHAMINADE, G.-J., Letter 472.

salt lose its savor? Television also sometimes occupies an exaggerated place in the life of certain religious or communities and without enough of a critical eye on the content on offer, because excellent programs can indeed nourish our lives and legitimate rest periods are necessary. But what is my level of need for information and formation? What is at stake in this reflection is not only intellectual, but also spiritual and apostolic. What will we offer through our action if our thinking is overly saturated with fashionable ideas? How will we help others to make the necessary discernment in the face of the current flood of information? Our *Rule* tells us that in order to be bold, we must be watchful (RL 11), in other words, we must discern. There is no doubt that personal and collective reflection on this subject is needed. For this reflection and discernment, what better help than faith?⁵¹

2. FAITH IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

To develop faith, Father Chaminade proposes various means. The one he places first is to acquire faith in the presence of God. In the fourth letter to the Master of Novices,⁵² Father Chaminade writes that, after having often reflected on it, thinking of "the first practice you have to introduce in the novitiate. ... My reflections have always led me to faith in the holy presence of God everywhere." For him this is the introduction to the whole life of faith.

It is indeed a very simple introduction: God is there; God is present in everything and everything is in him; I experience everything in his presence, with infinite respect and love. The growing inner certainty of his presence gradually transforms my life.

Despite its simplicity, this exercise can go a long way. It's already a beautiful doorway to mental prayer. But then, mental prayer will reinforce this experience. One of Father Chaminade's texts is entitled *Mental Prayer of Faith and of The Presence of God*.⁵³ Thus the exercise of the presence of God naturally leads to the prayer of faith which, in turn, deepens this experience and makes it more profound and permanent.

The aim is clear: to unite ever more our life and prayer and, above all, to imbue active life with a contemplative dimension. This corresponds well to the vision of Father Chaminade who wanted the brothers to live a contemplative life in action, uniting the advantages of one and the other.⁵⁴ For this same reason, in explaining the *Method of Prayer on the Creed*, Father Chaminade shows the importance of the meaning of the presence of God in and out of prayer:

. . . the exercise of the presence of God . . . must always accompany mental prayer.

It is assumed that he who does not develop a happy habit of exercising the presence of God will never make mental prayer. . . .

It is therefore necessary to practice often, outside of mental prayer, being conscious of the presence of God, in order to acquire the habit.⁵⁵

When this habit is created, through frequent repetition, the entry into mental prayer is without any difficulty because:

⁵¹ The Constitutions of 1891, in a beautiful article, show how faith unifies the various modes of knowledge by making it a source of instruction. Art. 302 : "By faith, [the professed] attains to the heroic exercise of the virtues of his state (Heb 11); by it, the divine mind, the mind of Christ, is produced and developed in him (1 Cor 2:16); by it, he becomes a man of prayer and of mental prayer. Every day he discovers in a brighter light and tastes with new enjoyment God in His word and in His works. Holy Scripture, the mysteries of religion, the examples and teachings of the saints, the wonders of the supernatural world, the sight of nature, the most ordinary and the most common things, all serve as a means of bringing him close to God, and all serve as an inspiration and a subject for prayer and mental prayer."

⁵² CL VII.17 [19] ff.

⁵³ *Writings on Prayer* 373-399 = CL VI.80.

⁵⁴ *Constitutions of 1839*, Art. 2: The "Little Society . . . wishes, as God will help it, to combine zeal with self-denial, work with prayer, and by combining the advantages of the active life with those of the contemplative life, to achieve the ends of both."

⁵⁵ CL VII.34 [27], "Method of Prayer on the Creed," 547. The same text can be found in the *Writings on Prayer*, 560.

In this happy state, the soul, accustomed to and as if familiar with the thought of God's presence, renews itself with the greatest ease, as soon as it enters a church or wants to engage in the exercise of mental prayer.⁵⁶

This exercise is a response to Christ's call to his disciples: pray at all times (Lk 21:36). Finding a way to respond to this demand fueled the spiritual search of a great number of monks and hermits from the first centuries of Christianity; it still inspired our Founder's seeking.

3. ACTS OF FAITH: AS IF HE SAW THE INVISIBLE...

Another practice advocated by Father Chaminade is the multiplication of acts of faith. This practice can prolong the previous one, but it also has its own value for strengthening the life of faith.

Faith is a theological virtue and, as such, a gift from God. However, like all virtues, it is also through exercise that it develops. Father Chaminade recommended "never to begin any action before first having made some act of faith—to renew yourself in the presence of God and to offer him the action in question."⁵⁷

He also recommended the multiplication of acts of faith during mental prayer as an adequate means to enter progressively into prayer but also to welcome interiorly the truths meditated upon.

Chaminade's concern was, here again, to strengthen the contemplative dimension of ordinary life, uniting mental prayer and daily life. He wanted to help the religious to live more and more in an atmosphere of faith. For that reason, among the resolutions taken in the course of the mental prayer are the acts of faith that one feels called to pronounce during the day:

In the beginning we must increase our fervor or support our good will by fixing the number of acts of faith or aspirations to God which we wish to make during the day or at each hour of the day. Determine some of these principal actions to be performed in a true spirit of faith, increase them little by little, render an account to ourselves of our fidelity in observing the practices that we have imposed upon ourselves. . . .⁵⁸

One act of faith that was particularly encouraged was faith in eternal life. This is practically the first recommendation that Father Chaminade transmits to his correspondent in what is usually called the *Letters to a Master of Novices*. In the first of these, he writes:

Credo vitam aeternam. The joy of eternal life must engrave itself profoundly upon all those who enter this holy militia [of religious life]. What battles they will need to endure! But those who struggle well, like athletes of Jesus Christ their divine leader, will be assured of that crown of glory which will never fade. . . .

Consequently, my respectable Son, I invite you, to focus almost all your instructions, conferences, and exhortations on faith in eternal life.⁵⁹

Naturally, this recommendation today encounters a cultural context very different from that of our Founder; this probably makes it more difficult to put it into practice. Nevertheless, by that very fact, this difficulty reveals the current tendency to forget this perspective of human existence as belonging to a transcendent reality. This is particularly true of countries in the northern hemisphere, probably because longer life expectancy and favorable living conditions make eternity less desirable, but also because the acceleration of the daily pace leaves little time for reflection on such matters. One of the prophetic dimensions of religious life, however, is to bring to light from now on certain dimensions of life that will only be fully manifested in the hereafter.

⁵⁶ CL VII.34 [53], "Method of Prayer on the Creed" = *Writings on Prayer* 569b.

⁵⁷ Letter 493, December 17, 1829, to Bro. Augustin Perriguet.

⁵⁸ "Oraison de foi et de présence de Dieu", EP VI.80 [16].

⁵⁹ First letter to a Master of Novices, in CL VII.17 [4]-[5].

The practice of acts of faith can easily be adapted to one's personal and community situation. I can multiply these acts to develop my faith in a reality that needs to grow in me, either because I perceive its personal and apostolic importance and I would like to strengthen it, or because I understand that it is currently deficient in my life.⁶⁰

In this spirit, I can, for example, express my faith in the presence of God in our midst, in my community in the lives of my brothers and in myself, in my students, in such and such a difficult person, in the life and activity of the Society of Mary, in the variety of movements and congregations, in the poor, suffering, or abandoned person. . . . I can multiply the acts of faith in the effectiveness of prayer or of listening to the Word of God or of proclaiming the Gospel, in the fruits borne by such an action or work⁶¹ It is particularly good that I do so when the effectiveness of my action seems to be lacking and the results too rare. These matters are usually hidden from our eyes but sometimes they are as if revealed to us. They are always significant graces in our lives. The exercise of faith is intended to make this perception of the hidden reality of our life and of the world more habitual.

Personally, I remember a celebration lived with a large number of young people in a very beautiful church in Rome; something of that celebration highlighted an invisible reality: that these young people were truly the living stones of the Church, much more beautiful and precious than those that made up the building where they were, despite the great beauty of the latter. I still think of a worldwide gathering of young religious where the variety of faces, costumes, and ways of life visibly expressed the variety of living and active gifts of the Spirit to the Church and the world. I still remember an unexpected visit, during a trip, to a woman who had been bedridden for years in a very poor house; through her testimony and her words, something made palpable the great radiance of this life which was isolated and unknown to most. I am sure that each of you could relate such experiences which are always glimpses of the Holy Spirit. What is perceived in such moments is usually hidden, but faith gradually opens our eyes so that we can see the invisible. Father Chaminade liked to use the beautiful expression "eyes of faith"⁶² : when they are open, we can witness to others about what we have seen and help them see, too. We can think of the testimony of Mary who meditated and contemplated the events in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51). We can also think of the scenes in John's Gospel that end with the opening of the eyes of some while, unfortunately, others remain blind. May we be part of that first group so that, like them, we can see and believe, and, above all, know how to bear witness to what we see!

Thus, in its simplicity, this method of Father Chaminade helps us to look at reality in a positive and trusting way, because in it is realized much more than what I see. Apart from certain indisputable signs of his action, God works most often in secret, but unceasingly, waiting only for the eyes of our faith to perceive

⁶⁰In a very beautiful "Letter to a religious of the Society of Mary, probably Father [Jules-César] Perrodin," Father Chaminade shows how acts of faith can be applied to the human and spiritual situation of each person (Letter 1269, undated):

We unite ourselves to Jesus Christ by the faith which we have in him, we draw from his treasures with this faith, since these treasures are ours. Have we need of humility, of patience, etc.? After having well recognized our pride, our lack of patience, etc., let us see in our treasure the humiliations, the love of humiliations, the sufferings and the love of sufferings which Jesus Christ has always had. The merits of Jesus Christ humiliated and suffering are infinite. Let us make for ourselves a healing balm from His humiliations and from his sufferings. Let us apply this balm to our pride, to our impatience, and we shall be healed; we shall destroy these vices and we shall cauterize the wounds they have caused in us; we shall love both the humiliations and the sufferings, since in and by Jesus Christ they have procured so great a glory to God, and they will procure it for him in us, united to Jesus Christ There you have, my dear son, the use we must make of our faith, and especially in mental prayer no doubt, and throughout the course of our life.

⁶¹In his 6th and 7th letters to the Novice Master, Father Chaminade invites his addressee to develop in the novices their union with the whole Church, the mystical body of Christ, and with its Head, Christ, and to perceive the Eucharist as a privileged moment of reception of this life. That is another space for faith development. Cf. *CL VII.17* [39], [53].

⁶² See for example Letters 665, 671, 1066, 1179, etc... This expression was made famous by a series of articles by the theologian Pierre Rousselot published in 1910 by the review *Recherches de Science religieuse*, pp. 241-259 and 444-475.

and witness to his work. This is particularly important in situations marked by suffering, human limitations, failure, or evil. It is up to us to perceive the presence of God, then more active than ever in inviting hope and comfort. Sometimes it is a question of "re-enchanting the world"; that is exactly what faith does and, guided by it, the man of faith does too. This is what we are called upon to collaborate in as well.

4. THE PAYER OF FAITH AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

This title comes from one of Father Chaminade's teachings on prayer, published in 1828 or 1829; we have already referred to it. Throughout his life he never stopped teaching how to do mental prayer, from his advice to Marie-Thérèse de Lamourous in 1796, to the *Method of Mental Prayer on the Creed* of 1840. Texts abound: writings on direction, teaching, preaching, notes, methods. . . . As the *Ecrits d'Oraison* testify, they are spread out over the whole life of the Founder.⁶³ They show his deepening of the subject, but they also respond to various needs of the moment regarding formation. A presentation of these documents and this path can easily be found in various quite accessible publications.⁶⁴

(a) Renewed Attention

It is important to remember that our last two General Chapters, in 2012 and 2018, both call for giving full space to mental prayer, especially by dedicating to it the hour required by the *Rule*.⁶⁵ This double mention reveals a weakness in our practice, otherwise why would it be mentioned? Since the origins of the Society of Mary, great importance has been attached to this exercise. Father Chaminade says that it is "the pivot on which all Christian and religious life turns."⁶⁶ or again that mental prayer belongs to the "constitutive exercises of religious life."⁶⁷ The Constitutions of 1839 devote a whole section to it and state:

It is stated in principle that it is impossible for man to rise to religious perfection without prayer, and that the more a religious devotes himself to this exercise, the closer he comes to his end, which is his conformity to J.C. The spirit of prayer must be together with devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the characteristic virtue of the Religious of Mary, and the one without exception in which each one strives to excel. Prayer is the common and unique source of all virtues.⁶⁸

The same Constitutions also add:

35. Leaders do not undertake and decide on anything important without consulting God in prayer.

⁶³ CHAMINADE, G.-J., *Writings on Mental Prayer*, Raymond Halter (Ed.), (Dayton: MRC, 1979), 598 pp.

⁶⁴ For example, Father Hoffer gives a brief theoretical summary in his book: *La vie spirituelle à l'école du P. Chaminade*, 1966, in Chapter IV, *Mener une vie d'oraison*, 133-159; *The Spirit of Our Foundation* gives a more developed presentation of it which also includes practical elements: vol. I, Chapter V: "Mental prayer, nourishment of the spiritual life," nos. 247-364; "In their joint work, *Enfleshing the Word: Prayer and the Marianist Spirituality Journey* (Dayton: NACMS, 2000), Enrique Aguilera and José María Arnaiz present general elements from these methods and other aspects of the Marianist tradition on prayer. Father Quentin Hakenewerth has dedicated many of his publications to Marianist methods of prayer. These books exist in different languages.

⁶⁵ XXXIV Gen. Chap. (2012), No. 15-b: "God speaks to the heart of those who enter into silence in order to hear him" (RL Art. 4.16). As a means for renewal and obedience to the Word of God, each Marianist will take to heart Art. 55 of the *Rule of Life*, calling us to an hour of personal prayer daily."

XXXV Gen Chap. (2018), No. 32: "The Chapter reminds every brother of the call from the *Rule of Life* to devote "an hour of each day to personal mental prayer" (*Rule of Life*, 55), daring to give space to God, to listen to God and to provide a counter-cultural witness to the world. To support this, communities will discuss their practices and structures which will support faithfulness to personal mental prayer. Unit administrations will make this an emphasis in their visitations to local communities."

⁶⁶ Letter 1269, to a religious of the Society, probably Father [Jules-César] Perrodin.

⁶⁷ *Constitutions of 1839*, No. 33.

⁶⁸ *Constitutions of 1839*, art. 34. This same passage appears in the quotations mentioned in our present *Rule*, at the beginning of Chapter IV on the life of faith.

The central role of mental prayer in Marianist religious life is also strongly marked in our *Rule*. We should not prefer any other activity to it (RL 4.4); and we "give special importance to . . . personal mental prayer, which nourishes within us the spirit of faith" (RL 48) and because "the essential is the interior" (RL 55).

(b) An Exercise of Faith

This is one of the reasons why we are interested in it here. Our *Rule* tells us that "In this form of prayer, we allow the Spirit of Christ take possession of our lives, filling us with faith, hope, and charity" (RL 55).

In Marianist prayer, not only does contemplation deal with the content of faith, but, moreover, it is realized thanks to the faith that allows one to adhere to what is contemplated. Through this exercise, faith is strengthened, just as is every virtue when it is practiced. Thus mental prayer and faith support each other, each one favors the other. These different aspects are typical of the Marianist tradition. In many areas, Father Chaminade was always inspired by many authors, but here he offers us a specific contribution. He emphasizes an important resource for spiritual growth and apostolic preparation: faith exercised and developed in the course of mental prayer develops the inner strength of the person and, by the same token, supports his apostolic action. Thus, through faith, prayer life and activity become mutually reinforcing. Far from taking time away from each other, each prepares and facilitates the other.

This was the great desire of Father Chaminade: to unite active and contemplative life,⁶⁹ each becoming a nourishment for the other. This is described in Article 56 of the *Rule*, in which I emphasize in italics the complementarity established between the two areas:

Contemplation of the Lord in his plan of love for the world impels us to *take part in* Christ's redemptive *mission*.

Mental prayer teaches us to *see that God is present in our actions*, in everyday events, and above all in the person of our neighbor.

Apostolic activity, in turn, makes us grow in virtues, helps to purify the heart and *nourishes mental prayer*.

Thanks to this exercise, the religious can be constantly animated by a glance and motivations of faith and he can invite others to follow him on such a path. For that reason, Father Chaminade, like many others with him, invited us never to diminish prayer because of the abundance of work:

It seems to me that the more affairs we have to deal with, the more difficulties and annoyances we experience, and consequently, the greater our need for mental prayer, especially good mental prayer. . . . It is only in this way that we can, in some way, multiply ourselves, etc., etc.⁷⁰

Do not neglect prayer, however busy you may be. . . . I am not losing sight of the fact that [the brothers] are all overloaded with work Make yourself clever in securing for them the means of making their mental prayer well, for it is there that you, as well as they, will find the peace of soul, the strength, the courage and especially the means by which we know how to exercise ourselves to the utmost when we find ourselves overburdened.⁷¹

⁶⁹ To Sister Célestine (of the Daughters of Mary) who is tempted to enter the Carmelite convent, whose vocation seems to her to be much more contemplative, Father Chaminade responds by highlighting the profoundly contemplative spirit of the two institutes (called here "the Institute of Mary").

"In the Institute of Mary there are no long prayers, neither vocal nor mental, but much work, sanctified by recollection and a religious silence In the Institute of Mary, to the idea of personal sanctification is joined effective work toward the sanctification of the neighbor, Letter 142 of July 11, 1820.

⁷⁰ Letter 1203, March 19, 1839, to Father Leo. Meyer, V, p. 177.

⁷¹ Letter 434 of May 15, 1827, to Brother Clouzet.

The expression "multiply" oneself" is important. At a time when we so often experience a lack of personnel to meet the great needs of the mission or the animation of the congregation, and when it seems to us so often that we lack time, let's not hesitate to "multiply" ourselves through mental prayer. . . . Father Chaminade's observation is moreover relayed by many classical authors, who point out that the more abundant the work is, the more prayer is necessary to come to terms with it, since prayer allows one to find inner strength and to concentrate on the essential. Praying more saves time.

c) Towards the Faith of the Heart

According to Father Chaminade, mental prayer is sustained and guided by multiple acts of faith. It begins with a profound act of faith in the presence of God. In its development, he advises "making an act of faith and repeating it often; then to consider our subject always in the light of this faith."⁷²

Initially, faith is exercised in a somewhat voluntaristic way, both in prayer and throughout the day, but little by little it becomes deeper and more natural, it becomes a spontaneous attitude, it touches more and more the heart of the person who begins to savor its presence and its inner and outer effects. It becomes less and less necessary to make the effort of acts of faith, it appears more and more that it is God who raises up this interior gift and it is only necessary to let him do more and more, to collaborate in this action and to eliminate the obstacles that limit what God does.

By way of comparison, we can think of the stages of the prayer life taught by Teresa of Avila, comparing them to the different ways of watering an orchard.⁷³ At the beginning, according to the first method, water is pulled up from a well with great effort; then the work becomes much easier when one starts using a water wheel (a *noria*, as Teresa called it), then even more so when the water is brought directly from a stream by a canal, and finally, what a marvel when, surrendering oneself to the action of God, one lets the rain do its work: God then does almost everything with very little effort on our part. Not only does the task become easier and easier, but it becomes more and more efficient and fruitful. So it is in our Marianist itinerary, from the initial stage of multiplication of acts of faith⁷⁴ to the progressive entry into the faith of the heart.⁷⁵ And certainly, when faith unites with the love of charity, one is no longer far from service.

That is an essential point in Father Chaminade's teaching on faith. The path that he proposes has reached its summit when it provokes an interior adhesion of the heart that is an act of love towards God. This love provokes the adhesion of the intelligence and the will and all of life is then directed towards God. He writes:

One believes with the heart and so is justified. (Rom 10:10) . . . The just not only believe the truths which religion proposes to them; they observe them and love them. By a true affection of heart, they make them serve as the foundation and steps toward practicing justice. This is how their justice is, as it were, fed by their faith. The one who is righteous will live by faith. (Romans 1:17)⁷⁶

Thus the notional faith must become more and more a faith received and loved by the heart.⁷⁷ Father Chaminade says:

⁷² 1st Conference to the Daughters of Mary on "Faith and Prayer," CL VI.13 [1].

⁷³ See Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography*, V, 11, 7-8.

⁷⁴ *The Spirit of Our Foundation* transcribes the testimony of Father Guillaume Silvain (*SFI* I, no. 221): "Father Chaminade was wont to make the novices at the Madeleine, to whom I belonged, recite many acts of faith. I knew some who recited a many as four hundred in one day."

⁷⁵ In 1828, in the text: In his book "Direction of the Society of Mary in the Ways of Salvation"(CL VI.76 [3]), Father Chaminade recommends "multiplying . . . the acts of faith, of the mind and of the heart."

⁷⁶ "Of faith," CL III.148 [207]

⁷⁷ In his study, *La foi dans l'enseignement de G.-J. Chaminade*, in paragraphs 4.2.5.1 to 4.2.5.3, Fr. Antonio Gascón describes this itinerary more precisely, Cf. French edition of 2017, pp. 244-265.

"[Faith] must be animated by charity. Faith should not be simply like a light in the mind; it must be in the heart. There must be a disposition of the heart which itself is faith, a love of the truth. That's why we must savor what we believe."⁷⁸

d) Conformity to Jesus Christ

However, the final goal of mental prayer and of the whole spiritual life is "the most perfect imitation of Jesus Christ." Mental prayer contributes particularly to this, as already mentioned: "It has been laid down as a principle . . . that the more a religious devotes himself to this exercise, the nearer he approaches his end, which is his conformity with Jesus Christ." Father Chaminade also writes:⁷⁹ "The Spirit of J.C. works in us our conformity to this divine Model, only in proportion that we have more faith."⁸⁰ Through faith, the Christian knows Jesus and adheres to his person, he opens himself to the action of the Spirit in an ever deeper way and the latter can then bring about the interior and progressive transformation in the image of the divine model. The believer is more and more inclined to be animated by the very sentiments of Christ, to desire to carry out his will and to translate it into action. He can say: it is no longer I, it is Christ who lives in me (Cf. Gal 2:20b).

5. FORMATION AND LIFE OF FAITH

The word "path" has come up often in this description. The growth of our life of faith continues throughout our lives. In religious life, it starts from the first stages of formation and accompanies the whole journey of the brother. To begin with, in the 9th letter to the Master of Novices, Father Chaminade recommends relying on the exercise of the presence of God as an introduction to the experience of mental prayer. He goes on to say: "If your [novices] are well deeply affected by faith in the presence of God everywhere, they will easily be disposed to carry on this prayer with joy."⁸¹ He also insists that the talks with the Master of Novices should focus in particular "on the mental prayers, or mental and vocal prayers, on what is happening there, either on the part of the Spirit of Jesus Christ or on the part of the tempter"⁸²

Attention to the life of faith makes it possible to better accompany the religious or the candidate. In his guidelines for the novitiate, integrated into the Constitutions of 1839, Chaminade recommends that a novice should not be admitted if he has only natural motivations, without any apparent sign of a divine call. "The Master of Novices . . . Should never admit him in whom he notices no sign of a divine vocation, nor any operation of the Holy Spirit in his demeanor" (309). Therefore "he should . . . regard [the candidates], examine them, not only according to exterior appearances, but much more particularly according to interior dispositions" (311). "Yes, it is upon the heart that he should especially direct his attention; if he does not see there any operation of the Holy Spirit, he will by that fact see no sign of a divine vocation. . . . If their piety seems to be inspired by a true devotedness to Jesus Christ, if they give evidence of some devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the Master sees what part faith has in these sentiments" (312). Once they have been admitted to the novitiate, the task of the formator will be to "bring them to the life of faith" (322) or

⁷⁸ Retreat of 1827 at St-Remy, 2nd conference, "On the Faith"; CL VI.67 [24]-[25].

⁷⁹ *Constitutions of 1839*, Art. 34.

See also Article 247: Jesus Christ wants to "have them live of his life and to transform them into other 'Himself.' The happiness and the glory of the religious is found there; he should feel nothing within himself but Jesus and that which Jesus felt: *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus*" (Ph 2:5). [NRSV]

⁸⁰ "Manual of Direction," CL VII.22 [36] = *Ecrits de Direction*, II, 422. He says, using one of his favorite quotes: "This is the doctrine of the Holy Council of Trent, *fides, initium, fundamentum et radix totius justificationis nostrae*. Faith is the beginning, foundation, and root of all justification."

⁸¹ CL VII.17 [71]. In 1821 or 1822, he wrote a "Primer of Mental Prayer" for the novitiate in Saint-Laurent (CL VI.3). In it he states: "In this method, the one who makes mental prayer seeks to raise the self to God only by faith." Fr. Charles Rothea, in a memorandum from the novitiate wrote: "As mental prayer is the soul of religion, the novices will strive to understand well the method adopted in the Institute, which is to make the prayer of faith in the light of faith." (Quoted in *The Spirit of Our Foundation*, I, no. 293).

⁸² Cited in SF I, No. c. 290: "Direction in Mental Prayer."

to support them in it (325). "If the formator finds that resistance persists among the novices, let him not be disquieted, provided furthermore that they be faithful to the exercises and to the practice of faith, such as they are indicated in the *Manual of Direction* -- faith will triumph in the end" (334). Faith will serve as a guide for both the novice and the formator: ". . . May those especially who in their earliest youth, have shaken off the yoke of the law, who wanted to follow their own will and were given over to the fury of their passions, find in the doctrine of faith the means of fortifying themselves and of triumphing. For the Masters everything consists in the timely application of the principles of faith according to which they have to conduct them" (336).

All these remarks by Father Chaminade show us his great experience in vocation discernment. That's an art that we need to receive from him today. Candidates must be accompanied according to these inner criteria, which are profound because the outside is not enough to make the religious, or even to evaluate or guide him. It is necessary to hear the Founder's insistence on discerning the work of the Spirit in hearts, observing the reactions of faith provoked by his action. It is at this level that vocation ministry and the action of the formator are operative. Not taking this into account is sometimes a great misfortune for the Society of Mary, which then runs the risk of welcoming members without a solid vocation and not offering the candidate a depth that can inspire his life and be the source of his happiness. This can be the cause of departures caused by the absence of deep roots of commitment, either by the absence of a vocation - in which case the departure is justified - or by the failure to deepen a real vocation. This demonstrates the vital importance of the development of the spiritual and interior life during initial formation and the first years of religious life.

The growth of the life of faith and of mental prayer is particularly suited to a path of ongoing formation. To be concerned about updating our intellectual, professional, theological, and biblical knowledge is very good and positive. But what about updating my spiritual life? When was the last time I read a fundamental document on this topic? When did I dialogue with an experienced master to re-launch my spiritual journey or the life of mental prayer? What do I really know of some of the great authors or works considered classics in this field? What place does this area occupy in my plans for continuing education or a sabbatical?

TO CONTINUE . . .

Here we are at the end of this journey, a bit long, but all in all it is still too short to embrace the richness and importance of our Founder's teaching on this subject and to recall for ourselves once again how much he attributed to it a central role in our life and mission.

What is at stake is missionary: it is a way that he shows us to respond to the multiple forms of indifference or unbelief that affect our times. He invites us, in the name of the inspiration he received, to proclaim and propose faith in Jesus Christ as an alternative to the forms those two attitudes take in our time.

We can only do this by being men of faith ourselves who live by faith and "ponder all things in the light of revelation" and discover "how God is at work in human history and in the events of our daily lives." (RL 4). We can do this by a daily exercise of faith and, in particular, by an ever more faithful and profound practice of mental prayer, the "exercise of faith." That is the means that our Founder gave us for contemplating in all things its end, its ultimate meaning: *In omnibus, respice finem*⁸³ [In all things, look to the end]. We can do this by forming, as religious and as a Family, "communities inspired by faith" (RL 9), and for this reason truly fraternal, "at one with the people of our time" (RL 11), witnessing to the presence of Christ and living the Gospel "in all the force of its letter and spirit" (RL 9).

⁸³ "Method of Mental Prayer on the Creed," CL VII.34 [1]. This is the title that opens that very important document. A remarkable mental prayer follows ... kind of Chaminadean *Principle and foundation*, this famous text which opens the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola (# 23).

Beginning by acknowledging our "magnificent destiny," which consists of "seeing God, loving him and serving him,"⁸⁴ this contemplation "moves us to share in [Christ's] saving mission," but also "to become aware of God's presence in our activities, in the events of each day, and especially in our neighbor." (RL 56). It helps us not to stop at the superficial aspects of events or even of our actions, but to understand the real issues and the real urgency. We thus abandon the temptation to consider only the external aspect of our activity and "to degrade ourselves to the base level of those who work in the educational factories of our century"⁸⁵ or in the apostolate. In this way we can stop confusing the means with the true end which consists in "introducing . . . everywhere the spirit of faith and religion and multiplying Christians."⁸⁶

That profound understanding gives a new dynamism to action. Faith is the virtue that inspired the entire life of Father Chaminade and made him a tireless and never discouraged missionary, despite the many obstacles he encountered. We want to take the same road. In the face of the difficulties and obstacles of our times, let us listen to him tell us again, as he did to his dear Father Chevaux:

Why, my dear son, do you not place all your confidence in Jesus and Mary? Do you believe that St. Peter established the Apostolic See in Rome by his education, by his knowledge, and his wisdom—his natural means? Do you not believe he succeeded only as a result of the confidence he put in the Master who was sending him? If you pray and do not obtain, why not continue to pray until your prayer is heard, in the meantime doing all that he inspires you to do?⁸⁷

Father Chaminade's model of faith was, of course, Mary. He was led by her on the roads of mission, desiring like her to bring Christ to the world. She is also for us an "example of faith" (RL 8) and we want to "assist her in her mission of forming in faith a multitude of brothers for her first-born Son" (RL 6). As Fr. David Fleming states, "Mary and faith are certainly Chaminade's two central and inseparable themes that were developed throughout his life. . . . [it is] impossible to understand him without examining his teaching and guidance on these two points." He wanted to "rekindle the life of faith in a world being transformed by revolutionary social changes and secularistic ideologies. In that effort, he turned to Mary as the great sign of the Christian faith."⁸⁸ It can be said that, on the one hand, "he learned and taught about Mary in the 'school of faith,' and about the faith in the 'school of Mary.'"⁸⁹

The motivation for this circular has been the desire that each of us might give renewed importance to faith as a means of growth in our religious life, our spiritual life, and our apostolate. I am convinced that this is an effective means of revitalizing these three areas. It is also a particularly suitable means in a time of great change and our diminishing human forces.

All these reasons make faith so much more important in our missionary life and experience today. The Society of Mary is and will be what the faith of each of its brothers will have made of it. There is no doubt in my mind that the solidity and strength of the Society of Mary, and part of the impact of its mission, are directly related to the intensity of this virtue within it. The Society of Mary will go as far as the strength of its faith will have carried it. The man who believes is not stopped; faith is a significant part of the "spirit" that forms "a man who does not die."

Let's listen to our Founder again:

I believe that no matter what kind of shake-ups it may have to go through, it will survive, since God has inspired us with the idea of giving it such a solid foundation, that of faith.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ "Method of Prayer . . .," op. cit., [1] and [2].

⁸⁵ Letter 1163, Saturday, August 24, 1839.

⁸⁶ Letter 725, Friday, February 7, 1834, to Father Chevaux.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ FLEMING, David, *A New Fulcrum: Marianist Horizons Today*. (Dayton: NACMS, 2014), 1.

⁸⁹ *Id.*, p. 2.

⁹⁰ Letter 546, September 1830, to Mother St. Vincent.

Let's also be alert to one of his major concerns:

The superioress general only expressed to me her grief over the fact that the spirit of faith was not the ruling power in that convent [of Arbois]. What causes her still greater grief is the fear that the novices are not being well trained. She has the same fear with regard to Acey. Her correspondence with Arbois does no more than let her see purely human views. Since my last visit to Agen, the entire community, but especially the superioress general, seemed to understand very well what a religious Sister is supposed to be, what it really means to live by faith, and what the government and direction of the superioress general is expected to be.⁹¹

But let us also share the cries of enthusiasm of our Founder. They are cries of faith in the midst of difficulties. The "Little Society" will always be that which Christ wanted for his Mother:

God has founded the Institute of Mary and gives it a fitting spirit. This spirit is the interior spirit. God calls us not only to sanctify ourselves but to revive the faith in France, in Europe, in the whole world, and to preserve the present generation from error. How great is the enterprise! How noble it is! How holy it is! How generous it is! How attractive it is for a soul who has at heart the glory of God and the salvation of others! And it is God who has chosen us among so many others!⁹²

Ours is a great work, a magnificent work! If it is universal, it is because we are *missionaries of Mary*, who has said to us: "Do whatever he tells you!" Yes, we're all missionaries. Each one of us has received from the Blessed Virgin a commission to work at the salvation of his brothers in the world.⁹³

For that reason, let us allow the very words of the Blessed One resound in us:

"Where is your faith, your faith in Jesus Christ?"

André-Joseph Fétis, SM
Superior General

March 25, 2020
Solemnity of the Annunciation
Patronal Feast of the Marianist Family

⁹¹ Letter 568, December 16, 1830, to Father Lalanne, Saint-Remy.

⁹² Retreat of 1821, "18th Mental prayer", CL VI.19 [63]-[64].

⁹³ Letter 1163, Saturday, August 24, 1839.