



*Circular
of the
Superior General
#1*

**THE SPIRIT OF THE SOCIETY
IS THE SPIRIT OF MARY**

Part One: IN CHRIST WITH MARY

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Part One: IN CHRIST WITH MARY

Dear Brothers:

This is the first time I am writing to you in this service of governing and animating that the last General Chapter gave me in the name of all of you, and which consists, in the words of the *Rule of Life* – nothing more or less – in following the witness of Blessed William Joseph Chaminade “to be a visible sign of the unity of the whole Society” and “preserve, strengthen and diffuse the common charism.”¹ It is a responsibility whose breadth frightens me and in the face of which I feel somewhat helpless. Thanks to the fact that Mary has been very present to me, I could accept it, and continue accepting it, in simple obedience, helped on the one hand by the conviction that it is the Lord himself who calls me through my brothers, and on the other hand by the assurance that the Holy Spirit will come and bring fruition to my emptiness. So, it is out of this simple obedience that I dare to offer my reflections and suggestions. I trust that in spite of their limitations the Spirit will make them fruitful for the Society through your understanding and fraternal acceptance.

As you see by the title, my first circular is about Mary. Why? What has made me decide that my first reflections and suggestions which I should share with you should be about Her? The inspiration for this circular comes from the combination of two facts.

The first fact is that since the *Rule of Life* that the Society gave itself twenty-five years ago up to our time, there has been a constant call to give her the central place which belongs to her in living our charism. This call has become more urgent, if that is possible, in the last three General Chapters, above all in *Partners in Hope* (1996) and in the recent *In Mission with Mary* (2006). The renewal of our Marianist religious life depends on bringing into our lives the depth of the Marian experience of our Founder.²

The second fact is that this renewal is yet to be made. For a good number of Brothers, this relationship with Mary presents unresolved problems and consequently she is not well integrated into their spiritual life, or has more or less diminished. For others, she has become stagnant in such a way that the life and mission today is sterile. We should recall that the General Chapter of 1996, following the suggestion of a proposition presented by those in charge of the Marian Library/MRI³, thought it worth while to make a survey of

¹ R.L. 7.44 (new version)

² Fr. José María Salaverri, commenting on the first General Chapter after the *Rule of Life* wrote a circular titled, *The Presence of Mary in the General Chapter of 1986* (Circ. 14, December 8, 1986). In it he affirmed: “The Society of Mary will be renewed only through a strong Marian impulse. The Society which “belongs to Mary” (RL 14) can enforce its identity only through an intense presence of the Virgin Mary. Above all, a presence in the heart of each Marianist who, “like the beloved disciple we accept Mary as a precious gift of God” (RL 6), a presence in each one of our communities and in the apostolate.” (p. 267)

³ The content of this proposition was this: “The General Chapter of 1981 adopted a revision of our Rule of Life and since then the Society of Mary has seen itself committed to the difficult task of progressive assimilation. It seems the moment has come to establish and evaluate the depth and degree of this assimilation. We would like to suggest such an evaluation, above all in relation to our Marian character.” The proposition is based on three observations: “1. We perceive a certain uneasiness among the Marianists regarding the image of Mary. Some to consider her as essential to our spirituality; some experience a certain difficulty at the

all of the religious of the Society about the living of the Marian character of our charism. Commenting on the results of the survey, Fr. José María Arnaiz wrote: “Sometimes the Society does not know what is best or what direction to take in order to give ourselves to Mary, and especially to make her known and loved. The General and Unit administrations should promote the working out of a definite and clear plan to make sure that Mary occupies the place that belongs to her in the life of the Marianists. The survey has shown that we need a serious Mariology and attitudes appropriate for a faithful disciple of Jesus, some actions that will incarnate the spirit of Mary into our activities. We can not live today with the Marian formation received 30 years ago. To enter into the mystery of Mary demands learning and renewing our ideas, our sentiments and our actions.”⁴

Motivated by these two facts, this circular attempts to help the formation process. Its whole purpose is to establish the bases a meaningful living with Mary. Now, our spiritual relationship with Mary is based on the image we have of her in our mind and in our heart. Consequently, the renewal and deepening of our Marian life means renewing and deepening that image. Therefore, the reflections that I am offering, while they are spiritual, must also be theological; focusing on a true “devotion”, they must also include “sound doctrine.”

The circular also attempts to be an homage to our *Rule of Life* on its silver jubilee. In reading it, I hope you will find some rays of light which will help you better understand the history of our normative texts and appreciate it in all its fullness. If I have chosen as a title for this circular the last phrase of Book I,⁵ it is not only because it expresses the essential Marian character of our charism, but also because it attempts to be a final synthesis, the quintessence of the *Rule* itself.

The reflections I am offering are developed in two parts which have as respective titles, I. “In Christ with Mary”, and II. “In Mission with Mary”.

Both parts are inseparable. They are two elements of spiritual life that require each other. One can not live “in Christ” without that living impelling us to the mission, and vice versa, we can not live “in mission” if it is not from life “in Christ”. Nevertheless, because of space, and to underline the importance of each one, I have preferred to separate them time-wise. In this circular I will develop only the first part. The second will come in another circular later on. In this way, there is more time for a careful assimilation of both, and at the same time the danger of the reader having a preference for one over the other and one being overshadowed is eliminated.

This first circular, “In Christ with Mary”, is divided, in turn, into two parts. The first, “The development of Marian devotion in our history”, attempts to help examine the past to situate and understand our present Marian devotion. In the second, “Mary in and from

moment of giving her an important place in their personal lives; others see her as a source of uncertainty. She will be like a stigma that makes the S.M. seem conservative and sentimental. 2, We also see a growing difficulty at the moment of taking on and living some specific aspects, central to Marian spirituality. For example: the spiritual maternity of Mary, our alliance with Mary, the imitation of Christ in his attitudes toward Mary, consecration to Mary. 3. Finally, we observe the lack of a strong, apostolic Marian dynamism.” (J.M. Arnaiz, P. González-Blasco, J. Roten, *With Mary toward the future*, SPM, Madrid, 2000, pp. 113 ff.)

⁴ *ibid.* p. 61

⁵ RL 114

the center of Christian life”, I try to offer a basis for this through a reflective meditation on the Marian articles of the first chapter of our *Rule of Life*.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MARIAN DEVOTION IN OUR HISTORY

1.1. Mary at the heart of our foundational charism.

The Marian foundation of our charism is incontrovertible, and the presence of Mary in our history has been fundamental from the beginning to our times. Our foundational and normative documents as well as the life itself, and even our own name offer ample testimony.

We all know that our Marianist life is based on a special understanding and living that our Founder, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, had of Mary. This understanding and living came to him inspired by his particular way of approaching her and contemplating her. His approach to Mary was not motivated by a mere devotional interest, or for deepening doctrine. He was not a theologian in the academic or technical sense of the word, nor was he a preacher. Fr. Chaminade was a passionate missionary, a man profoundly concerned with the evangelization of his world, dedicated body and soul to the task of educating the People of God in faith, strongly threatened by the philosophism and laicism of his time. His missionary passion is the central axis of everything he lived and carried out throughout his life. Out of that passion he turned to Mary, and conversely, from the contemplation of Mary he fed and channeled his missionary impulse.

Situated in this perspective, his image of Mary takes on some very marked traits which are insistently repeated in his notes and writings. We all know them, but it would be good to recall them at the beginning of our reflection so they can be with us throughout as an original and stimulating reminder. We have to refer to them constantly as constituent elements of the charism, of our particular way of being in the Church. We can summarize them in the following way:

a) Mary has a special mission in Salvation History. Basing himself on the Fathers of the Church, Fr. Chaminade contemplates Mary with the whole Salvation History as a background, led by God from the creation and the first sin to the final triumph of life over death in a new creation. He sees Mary prefigured in the Old Testament, chosen and full of grace in her Immaculate Conception, cooperating with the Son in the mysteries of redemption, triumphant with him in the Assumption.⁶ Mary summarizes in herself, like an icon, the image of humanity newly redeemed by the Son, a humanity “full of grace.”⁷

⁶ “Yet, Mary’s exalted mission does not end on Calvary. Her charity, stronger than sorrow and death, enables her to survive an ordeal that would have crushed a thousand lives less fragile than her own. For is she not the New Eve, and as such, necessary to her children? Yes. she must still take part in the glorious mystery of the Resurrection of her first-born Son. and be present. too. at his triumphant Ascension into glory. Then, her presence is required in the midst of the Apostles gathered about her in the Cenacle, while her maternal solicitude must extend over the infant Church. to edify and to instruct the faithful, and to guide them aright along the rugged roads of a pagan world until the day when this earth, unworthy to possess her any longer,

b) The specific mission of Mary in Salvation History, that for which she was chosen and called by God, is to bring forth the Son. It is a maternal, generative, educational mission, linked to the Incarnation, which extends to all the sons in *the* Son. The gospel phrases that Fr Chaminade liked to cite most in reference to Mary are contained in the words of Jesus on the cross, “Woman, here is your son. Son, here is your mother,”⁸ and the designating of Mary in the gospel of Matthew, as “Mary, of whom Jesus was born.”⁹

c) The mission of Mary was based on and developed by her faith through which she gives her-self fully and unconditionally into the hands of the Holy Spirit for the fulfilling of God’s plan. The faith of Mary, “behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word” is the human “place” that God needs to come into the world and save it.¹⁰

d) In this way, Mary contributes to the triumph of God over evil in human history, the fulfillment of the original promise: “She will crush your head.”¹¹

The mission of Mary, intimately linked to the saving mission of the Son, does not end – it could not end – with the Assumption, just as that of the Son does not with his Ascension, but is perpetuated in history. In times of crisis of the faith, as was that of Fr. Chaminade, it is even more urgent. This is what he understood with noonday clarity, and from that perspective, he saw himself and he saw the Marianists as called to collaborate with Mary today in her mission.¹² With him, the contemplation of Mary was transformed into a missionary vocation. We are called to let ourselves be formed by her as sons, and to be her “helpers”, her “allies”, “to be, in our humility, the heel of the Woman,” as he said to Fr. Lalanne on the day he decided on our foundation.

shall behold her borne by the hands of angels to the highest heavens, next to the eternal throne of her divine Son, Jesus Christ.” *Marian Writings*, Vol. 2, 475.

⁷ The second most cited evangelical phrase by Fr. Chaminade in his writings on Mary is the greeting of the angel, “full of grace, the Lord is with you.” (Lk 1:28). In this greeting, Fr. Chaminade sees condensed the good news of a new creation. Citing Marchant he writes: “Hail, Mary, full of grace”,, “Hail, that is: rejoice, be happy, be joyful. Let Eve’s name be changed. The angel appears to contrast Mary with Eve, Mary’s joy with Eve’s sorrow, the blessing conferred on Mary with the curse pronounced on Eve, Mary’s grace with Eve’s sin, Mary’s offspring with Eve’s offspring.” *Marian Writings*, Vol. 1, 268.

⁸ John 19: 26-27

⁹ Mt. 1:16. Alluding to this expression with which he titled meditation 18 of the retreats of 1822, he said: “Every preacher who wishes to speak of Mary, whatever the text of his sermon, always come back to this: Mary of whom Jesus was born.” *Marian Writings*, Vol. 2, 790

¹⁰ “Three things that are absolutely necessary to establish a solid peace: 1) a place where the interested parties can meet safely in order to conclude the peace; 2) means that are mutually satisfactory in order to enforce it; 3) guarantees accepted by both parties in order to maintain it. In this mystery, Mary, by her fiat, etc. provides the place, the means and the guarantees necessary to conclude, to enforce, and to maintain peace between God and man.” *Marian Writings*, Vol. 1, 402

¹¹ Genesis 3:15. It is sufficient to recall this famous passage of the letter to the retreat preachers in 1839: “Mary’s power has not been weakened. It is our firm belief that she will vanquish this heresy as she did all the others, for today she is, as she has always been, the incomparable Woman, the Woman of promise who is to crush the head of the infernal ser-pent. Jesus himself by always addressing her in his public utterance with this great name, would teach us that she is the hope. the joy, the life of the church, and the terror of hell. To her, therefore, is reserved a great victory in our day, for to her belongs the glory of saving the faith from the destruction with which it is threatened.” *Marian Writings*, Vol. 2, 74

¹² It is good to recall here the second last paragraph of the letter that Fr. Chaminade wrote to Pope Gregory XVI on September 16, 1838 to present to him two institutes and their Constitutions: “These two Orders have taken as their distinctive name that of the august Mary. May they make it known, loved and cherished in all the earth! For I am intimately convinced that Our Lord has reserved to His holy Mother the glory of being the particular support of the Church in these latter days.” *Letters*, Vol. 4, p. 294

Recalling these great Marian traits with those that define our charism, I invite us to ask our-selves: How have we lived them in the past? How are we living them in the present? How are we called to live them at this moment of our history?

1.2. Marian Filial Piety.

Fr. Simler condensed our special way of living Mary as Marianists with the expression, “filial piety”. That expression as such did not come from Fr. Chaminade who never used it literally, but from Fr. Caillet and was included in the Constitutions of 1891. In them it appears as the “distinctive sign” of the Society and was described in four famous articles that many of us learned by memory in our novitiate.¹³ Later, the same Fr. Simler gave it ample commentary in his long instruction on the characteristic traits of the Society.¹⁴

Filial piety emphasizes and accentuates an important aspect of Chaminadian spirituality: our Marian sonship –“we are sons of Mary” repeated insistently by the Founder – and helps to live it concretely in the spiritual life. Consequently, from the time of the generalate of Fr. Simler it had great influence on our traditional Marianist devotion, at least until Vatican Council II. Works like *Our Gift from God* and *My Ideal*, both by Fr. Neubert, contributed to developing and diffusing it.

Nevertheless, this way of understanding our dedication to Mary left in the shadows another fundamental aspect of Fr. Chaminade’s Marian spirituality – the apostolic one. Fr. Neubert himself already referred to this. “Nearly every element of devotion to Mary found in Fr. Chaminade’s projects reappears in Fr. Simler’s. Still the latter’s teaching has not exactly the same tone as the Founder’s. Although the same elements are shared by both, the mixture is not the same. The dominant expression of Fr. Chaminade was “missionary of Mary”; Fr. Simler’s was a “reproduction of the filial piety of Jesus”. ...Like the Founder, he insists on the obligation of being an apostle of Mary. But for him, the obligation signifies almost exclusively to spread the knowledge of her and devotion to her. For Fr. Chaminade the obligation comprises all our Marianist activity, because in everything that we do – prayer, teaching, manual labor – we should be aware of acting in Mary’s name, winning the world for Christ. Father Simler’s devotion to Mary is more contemplative, Father Chaminade’s more militant.”¹⁵

¹³ “Every pious Institute proposes to itself the same perfection, but not all have the same special vocation. Each receives from God a proper gift, one after this manner and another after that...What for the Society of Mary is the gift of God, what constitutes its physiognomy and forms its distinctive trait is a total filial piety toward the Blessed Virgin Mary.” (art. 293)

“Recalling the words of Jesus to his beloved disciple: Behold your Mother, the professed of the Society places above all other happiness that of being called and being a son of Mary. He knows that all good things have come to him through his Mother.” (art. 294)

“As a pious son he delights in honoring her, loving her and making her loved. He never ceases thinking of her, of speaking of her goodness and explaining how she is, in all truth, our Mother, our life, the cause of our joy and the reason for our hope.” (art. 295)

“Because of this filial piety, the child of the Society instinctively feels inclined to imitate the life of Jesus and Mary, applying himself with marked predilection to reproducing the most notable virtues of the family of Nazareth. Among these virtues he especially distinguishes humility, simplicity, the spirit of faith and of mental prayer, and family spirit. These are the characteristic virtues of the Society of Mary.” (art. 296)

¹⁴ Circular No. 62 (1894)

¹⁵ Neubert, Emil, *Our Gift From God*, translated by Sylvester P. Juergens, S.M., S.T.D., 1962, p. 122

This difference in focus can be seen immediately when the first chapter of the Constitutions of Fr. Chaminade is compared with that of the Constitutions of Fr. Simler. We recall that in both of them it is said that the Society has two purposes, described in this way in the Constitutions of 1891: 1- to raise (*with the grace of God* Fr. Chaminade qualifies) each of its members to evangelical perfection; 2 – to work (*in the world* Fr. Chaminade says) at the salvation of souls (*sustaining and propagating by means adapted to the needs and spirit of the times the teachings of the Gospel, the virtues of Christianity and the practices of the Catholic Church* is added to the Constitutions of 1839). Both are summarized in one unique purpose, the most faithful imitation of Jesus Christ in two aspects: the imitation of the virtues of Jesus, and the imitation of his apostolic zeal. So, while Fr. Chaminade introduces our devotion to Mary in article 4 of his Constitutions which speaks of our apostolic zeal, Fr. Simler does so in article 3 which speaks of the imitation of the virtues of Jesus: “The professed of the Society of Mary consecrates himself to reproducing with visible complacency the filial piety of the Divine Model for Mary, his Most Holy Mother.”

Consequently, with this perspective, as Fr. Neubert noted, our relationship with Mary changes from being that of an “ally” with her in the service of the plan of God for humanity to one of “imitator” of Jesus, the Son, in his personal relationship with the Mother.

1.3. The “Mariological turn” in the second half of the XX century, and its repercussion.

With filial piety, our traditional Marian devotion was part of the Mariological current of the XIX century and the first half of the XX., called by some critics the “Mariology of the privileged.” Starting with the divine maternity as the great, singular privilege of Mary, other privileges, which honored and exalted her, naturally followed. The result was an image of Mary with all kinds of special titles attributed to her. The effect of this Mariology was to make her something separate in theology so that the devotion became something “additional” at times forced or unfitting in prayer, cult or homilies. Popular piety and Marian devotions expanded in this “separate”, almost autonomous way. Separated from the liturgy, it was not always possible to avoid the danger of a relationship with Mary brought about by considering her through a psycho-social imagination rather than what is revealed about her in the Word of God.¹⁶

¹⁶ It is very interesting to note that Fr. Chaminade already made reference to this danger. Speaking of devotion to Mary he affirms that “the cult of Mary should be prudent”; against “the illusion of Christians who give to Mary what does not belong to her” he says: “In calling Mary our hope, we must keep in mind that it is through Jesus Christ that she is our hope”. And he adds a clarifying note: “The enemies of Mary must not consider themselves vindicated by these remarks. In wishing to keep devotion to Mary within bounds, we shall not diminish the sentiments that accompany it, we shall not do away with the practices, etc. We are aware that devotion must be prudent and wise, in other words judicious and true, because God can be honored only in truth...and the devotion which is due to God must also be prudent. “worthy of thinking beings” (Rm. 12: 1). Now, what do the prescriptions of the Church and the principles of religion teach us? On the one hand that God alone is holy, he alone most powerful, our sovereign good, our happiness, the final object of our hope, the sole and true object of our worship and love, that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life; that there is no salvation except through him; that no other name under Heaven has been given to men through which they can be saved.” *Marian Writings*, Vol. 1, 34 ff.

Vatican Council II reacted to this tendency, placing and contemplating Mary in the framework of Salvation History. The council fathers did not agree to treat Mary in a separate document as the preparatory commission had foreseen, but they reserved for her the final chapter, the eighth, in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* on the Church. In this way, the Council consideration of Mary remained integrated, with all of its singularity, into the history and reality of the People of God. As some commentaries have noted, the Council went from a Mariology of privileges to a Mariology of “anticipation”. Mary is the creature who “anticipates” and prefigures in herself the journey of the Church, the journey of Christian life. The result was a sober presentation of Mary which some did not hesitate to call “minimalist”, but it had great depth.

So, renewal and “updating” of doctrine was not enough; As happened, and continues happening with the collection of council documents, a problem of great importance is still pending: that the renewed doctrine take hold in the Christian life of the faithful and shape their devotion. With the question of Mary, this transition from the doctrinal to the devotional is particularly difficult due to the complexity of factors involved: traditional, psycho-affective and cultural.

From this concern to center Marian devotion in the People of God, there came forth, following the Council, a basic and very important document: the exhortation *Marialis Cultus* of Paul VI on February 2, 1974. With the purpose “to help the development of that devotion to the Blessed Virgin which in the Church is motivated by the Word of God and practiced in the Spirit of Christ”¹⁷ it analyzes in detail the keys to a proper devotion to Mary and consequently the practices which express it. These should be inspired by Christian cult which gives them their norms. We re-call them here, in summary form, taking phrases from the text itself.

- “In the first place it is supremely fitting that exercises of piety directed towards the Virgin Mary should clearly express the Trinitarian and Christological note that is intrinsic and essential to them. Christian worship, in fact, is, of itself, worship offered to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, or, as the liturgy puts it, to the Father through Christ in the Spirit.”
- “That in expressions of devotion to the Virgin, the Christological aspect should have particular prominence...and should reflect God’s plan which laid down “with one single decree the origin of Mary and in the Incarnation of the divine Wisdom.” This will without doubt contribute to making piety towards the Mother of Jesus more solid, and to making it an effective instrument for attaining to full “knowledge of the Son of God, until we become the perfect man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself” (Eph 4:13).”
- To give “prominence in this devotion to one of the essential facts of the faith: the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Theological reflection and the liturgy have in fact noted how the sanctifying intervention of the Spirit in the Virgin of Nazareth was a culminating moment of the Spirit’s action in the history of salvation.”
- “ It is also necessary that exercises of piety with which the faithful honor the Mother of the Lord should clearly show the place she occupies in the Church: “the highest place and the closest to us after Christ.” The liturgical buildings of Byzantine rite, both in the architectural structure it-self and in the use of images, show

¹⁷ *Marialis Cultus*, Introduction, p. 3

clearly Mary's place in the church. On the central door of the iconostasis there is a representation of the Annunciation and in the apse an image of the glorious Theotokos. In this way one perceives how through the assent of the humble Handmaid of the Lord mankind begins its return to God and sees in the glory of the all-holy Virgin the goal toward which it is journeying."¹⁸

After recommending that Marian devotion be based on the Bible and the liturgy and take care to be expressed in a proper way from the anthropological and ecumenical points of view, Paul VI makes a masterful application of these directives to the right understanding and praying of the Rosary and the Angelus as examples of traditional Marian devotions.

But *Marialis Cultus*, in spite of its solidity and depth, in spite of its wide acceptance in circles of theological reflection and even up to the magisterium of John Paul II,¹⁹ did not have – and still does not – the resonance that it deserves in the life of the People of God. Where, for instance, is the rosary prayed as Paul VI indicated? Where have songs, texts and traditional practices been renewed based on his criteria? Thirty years later, *Marialis Cultis* still has not affected the devotion of the faithful. Why? Let the question stand for the moment. Further on I will be bold enough to suggest some possible answers.

Even though among the Catholic faithful Marian devotion was historically well entrenched, the fact is that after the Council there was no renewed blossoming of this devotion. Rather, there was a great silence about Mary in the reflections and life of Christians. The People of God were perplexed about traditional devotion to Mary and something new which seemed necessary but about which no one spoke or made changes. A sober liturgy took over and devotions fell by the wayside: the Little Office, the rosary, novenas, etc. Consequently, many lost track of Mary in their Christian life and others, with no alternative, stayed with the old usages. Even among us.

In this new context, our traditional “Marian filial piety” does not foster devotion for a good number of Marianists. The way it was presented did not serve to keep Mary alive in our lives, in the full conciliar perspective. Without pretending to be exhaustive, I would say that the reason for this “disinterest” is due to two of its weaknesses:

- a) Its weak biblical support. With “filial piety”, the contemplation of Jesus was more in focusing on his human side, the psycho-affective, of a relationship of a son with his mother than on the New Testament as a whole. This affective relationship of Jesus with his mother is not found in the New Testament. I don't say that it didn't exist or that we may not presume it did. It is obvious that in virtue of the reality of the Incarnation, Jesus had, in regard to his mother, the filial love of an exemplary son. What I mean to say is that we do not have a text, a New Testament passage, which expresses or describes this relationship. Even more, from this point of view the scenes of Jesus “from a distance” regarding a filial affective dependence on his

¹⁸ Ibid., cf. nos. 25-28

¹⁹ The pontificate of John Paul II was especially Marian. We recall, in the wake of *Marialis Cultus* his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* of October 16, 2002, very enlightening about the question of Marian devotion, in particular its Christocentrism. But neither should we forget his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* of March 25, 1987, in which, following along the lines of chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium* he offers us, among other reflections, an excellent meditation on the journey of faith with Mary.

mother, often present in the Gospels, become enigmatic, difficult – not to say impossible – to understand.²⁰

- b) The foundation that Fr. Simler gave to filial piety is clearly Christ centric. But in the way it is presented, his Christocentrism runs the risk of turning into “Mariacentrism”. Expressions so often used in our tradition like “What would a son not do for his mother?”, understood not in a theological sense but a human-affective one, could lead us to consider Jesus as a son who lived *for* his mother and not *with* his mother for the Trinitarian plan of salvation.

It was evident that the Marianists needed to re-situate and re-direct our Marian devotion. We had to make our own particular journey of *aggiornamento* rethinking and reformulating our charism in the light of the Council.

1.4. Our own assimilation of the “Mariological turn”: what we have done and what remains to be done.

We have to admit that the Council’s presentation of Mary, both in its perspective and in its method – returning to the biblical and patristic sources – pleasantly surprised the Marianists. We see in it a return to the most genuine Chaminadian Mariology and it helped us to rediscover and re-formulate our charismatic and special way of contemplating Mary. What we have called the “Mariological journey” of the Council did not put up a wall to our reflection on Mary, but quite the contrary. After the Council there were published, and continue being published, valuable and in-depth Marianist Mariological studies, not as many as might be desired, but more numerous than we might think.

In this way, following the directives of the Council, the Society could carry out its own return to the biblical and foundational sources. It was possible to give itself a new chapter one of the *Rule of Life*, without doubt the best synthesis of our charism in our constitutional history. It was also possible, reflecting the directives of *Marialis Cultus*, to wonderfully revise our two most traditional expressions of Marian devotion, the act of consecration and the Three O’clock prayer, resulting in two texts of very rich theological and charismatic content. And finally, in this way, throughout the last 25 years, through the documents of the General Chapters we have not failed to give a well founded Marian, theological, and charismatic impulse to our life and mission.

But, as I have said in speaking of the Council, the renewal and “updating” of the doctrinal texts and norms is not enough. There remains the problem of making them part of our life. We have a well-established and fundamentally solid doctrine; we have excellent docu-

²⁰ It is interesting to note that Fr. Chaminade already saw the danger of considering the relationship between Jesus and Mary from a purely affective perspective. In his notes of instruction, in one of his talks about the Assumption of Mary, he criticizes those who might interpret this mystery as a gesture of filial tenderness of Jesus toward his mother. “The merit of Mary is essentially and radically the principle of the glory with which she was crowned...Who could not imagine that Jesus, ceding to his filial tenderness, would use all of his power to elevate to the highest glory the one who carried him in her womb? An error! An illusion that we have! Jesus Christ, in his divine works, no longer listens to flesh and blood. Open the Gospels and see him in fulfillment of his mission. He sees only the Father who is in heaven. In this he has nothing in common with Mary. His answers would seem to contain a certain hardness toward Mary for whom he would not be taught our mysteries.” (*Ecrits et Paroles*, Vol. II, 202.172, p. 434)

ments, profound and enlightening. But they are more in the mind than in the heart, in words more than in deeds, on paper more than in life. This is true for many aspects of our religious life. It is also true with regard to our relationship with Mary.

We return now to the “Why” that we left in suspense in the previous section. Why doesn’t a Marian doctrine so solidly established and developed from the very center of our Christian and Marianist life transfer into daily life? I dare to answer with another question: Is it not because our spiritual life fails to be centered in the same center as doctrine?

Personally, I am convinced that the tepidity or coldness of doctrinal penetration in life which affects our relationships with Mary, and not only with her, is due to the fact that our spiritual life is not centered in the essential, but in the peripheral. We have profound formulas that go to the roots and spring from them, but our daily living, in the spiritual and in the concrete, has not descended to that profound level, nor become part of it. So it has been trapped in the pretense of fruits which, since they have not roots from which to spring and be fed, are only phantoms.

We have a very important task ahead of us: to have our spiritual life descend to that essential center that inspires and develops. How? We don’t have to go very far to find the way. It is sufficient to let ourselves be led by the *Rule of Life*. My conviction is that we have in it a treasure whose richness is yet to be explored. Perhaps we need to discover its perspective and integrate it into our life. I hope that the following reflections will help toward that end.

II. MARY IN AND FROM THE CENTER OF CHRISTIAN LIFE (MEDITATING ON THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE *RULE OF LIFE*)

2.1. The essential center: living the mystery of our conformity with Christ.

2

In calling us to be Marianists
God asks us to follow in a special way
Jesus Christ, Son of God
become son of Mary
for the salvation of all.
Our goal is to be transformed into his likeness
and to work for the coming of His kingdom.

3

Our religious vocation is a life of faith
rooted in Baptism
by which we first began to live in Jesus Christ.
We come together to form communities of faith
with our brothers and sisters.

4

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.

First of all, and as a point of departure, the *Rule of Life* recalls what constitutes the basis and the final goal of all spiritual life, conformity with Jesus Christ. “Our goal is to be transformed into his likeness.” This follows the tradition of our previous Constitutions. “Christian perfection, which the Society of Mary proposes as its first object, consists essentially in the most exact conformity possible with Jesus Christ, God made Man in order to serve as Model for men” say the Constitutions of 1839 (a. 4). And in those of 1891 (a. 3): “Perfection, the goal of the Society, consists in conformity of life with that of Jesus Christ.”

Nevertheless, the perspective from which conformity with Christ is seen, and the way of understanding and living it, is presented in a manner different from that of previous Constitutions, especially those of 1891. While these continued to say “every Christian can achieve this conformity observing the precepts of the Gospel; for the professed of every Order and every pious Institute there must also be the practice of the evangelical counsels,” the *Rule of Life* immediately recalls living the sacramental mystery of baptism “through which we begin **to live in Jesus Christ.**”

This is no superficial change. It has profound meaning for the spiritual life. Through it the *Rule of Life* invites us to examine the basis of our Christian life, that is, our relationship with Christ, limited in many of us to being an “admirer” of this model and example of life. What is really in question is an authentic call to re-ground the spiritual life by living the mystery of communion with Christ and not by imitating him. It is important that we understand the meaning and effects of this call.

Conformity with Christ is something deeper than imitating him. “Con-form” is to “acquire the *form of*”. This is along the lines of St. Paul’s “*in Christ*”. We recall how he formulated the great goal of his life, the perfection to which he aspired: “be found *in Him*; not having my own righteousness of Law, but through the faith of Christ, having the righteousness of God on faith”²¹

While imitation depends on our ascetical-moral efforts, conformity with Jesus Christ is the work of the Spirit in us; it cannot be attained by our efforts alone.²² Imitation supposes a distance between the one being imitated and the imitator. Even more, the distance encourages imitation. Because there is a distance, the imitator proposes to walk toward the model, even if it is present only on the horizon, almost like a utopia. So, while imitation is encouraged by distance, conformity comes from intimate communion through which, by pure grace, we are “incorporated” into Christ. It is true that conformity with Christ inspires the imitation of Christ, but we should not confuse it with that, much less reduce conformity to imitation.

²¹ Philippians 3:9

²² In the important Notebook D of his writings on Direction, Fr. Chaminade notes: “Since perfection in the Society of Mary is rooted in conformity with O.L. J. C. under the protection and maternal solicitude of Mary, it is necessary to know more and more why J.C. came to this world, how he is the way, the truth and the life, how J.C. communicates to us his Spirit, how the Spirit of J.C. makes us live the life of J.C. and conforms us completely to our divine Model: in it consists entire conformity with J.C.” (ED II, 404)

It is not a question of suppressing our duty to imitate Christ, but rather of grounding and focusing well its place in the spiritual life. This comes precisely from the experience of the infinite love of God which, passing over the barriers of his infinite distance, makes us one with the Son. And it is this experience which, making us conscious of the asymmetry (better than “distance”) between his love and ours that arouses the desire to correspond by following and imitating Christ, the human incarnation of divine love. So it is the “*in Christ*” which animates and encourages the “*like Christ*”.

Perhaps the best lived expression of this principle is the confession of Paul himself when, after affirming his desire to be in Christ, he says: “Not that I have become perfect yet: I have not yet won but I am still running, **trying to capture the prize for which Christ Jesus captured me.**”²³ In fact, without the previous experience of “having been captured”, the desire to “capture” Christ is in vain and has no basis. It might appear noble but in fact it is nothing more than a phantom, and a dangerous phantom because, leading us one or the other time to failure, it provokes a huge tiredness, and the noble desire to *be like* is extinguished, a victim of itself, because it is not rooted in living the great gift of *being in* through grace. How many abandonments of the spiritual life, of the Christian life or of religious life find their roots here!

So, we must recover and cultivate the **mystical experience** as the central core of our spiritual life. The *Rule of Life*, as we have seen, invites us to this.

What I have just affirmed might sound rare or strange, an “out-of-the-flesh spiritualism” or something of great saints, even to ecstasy in prayer. But this isn’t so. The recovery of the mystical experience is necessary not only for “specialists in prayer” or for religious, but for any faithful Christian. The Christian life either springs from or is developed by the experience of **the mystery of grace** (this is what the adjective mystical means) or it is not Christian and is still rooted in the Old Testament. Because it is this experience that characterizes it as such, that brings it into the newness of the New Alliance. Without it, the relationship with Christ is reduced to that of a disciple with a “teacher of life”, with a rabbi, and nothing more. And the Christian life is reduced to the task of complying with certain norms of life, more or less “progressive” or “conservative” (this is disputed), as if we were not in some other kind of relationship with God which began with the Incarnation and which we call New Testament.

In what does this “mystical experience” consist? St. John of the Cross defines it in a summary and suggestive way as “a loving awareness of God present.” Present through grace, in history, and in the very depths of ourselves. We can reach it only through faith. It is an experience based on faith, an experience in and from faith as we state very well in the *Rule of Life*.

- A faith which emerges in our Christian life with baptism, at the moment in which our incorporation into Christ become a reality. “Our religious vocation is a life of faith rooted in Baptism. (RL 3)
- A faith which, from that moment, leads us to an “awareness of God”, that is, penetrates existence with a new light and brings us into the body of those who walk through history “as if they saw the invisible”.²⁴ “We strive to become men of

²³ Philippians 3:12 (Jerusalem Bible translation)

²⁴ Cf. Hebrews 11: “It was by faith that he (Moses) left Egypt and was not afraid of the king’s anger; he held to his purpose like a man who could see the Invisible.” (verse 27).

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.” (RL 4)

- A faith that produces a “loving awareness” because it is fed not only by knowledge, but above all by the **fruition of the mystery** in the liturgy and in prayer. The faith of the heart, our Founder would say. “In order that Jesus be the center of our lives as we await his return, we dedicate a generous part of each day to the practice of prayer. In our prayer life we give special importance to the liturgy, which is the prayer of Christ and of God’s people, and personal meditation which nourishes within us the spirit of faith” (RL 48). “The personal prayer of the Marianist is an act of faith. Persevering dedication to prayer leads to faith of the heart, and brings us closer to our goal, conformity with Jesus Christ. Through, with and in Him the Spirit leads us into communion with the Father. (RL 58)

2.2. Mary at the center of the mystery of our Christian life. From the incarnation to Calvary.

This mystical, basic experience of our being *in* Christ is what opens to us the correct access to Mary. In the face of this mystery of real and not only intentional communion with Him that trans-forms us into sons of God with the Son, we ask ourselves: “How is that communion possible?”

The answer comes from the mystery of the Incarnation. If we can “con-form” with the Son, it is because the Son, through the power of his love and the power of the Holy Spirit, took on our human “form”.²⁵ “God became man so that man might become like God”, the Fathers say. It is from the incarnation and in virtue of it that that humanity is capable of divinity, it is the place of communion with God.

But the human nature assumed by the Word was not created “ex nihilo” for the occasion. It came from humanity itself. The Son is “born of a woman,”²⁶ of Mary, becoming one of us. It is here, at the root of this extraordinary event, the apex of history, the door of the new Alliance of God with humanity, that we find Mary. “Mary, of whom Jesus was born”, our Founder repeated over and over to emphasize the place that is proper to her in Christian life, the place from which he contemplated her now and then.

5

By the gift of faith
the Virgin Mary totally opened herself
to the mission the Father gave her
in his plan of salvation
Jesus was formed in her by the Holy Spirit
He willed her to be the Promised Woman
sharing in all his mysteries
When his hour had come
he proclaimed her our Mother.

²⁵ We recall the words of the hymn in the letter to the Philippians in its literal translation: “(Christ) though he was *in the form of God*...emptied himself having taken the *form of a slave* becoming like men.” (2:6-7)

²⁶ Galatians, 4: 4

Contemplating Mary in the mystery of the incarnation, we see that her role in the work of our redemption is active and unique. No other human creature has had it, or ever will. And since it finds its origin in the assumption of human nature on the part of the Son, it continues from that moment to everything he lived as a man, taking on the human nature conceived in Mary through death to the resurrection. For this reason we can say in all truth that Mary was associated in all of the mysteries of our redemption, as our Founder liked to recall.

Thus, the contemplation of Mary in the annunciation and her contemplation at the foot of the cross are complementary. In the order of human redemption, the surrender of human nature that Mary makes into the hands of the Spirit in the incarnation is not completed until the definitive surrender in “the hour” of going to the Father.

It will be the Son who gives it, bringing the Mother after and with him. The Mother had conceived the Son but it will be the Son who brings the Mother to “the hour” of the completion of redemption, “the hour” of going to the Father. At that moment, her maternity achieves its redemptive fullness when the human nature of the Son, the same that had been engendered in her, dies, abandoned into the hands of the Father by the Son, with him and in him. “The hour” of redemption will also be the hour of realizing the true extent of her maternity in the incarnation.

St. Augustine expresses this in an admirable way. Commenting precisely on the reply of Jesus to his mother at the wedding at Cana, “my hour has not yet come,” he says: “His mother asks him for a miracle, but he does it as though unaware of human feelings when he is going to do divine work, as if to say: what in me works miracles you did not engender; you did not give birth to my divinity; but as you engendered my weakness I will acknowledge you when my weakness is hanging on the cross. This is the meaning of the words, “my hour has not yet come”...He acknowledges her at the moment he is going to die what she gave him. The being given to Mary does not die, but what Mary gave. The eternity of the divinity does not die, but the weakness of the flesh.”²⁷

And it is at that moment, the moment in which the weakness of the flesh engendered by Mary finishes its journey in history and is redeemed by going to the Father through the Son on the cross when the Lord will reveal to the “beloved disciple”, and in him to all his true disciples, that she is the Woman, the Mother.

2.3. The maternal mission of Mary.

6a
Like the beloved disciple
we accept Mary as a precious gift of God.
Moved by Jesus' love for his mother
we dedicate ourselves to her
so that the Holy Spirit
in whose action she cooperates
with a mother's love
may form us more fully to the image of her Son.

²⁷ *Tract. in Johannem*, VIII, 9

“Behold your mother.” The meaning of this revelation is powerful. In fact, if it is the humanity of Christ that makes our redemption possible, if it is his “conformity” with our flesh that opens the door to our “conformity” with him, the function of Mary in the Christian life is much more than being an exemplary believer. She is at the generative center of this life because she is a key participant in its creation, cooperating with the Spirit in a generative, maternal way.

From where does this generative capacity come? From her faith. Mary is a mother through her faith. The humanity of the Son of God takes shape in her through the Holy Spirit when she totally opens herself to him through faith. It is her faith that makes possible her bodily generative capacity as a woman, impossible because of her virginity (“How can this be since I have no relations with a man?”). It is her faith that opens her womb to fecundity, giving life to a new humanity that will forever remain united to the Word.

In her fullness of faith, “Mary conceived in her mind before in her womb” St. Augustine says.²⁸ “Rightly, therefore, the Fathers see Mary not merely as passively engaged by God, but as freely cooperating in the work of man’s salvation through faith and obedience. For, as St. Irenaeus says, she “being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.” Hence, not a few of the early Fathers gladly assert with him in their preaching: “the knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith.” Comparing Mary with Eve, they call her “Mother of the living” and frequently claim: “death through Eve, life through Mary.”²⁹

It is this generative power of the faith of Mary that fascinated Fr. Chaminade. “What I have been admiring for some time now, and for too short a time, is the fact that Mary became associated at the moment of the incarnation to the eternal fecundity of the Father by her vivid faith animated by an inconceivable great love, and she gave birth to that humanity in which her adorable Son clothed himself. In like manner, my dear Son, it is faith that causes us to conceive Jesus Christ within ourselves ‘So that Christ may live in your hearts through faith..he gave us power to become children of God’. All the treasures of divinity in Mary are traceable to the faith which animated her; she became a fullness of grace, a source of life. Just as Mary in her faith conceived Jesus Christ in the natural order, so in a very real sense we have the power to conceive him in the super-natural order by faith.”³⁰

With this, he understood that the maternal mission of Mary was universal. “By consenting to the incarnation of the Word, the Blessed Virgin contributed in the most potent and efficacious way to the work of our Redemption. By the very fact of consenting, she devoted herself in such a way that it can be said that she bore all men in her womb just as any mother bears her children.”³¹

Convinced, therefore, that only in letting ourselves be formed in this maternal womb of Mary, which is the fullness of faith, can we “con-formed” with Christ, he could not

²⁸ Sermon 215

²⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 56

³⁰ Letter to Fr. Perrodin, March 1, 1843. *Marian Writings*, Vol. 2, 116, p. 54.

³¹ *Ibid.* 662, p. 257

consider himself, nor we ourselves, except as “sons of Mary”.³² In his autographic notes of Direction with which he tried to complete the Constitutions, developing the spirit which animates them and indicating the guide-lines for the spiritual formation of the religious, he wrote:

- “1. The new Order takes the name of *Society of Mary* because all those who compose it consider themselves as her sons: perhaps it would be better to call them *Family of Mary*.
2. A truly Christian person can not, nor should not, live anything other than the life of Jesus Christ. The religious is called to it in a special way. This divine life should be the beginning of all his thoughts, his words and his actions.
- 3, Jesus Christ was conceived in the womb of the august Mary through the work of the Holy Spirit; Jesus was born from the virginal womb of Mary. *Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary*.
4. Baptism and faith begin the life of Jesus Christ in us and through them we are conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit, but we must, like the Savior, be born of the Virgin Mary.
5. Jesus Christ wanted to be formed in our likeness in the virginal womb of Mary, and we, likewise, should be formed in him through her, direct our activities according to hers, our inclinations according to her inclinations and our life according to her life.
6. All that Mary carries in her womb cannot be more than Jesus Christ himself, or live more than the life of Jesus Christ. Mary, with inconceivable love, always carries us as little children in her chaste womb until, having formed in us the first traits of her Son, gives birth to us as she did to Him.”³³

Perhaps we can now better understand in all of its depth and richness the phrase of article 6 of our *Rule of Life*, “so that the Spirit, in whose action she cooperates with a mother’s love, may form us more fully to the image of her Son.”

2.4. Sons of Mary for the salvation of the world.

In order to be formed into the image of the Son, “inspired by the love of Jesus for his Mother, we give ourselves to her”, we say in our *Rule of Life*. Our giving of ourselves to Mary, imitating the love that Jesus had for her, that is, the love by which he gave himself to Mary to be formed as a man.

³² In Chapter V of the little treatise on *Our Knowledge of Mary* which has as its title “Mary, Mother of Christians”, he concludes: “We are then, in very truth, the children of Mary. We belong to her as a child belongs to its mother. In her and through her, Jesus Christ in communicating to us his life, has made us partakers of his nature, so that we are born spiritually of Mary in consequence of her ineffable union with Jesus Christ, the Father of our souls. Without trying to plumb the depths of this mystery, let it suffice for us to know that Mary conceived Jesus in her soul by faith, when the Word of God in the womb of the holy Virgin emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, so that she became truly another Christ. Being then associated in all his thoughts and all his sentiments, she knew herself to be the New Eve and gave herself totally to the divine work of her Son, who willed to engender us spiritually in her and with her.” *Marian Writings*, Vol. 2, 491.

³³ Notebook D, doc. H, ED II, 334-339. This logical relationship of the fundamental principles of the Christian life was the main thread of the retreats of 1827 (*MW*, 2, 821-834) and are frequently repeated in the teachings of the Founder.

Having come this far after our long journey, we understand that “the love of Jesus for his Mother” has roots that are much deeper and more “mystical” than the psychological-affective ones. It is included in the loving surrender of God to humanity in the incarnation. It springs from his de-sign, from his will to save. Consequently, it is not the same love of a son toward his mother who has conceived him and given him life. It is a pre-existing love, manifested in the choice from all eternity, It is this pre-existing love that the angel announces to Mary in his greeting. It is part of the primordial love of the Trinity in which, as St. Paul said, the Father has predestined us to be saints.³⁴

It is that immense Trinitarian love, overflowing in its design for salvation, which, in order to give itself to humanity, does so concretely in a woman, Mary. The love with which the Son gives himself to his Mother is nothing less than redemptive love. Steeped in faith, she gives the son the human form he needs to “become flesh”, that is, to enter concretely into our history, tangibly and actively.

By its filial surrender to Mary in Jesus, the love of God becomes human. The Son gives himself to Mary in order to receive humanity from her. He loves and embraces in the maternal womb of Mary “human flesh” who, in turn, opens herself to him and embraces him through faith. In this mutual loving embrace, all the immensity of the love of God submits itself to the human dynamic, from birth as a child to death, death on a cross. “The child grew” and “was subject to them”.³⁵ And Mary’s womb is the hiding place of the power of the divine love of God in frail humanity, of the divine in the human. “Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary?”³⁶ St. Paul will consider this mystery as a “kenosis”, an emptying of self out of love.³⁷

By its filial surrender to Mary in Jesus, the love of God becomes fraternal in order to reveal the Father. Marian sonship and universal fraternity go hand in hand in the Son. He is a brother because he is a son, and he is a son because he is a brother. And in this way the Son opens the door to the revelation and manifestation of the love of the Father. Becoming a son of Mary he makes himself a brother, and recognizing us as brothers, he makes us sons of the Father. It is through his status as a brother that the paternity of God comes into the world. “Jesus Christ made himself the Son of Adam in order to enable us to become the children of God his Father, (a double bond whereby he unites himself to us). Our Father becomes his and his becomes ours. “*I am ascending to my Father and your Father*”. By the same liberality, Jesus Christ gives us his divine Mother as our

³⁴ Cf. Ephesians 1: 3-4

³⁵ Luke, 2:51 ff.

³⁶ Mark, 6:3

³⁷ It is from this perspective that we understand the insistence of Fr. Chaminade on the “submission” to Jesus and Mary, a submission that he did not cease to contemplate, in a very concrete and carnal way, in the best sense of that word. “Mary, the Mother of God! Heaven is in her chaste bosom, the Divinity dwells there corporally, veiled, though not destroyed, under the form of a slave. When Jesus sees the light of day, how admirable it will be to see him dependent on Mary and subject to her authority like an ordinary child conceived in sorrow and sin. Then the Son of God will allow himself to be cared for, nurtured, clothed and reared by a creature, who will fulfill toward him all the duties of a mother. Helpless to care for himself and his needs, the Eternal Word becomes a little child, will rest in Mary’s lap and on her heart, will be fed at her breast, will beg her tender caresses and will sit at her feet and listen with docility.” (*Marian Writings*, 2, 461). And in all of his projects for the Constitutions the reference of “he was subject to them” from the gospel of Luke was never absent. (Cf. Constitutions 1828, art. 5)

Mother so as to be our brother in every respect. Mary is united to the eternal Father in order to be the Mother of all the faithful.”³⁸

By its filial surrender to Mary in Jesus, the love of God becomes a bride to bring forth the Church. The Son, formed in the womb of the Mother, is also, as we have previously seen, the one who forms the Mother, opening her maternity to universal saving fecundity. The Son is also a bridegroom. This is undoubtedly the viewpoint of the Gospel of John, as many of the Fathers have noted, in which Jesus always calls Mary “Woman”.³⁹ Who is the true bridegroom at the wedding in Cana? Is this not, perhaps, the perspective from which to understand the profound meaning of the scene of Calvary, so loved by our Founder? Definitely, in the “hour” of redemption, Jesus “saw the disciple together with his Mother.” Woman and disciple, united in a maternal-filial relationship, is the new humanity that the Lord leaves journeying in this world. It is the Church in its double condition as Mother and Disciple. A Mother who, made fecund through the gifts of the Spouse – his Word, his Body, his Spirit, the water and blood from his side – continues generating the life of a new man for a new creation. “Mother, behold your son.” A disciple who takes all of these gifts of the Mother as his most precious possession, in order to be formed in her womb. “Son, behold your Mother.”⁴⁰

We understand now the power contained in the first phrase of article 2 of the *Rule of Life*: “In calling us to be Marianists, God asks us to follow in a special way Jesus Christ, Son of God, be-come Son of Mary, for the salvation of all.” Becoming sons of Mary with him and like him we are “con-formed” to this way of love, incarnated in the human, fraternal and filial by which we can embrace humanity and the Church for the salvation of the world.

I hope that this meditation based on the *Rule of Life* has helped us understand how and why Fr. Chaminade contemplated the maternity of Mary as her great mission in Salvation

³⁸ *Marian Writings*, Vol. 1, 82, p. 52

³⁹ “In the first place, he was pleased during his mortal life to call her by the great name of Woman. This fact is remarkable... Though we do not pretend to reject the various interpretations by which some have sought to justify the seeming inconsiderateness on the part of the Son of God in this particular, yet may we not say that the paramount reasons why the Savior of mankind should make use of the name Woman when speaking to his Mother was precisely to make us understand and to remind us unceasingly of the one great fact that she is indeed the New Eve, promised together with the Redeemer? (*Marian Writings*, Vol. 2, 471)

“Thus, according to St. Bernard, just as for the procreation of man it was not fitting that Adam be alone, that an aid like unto him was thought necessary, so likewise in the eternal decrees, it was fitting that Jesus Christ, the New Adam should not be alone in the spiritual generation of man: Mary, the New Eve, is the aid like unto him who is to cooperate with him.” (ibid. 467)

⁴⁰ In the contemplation so frequent and thorough that Fr. Chaminade made of this episode, references to this spousal and ecclesial perspective had to be there. In one of his sermons on the compassion of the Virgin, identifying her with the spouse in the Song of Songs who sings “I will go to the mountain of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense” (Sg 4:6) he says: “She, the **true spouse of Jesus Christ**, tells us, “I will go..”. I wish to follow her example. I will climb that mountain that is more terrible than Mt. Sinai and will give myself up to sorrow and disgrace...Jesus Christ suffers for all men, but they must receive the application of his merits. **Mary represents the Church.** As Mother of the Christians to whom she gave birth at the foot of the cross, and whom Jesus in fact constituted as such in his testament.” (*Marian Writings*, Vol. 1, 214).

“The natural death of Jesus Christ was a mystical representation of the death of the “old man” and that is why the blood and water which flowed from the side of Christ represented the Church. Eve, formed from a rib of the sleeping Adam, was a figure of this profound mystery. Through the death of Jesus Christ, Mary had experienced death. The lance which pierced the side of her Son pierced her beautiful soul, displaying for us in herself the same mystery, the formation of the Church. We might say that she gave us birth.” (*Marian Writings*, Vol. 1, 76)

History; how and why he found in it the call of God for ours. To reflect on the meaning and consequences of all this for our own missionary commitment, will be the object of our reflection, God willing, in a second circular.

Here, I finish, brothers. Opening the way of meeting Mary in the central mystery of our Christian life, I hope to have offered you a means to re-discover, in all its depth, the place that Mary occupies in our charism which is none other than that which she has in all Christian life. Except that we, who follow in the wake of our Founder, have been given the gift of understanding it, and making it known.

I invite you to give thanks to God with me for the gift of this great vocation and to ask him to help us to love it and live it more and more with fervor and authenticity.

Your brother in Christ, Son of God, become Son of Mary for the salvation of all,

Manuel J. Cortés, S.M.
Superior General

March 25, 2007
Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord