

reared in her care after having been formed in her virginal womb.<sup>23</sup>

The imitation of Christ – the transformation of each Marianist into another Christ, into Jesus Christ, Son of Mary – lies at the heart of Marianist spirituality in its earliest historical manifestation during the years between 1800 and 1850.

The life and experience of the first Marianists during this 50-year period are of prime importance for us today. They play a paradigmatic role analogous to the one played for the whole Church by the Jerusalem community and the early Christian communities of the second half of the first century. At that time the apostles were still alive and proclaimed the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. The precious writings of the New Testament convey the first historical manifestation of Christian spirituality in the life and experience of the first Christians. Down through the Christian centuries, that experience has played and continues to play an emblematic role for the Church.

So, too, does the experience of the first Marianists hold up the new paradigm of living the Gospel communicated to them by Father Chaminade while he was still alive. This paradigm shows us Marianist spirituality as they experienced it. They heard Father Chaminade say that the Lord had chosen new wars, and they felt called to join Mary in her mission and to be transformed by her into Christ, her Son.

---

<sup>23</sup> Article 5, Constitutions of 1839. MW 2, § 576, p. 225. Father Armbruster points out that this article gives evidence of the development of the Founder's thought in the "impassioned search" he made "for ways to harmonize an old ideal in his life, the imitation of Jesus Christ, with a more recent discovery, the imitation above all of *Jesus, Son of Mary*." The progression of this discovery can be traced by comparing this article with the same article of the 1829 draft of the Constitutions, which calls devotion to Mary *one of the most salient points* of the imitation of Christ. In the final version these words become *the most salient point*. See ARMBRUSTER, *Devotion to Mary*, pp. 31-32, note 73.

## *Development of Marianist Spirituality After 1850*

### *A Word on Sources*

When we turn from an examination of the foundation period of Marianist spirituality (1800-50) to the study of its subsequent history and development (after 1850), we are immediately struck by the sharp drop in the number of works that have been produced by Marianist writers about the latter period. Many shelves and tiers of shelves in Marianist libraries are filled to overflowing with histories and analyses of the spirituality of the foundation period, but one single shelf would suffice to hold all the books and monographs that have been written to date on the history of Marianist spirituality after 1850. Most of these works are histories of our characteristic Marianist devotion to Mary over the years, or they are histories of Marian or Mariological studies by Marianists. None of them treats the broad history and development of Marianist spirituality as it has been conceived in the paper. Even this paper can be considered no more than a preliminary attempt to survey the terrain and cast a few *jalons*, as the French say, to mark out paths for possible future research. Marianist history, in general, is still an incomplete and underdeveloped area of research and study. When we narrow the focus to the history of Marianist spirituality, the number of sources reduces to a handful.

In view of this peculiar situation, I will start this examination of the history of Marianist spirituality after 1850 with a brief discussion of these few sources and an assessment of the current

state of the literature. One of the best sources is the 25 pages Father Neubert devotes to the topic in his book *Our Gift from God*.<sup>1</sup> He was writing at a time when the phrase *filial piety* was still regnant in the Society of Mary as the special name we Marianists gave to our characteristic devotion to Mary. As a result he starts his history with explanations of how it came to be that Father Chaminade and the Marianists of the foundation period never used the term. He is gentle with Father Simler in recounting some of his blunders and fumbling attempts to "improve" the vow of stability. This fits Father Neubert's casting Father Simler as one of the main heroes of his account and fully deserving of the title "Second Founder."

There are two short histories of our Marianist Marian devotion after 1850 which treat the same events Father Neubert covered in the chapter of *Our Gift from God* cited above. One is *Sketches on the Original Meaning and the Changes in Our Vow of Stability* by Father Paul Verrier, and the other is the *History of Our Apostolic Devotion to Mary* by Father John G. Leies.<sup>2</sup> Both were published by the Apostle of Mary Documentary Series in Dayton around the end of World War II, while it was under the guidance of Father Ferree. Father Paul Verrier is more blunt than Father Neubert in his assessment of Father Simler's near loss of the vow of stability. I have never seen the French original of Father Paul Verrier's sketches on the history of our vow of stability. As far as I know it was never published in the French original. A notation on the title page of the translation indicates that the original manuscript was written in Sion in 1925 and in

<sup>1</sup> Emil NEUBERT, SM, *Our Gift from God*, Chapter 15: "History of Our Marian Heritage" (St. Louis: n.p., 1962), pp. 104-28.

<sup>2</sup> Paul VERRIER, SM, *Sketches on the Original Meaning and the Changes in Our Vow of Stability* (Dayton: Apostle of Mary Documentary Series, November 1949).

John G. LEIES, SM, *History of Our Apostolic Devotion to Mary* (Dayton: Apostle of Mary Documentary Series, vol. 1, no. 5, document 4405, May 1944).

Strasbourg in 1937. I do not know if private copies were widely circulated or what reception they received. Father Paul Verrier knew Father Simler personally, as well as all the other leading figures of the great revival of Marianist spirituality at the turn of the century (Klobb, Lebon, Cousin, Schellhorn, et al.). Perhaps for these reasons he did not feel constrained to gloss over Father Simler's mistakes.

This tone of frankness is also found in the short monograph of Father John G. Leies. He wrote it during the years of World War II, probably while he served as novice master of the St. Louis Province. He does not treat the near disappearance of the vow of stability, but he characterizes the generalates of Father Caillet and Father Chevaux as a time of obscurity for our devotedness to Mary. According to Father Leies, this obscurity was only partially lifted by Father Simler's instructions on filial piety, which did not encompass the full breadth and depth of the Founder's doctrine. For Father Leies, the hero who dispelled the darkness was Father Klobb, who in the last five years of his life succeeded in re-igniting the flame of our true apostolic devotedness to Mary.

Both of these monographs are worth reading because of the unequivocally positive estimate they give to our Marianist apostolic devotedness to Mary and the clear conviction they convey that this precious treasure has been successfully transmitted to us by our Marianist forebears, despite some precarious times in our history when it was obscured or almost lost.

Two studies I found useful in preparing this paper treat the history of Marian thought and Mariology among Marianists after 1850. One is the 1965 monograph of Bruno Ferrero.<sup>3</sup> The other is a work still in progress being written by Emilio Cárdenas in

<sup>3</sup> Bruno FERRERO, SM, "Evoluzione del pensiero mariano nella storia della Società di Maria", *Quaderni Marianisti*, No. 23 (Marianisti: Provincia Italiana, 1965).

Poland.<sup>4</sup> Indirectly, both of these studies throw light on the evolution of Marianist spirituality since 1850.

Despite its brevity, this enumeration fairly well exhausts the list of main sources.<sup>5</sup> After these works, it is necessary to go to general Marianist histories or to biographies of individual Marianists to fill in the picture of the history of Marianist spirituality after 1850. There is still no definitive general history of the Marianists or of the Society of Mary. Father Délas' expansion of the popular histories of Father Lebon and Father Gadiou is useful as a stopgap.<sup>6</sup> His history of the Constitutions of the Society of Mary is also useful.<sup>7</sup> To these histories can be added the regional Marianist histories that have appeared in recent years. Finally, the various biographies and biographical sketches of key persons in the history of Marianist spirituality contain further information.

With this assessment of sources and current state of the literature for the history of Marianist spirituality after 1850, we can turn to a rapid review of that history.

#### *The Transformation of the Society into a Teaching Congregation*

When we look in on the Marianist world in 1850 immediately after the death of Father Chaminade, we find Father Caillet at the helm of leadership in the Society. He had been in the office

<sup>4</sup> Emilio CÁRDENAS, SM, *150 Años de estudio de la mariología de Guillermo José Chaminade (1850)*, unfinished manuscript, Czestochowa (Poland), January 1998.

<sup>5</sup> There are most likely other sources of which I am not aware. I did not have the opportunity of making a systematic survey of Spanish and Italian Marianist documents. For example, I did not know about Bruno Ferrero's monograph until Emilio Cárdenas pointed it out to me.

<sup>6</sup> Louis GADIOU, SM, and Jean Claude DÉLAS, SM, *Marianistes en mission permanente* (Paris: Marianistes, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> Jean Claude DÉLAS, SM, *Histoire des Constitutions de la Société de Marie*. (Fribourg: Études marianistes, 1964).

of Superior General since the Society's General Chapter of 1845. The Daughters of Mary were still in communion with the Society, but communications were beginning to get strained and the administrative links between the two congregations of Marianist religious broke down during Father Caillet's term.

For all intents and purposes, Marianist lay communities had passed out of existence. Marianist sodalities had been outlawed by the Revolution of 1830, and they were never revived as such. Their place was taken by Marian confraternities, where a remnant of the first lay Marianists continued their experience of Marianist spirituality as they grew older. However, adult Marianist lay communities in the classic form in which they had emerged in the early part of the century were a thing of the past.

The centers of vibrant Marianist spirituality were now the many communities of the Society, which year by year was expanding and improving its identity and competence as a prospering teaching congregation in the burgeoning arena of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Catholic education. There was a certain unease surrounding the Founder's last years that lingered among the rank and file of the Society's members. Many questions about his removal from the office of Superior General, his tense disagreements with Father Caillet, and the strange actions of some of the Society's leaders went unanswered. The new general superiors did their best to maintain a discreet silence about many matters. They were no doubt secretly relieved that Father Roussel had decided not only to withdraw from the Society after his unsuccessful efforts to become Superior General but also to repent at Our Lady of Victories, to apologize for the harm he had done, and to turn over a new leaf by joining the ranks of the diocesan priests in his home diocese.

On the other hand, Father Lalanne was alive and well in Paris, where he was still working off the financial debts of Layrac, and where his Marianist identity was as firm, expansive, and con-

tagious as ever. He was still in the forefront of those seeking to blaze new trails for Christian education and Catholic schools. He never saw his role in contributing to the Founder's troubles during the last years as reason to question his loyalty to Father Chaminade or doubt his total commitment to the Marianist vision. In 1852, he headed the small group of Marianist religious who took charge of Institution Sainte Marie on Rue Bonaparte in Paris. With this move he saw the Society of Mary establishing a beachhead in the capital and expanding its efforts to serve Mary's mission in a way that was entirely fitting and appropriate. We can gauge his understanding of what this expansion signified for Marianist spirituality by quoting from the address he delivered to introduce himself and the Marianists as the replacements of Father Leboucher after their arrival to take charge of the administration of the school.

When you bring your children to the threshold of this house which bears such a blessed name, you know very well, you mothers especially that are so luckily inspired in the education of the young, you know very well into whose hands your cherished charges are deposited. ... The first piece of news I wish to announce is that an important change has taken place in the faculty of this institution. ... We [the Marianists], as successors of this good man [Father Leboucher] are to continue the undertaking begun under such favorable auspices and conducted with so much propriety. And now, what shall I say about ourselves?

... I may say, it is by reason of a religious principle that we devote ourselves to the care of youth; not only have we embraced the profession of teaching from the earliest years of manhood, but we know we serve the God in whom we believe, by instructing children to know and love Him, who alone is able to render them happy if they remain faithful. Yes, Gentlemen, to teach children, and the youngest by way of preference, to

know and love God is the humble profession of the *Brothers of Mary*, and I am able to announce this statement without vanity or taint of human respect, solely because it ought to be mentioned.

Indeed, all of you are aware what Catholicity stands for when symbolized under the sacred name of Mary, especially such as have had the happiness of obtaining the principles of truth from Christian teachers. The name of Mary! It betokens the tenderness of a mother raised to the degree of a supernatural virtue. The name of Mary! It stands for the purity of innocence, safeguarded by the force of special grace from God. The name of Mary! It is the zeal of Divine Charity in alliance with patience in labor, and generosity in sacrifice. The name of Mary! It is the contentment and joy of the heart in the simplicity and seclusion of the most humble ministry. Happy are those who have comprehended and believed all that this pious name signifies in wise counsel and good example; happy are they of whom I am the representative, who have adopted it long ago and placed it as a seal on their institutions and undertakings. ... It is their pleasure, above all, to take in full justice the name of Brothers under the maternal tutelage of Mary.<sup>8</sup>

He goes on to point out that the religious life has not stunted the thoughts and feelings of these Marianist teachers and caused them to look on the world with contempt, as was alleged at that time by those hostile to allowing religious to be teachers. "We categorically deny the imputation of indifference towards all human knowledge. Though we are not men of the world, we are not for all that, men of another age or men of another country; our lives are not hidden, they are not relegated to the deserts, nor passed within the narrow limits of a cell. To act on the world we are persuaded that we must know it, and hence our life is

<sup>8</sup> Jean Baptiste LALANNE, SM, Awards Distribution Ceremony Address, Institution Sainte Marie, Rue Bonaparte, Paris, 1852, in *Spirit* 3, § 394, pp. 567-68.

mingled with all the movements that influence the trend of the epoch, and call for a new order of requirements."<sup>9</sup>

In this address of Father Lalanne, we notice some shifts of emphasis from the language used by Marianists some 20 or 25 years earlier. In his repeated invocation of the name of Mary, he doesn't mention her mission of vanquishing the heresy of religious indifference or her crushing the head of the ancient serpent with her heel. His images are more gentle. They suggest the nurturing care and tenderness of a mother, the happiness and joy of the heart of a group of men who have embraced the profession of teaching from their earliest years of manhood and done so under the maternal tutelage of Mary. Furthermore, these Brothers of Mary have a positive stance toward the world and the secular order. They "categorically deny" being so totally separated from the world by their religious profession that they are indifferent to human knowledge. Instead they want to "act on the world," know it, and lead lives mingled with all the movements and trends of the times that call for "a new order of requirements."

These shifts in language signal the gradual modulation of the experience of Marianist spirituality that accompanied the transformation of the Society of Mary into a teaching congregation. This transformation meant participation in the vast new movement for universal education, one of the most prominent manifestations of Modernity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Becoming a teaching congregation thus entailed a certain détente in the militant resistance to the Modern world and the heresy of religious indifference which had characterized Marianists during the foundation period. Transformation into a teaching congregation was a process that had begun before the Founder died. He advocated and directed the Society's entry into the school world. The 19<sup>th</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 569.

century was the epoch in which the populations of Europe and the Americas moved from being almost entirely illiterate to being almost entirely literate. The dream of human progress attached to learning, and the school was the social invention that was being perfected to accomplish this Modern advance. Like many other religious in France, the early Marianists saw in this new movement of universal schooling a tremendous tool that could be used to evangelize masses of people and recover the ground that had been lost to the de-Christianization that issued from the Revolution.

During the 1820s, the ministry of teaching existed side-by-side with the ministry of Marianist religious directing sodalities. Father Chaminade could still write that one of the circumstances that led to the birth of the Institute of Mary was the need for a director of the Sodality not subject to death. This "director" who would never die could not be an individual person, but a *society* of persons "devoting itself to this work for God's sake, accomplishing it in the maturity of life, after having been trained there-to by holy obedience, and transmitting the same spirit and the same methods to their successors."<sup>10</sup> The Society of Mary and the Daughters of Mary were meant to be the "director" of Marianist sodalities who would never die. During the 1820s, the total number of Marianist religious was still relatively small. About 30 members of the men's section of the Sodality joined the nascent "little Society," and from among them came the early Marianist religious who gave Father Chaminade the greatest assistance in directing the Sodality. However, these 30 odd Marianist religious who had belonged to the Sodality also included the most important early Marianist teachers and educators. Father Lalanne was chief among them. By the time he delivered the above address to the parents of the students of Institution Sainte Marie

<sup>10</sup> "Answers to Objections That Are Ordinarily Made Against Sodalities" (1824), in *Spirit* 3, § 212, p. 240. Also in *Écrits et Paroles* 1, § 154.23, p. 665.

on Rue Bonaparte in Paris he had already spent 35 years as a Marianist religious devoted to the ministry of schools and teaching. His most brilliant and successful years as the first Marianist director of Collège Stanislas were still ahead of him. There is good reason for his being regarded as one of the most important Marianist educators in the history of the Society.

The official documents of the Society of Mary and Daughters of Mary that were written by Father Chaminade or drafted under his guidance made it clear that Marianist religious were committed to education. The Civil Statutes of 1825 issued by the French government authorized the Society as an educational association that was legally permitted to conduct schools. The Constitutions of 1839 attempted to sanction and establish the educational character of the Society by giving the word *education* a special meaning peculiar to the Society. In the Society, the Constitutions stated, the word signified not just teaching and the conduct of schools; instead its meaning was expanded to include all the means of implanting and developing the faith of Christians from the cradle to the grave.<sup>11</sup> Education thus encompassed both those works in which Marianist religious were actually engaged as well as those in which they might engage in the future. Any evangelizing work of the Church was one to which the Society could devote itself. The range of works in which members of the Society engage was in principle and potentially universal, and in the Society all these works were to be called works of education. This inflated meaning of the word *education* was also prescribed in the Simler Constitutions of 1891.<sup>12</sup> Despite these prescriptions

<sup>11</sup> SM Constitutions of 1839, Article 251. "Title 2: Christian Education. Under this title are included all the means by which religion can be inculcated into the minds and hearts of men and by which they can be trained from earliest infancy to the most advanced age in the fervent and faithful profession of a true Christian life. These means fulfill the second object of our little Society."

<sup>12</sup> SM Constitutions of 1891, Article 261. "The term education comprises all

of the Constitutions, most Marianists continued to use the word *education* in its ordinary meaning referring to teaching, instruction, and learning in schools. However, when they wanted to emphasize the profound importance of being Marianist educators, they could on occasion invoke the seemingly tautologous aphorism of the Constitutions "The Society of Mary teaches only in order to educate!"<sup>13</sup>

During the years between 1830 and 1850, while Marianist Sodalities were slowly declining, the number of Marianist schools and the number of Marianist religious teaching in them kept growing. By 1850 there were almost 500 members in the Society of Mary, and virtually all of them were involved in the apostolate of schools. Few of these members had directly experienced the origins of the Society in the Bordeaux Sodality. Within this numerous, youthful assemblage of Marianist educators, there were still a few remaining from the 30 odd members who had joined the Society from the Sodality.<sup>14</sup> Those who had not left the Society and who were still alive could occasionally recount anec-

---

the means which enable us to sow, cultivate, strengthen, and render fruitful the Christian Spirit in souls, in order to lead them to a sincere and open profession of true Christianity."

<sup>13</sup> SM Constitutions of 1891, Article 272. "The Society of Mary teaches only in order to educate; therefore, the Brothers receive and instruct children in order to make them good and fervent Christians."

Father Lackner has investigated the understanding of the fundamental distinction between instruction and education among early members of the Society in his study of the founding vision of Marianist education. See Joseph H. LACKNER, SM, *William Joseph Chaminade, His Apostolic Intent and His Engagement with Schools, Instruction, and Education: An Historical Portrait* (Dayton: NACMS Monograph Series, Document No. 42, 1999), pp. 31-36.

<sup>14</sup> According to my study of early members of the SM, there were 470 members in 1850, 511 in 1851, 550 in 1852, 609 in 1853, and 669 in 1854. During this five-year period their average age was just above 30. There were only 11 members who had belonged to the Bordeaux Sodality in their youth. Lawrence J. CADA, SM, *Early Members of the Society of Mary* (Dayton: NACMS Monograph Series, Document No. 40, 1999), pp. 550-51.

notes to their youthful fellow-Brothers about the former days of the Sodality when Father Chaminade was in his prime. But in the years after 1850, everyone's main energies were directed towards developing the Society into a competent and successful teaching congregation.

An important and telling illustration of these efforts is the Marianist *Manual of Christian Pedagogy*, which was published in two volumes in the years 1856 and 1857. This work was written by Father Fontaine and gathered together the accumulated wisdom of the various Methods of Teaching drawn up during the previous 30 years by a generation of Marianist religious.<sup>15</sup> Many of them had also written textbooks for classroom use, but they returned over and over to revising and improving the successive Methods of Teaching in order to establish the guidelines for quality education in the Marianist tradition. They were convinced that the Marianist spirit enhanced Marianist schools and Marianist teaching with a set of characteristics that distinguished Marianist education from education in general. When the Manual appeared in the 1850s, it met with a very positive reception and was praised for the accuracy with which it articulated the principles and practice of Marianist pedagogy.

This work, due to the indefatigable zeal of Father Fontaine, the Second Assistant, by far surpassed the modest attempts of the preceding epoch in its breadth of view

---

<sup>15</sup> The Manual was published in Bordeaux by Gounouilhou et Lafargue in 1856-57. During the 1880s various portions of the two volumes were translated into English under the direction of Brother Kim and reproduced in a primitive form of spirit duplication for use in the formation programs of the American Province. A free translation of the first volume was published by the American Province under the title *Manual of Christian Pedagogy for the Use of the Brothers of Mary* in 1899. An abridged version of this translation, which removed all explicit references to the Society of Mary, was published by the American Province in 1910 as a general manual of pedagogy for use in Catholic schools throughout the United States.

and wealth of material. It no longer represented a simple method, or still less, an ordinary set of regulations, but a real treatise on pedagogy.<sup>16</sup>

It was especially the first volume devoted to the principles of Marianist pedagogy which received the most praise. This volume was used in the formation of Marianist religious for decades and complemented the principles of Marianist education contained in the 1839 Constitutions and all the revisions of the Constitutions made between 1865 and 1891.<sup>17</sup>

One recommendation of the Manual which is singled out as especially characteristic of the pedagogical method advocated in the Society is the advice to link the mind and the heart in good education. Father Fontaine was writing before the neo-Thomist revival of the 1890s. He therefore finds no difficulty in claiming that the soul has not two, but three faculties: intellect, heart, and will.

*Education of the Intellect.* Man is created after the image and likeness of God. As in God there is a trinity of persons, so in the human soul there is a trinity, which like the Trinity of Heaven, coalesces into a mysterious unity. God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the soul is Intellect, Heart, and Will. The soul, therefore, has three distinct faculties.<sup>18</sup>

A good teacher must become skilled in the art of linking the first two of these faculties in order to develop the first, that is, to develop the intellect or mind of the student.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Spirit* 3, § 257, pp. 328-29.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Kauffman makes a lengthy analysis of the *Manual*, pointing out its elaborate treatment of positive human capacities and contrasting it to the corresponding manual of the Christian Brothers. See Christopher J. KAUFFMAN, *Education and Transformation: Marianist Ministries in America Since 1849* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), pp. 123-29.

<sup>18</sup> [Jean Baptiste FONTAINE,] *Manual of Christian Pedagogy for the Use of the Brothers of Mary* (Dayton: Nazareth, 1899), p. 25.

The way to the pupil's mind lies through his heart; unless the teacher gain the heart, he will never control the mind. A disliked teacher will talk in vain to an unsympathetic class.

The heart of the pupil is not taken by storm, as a fortress, nor by cutting off supplies, as cities are reduced. The human heart surrenders to kindness only. Fear will close the portals of the heart, confidence alone will open them. Let the religious teacher conquer the youthful heart by kindness and rule it by love.<sup>19</sup>

This piece of advice recalls Father Chaminade's distinction between faith of the mind and faith of the heart. Once, when he was writing to Father Lalanne, he pointed out that faith of the mind and submission of the mind to what we believe is a gift of God, and quite a great gift, but it is not the whole of faith. It is faith of the heart which leads to justification. "The submission of the mind is already a great favor of God, but it is only a preparation for the submission of the heart; and the heart will submit only for love. At least that is the way I see it, and it seems to me dangerous not to see it like this in practice."<sup>20</sup>

The recommendations of the Manual are quite concrete, detailed, and practical. Such, for example, is the advice never to resort to corporal punishment or corporal discipline, the avoidance of which was also singled out as a characteristic of Marianist pedagogy.

Do not inflict injurious punishments, such as kneeling for a long time, remaining in an uncomfortable position, fasting, etc. Pinching, slapping the face or the head, pulling the nose, ears, or hair, beating with the fist, kicking, are indignities to which no child should be subjected.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Lettres 3*, Chaminade to Lalanne, Jan. 23, 1833, no. 661, p. 227. Quoted in SIMLER, *Chaminade*, p. 309.

Such brutal treatment is not only incompatible with the character of a religious teacher, but it is also cowardly, unmanly, and amenable to criminal law.<sup>21</sup>

A careful reading of the Manual discloses many traces of Marianist thought and sentiment which reflect or recall features of Marianist spirituality which are explicitly stated elsewhere and which have been handed down to us by our Marianist forebears.

It is clear that the years between 1850 and 1875, which coincide more or less with the generalates of Father Caillet and Father Chevaux in the Society of Mary, are a period in which the tone of Marianist spirituality and the imagery and language with which it was expressed and experienced were changing. It was a time of forgetting many aspects of Marianist life that had once been crucially important, such as Marianist lay communities and the militant, apostolic sense of history with which the first Marianists consecrated themselves to Mary's mission with enthusiastic and determined zeal. Father Neubert calls it a period of "Partial Eclipse of Our Marian Doctrine."<sup>22</sup> To understand and evaluate this judgment, we need to examine later developments in Marianist spirituality which transpired during the generalate of Father Simler.

However, the cutting edge of the development of Marianist spirituality during the years between 1850 and 1875 is most explicit in the emerging identity of the Society of Mary as a teaching congregation that measured up to the standards of excellence that were then taking shape in the Catholic schools movement of 19<sup>th</sup> century France. Marianist devotion to Mary became more mellow, and Marianist attitudes toward the Modern became a bit more open.

<sup>21</sup> [FONTAINE,] *Manual*, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> NEUBERT, *Our Gift from God*, pp. 106-11.

### *The Simler Years*

Father Simler, the "Second Founder," succeeded Father Chevaux as Superior General of the Society in 1876. He died in office 29 years later in 1905. His generalate is one of the most important in the history of the Society for many reasons.<sup>23</sup> One of those reasons and the one which concerns us in this paper is the profound impact his leadership had on the development of Marianist spirituality. Broadly speaking, there are two parts or phases to his influence on Marianist spirituality. First, he raised into high consciousness the understanding and awareness of our special Marianist devotion to Mary by giving it the name *filial piety*, which he successfully introduced into the text of the 1891 Constitutions of the Society in the crucial articles which delineate and explain the core of Marianist Marian spirit and devotion. Second, he rehabilitated the reputation of Father Chaminade by publishing the biography of the Founder, which was a revelation to the Marianist world. Marianists saw once again the full breadth of Father Chaminade's vision of the Marianist mission, and a thrilled amazement over this wonderful recovery swept through the Marianist world during first years of the present century. From 1901, the year Simler published his biography of the Founder, this recovery of the Chaminadean sense of the Marianist spirit has continued and grown right down to our own day.

<sup>23</sup> The definitive history of Father Simler's generalate has not yet been written. However, there are good, partial accounts in Brother Cousin's biography, in the popular histories of Father Lebon, Father Gadiou, and Father Délas, and in an array of other sources such as biographies of other Marianists, accounts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century expansion of the Society, histories of the Constitutions, and the histories of our Marian devotion by Emile Neubert, Paul Verrier, and John G. Leies which we have cited in this paper. Recently, these sources have been significantly augmented by the publication of Father Simler's private journal. See [Louis COUSIN, SM], *Joseph Simler, Fourth Superior General of the Society of Mary* (Dayton: St. Mary's Convent, 1913). See also Joseph SIMLER, SM, *Journal intime et notes*, edited by Ambrogio ALBANO, SM (Rome: AGMAR Collection "La Gerbe", 1996).

We know that Father Simler had an especially fervent devotion to Mary before he became Superior General. It was probably during his novitiate in the years 1853-55 that he discovered St. Louis Grignion de Montfort's *True Devotion to Mary*. The book made a deep impression on him. He shared his discovery with his close friend Louis de Lagarde, and together they came to see that the devotion to Mary that characterized the Society of Mary which they were entering bore a strong resemblance to that of Grignion de Montfort.<sup>24</sup> The two friends shared many more experiences that would have far-reaching effects, including the discovery of Father Chaminade's manuscripts during their forced confinement in the Society's Paris headquarters during the siege of the city in 1870-71 at the time of the Franco-Prussian War. Here is Father Simler's own account of this significant occurrence.

During the long siege of Paris of 1870-71, we were whiling away the hours of our confinement by rummaging through the archives of the Society of Mary when our attention was arrested by documents concerning Father Chaminade, the Founder of the Society. What a revelation this reading proved to be! It dawned upon us that Father Chaminade was more of an unknown than we had realized, not only in those regions where he had exercised his apostolate, but even in the religious families he founded and which continue to live his spirit and to function under his guidance.

We were aware that Father Chaminade constantly recommended to his disciples the truly Christian maxim he himself practiced, "Love to be unknown and to be esteemed as nothing." This love for the hidden life explains how he was able to live without attracting public attention and to die without creating a stir. But did it justify the silence that has since shrouded the person and

<sup>24</sup> NEUBERT, *Our Gift from God*, p. 112.

the works of this ardent apostle? Could that prolonged silence and that apparent oblivion find any justification today? Were these not rather regrettable, especially in the institutes of which he was the Founder? When Divine Providence allowed us to stumble on those documents, so well hidden in their cartons, was it not inviting us to make them public so that Father Chaminade might appear to us as the man he was and as he reveals himself in his letters and in the deeds making up his life's work?<sup>25</sup>

No doubt Father Simler found in these valuable manuscripts much about the Founder's description of our Marianist devotion to Mary. The manuscripts definitely made him dream of a biography of the Founder, that would one day be written by himself or someone else. In fact, he and his secretary Father Klobb were the authors who were going to write that biography, which was published 30 years later.

With these experiences as part of his background, Father Simler was elected Superior General at the General Chapter of 1876. Among other things, he is known to members of the Society as the Good Father who wrote a great number of long, tedious circular letters. In most libraries of Marianist documents the 94 Simler circulars are bound into three thick volumes. Quite a few of these circulars are more than 100 pages long and constitute minor treatises on the topics they treat. We will examine two of these long circulars which play a key role in the development of Marianist spirituality: the "Instruction on Piety" (Circular No. 10, June 28, 1878); and the "Instruction on the Characteristic Features of the Society of Mary" (Circular No. 62, July 10, 1894). It is in the circular on Piety<sup>26</sup> that Father Simler started the work of establishing the special Marianist meaning of the term *filial piety*.

<sup>25</sup> SIMLER, *Chaminade*, p. XXV.

<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, the ET of this circular that is most readily available to

### *Filial Piety*

Father Chaminade and the Marianists of the foundation period never used the term *filial piety* in the specialized sense that Father Simler was going to give it. Neither did Marianists in the first years after the Founder's death. For example, Father Fontaine's widely read *Manual of Christian Pedagogy* devotes a section to filial piety in the chapter on the role of love in Christian education. But here the term simply means the great respect and tender love which pupils have for their parents. Of all natural sentiments, it is "the first and most deeply engraven on the heart. Education, therefore, has not to implant it, but merely to strengthen and perfect it." However, Father Fontaine does not go beyond this ordinary and commonly understood meaning of the term.<sup>27</sup>

Father Caillet used the phrase *filial piety to Mary* once in a circular as a synonym for *devotion to Mary*. At the end of Father Caillet's generalate, in 1867, Brother Girardet, the respected and saintly director of the novitiate at Ebersmunster, published *L'art de devenir meilleur*, a book of meditations for the use of novices and young Marianist religious.<sup>28</sup> In this book, he repeatedly used the expression "devotion or filial piety towards the Blessed Vir-

---

English-speaking Marianists is the abridged version published in 1881 by the American Province under the title *Filial Piety in Christian Life* and intended as a spiritual reading book for "the public in general." The abridgement deleted all references to the Society of Mary including the section entitled "Spirit of Piety in the Society of Mary," in which Father Simler explains why the vow of stability is for Marianist religious the vow of filial piety toward Mary. This paper will cite the complete ET of 1952. See Joseph SIMLER, SM, "Instruction on Piety," *Circular No. 10*, June 28, 1878, 2 parts (Dayton: Apostle of Mary Documentary Series, March 1952).

<sup>27</sup> [FONTAINE], *Manual*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>28</sup> [FRANÇOIS GIRARDET, SM], *The Secret of Becoming Better or a Series of Meditations on the Principal Truths and Virtues of the Christian and Religious Life* (Dayton: St. Mary's Institute, 1885), passim.

gin" or simply "filial piety towards the Blessed Virgin" to refer to the attitude Marianists have toward Mary. Similarly, while Father Chevaux was Superior General, he directed the composition of a collection of particular examens for young Marianists which included one on devotion to Mary or "fidelity in practicing and propagating devotion, that is, filial piety towards the Blessed Virgin Mary." These few scattered uses of the term during the generalates of Father Caillet and Father Chevaux were hints of what was to come, but they were not yet versions of the full blown formula "the most faithful imitation and reproduction of the filial piety of Jesus toward Mary, his mother," which Father Simler was going to canonize and use to name the first and most prominent characteristic feature of the Marianists.<sup>29</sup>

Father Simler broke new ground with the "Instruction on Piety," the first of his long circulars. Here for the first time he gave the term *filial piety* its new specialized Marianist meaning. The circular treats piety on a grand canvas. Here, in Father Simler's own words, is the plan of the circular.

Our subject is immense. It comprises the study of piety in man, that is the history of this natural tendency which God has placed in us: its successive transformations under the guidance of the will which makes it a virtue, under the action of divine grace which makes it a supernatural virtue, under the movement of the Holy Spirit, which raises it to the dignity of a Gift. Then rising still higher we shall study piety in the most Holy Trinity, and in the person and works of Christ our Savior.<sup>30</sup>

Father Simler starts with a consideration of piety in the natural order, which first appears as the sentiment of reciprocal affection and love which unites members of a family among

<sup>29</sup> NEUBERT, *Our Gift from God*, pp. 106-7.

<sup>30</sup> SIMLER, "Instruction on Piety", part 1, pp. 1- 2.

themselves and as the acts which this sentiment inspires. The piety of children toward their parents is the filial piety of which Father Fontaine spoke in the *Manual*. Domestic families are the type of all the other families to which human beings belong: households, communities, larger associations, civic societies, nations, and the worldwide family of humankind. All these manifestations of family form the basis in nature on which grace can build and raise piety to the level of supernatural virtue.

From a consideration of piety in the supernatural order, Father Simler moves to piety in God, that is, divine piety in the Most Holy Trinity. "The love of the Father for the Son, the love of the Son for the Father, the love of the Father and the Son in the Holy Ghost, all the Father does for the Son, all the Son does for the Father, all that the Father and Son work in the Holy Ghost; all this may and should be designated by the name of piety, for it is a question of relations, inspirations, operations, bonds of love between persons of the same family."<sup>31</sup> The love of the Son for the Father and all the Son does for the Father constitute divine filial piety. With these considerations Father Simler approaches with awe his treatment of the Incarnation, the great mystery of divine piety and the first invention of divine filial piety. "The Incarnation is the great mystery of piety because it is the great act, the pious invention of the Son for the honor and glory of his Father. ... This inexpressible mystery is the masterly invention of the pious Jesus, for it is the work of his very heart."<sup>32</sup>

In Christ, human filial piety becomes divine, and divine filial piety becomes human. And since Mary is inextricably involved in the Incarnation, she is the second invention of the filial piety of the Son for his Father. She is the masterpiece of divine piety. The divine filial piety of Christ toward his Father extends to his

<sup>31</sup> *IBID.*, part 1, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> *IBID.*, part 1, pp. 17, 19.

filial piety toward his Mother. This filial piety of the Christ, the Son of God, for his Father, is the model and exemplar for all created filial piety, including his filial piety for Mary. It is also the model for our own filial piety toward Mary. When we love Mary, when we manifest our filial piety toward her, we are gathered up into the mystery of the Incarnation, into participating in the mystery of Christ's filial piety toward Mary. By the mysterious grace of exemplary participation, we reproduce the filial piety of Christ, the divine Son, for Mary, his mother.<sup>33</sup>

Having thus explored natural piety, supernatural piety, divine piety, and the filial piety of Christ for Mary, Father Simler turns to an examination of the spirit of piety in the Society of Mary. He first recalls the explanation of the vow of stability found in the Constitutions of the Society. "By the vow of stability the professed intends to constitute himself permanently and irrevocably in the state of a servant of Mary. It is properly a devotedness to the Blessed Virgin with the pious design of propagating her knowledge and perpetuating her love and cult as much as possible through oneself and through others in whatever circumstances of life he may be." In view of all that has been said about piety and the filial piety of Christ toward Mary, Father Simler asks, "Do you not understand, my dear children, that the vow of stability thus understood is, so to speak, the vow of filial piety towards Mary?"<sup>34</sup>

He recalls that in some religious orders or congregations the Church authorizes the profession of a fourth vow.

Those institutes that have requested and obtained a fourth vow have generally wished to make known in this way what distinguishes them from all other institutes, and what constitutes their proper physiognomy in

<sup>33</sup> *IBID.*, part 1, pp. 20-24.

<sup>34</sup> *IBID.*, part 2, p. 37.

the great religious family, or at least what is most striking in their physiognomy. For the Society of Mary, the vow of stability indicates precisely what will be found habitual and dominant in the Society and essentially characteristic of each religious.

What is this striking trait? Is it necessary to mention it? It so dominates everything that it is in evidence everywhere. ... All for Mary, all by Mary, all with Mary, always and everywhere Mary. ... By the vow of stability, however, we go beyond what simple Christians and the religious of other institutes do.

We consecrate to Mary and we give to her all that we have and all that we are: our persons, our works, our time, and our life. ... To give all to Mary, to expect all from Mary, and to show by our actions that this is our constant disposition, the habitual and reasoned disposition of our soul, this is our special and striking characteristic. ... To propagate the knowledge of Mary, to perpetuate her love and her cult, this is our supreme ambition. Such is the true meaning of our vow of stability. ... Our vow of stability is then, I repeat, a vow of filial piety towards Mary.<sup>35</sup>

With the spiritual and theological analysis of this first of his long circulars, "The Instruction on Piety," Father Simler was convinced he had penetrated to the sublime secrets of Marianist devotion to Mary and that he had demonstrated that it coincides with filial piety to Mary. The words *filial piety to Mary* emerged as a succinct phrase that could be used as a fitting and theologically accurate name for the characteristic Marianist devotion to Mary. As the newly elected Superior General, he was now responsible for continuing the process of getting the Constitutions of the Society approved by Rome, and he saw no reason why the characteristic of filial piety should not be mentioned explicitly in the text of the Constitutions. The General Chapter of 1876 had

<sup>35</sup> *IBID.*, part 2, pp. 37-38.

given his administration the mandate of completing the revision of the text and submitting it to Rome. Father Simler took advantage of this opportunity and introduced the new term into several key articles.

The new version of Article 3 stated, "the professed members of the Society of Mary, as a characteristic feature, endeavor to reproduce in themselves with visible complacency the filial piety of the Divine Model to Mary, his most holy mother." This article was complemented by Article 293, near the end of Book 1, which repeated the idea of Article 3 and amplified it with further considerations that had been derived in the circular on Piety.

All pious institutes propose to themselves the same perfection, but not all of them have the same special vocation. "Everyone hath his proper gift from God; one after this manner, another after that" (1 Co 7:7). That which may be considered the gift of God for the Society of Mary, that which constitutes its physiognomy and forms its distinctive feature is a truly filial piety towards the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This article would later inspire Father Neubert when he chose the title of his book *Our Gift from God*.

The article which contains the most oft-quoted passage in the Simler Constitutions is Article 6.

On account of the second object of the Society, zeal for the salvation of souls is a disposition which should animate all its members; on the other hand filial piety toward Mary constitutes and expresses, in consequence of a manifest and primordial intention always carefully maintained in the Society, the proper physiognomy and distinguishing mark of the members of the Society. But let it be remarked that these two qualities are among the most characteristic features of the Divine Model; the Society has then, in reality, but one object in view, namely,

*the most faithful imitation of Jesus Christ, Son of God, become Son of Mary, for the salvation of mankind* (emphasis added).

After the 1891 Constitutions were approved, the last line of this article became the most popular statement of the Marianist ideal that was used and quoted in the Society. If a member of the Society were asked what filial piety actually is, he would most often reply "the most faithful imitation of Jesus Christ, Son of God, become Son of Mary, for the salvation of mankind."

For some reason Father Simler did not insert the formula "the vow of stability is the vow of filial piety towards Mary" from his circular on Piety into the revised text of the Constitutions. However, he concluded Book 1 with an idyllic description of the typical member of the Society as a man who, "after the example of Jesus and under the inspiration of filial piety to Mary, journeys onward, occupying himself with the affairs of his Heavenly Father, laboring for the glory of his Mother, and doing good to his fellow-Brothers."<sup>36</sup>

With the approval of the Constitutions by Rome in 1891, *filial piety* rapidly became established as the standard term used in the Society to refer to its characteristic devotion Mary. This usage lasted about 75 years until work began on the latest revision of the Constitutions of the Society. The General Chapter of 1961 began the process. It culminated 22 years later when the 1981 Chapter accepted the text of the Rule of Life that received Vatican approval in 1983. No formal decision was made to abandon the term *filial piety*. However, it does not occur in the 1983 Rule. During the 1960s, Marianists simply and quietly stopped using the term by a seemingly unspoken consensus.<sup>37</sup> It might be interesting for Marianist historians to investigate whether there is

<sup>36</sup> SM Constitutions of 1891, Article 305.

<sup>37</sup> The interim SM Constitutions of 1967 use the term in two brief mentions (Articles 5 and 95) and in the chapter on the characteristic virtues which was

any record of discussions or informal deliberations that took place in favor of discontinuing the use of the term.

The long process of obtaining Vatican approval of the 1891 Constitutions was not without its difficulties. The biggest problem Father Simler faced was the near loss of the vow of stability. He obtained the agreement of the General Chapter of 1881 to establish a "Class of Veterans" in the Society selected from the members older than 35 who were perpetually professed for at least 10 years and who alone would make the vow of stability. The text of the Constitutions was revised to this effect and submitted to the Vatican. The Vatican, in the *Animadversions* of 1882, rejected this change and directed that the vow of stability be dropped altogether. This outcome came as an unwelcome and distressing surprise to Father Simler and his advisors. They realized they were partially to blame for the crisis because they had tried to tamper with the vow of stability.<sup>38</sup> After an appeal and negotiations, the Vatican agreed to allow the Society to retain the practice that had been in place since 1865, that is, restricting the vow to perpetually professed members.<sup>39</sup> Yet another revision of the Constitutions was drawn up and submitted in 1885. It is this text which finally received canonical approval on July 10, 1891.<sup>40</sup>

---

retained unchanged and provisionally from the Simler Constitutions of 1891. However, a new terminology centered on the word *community* shifted these isolated uses of *filial piety* to the sidelines.

<sup>38</sup> Father Paul Verrier makes the following remark when he recounts this development. "It would be interesting to re-read the minutes of the meetings of the Council of the General Administration at the place where Rome's decision had been communicated and commented upon. They must have been stupefied at first, and imagine what emotion they felt at the thought that the vow of stability was about to disappear completely." Paul VERRIER, *Sketches*, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Besides the account of this episode in the short history by Paul Verrier referred to above, there is a detailed account in Father Délas' *Histoire des Constitutions*. See also NEUBERT, *Our Gift from God*, pp. 114-19.

<sup>40</sup> Jean Claude DÉLAS, SM, "Rule of Life," in *Commentary on SM Rule*, pp. 1058-61

Three years later, when Father Simler published his "Instruction on the Characteristic Features of the Society of Mary", he identified signal filial piety towards Mary as "the first and principal distinctive feature of the Society."<sup>41</sup> In the 16 years since 1878, when he had published the circular on Piety, many things had happened under Father Simler's leadership. There were successes and failures amid the steady growth and expansion of the Society. One of the clear accomplishments was the solid establishment of filial piety to Mary to a position of preeminence in the Society, both the conscious living and experience of this Marianist devotion to Mary and the use of the term *filial piety* to name it and speak about it. Even though we no longer use the term, we know the reality which has been handed on to us as one of the core dimensions of Marianist spirituality.

#### *Rehabilitation and Rediscovery of Father Chaminade*

From our vantage point today, the most important contribution of Father Simler to the development of Marianist spirituality did not occur until the final years of his generalate. With the final approval of the Constitutions accomplished, he at last had enough time to turn his attention to his dream of writing a biography of the Founder. In the winter of 1870-71, when he had perused the manuscripts in the archives for the first time, Father Simler had concluded that Father Chaminade was "an unknown" in the Marianist world. Two decades later, in 1891, this situation had hardly changed. In the spring of that year, Father Simler had made a small step to rectify this situation by publishing the "Historical Notice of the Society of Mary" (Circular No. 55, March 12, 1891), which included facts and information about the Founder's life and works that had been previously unknown

---

<sup>41</sup> SIMLER, "Instruction on Characteristic Features," pp. 34-67.

to many members of the Society. However, the bulk of the work on the Founder's biography was still ahead of him.

The biography obliged him thoroughly to study the original documents buried in the archives of the Society, as well as many obscure facts in the history of the Church in France, from 1780 to 1850. The undertaking was too vast for any one man, especially one who had to govern an extensive religious society. But Providence supplied a precious aid in the person of his secretary, Father Charles Klobb, who had mastered the classics as well as history and theology, and who was a thoroughly Marian and apostolic religious.<sup>42</sup>

The professional historical standards and level of scholarship of the biography turned out to be of a different and totally higher order of magnitude than that of the "Historical Notice of the Society of Mary." This superiority was due to the talents and competence of Father Klobb. He became Father Simler's secretary in 1895 and in that capacity co-authored the Founder's biography. In 1899, Father Simler confided the work he had done on the biography to Father Klobb

... and directed him to study and coordinate what he had collected and to continue and to complete the work of research. Thus Father Klobb undertook a series of travels in the footsteps of Father Chaminade assembling a vast amount of documentary material. Father Simler wished to write a simple book without the many references imposed by modern historical method, but Father Klobb objected and insisted on rigorous documentation. He won his point, and Father Simler, not having a taste for such meticulous writing, turned the project over to Father Klobb. By the spring of 1901 the basic text was

<sup>42</sup> NEUBERT, *Our Gift from God*, p. 123.

completed, and in the fall of the same year the book, put in final form by Father Simler, was published.<sup>43</sup>

The book came out just two short years before the Associations Law of the French government was going to close down a significant portion of Marianist schools in France, drive the General Administration into exile in Belgium, cause the new Marianist seminary to be moved from Antony to Fribourg, force the relocation of many members of the Society, and precipitate the withdrawal from the Society of many others. It was a true restructuring.

Despite all this turmoil, the book was in circulation and began to have its transforming effect on the Marianists of that day. If they did not read the book themselves because it was so long and scholarly or because it was written in French, they heard about it from other Marianists. Marianist schools and Marianist buildings across the world began to be named "Chaminade," pictures and portraits of the Founder began to be reproduced and distributed, and statues of him began to be erected in Marianist courtyards and on Marianist properties. Episodes from the Founder's life were recounted in talks and conferences to Marianist religious and repeated to pupils and students in Marianist schools. Marianist religious heard the story of the Bordeaux Sodality and the Association of Adele. They pointed out the similarity of this former work with adults to efforts being made by a handful of Marianist religious of that day to work directly with adult lay Catholics in the Sillon Movement.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Thomas A. STANLEY, SM, *The Mystical Body of Christ According to the Writings of Father William Joseph Chaminade* (Fribourg: St. Paul's Press, 1952), p. 15, footnote 38.

<sup>44</sup> Brother Cousin's account of the Sillon Movement in his biography of Father Simler, published a few months after his death in 1905, illustrates this point. When he was writing, the Church had not yet condemned the Movement. Brother Cousin makes the following comments on Father Simler's dealing with

An even larger effect was produced by the conferences and retreats of Father Klobb in which he exposed and explained the thought and vision of Father Chaminade as he had discovered it in his research for the biography.

In 1904 Father Klobb preached the annual retreat at the Marianist Seminary in Fribourg, Switzerland. He chose as sole theme of his conferences, the apostolate. Speaking on the apostolate in the Society of Mary, he explained Father Chaminade's ideas about the apostolic mission of Mary, about the foundation of the Society of Mary in order to supply her with an army of soldiers, about our participation in the mission of the Immaculate Virgin and the boundless confidence which this participating should give us. All this was a revelation to the seminarians, none of whom had heard such views before.

The following year, Father Klobb was called to preach a retreat to the superiors of the Society at Fayt-Manage, Belgium. The retreatants comprised the members of the general and provincial administration as well as directors of several important communities. He spoke on the

---

this new apostolate. "In order, in the words of our Founder, 'to extend its action over man during his whole life, taking charge of him from his most tender age, and leaving him only to deliver him into the hands of God' (SM Constitutions, art. 281), to widen the sphere of its apostolate wherever possible, the Society of Mary found it fitting to take upon itself what in our days is called 'social work' (*oeuvres sociales*). This work corresponds to that of Father Chaminade's Sodalities, and occupies a rank constantly gaining importance in the Christian regeneration of staid old European societies as well as the more recent organizations of the New World. This enterprise of a social apostolate presupposed some experimenting; it required special abilities that could not be implanted by administrative measures, but which would crop up and develop in the course of the work. Consequently Father Simler gave no orders regarding them. Perceiving in the Society special vocations for this line of work he encouraged their efforts and initiative." Brother Cousin's mention of "special vocations" in the last sentence is an oblique reference to himself, as well as Father Leber and others. See [COUSIN], *Simler*, pp. 161-68; the cited passage is on p. 163. In the original French text, the *Sillon* is treated on pp. 158-66 and the cited passage is on pp. 160-61

Founder's teaching about the Society, its spirit and apostolate. There was the same astonishment and enthusiasm as in the seminary. Father Francis Kieffer, then director of Villa St. Jean, Fribourg, said, "It was as if a poor family just learned that it had fallen heir to an immense fortune." A decision was taken to multigraph a summary of the conferences for all the retreat-masters of that year.<sup>45</sup>

Father Neubert, who wrote the above lines, was one of the seminarians in 1904. This citation is thus, in part, an eyewitness account, written 50 years after the fact. No doubt, the seminarians' retreat of 1904 is the start of the decisive influence and impact he always claimed Father Klobb had on him.<sup>46</sup> News of the seminarians' retreat must have cheered Father Simler in his last days, and the positive reception given to the biography he had dreamed of for so many years and which had been so brilliantly realized with the able assistance of Father Klobb must have been a consolation in the face of the troubles inflicted on the Society by the French government. He died on February 4, 1905.

#### *Emergence of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Marianist Spirituality*

Two months after Father Simler died Father Klobb preached the Easter retreat to the superiors of the Society in Fayt and as-

---

<sup>45</sup> NEUBERT, *Our Gift from God*, pp. 124-25.

<sup>46</sup> "Un événement encore plus important pour la carrière du jeune prêtre fut la découverte de l'héritage spirituel de G.-J. Chaminade, fondateur de la Société de Marie. En 1904, le P. Klobb, alors secrétaire du P. Simler, supérieur général, lui révéla la pensée du fondateur sur la nature originale de la Société de Marie... Dans une lettre à un confrère américain (15 mars 1960), à la fin de sa carrière, Neubert écrivait que, depuis qu'il en eut connaissance, 'cette idée a été constamment reprise dans toute ma prédication mariale et mes écrits.'" Théodore Koehler, "Neubert (Émile)", in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 11, col. 151. The American Marianist was Brother Gerald Jarc. The idea that Father Neubert returned to all his life was Mary's apostolic mission.

tonished them with the vision of the Father Chaminade. The success of the retreat prompted the decision to publish more writings which would communicate the Founder's dynamic vision to the Marianist world. Besides distributing copies of the retreat notes,<sup>47</sup> plans were made for two new publications in addition to the biography of Father Chaminade, which had already come out: first, an expansion of Father Klobb's *Les Enseignements du Fondateur par rapport à la Société et à son esprit*; and, second, the letters of Father Chaminade.

The first work was a manuscript "contained in two large notebooks which Father Klobb carried about with him and from which he gave numerous conferences and retreats in many houses of the Society."<sup>48</sup> He had been working on the expansion for some time and continued this work after he was elected Head of Instruction at the General Chapter held in August 1905 in Rèves, Belgium. Unfortunately, his early death in 1906 interrupted this work. Father Lebon took over the task, which issued in the publication of the *Spirit of Our Foundation* during the years between 1910 and 1916. Father Lebon also completed Father Klobb's work on organizing the letters of Father Chaminade, the first 5 volumes of which were published during the years between 1930 and 1934.

These publications put a huge array of the Founder's writings at the disposal of Marianists throughout the world. Members of the Society began to study and meditate upon the founding vision and inspiration in ways that had not been possible before that time. All this activity led to a development of Marianist spirituality which was far more directly in touch with the thought

---

<sup>47</sup> These retreat notes have been published recently by AGMAR. Charles KLOBB, SM, *L'Esprit de la Société: Retraite de Fayt, Semaine de Pâques 1905* (Rome: AGMAR Collection "La Gerbe", No. 9, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> STANLEY, *Mystical Body*, p. 16, footnote 38.

of Father Chaminade than anything that had taken place in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The rediscovery of the Letter to the Retreat Masters of 1839 illustrates the change that was taking place. In 1839, handwritten copies of the Letter were sent to the three retreat masters and to each community of the Society and the Daughters of Mary. Some of these copies were read by the religious. Father Fridblatt, for example, wrote an enthusiastic letter to the Founder after he had seen copies at Courtefontaine and Saint Remy. But after the end of that year, there is little evidence that the copies of the Letter were read, even after it was published in 1863 in Father Caillet's *Recueil*, the collection of his own circulars up to that date and some of Father Chaminade's. Father Caillet and Father Chevaux never cited the Letter in any of their circulars or official documents. Neither did Father Simler before 1891. That year he published the "Historical Notice of the Society of Mary," in which he quoted at length from the Letter. Three years later, in his "Instruction on the Characteristic Features," he quoted even longer passages. Thus, it was only after a silence of 52 years, from 1839 to 1891, that the Letter emerges from obscurity.<sup>49</sup> From that time forward, however, there has been a complete turnaround, which was caused by the rediscovery of Father Chaminade at the turn of the century and the publication of Marianist documents since then.

Today the Letter is regarded as the most important single piece of writing that comes down to us from Father Chaminade and his best explanation of the Marianist vision of Mary's mission and the participation of Marianists in that mission. Father Klobb said that the text of the Letter should be engraved in letters of gold on the walls of the Society's houses of formation.<sup>50</sup> Father

---

<sup>49</sup> NEUBERT, *Our Gift from God*, pp. 110, 121.

<sup>50</sup> J. VERRIER, "Marianist Stability," in *Commentary on SM Rule*, p. 752.

Neubert called it the most beautiful of the Founder's writings.<sup>51</sup> The Letter has been published and republished in numerous editions and translations. Recently, Father Armbruster's marvelous commentary on the Letter has provided us with more than 400 pages of meticulous textual analysis. Today, after the Letter has held its eminent status for so long, it hardly seems possible that there was a time when a half century went by during which it had virtually disappeared from Marianist consciousness.

By itself, the publication of the biography of the Founder, of the *Spirit*, and of the letters was not the sole cause of the development of Marianist consciousness and spirituality in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Certain Marianists were especially influential in fostering this development. In Europe, Father Schellhorn was one of the foremost of these propagators of the Marianist spirit and Marianist spirituality. He was a close personal friend of Father Klobb, who was three years older than Father Schellhorn. Their friendship began in 1891 in Rome where they were seminarians and continued in Cannes after 1894. Father Schellhorn learned first-hand and directly from his friend about the exciting discoveries of the Founder's vision.

In 1903, at the suggestion of Father Klobb, Father Schellhorn was named novice master of the newly reorganized novitiate in Belgium. There for the next 32 years, he formed a whole generation of French, Belgian, and Swiss members of the Society. He used the Marianist documents that were being published to instill a strong and deep awareness of the vision of Father Chaminade and the Marianist devotion to Mary. To these documents he added books that he composed for the use of the novices: the *Catechism of the Interior Life*, the *Catechism of the Religious State*, and the *Little Treatise on Mariology*. He died in 1935 after succumbing, like his good friend Father Klobb, to the ravages of tuberculosis.

---

<sup>51</sup> NEUBERT, *Our Gift from God*, p. 110.

During these same years after World War I, there was a movement among opinion leaders of the Society to restore whatever may have been lost of the original role and meaning of the vow of stability by Father Simler's near loss of the vow in the 1880s. Prominent among them were Father Paul Verrier, Brother Cousin, Father Lebon, Father Schellhorn, and the young Father Neubert. They had the full backing of the General Administration.

When the Constitutions were being modified to conform to the new Code of Canon Law, these promoters of a renewed vow of stability successfully introduced a revised version of Article 55 into the Simler Constitutions of 1891. Article 54 of the 1891 Constitutions stated, "In adding the vow of stability to the three ordinary vows, the professed intends expressly to manifest his determination to fulfill this obligation to the Society (the obligation to persevere in it and never refuse it his cooperation)." The old version of Article 55 then went on to state, "In the second place, he intends to constitute himself permanently and irrevocably in the state of servant of Mary, to whom the Society is especially consecrated." The new 1922 version of Article 55 stated, "*Above all, he intends to constitute himself permanently and irrevocably in the state of a servant of Mary, of her to whom the Society is especially consecrated. The vow is, in reality, a consecration to the Blessed Virgin, with the pious design of making her known and of perpetuating love and devotion to her.*" The words in italics were the changes and additions. The advocates of this new version of Article 55 hailed it as a great victory which regained whatever ground had been lost 30 years earlier by the imprudent efforts of Father Simler to change the vow. Amid the euphoria, they urged all the members of the Society to penetrate themselves with the newly recovered spirit of the vow of stability, which they characterized as a vow of consecration to Mary, as the new text of Article 55 stated.

Many years later, Father Joseph Verrier, nephew of Father Paul Verrier and Marianist historian of the first rank, looked back on the efforts of his uncle and the other promoters of a renewed vow of stability with a critical eye. He contended that their work was marked by exaggerations and confusions which introduced uncertainties and diverse interpretations that led to many Marianists being misled and steered off course. Even worse, he believed that there is risk of the exaggerations and confusions continuing to steer us off course and mislead us because they have been enshrined in texts and documents we have come to regard as family treasures.<sup>52</sup> Here, in his own words, are the conclusions he draws in a long memorandum he wrote in 1984, but never published.

What emerges from this discussion? For lack of understanding the thought of our Founder, for lack of distinguishing the ascetical and moral plane from the juridical and canonical plane, also for the lack of taking into account the evolution which has taken place in Church legislation on the subject of congregations with simple vows, there has been too much insistence on the importance of the vow of stability in the Society of Mary and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary to the detriment of the nature of the two societies.

In contemplating the flying buttresses, the cathedral was neglected. In looking at the anchor, the ocean liner was forgotten. The tree has hidden the forest.

<sup>52</sup> "Cette remarque est essentielle. En a-t-on suffisamment tenu compte jusqu'ici? Il ne semble pas. Autrement, aurions-nous au sujet de notre vœu de stabilité tant d'incertitudes? tant d'interprétations diverses, qui déroutent ou égarent et risquent malheureusement de dérouter ou d'égarer encore à l'avenir, étant regardées et classées comme documents de famille?" Joseph VERRIER, SM, "Notre Don de Dieu," p. 1. This document is a typewritten manuscript of 55 pages completed in Rome on January 10, 1984. I am indebted to Father Eduardo Benloch, who called it to my attention and gave me a copy of his copy, which has in turn been placed in the NACMS research library.

Independently of any vow of stability, the members of the Society of Mary and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate are consecrated to Mary by the very fact of their religious profession.

In effect, every religious profession, besides the promise made to God to live in poverty, chastity, and obedience to Superiors of a religious society recognized and juridically designated by the Church, also includes an implicit contract by which the professed expresses his or her will to be incorporated in this religious society, while on its side this society accepts him or her with the title of member.

Since the Society of Mary and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate are officially and constitutionally religious societies consecrated to Mary and as it were "the property of Mary," it is obvious that each and every one of their members is *ipso facto* consecrated to Mary by the effective and real hold which Mary has over each of them through the intermediary of the Superiors of these societies.

This consecration is complete. The vow of stability adds nothing. What it does is make the consecration more firm, more irrevocable, more steadfast, in a word, more solid in the eyes of conscience and the world.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> J. VERRIER, "Notre Don de Dieu," p. 48. "Que ressort-il de ce débat? Faute de comprendre exactement la pensée de notre Fondateur, faute de distinguer le plan ascétique et moral du plan juridique et canonique, faute aussi de tenir compte de l'évolution survenue dans la législation de l'Église au sujet des congrégations à vœux simples, on a trop insisté, au dam de la nature de la Société de Marie et de l'Institut des Filles de Marie, sur l'importance du vœu de stabilité dans ces deux sociétés.

"En contemplant l'arc-boutant, on a négligé la cathédrale; en voyant l'ancre, on a oublié le paquebot; l'arbre a caché la forêt.

"Indépendamment de tout vœu de stabilité, les membres de la Société de Marie et ceux de l'Institut de Filles de Marie Immaculée sont consacrés à Marie par le fait même de leur profession religieuse.

"Toute profession religieuse, en effet, outre la promesse faite à Dieu de vivre dans la pauvreté, la chasteté et l'obéissance aux Supérieurs d'une société reli-

These views of Father Joseph Verrier are found in gentler and more muted form in his article "Marianist Stability" in the *Commentary on the SM Rule of Life*. But in the lengthy memorandum of 1984 he systematically opposes the position of the promoters of a renewed vow of stability. The monograph "recounts the insistent and tenacious consultations at the Vatican and with theologians which Father Paul Marie Verrier made in order to justify his explanation of the vow of stability as the expression of a direct consecration to the most Blessed Virgin. The answers were always clear, denying absolutely this explanation. The author also reproduces a series of letters exchanged among Marianists of the period with respect to this polemic: Father Joseph Verrier himself, Father Resch, Father Hoffer, and Father Neubert."<sup>54</sup> This controversy has receded into the background in recent years. Very few persons knew about Father Joseph Verrier's disagreement with his uncle, and not many consider it an important matter to insist that the vow of stability is an indirect rather than a direct act of consecration.

Another great apostle of the Founder's apostolic and Marian vision was Father Neubert. As was mentioned already, he, too, was strongly influenced by Father Klobb. In 1907, he was sent to the American Province to help with the formation of new mem-

---

gieuse reconnue par l'Église et juridiquement désignée, comporte un contrat implicite par lequel le profès exprime sa volonté d'être incorporé dans cette société religieuse, tandis que, de son côté, cette société l'agrée à titre de membre.

"Puisque la Société de Marie et l'Institut des Filles de Marie Immaculée sont officiellement et constitutionnellement des sociétés religieuses consacrées à Marie et comme 'la propriété de Marie,' il est évident que tous et chacun de leurs membres sont *ipso facto* consacrés à Marie par l'emprise effective et réelle que Marie a sur tous et chacun d'eux par intermédiaire des Supérieurs de ces Sociétés.

"Cette consécration est complète. Le voeu de stabilité n'y ajoute rien. Ce qu'il a de propre, c'est de la rendre plus ferme, plus irrévocable, plus inébranable, plus solide en un mot aux yeux de la conscience et du monde."

<sup>54</sup> Comments of Father Benloch sent to L. Cada in March 1999. See Appendix of this paper for the context of these comments.

bers of the Society. He became the first novice master of the St. Louis Province when it was formed in 1908, and later spent several years at Mount St. John in Dayton, where he helped in the novitiate and scholasticate. When he arrived from Europe, he brought with him the manuscripts for the *Spirit of Our Foundation* along with an expansive and contagious enthusiasm for Marianist spirituality and the Marianist vision. During his 14 years in the United States, he was for American Marianists their most direct connection with the great rediscovery of Father Chaminade that was unfolding on the other side of the Atlantic. When he returned to Europe in 1921, he left behind his "Interior Life Book" which was used for many years in the novitiates of the American provinces.

In Europe, he was made superior of the seminary in Fribourg, a post he held until 1949. After that, he continued living at the seminary until his retirement in 1962. During his 40-year sojourn in Fribourg, he continued his promotion of the Marianist vision with seminarians from all the provinces of the Society. He concentrated especially on the Marian thought of Father Chaminade and became a respected mariologist in his own right. His most important contribution to the spread of Marianist spirituality was his miniature masterpiece *My Ideal*.

The publication of Marianist documents continued unabated down through the century right up to the present. The introduction of Father Chaminade's cause of beatification gave added stimulus to this outpouring of publications. When the objections of the devil's advocate brought the cause to a standstill in 1936, members of the Society turned to studying the documents to understand the Founder and to re-examine and confirm the evidence for his holiness.

These were the years of syntheses. Father Neubert wrote a *Synthesis of Our Characteristic Traits* in 1940. Father Ferree wrote two syntheses – the first synthesis, which appeared in several

editions between the years 1942 and 1954 with various titles, such as *A Program of Studies in Marianist Documents*; and the second synthesis, which also appeared in several editions and revisions starting in 1961 and also had various titles, such as *Texts of Capital Importance in a Synthesis of Father Chaminade's Thought*. Father Ferree was the first major interpreter of Father Chaminade in the history of the Society who was not French. During and after World War II, he was superior of Mount St. John, the house of formation in Dayton that served all the American provinces of that time. During his years in that position and for a long time thereafter, he inspired a whole generation of young American members of the Society to dedicate themselves to studying "the documents," where they could learn directly the breadth and depth of our Founder's apostolic genius. Marianist studies flourished and Marianist publications multiplied. Father Ferree's impact on young American Marianists at mid-century can be compared to Father Klobb's impact on young European Marianists at the turn of the century.

The Fribourg seminary also became a center of Marianist studies and Marianist publications in the years between World War II and Vatican II. A series of dissertations were published which treated various themes in the writings of Father Chaminade. Provisional editions of the *Notes d'Instruction* and the *Notes de Retraites* were published. Father Armbruster started work on the first set of *Écrits* volumes, the ones on direction. These were followed by the *Écrits Marials* and the *Écrits d'Oraison*. These publications carried further the wave that had been set in motion by Father Simler's biography in 1901.

The active pursuit of the cause of Father Chaminade was again taken up in 1968, when Father Vasey became postulator. He answered the 1936 objections of the devil's advocate and successfully argued the case in favor of the heroicity of virtues of Father Chaminade. The Founder was declared Venerable in 1973.

Today, in 1999, it appears we are on the eve of Father Chaminade's being declared Blessed.

The steady stream of Marianist publications during the 20<sup>th</sup> century is only one current in the development of Marianist spirituality that has taken place. The Marianist spirituality of this century has been a blending and confluence of many other currents as well, such as the ones that will be suggested in the final section of this paper to Marianist historians and writers as possible areas for future research and study. When the results of this research become available, it will be possible to write a suitably comprehensive history of Marianist spirituality of this century. In the meanwhile, this short history of Marianist spirituality can serve as a provisional tool and springboard for further work.

Perhaps the hardest part of writing the history of Marianist spirituality is entering deeply enough into the minds and hearts of our Marianist forebears to grasp the zeal and love that inspired them to give themselves to the Marianist vision and the Marianist dream. This paper has done no more than catch a few fleeting glimpses into their minds and hearts, but those glimpses seem vivid enough for us to pick up the excitement and adventure of their experience of Marianist life and for us to intuit our own relationship with them in the common Marianist spirituality we share with them.