

What's this about the fulcrum?

Circular No. 7, "With Blessed Father Chaminade toward Our Future," includes the quotation from William Joseph Chaminade concerning "a new fulcrum." The circular was written by David Joseph Fleming, SM to commemorate September 3, 2000, the day of the beatification of our Founder. NACMS has received several inquiries about the source of this quotation; because the background may be of general interest, we present it here.

In *Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, Founder of the Marianist Family*, Vincent Gizard, SM, writes (pages 68-69):

"This Sodality's success [Bordeaux] did not occur without evoking some resentment and difficulties with the parishes. Several objections were posed, and in 1824, Chaminade responded in a statement which merits our examination.

The first objection was that "every age, every state of life, and every social condition were found all together in the Sodality. And above all, what cannot be tolerated are these public meetings."

A second objection dealt with the relationship between the Sodality and the parishes. Was not the Sodality spirit opposed, in general, to the parish spirit? *The third objection*, to which Chaminade responds, is the section in which the quotation is found. Here is the relevant text.

Answers to Objections That Are Ordinarily Made against Sodalities Established on the Plan of the One of Bordeaux, on the Form Given Them, and on Their Relations with Parishes

Third Objection:

How much good have not the older Sodalities accomplished during the three hundred years of their existence! Now, these Sodalities, established at first by the Jesuit Fathers in their colleges, from which they passed to the people, included in their membership only those of the same condition in life. Why not hold fast to the tradition and experience of the past, rather than found Sodalities modeled on a new plan whose success, to say the least, is very doubtful?

Answer:

At the risk of repetition—for it was already said—I maintain that this enterprise is no venture. A practice that has been tried out during the space of twenty-four years in Bordeaux and elsewhere is no longer an experiment! Everyone is aware of the good spirit that reigns in Bordeaux, and how the people, in general, are loyal to religion and correct principles. We do not claim that these results are the outcome of the Sodality: but you will concede on this subject the testimony of enlightened persons, who say that

a nucleus of good men, in a populous city, may powerfully uphold and maintain correct principles, like a pillar which supports an edifice, though in itself, it is but a small part of it.

However, let us give a direct answer to the objection made: "What benefit is there in founding Sodalities on a new model?"

Why, may I ask, is not the general state of things at the present time the same as it was heretofore? Why must everyday conditions be met with vaster, and more improved modern methods, than years ago? Who does not see that since the Revolution, a new fulcrum must be found for the lever that moves the modern world? Posed in its simplest form, the objection reduces itself to the examination, whether the new Sodalities offer more abundant means and resources than the old. We believe firmly they do.

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The new Sodalities differ from the old principally in five points, which, in my opinion, leave the advantage with the former.

1. From the union of persons in various conditions of life there will result, in the cities, one body, well-enlightened in its faith and practicing it publicly, prompted by honesty and singleness of purpose, all of which represents faithfully the society of the early Christians in this wicked and degenerate age.
2. The public meetings, too, are equally beneficial to those who deliver the addresses and to those who listen to them, for they set forth religion in an agreeable and interesting manner. In our Sodalities are found ordinary workmen who, without departing from the lowliness of their condition, know their faith sufficiently to be able to instruct their children or their fellow workmen and, in case of necessity, also know how to defend it. These assemblies have trained others who became priests and have rendered, or are still rendering, signal service to the Church.

Moreover, as these meetings are held in public, they may easily be supervised and inspected by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, should such an occasion arise. This alone will allay all fear of causing offence to one or the other.

3. Let us now consider their zeal and their spirit of apostleship. In the old-time Sodalities, there was scarcely any other purpose in view than to sustain pious Christians in the way of salvation by mutual edification. But in this age, an age of revival, Holy Mother the Church demands something more from her children. She wishes the concerted action of all to second the zeal of her ministers and to labor at her restoration. This is the spirit which the new Sodalities inculcate. Each director is a persistent and active missionary, and each Sodality a perpetual mission.

4. The class of postulants next deserves our attention. This class is composed of boys who have made their first Holy Communion and who, on account of a lack of spiritual succor, are continually exposed to the allurements of the world. The care of these boys is entrusted to several sodalists, who engage in it purely from motives of zeal but whose efforts are constantly guided by the advices and counsels of the director. The good resulting from this work, both for the children and for those in charge of them, is scarcely believable. No similar undertaking is found in the older Sodalities.
5. Finally—and we ought to have begun with this point, for of all our means it is the most potent and the one most dear to us—the new Sodalities are not only associations *in honor of the Blessed Virgin*, but they are a holy militia that advances *in the Name of Mary*, that knows how to battle with the infernal powers under the guidance and obedience of her who is destined to crush the head of the serpent.

The consideration of these differences easily demonstrates the superiority of the new Sodalities over the older ones, especially when directed and maintained in the spirit of their foundation, and they afford greater assistance to religion. There is, therefore, a sufficiently convincing reason for the foundation and spread of the new Sodalities.

The full text of the letter, which includes three additional objections and Chaminade's reply, can be found in *The Spirit of Our Foundation* (Dayton, Ohio: Mount St. John Normal School, 1920), vol. 3, 231-40.