

JANUARY 2012
With William Joseph CHAMINADE
IN THE SERVICE OF MARY
A PERMANENT AND IRREVOCABLE GIFT



In this room Father Chaminade died on January 22, 1850.

" I look upon the Society, it seems to me, as upon a work of God. I believe myself the most incapable of men to govern it and to lead it to success in its purpose and mission, but the Lord is my light and my support. I fear no contradiction, no persecution, provided I am not guilty of provoking them. I would regard it as a signal favor were God to send me someone I could give all superiority to. I could then look upon myself as the very last in the Society, as I very sincerely believe myself to be in the sight of God, but I shall stay at my post as long as I believe God requires this work of me. The pains, humiliations, the contradictions, even the persecutions will be for me a real gain and benefit?" (L III-801, October 10, 1835, to Fr. Lalanne).

"I am becoming old, my dear son, and I am aware that soon I shall go to give an account to our Lord Jesus Christ of the mission which he deigned to give me during the course of my life, both before the first Revolution and after. I have survived my trials and the greatest was not that of 1793 when only a step separated me from the scaffold: the thickness of a plank. The trials of 1844 are very much more serious. May God be praised! May Mary be glorified!" (L VI-1313, August 1844, to Fr. Caillet).

Father Chaminade was then at the very heart of the conflict, which lasted for nine years, and that put him in opposition, even until his death, to the General Council of the Society of Mary. He would progressively lose all influence over the congregation and its members.

"The 24th of January, one thousand eight hundred fifty, were celebrated in the church of Saint André of Bordeaux the religious funeral rites of William Joseph Chaminade,



89 years of age [sic], honorary canon, son of deceased parents, himself deceased two days before, at Rue Lalande n° 4, fortified by the sacraments of the Eucharist and of Extreme Unction. In witness thereof I, the undersigned vicar, have drawn up the present document." Signed G. Cazenave, vic.

(Registers of the Cathedral of Saint André, Bordeaux)

Until the end...

At the time of the transfer of the remains of the Servant of God, Father Lalanne ended his address with this solemn affirmation: *"As a witness of his actions and his words, we affirm here before Heaven, which has been a witness like us, that we have never surprised him spending, I won't say a single day, but a single hour, of his time*

and his constant work at whatever it might be that was not related to God and to leading souls into the ways of God. No one can produce a writing, a letter, a proposal, a teaching, an example or any advice from him that could not serve one's religiosity: it is not possible to describe that man otherwise than by calling him a man of God" (Cf. Lettres IV, p. 345).

" O Mother of the divine Wisdom and of Good Counsel, you will be my guide, my light.... In setting out on this work, I would have no ambition other than to make you known, loved and served more and more. To write the life of the venerable Father Chaminade and the history of his apostolic labors, is not that a way of making you known through his works? For Father Chaminade never ceased to repeat that he acted only for you and through you, that the Society of Mary was your work, that all he himself did under the inspiration of zeal for the salvation of souls should be considered as your work" (Joseph SIMLER, *Private Journal and Notes*, May 1, 1895 – when he was working on the biography published in 1901).



Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, September 3, 2000.
 Beatification of William Joseph Chaminade.
 Here, beside Pope John XXIII.

FOREVER AT THE SERVICE OF MARY

Profound social, cultural and religious upheavals, such as those that marked the years of Father Chaminade's active life, demand solid and firm personal choices on the part of Christians. In that context and because of his own experience, Father Chaminade was ever more conscious of the importance of the mission of Mary and of a permanent commitment to her. For the religious that is the intention of the vow of stability which makes definitive the covenant contracted between each member and the congregation, in the service of Mary.

19. *By the vow of stability, the member intends constituting himself permanently and irrevocably in the state of servant of Mary.... with the pious design of spreading her knowledge and of perpetuating her love and her cult, as much as possible....*

20. *Moreover, the vow of stability is made with the intention of never depriving the Society of one's cooperation in the work that has been undertaken....* (Constitutions of SM 1839).

That spirit of permanence in the service of Mary was already present in the lay branch, as shown in the Act of Consecration used by all the members from 1801 onwards:

"...I give and dedicate myself [to the] worship [of the Mother of God]; I honor and I shall always honor in a special manner her Immaculate Conception. I throw myself upon the bosom of her maternal tenderness, and I will fulfill all the days of my life the duties of respect, obedience, confidence and love which the glorious and lovable quality of being a child of Mary inspires in me" (Chaminade Legacy I-36).

Father Chaminade himself lived that stability according to the spirit and the letter – without ever professing the vow – throughout his life, which was totally devoted to the service of Mary. In his letter of August 24, 1839, he handed down to us his apostolic testament.

" All periods of the Church's history are marked with the struggles and the glorious triumphs of the august Mary. Ever since the Lord put enmity between her and the serpent [according to Gen 3:5],

she has constantly overcome the world and hell. All the heresies, the Church tells us, have been vanquished by the Blessed Virgin, and little by little she has reduced them to the silence of death. In our day the prevailing great heresy is religious indifference which is casting on souls the deadly sleep of selfishness and the blight of passion. (...) Consequently, the divine light of faith is growing dim and being extinguished in the very midst of the Christian world; virtue is becoming more and more rare, is disappearing, while vice is breaking loose with frightful fury. It seems that we are about to see what has been foretold, a general defection and an apostasy really all but universal.



teaches us that she is the hope, the joy, and the life of the Church and the terror of hell. To her, therefore, is reserved a great victory in our day: hers will be the glory of saving the faith from the shipwreck with which it is threatened among us.

*"Now, we have understood this design of Providence ... and have hastened to offer Mary our feeble services in order to labor under her orders and combat at her side. We have enlisted under her banner as her soldiers and her ministers, and we have bound ourselves by a special vow, that of **Stability**, to assist her with all our strength until the end of our life, in her noble struggle against the powers of hell. And as an Order justly*

This description of our times, unfortunately so exact, is however far from discouraging us. Mary's power is not diminished. We firmly believe that she will overcome this heresy as she has overcome all others, because she is today, as she was formerly, the incomparable Woman, the promised Woman who was to crush the serpent's head: and Jesus Christ in never addressing her except by this sublime name,

*celebrated has taken the name and standard of Jesus Christ, so we have taken the name and standard of Mary and are ready to hasten wherever she calls us, in order to spread her cult, and through it the kingdom of God in souls. This (...) is certainly the distinguishing character and family trait of both our Societies: we are in a special manner the auxiliaries and the instruments of the Blessed Virgin in the great work of reforming morals, of preserving and propagating the Faith, and by the fact, of sanctifying our neighbor. ... we make a vow to serve her faithfully till the end of our life, to carry out punctually all that she tells us. We are glad that we can thus spend in her service the life and strength that we have pledged to her. We are moreover so entirely convinced that this is the most perfect thing for us to do, that we explicitly renounce, by our vow, the right ever to choose and embrace another Rule. (...) by the vow of **Stability** we mean to oblige ourselves in justice, my reverend son, to cooperate as well as we can until the end of our life, in the work undertaken (...).*

"What I look upon as peculiar to our Orders, and what appears to me to be what is without precedent among known institutions, is, ... that it is in the name of Mary and for her glory that we embrace the religious life; it is in order to consecrate ourselves, all that we have and are, to her to make her known, loved, and served, in the intimate conviction that we shall not bring men back to Jesus except through his most holy Mother" (L. V – 1163)



La Madonna dei Palafrenieri, detail - (1605) IL CARAVAGGIO