

**2011 September  
Meditation and Celebration**

**THE LORD HAS CHOSEN NEW WARS!**

**I. Observe** -- a fact of life: Father Lalanne on the origins of the Society of Mary (Bordeaux, springtime, 1817).

Lalanne was the first [of the future founders]. He came one day to announce ... that he thought he was called to a kind of life and work similar to the very life and work of the director of the Sodality. At this revelation, Rev. Chaminade seemed moved to tears, and he answered with a joyous exclamation: "This," he said to Lalanne, "is what I have been awaiting for a long time. May God be praised! His will is clear. The moment has come to put into execution the plan which I have been pursuing since he inspired me with it thirty years ago.

He then explained his idea to Lalanne. The religious life, he said, is to Christianity what Christianity is to the human race. It is as imperishable in the Church as the Church is imperishable in the world. Without religious, the Gospel would nowhere find its full realization in human society. It is, therefore, in vain that attempts should be made to re-establish Christianity without institutions which allow human beings to practice the evangelical counsels. But it would be difficult, and inappropriate today, to revive these institutions in the same forms which they had before the Revolution. Monastic forms are out of date, he added; they have greatly demeaned themselves by so many scandals! However, he added, no special form is essential to the religious life.

A person can be a religious while looking like a secular person. The wicked will take less offense, and it will be more difficult for them to place obstacles in the path. The world and the Church will not be less edified. Let us, therefore, form a religion association with the three vows of religion but without name, habit, or civil existence insofar as possible. *The Lord has chosen new ways of fighting* (Jg 5:8). Let us place the entire venture under the protection of Mary Immaculate, to whom her divine son has reserved the final victory over hell: *And she shall crush thy head* (Gen/Gn 3:15). "Let us, my son," he said with an enthusiasm not usual for him, "in our humility, be the heel of the woman."<sup>1</sup>

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**II. Judge**

1. Father Chaminade based his explanation of his thought on two biblical texts taken from the Hebrew Scriptures. For him they are important, and he returns to them often. The first is taken as a banner by Marianists: "The Lord has chosen new ways of fighting!" At first glance, in the way it is presented, we might think that these "new ways of fighting" are simply strategic adaptations of Christianity and of the religious life to the "new" cultural situation. That would be a matter of new "forms" of religious life "under a secular appearance," "without

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<sup>1</sup> Lalanne, *Notice historique sur la Société de Marie*, Bordeaux, 1858. See *The Chaminade Legacy*, vol. 5, doc. 17, [6-7].

name, habit, or civil existence.” If it were understood in that way, it would be a matter of reducing, by oversimplification, Father Chaminade’s charism. As for the text. *Nova bella elegit Dominus*: it frankly has to do with a paragraph of intense prophetic thought, a great profession of faith which has for object the eschatological plan of the “Son of God” concerning “Mary Immaculate,” the “Woman.” Is that not the evangelical “novelty” with which Father Chaminade was to “affront” the “new” situation?

2. The biblical text *Nova bella elegit Dominus* is a translation of the Vulgate of Judges 5.8, a verse of the canticle of Deborah, judge and mother in Israel. She is singing of the powers of God and she also praises the action of another woman, Jael. At a time when there was a lack of leaders to defend Israel, the woman appears through whom the Lord will gain his victory. The Latin translator adds a gloss to make it into an expression of faith: *Nova bella elegit Dominus!*

### **The important role of women in the salvation of the nation.**

At the time of the judges, the prophetess Deborah does something even more important. After having ordered the leader of the troops to gather his men and engage in the battle, she, by her presence, assures the success of the Israelite forces, announcing that another woman, Jael, would kill the enemy leader.

Moreover, in order to celebrate the great victory, Deborah intones a great canticle of praise for Jael’s action: “Blessed among women be Jael, blessed among tent-dwelling women” (Jgs 5:24). The words which Elizabeth addressed to Mary on the day of the Visitation: “Blessed are you among all women” (Lk 1:42) are an echo in the New Testament of this praise.<sup>2</sup>

3. Father Chaminade knew that Deborah and her canticle prefigured the Virgin Mary, and that the praise of the *Ave Maria* had its origin there. He knew that the tradition about this verse was an appeal to faith. The year after the charismatic meeting with Lalanne, he had devoted a meditation at the founding retreat of the institute to the theme of faith according to the same thought:

*Nova bella elegit Dominus.* Perhaps some one will find that, against the world especially where the enemies of God are so numerous and powerful, the weapon of faith is a weak one. But let him learn that God does not wage war in the way of men. The Lord is pleased to vanquish his enemies by means of instruments which seem to them the most feeble and the most despicable, while they deploy against him the full apparatus of their power. We see it in the victories of the Church, prefigured by the victories of the people of God. ... With the same arms, and to the glory of the same God, let us advance with courage and confidence to the same conflict.<sup>3</sup>

For Chaminade, the “new wars” (or new ways of fighting?) are those which God wages in all ages for his servants, apparently the weakest and the most insignificant, who struggle with courage for the faith. It is the Immaculate who is the sign of this struggle of faith. Whatever is dedicated to her is placed under her protection.

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<sup>2</sup> John-Paul II, *Femmes engagées pour le salut du peuple*, Marian catechesis during the general audience of Wed. 27 March 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Lalanne notes, retreat of 1818, in *The Chaminade Legacy*, vol. 5, doc. 24, [67-70]. See also Collineau notes, retreat of 1818, in *The Chaminade Legacy*, vol. 5, doc. 25, [24-25].

Chaminade's confidence, his charismatic intuition, is often manifested throughout his whole life, both in his role as director of the sodality and as founder of the religious orders. The testimony of Lalanne speaks as much to the laity as it does to the religious.

### III. Act.

Reflect on your Marianist heart and see how your faith is becoming "new." In which conflicts are you engaged today? And how do you now understand the protect of Mary Immaculate for you and for your community?

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## PRAYER

**Decorations:** In the middle, the crucifix has place of honor. In the background, a palm tree or branch symbolizing the place where Deborah dispenses justice. Below, an image of the Virgin Mary. All around, images of women and saints. Among them, of course, Adele and Marie-Thérèse. Chaminade, on the side, contemplates the tableau.

**Music:** songs of praise to Mary and to Jesus.

\*\* 1. **The word of God.** The story and canticle of Deborah, the book of Judges, chapters 4 and 5. In your bible and at verse 8 of chapter 5, you will not find the *Nova bella elegit Dominus* (The Lord has chosen new wars), for , as we have explained above, that phrase was added in the Vulgate. But it is a most becoming title for the canticle. Of course, the text must be read with all required prudence, purifying it in the light of the Gospel, removing from it any expression of violence. The two women are here considered by Chaminade as symbolizing the pure and innocent heart of the Immaculate, for it is truly Mary's faith which triumphs over evil.

\*\* 2. **Blessed are you among women!** This is the first part of Elizabeth's greeting. Filled with the Holy Spirit, she evokes Deborah's canticle. Remember the courageous and blessed women whom you have met on your journey of faith, and bless them with Mary. If this prayer is made in a group, after each invocation you might well chant the blessing. You might also make a prayer of intercession for other women whom Jesus is approaching today, asking them: "Give me to drink," as he did to the Samaritan woman.

\*\* 3. **And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus!** Elizabeth's blessing is a road "through the Mother to the Son," as is said in the very meaningful motto of Marianists. It is clear that, while Mary is at the beginning, Jesus is at the end. Bless Jesus, Son of God, who has chosen the Immaculate for the victory of faith. Fix your gaze, now, on the cross of Jesus. Individually or as a group, compose a litany of blessings to Jesus, Son of God, become Son of Mary, for the salvation of all.

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