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THE CHAMINADE VISION, THE MARIANIST CHARISM

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This is a summary view of the gift (charism) of Blessed William Joseph Chaminade to the Marianist Family and to the Church. It is an attempt to present the special Marianist grace (charism) in a nutshell.

The Meaning

A charism is a special grace given one, but it is meant to benefit members of the Church and meet the needs of the world. The term comes from the Greek word meaning free gift. Every religious congregation has a charism shared by each of its members.

The Chaminade doctrine of Mary's Apostolic Mission and our participation with Mary to bring Jesus to all peoples, our charism, was clearly researched and organized theologically and popularized in print and preaching by Father Emile Neubert, S.M. This is our Marianist heritage. This is the challenge all Marianists are called to live and to propagate.

The concept and reality of Mary's Apostolic Mission is the kernel of our Marianist charism. It is the watchword that encapsulates our Marianist way of life. This is our shibboleth, which we often express in the Latin ablative absolute idiom *Maria duce*.

We are called to participate in the state and mystery of Jesus, Son of Mary; in the mission of applying the merits of the Redemption; in Mary's maternal responsibility to apply those merits to all humankind.

Historical Context

Blessed William Joseph Chaminade in post-revolutionary France was the only noteworthy Mariologist of the first half of the nineteenth century. Considering the tenor of those times, his contribution to Marian theology is remarkable. Commenting on

those times, Monsignor George Shea observed that the deviations of Jansenism and related controversies motivated the orthodox theologians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to nourish Marian piety. This they accomplished by broadening and deepening the doctrinal bases of Mary's mediational role, a crucial issue in the Jansenist heresy.

Monsignor Shea noted that, if we assign John Henry Newman to the latter half of the nineteenth century, Chaminade is the only Mariologist worthy of note in the preceding fifty years.

Chaminade's Approach

Chaminade based his doctrine of Mary's Apostolic Mission on the foundational doctrines of the Mystical Body of Christ, and of Mary's Spiritual Maternity, Coredeemption, and distribution of all graces.

In his own words:

Christ has ordained all concerns of religion that Mary participated and cooperated in all of them.

We do not go to Mary as our God, but we go to God through Mary, as faith tells us. He came to us through her.

Keystone of the Marianist Charism

Blessed William Joseph's teaching about Mary's Apostolic Mission is clear and straightforward. He presents nothing new and radically different, except for his clarity and amplification, from what was held by the early Fathers of the Church. But his originality and development are manifested in the consequences he draws from the doctrine of Mary's Spiritual Maternity regarding her present role in the world. He clearly establishes Mary's Apostolic Mission as a corollary of her Spiritual Maternity.

In union with her Son, Mary collaborates on Calvary in redeeming all in principle. To be the true Associate of the Redeemer she must yet apply to each of us the fruits of the Redemption in fact. Acknowledging this notion, we realize it is theologically certain. Mary's Apostolic Mission is a particular, essential, and integral aspect of her social functions as Spiritual Mother and Associate of the Redeemer.

This doctrine is the keystone of the Marianist charism. While Chaminade's inspiration is addressed to those who follow the Marianist vocation to assist Mary in her Apostolic Mission, the message certainly applies to the whole of Christianity. He saw this as an intensification of our baptismal promise, as our baptismal obligation to evangelization. The social orientation of his teaching -- his Mystical Body framework and social consciousness -- focuses on the Church at large and on all society.

These words of Chaminade taken from *Our Knowledge of Mary* summarize the charism bequeathed to his Marianist Family and to the Church.

We have seen Mary making use of all the rights of a Mother in regard to her Son, Who is our God, and sharing, if we may be permitted to say so, with the Eternal Father parental claims over the Uncreated Word. We have seen her, the New Eve, fulfilling in behalf of the human race the functions of a Spiritual Maternity, engendering in it a new life for heaven lost through the sin of Adam. We have seen her sacrificing on Calvary the only Son of her fruitful virginity. We have seen her at the foot of the Cross, stronger than death, associated with her Divine Son, as she had been associated in all the mysteries of His life. We have seen her from that very hour watching over all Christians, her children, with the most tender solicitude, fulfilling in their behalf the sublime duties of a Mother.

Our Knowledge of Mary further records Chaminade's thought on the Apostolic Mission of the New Eve.

Mary's exalted mission does not end on Calvary. ... Is she not the New Eve, and as such, necessary to her children? ... Her maternal solicitude must extend over the Church to edify and to instruct the faithful, and to guide them aright along the rugged roads of a pagan world.

Nor does the sublime mission of Mary end with her entrance into glory. Even in heaven she continues to cooperate in the work of regeneration, for all things are done through Mary, and every good gift comes to us through her. Jesus proves to us this fact that His Mother is the New Eve, as truly as He is the New Adam.

On this point the doctrine of the Church leaves no doubt. We have her testimony in the words of her accepted oracles.

In reality this is the practical meaning of our baptismal call and confirmation pledge to evangelization, to put the Good News into action.

Neubert's Integration and Synthesis of Chaminade's Mariology

Recent writings of theologians and popes have stressed the universal role of Mary. Outstanding among those writers and preachers is Father Emile Neubert, S.M. An increasing awareness of the universality of Mary's relation to all persons and to the apostolate of the Church is plainly evident in the teaching of the ordinary magisterium.

Although Mary's Apostolic Mission has not been explicitly and officially defined, it has clearly been stressed in recent teaching and in papal pronouncements on Mary's Spiritual Motherhood, Coredeemption, distribution of grace, and Queenship. It is contained and implied in these other Marian doctrines.

Chaminade taught explicitly the apostolic role of Mary and our obligation to participate in it. Neubert and other Marianist writers have expanded and integrated this teaching. They made it clear that Mary's maternal responsibility is a continuous mission and not a single act which ended on Calvary. The apostolic responsibility of her Spiritual Maternity is part of her vocation -- and ours.

The social and apostolic dimensions of Marian doctrine and devotion continue to unfold. The dynamic relations of Mary to us are both personal and communitarian. She concerns herself with the welfare of individuals and also of social institutions, with the entire Mystical Body of Christ -- laity, religious, and clergy. More plainly this understanding is coming to the fore.

In pulling together Father Chaminade's position and couching it in precise theological terms, Father Neubert formulated this cogent conclusion, identifying Mary's Apostolic Mission. In *La Mission Apostolique de Marie et la Notre* he explains:

These comparisons between Mary's Apostolic Mission and her role of Mother, Coredemptrix, and Distributor of all graces permit us to affirm that this Mission is revealed. It does not follow as a simple logical consequence of these three functions of Mary which are revealed, but as a particular aspect, as an integral part of them, to the point of being identified with them. Under another name it is simply her role of Coredemptrix and above all of Mother and Distributor of graces. It shares, consequently, in the certitude of these three functions, and we can say that it is revealed as truly as these three are, even if Tradition had never spoken explicitly of an Apostolic Mission of Mary. Provided the idea has been revealed, the name need not be.

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