



Circular
of the
Superior General
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**TO KNOW, LOVE AND FOLLOW
THE FOUNDER**

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TO KNOW, LOVE AND FOLLOW

THE FOUNDER

Dear Brothers:

Next year, 2011, marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of our Founder, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade. The entire Marianist Family is preparing to celebrate and promote, in all branches and at all levels, a number of initiatives to commemorate and contemplate our Founder – who he was, and the life he lived. These are all designed to boost knowledge and appreciation of Blessed Chaminade and, above all, imitation of him. We all hope that this celebration will be an occasion for the renewal of the way we live our Marianist vocation.

With this in mind, and desiring to contribute to this renewal, it seemed apropos to write this circular entitled: *To Know, Love and Follow the Founder*. As with the previous three, this circular springs from my concern, interest, and responsibility to help revitalize and deepen our understanding and experience of our own charism, our particular reason for being in the Church and in the world. My specific purpose this time is to share with you a series of reflections which might lead us to understand how this revitalization happens. This is accomplished by getting to know the Founder better, and following him more closely. It is, therefore, a circular about him. Yet, it is not about his life or his thought, rather it is about his role in the Marianist vocation, in our own vocation. In this sense, it is like an echo and an extension, exactly one century later, of the excellent prologue which Fr. Hiss wrote for the publication of the first fascicle of *The Spirit of Our Foundation*.¹ Whoever remembers this, will easily recognize its mark on these words to follow. I have identified very strongly with what he proposed. I hope that from this communion of purpose, the circular might also contribute to the motivation and centering of our lives throughout this “Chaminade Year.” Furthermore, I hope it also inspires study and specifically Marianist formation within our great Family!

I – THE ROLE OF FOUNDERS IN A SPECIFIC VOCATION

1.1 The lives of the founders: the origin and source of the various forms of consecrated life and of their different charisms.

Permit me to begin these reflections by recalling some of the paragraphs of Fr. Hiss in the prologue to which I just alluded:

¹ Fr. Hiss signed this prologue on May 1, 1910.

“None of you can ignore this: the Church is not a human institution which stands by its inherent power, by the superiority of its organization or by the natural qualities of its adherents. No; what vivifies it is a supernatural principle, is the very Spirit of its Divine Founder, Our Savior Jesus Christ, who imparted it to her on the day of Pentecost; and the better she conforms herself to His teaching and corresponds to His grace, the better does she fulfill her destiny. **In like manner, a religious family lives, in a certain sense, by the soul of its founder;** in other words, it should portray the character and practice the virtues it derives from him. (...)

For **it is by [the founder] that the Spirit of Jesus is communicated to the foundation together with the distinguishing character that He would see it have.** A glance and a little reflection will suffice to render evident that in the bosom of the Catholic Church the divers religious institutes, taken together, have a mission to show forth, by their diversity, a complete picture of the divine perfections of Jesus. Alone none of them could carry to an equally high and eminent degree all the divine gifts and germs which are contained in the spirit of Christ... On this account a division of work is made among them... Thus, every society has a spirit of its own leading it to a characteristic life and works of a special nature. (...)

But this particular form of the Spirit of Jesus descends, in the first place, into the soul of the Founder; **it is in his moral personality that it first manifests itself prominently.** In him we find the store-house and, as it were, the reservoir of this life, which, welling forth from his expansive soul, flows into all those who, in days to come will turn towards him for light and guidance...”²

More than half a century later, the Second Vatican Council affirmed:

“Indeed from the very beginning of the Church men and women have set about following Christ with greater freedom and imitating Him more closely through the practice of the evangelical counsels, each in his own way leading a life dedicated to God. Many of them, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, lived as hermits or founded religious families, which the Church gladly welcomed and approved by her authority. So it is that in accordance with the Divine Plan a wonderful variety of religious communities has grown up which has made it easier for the Church not only to be equipped for every good work and ready for the work of the ministry – the building up of the Body of Christ – but also to appear adorned with the various gifts of her children like a spouse adorned for her husband and for the manifold Wisdom of God to be revealed through her.”³

Thus, the consecrated life, in its various forms, has its origin in those “men and women” who gave their lives in order to follow the Lord. They did so, all “in their own way,” meaning, according to their particular inspiration received from the Spirit; according to their *charism*. Therefore – and we need to always keep this in the forefront of our minds – this charism did not arise from strategic planning for evangelizing, nor from academic theological reflection.

² *The Spirit of our Foundation* (SF hereafter) I, p. xv ff.

³ PC n.1.

It is not founded in a declaration, a document, or even in directives, norms, or a rule of life. It springs from the Christian life of the founder, from his or her particular living out of the Gospel.

Church History teaches us, as Fr. Hiss himself continuously recalled, that with the power of the Spirit's breath comes the development of the institution as it grows in the number of its members and multiplies its works. Surely, there will come a time when there is a need to channel this life. "Then comes the idea to edit the Rules in order to preserve in the numerous members, and in the coming generations, the unity of spirit. Nevertheless, **their efficacy is not merely bound up in their wording**, but it is derived in the first place and solely from the spirit they embody..."⁴

In the end, these words of Fr. Hiss, as well as the text of the Council, are telling us that founding charisms emanate neither from treatises on spiritual theology, nor from rules of moral conduct. Rather, they derive from concrete, individual lives, lived in fidelity to the Spirit. Their authenticity and strength lie not in the power of a convincing discourse, which in a given moment attempts to formulate a charism, nor in the number of admirers or followers that one provokes. But, they lie in fidelity, namely, **in the holiness of the founders**.

So when (as in the recent case of a well known religious institute) the holiness of the life of the founder is placed in doubt by proven facts, the real problem that arises as a result is not the repair of the damage which this dysfunctional life has caused, but rather, the authenticity and validity of the alleged charism which a particular founder bequeaths.⁵ On the other hand, however, when the holiness of the founder is proven, and moreover, recognized, the particular charism is strengthened and confirmed in the Church. Was not this, perhaps, the experience of the Marianist Family as a result of the beatification of our Founder ten years ago? The positive impact of this event upon the recognition and living out of the Marianist charism is undeniable. Hence, we have an ardent desire and great interest that this recognition be extended to the point of full and universal veneration in the Church. May the Lord grant us the grace of being able to celebrate Blessed Chaminade's canonization soon!

1.2 The essential memory of the founder.

If the different forms of consecrated life spring from the lives of the founders, so that their very existence remains justified, it will be necessary to stay faithful to the founder's inspiration. If not, they lose their reason for being in the Church and in the world.

This fidelity becomes even more necessary in times of cultural change, such as these in which we live. As I said in my presentation of the documents of the last General Chapter,

⁴ SF I, p. xvi ff.

⁵ We are reminded how the communication from the Holy See regarding the canonical visit of the institute we refer to, published on May 1, 2010, pointed out that one of the necessary and urgent tasks to be faced in order to assure its future was, precisely the redefinition of its charism.

we live in a “time of change and transition between an image of religious and Marianist life which is fading and another which has not yet clearly emerged. As the results of the consultation of the Society clearly show, it is a time of uncertainty in which there are fears in the face of the future.” In such a situation, we can only face this future with conviction and hope if we strengthen and revitalize our own charismatic identity, i.e., fidelity to the Founder. “To be open to the future we need to consolidate in our personal and community lives our signs of identity in the Church and in the world. In other words, we do not know yet very well what the future will be, but we are convinced that there is one and we trust in the Lord because we know – even more, we feel and believe – why and for what reason the Lord wants Marianist religious in the Church and in the world.”⁶

Since Vatican II, all official documents devoted to the necessary renewal of consecrated life have emphasized the criterion of fidelity to the inspiration of the founder as a prerequisite if this renewal is to be carried out properly. We find it imperative, therefore, to always keep the memory of our Founder in the forefront of our consciousness – not, however, as a “documentary memory” from the past, but rather, as a living presence which spiritually inspires and motivates.

Among the documents in question, *Evangelica testificatio*, from Paul VI⁷, is, perhaps, one of the most inspiring. In it, after exhorting men and women religious to renew contemplation and apostolic zeal in their lives, the Pope writes:

“Only in this way will you be able to reawaken hearts to truth and to divine love in accordance with the charisms of your founders who were raised up by God within His Church. Thus the Council rightly insists on the obligation of religious to be faithful to the spirit of their founders, to their evangelical intentions and to the example of their sanctity. In this it finds one of the principles for the present renewal and one of the most secure criteria for judging what each institute should undertake.”⁸

It is, therefore, a memory that nurtures fidelity to their “spirit,” to their evangelical intentions, and to the “example of their holiness.” And for that, neither historical knowledge, nor simple, external imitation of the way the founder lived, will suffice. It requires a living memory, a presence in our consciousness, which can help develop in us a true spiritual affinity with the founder. In the end, what it really means is that we must remain responsive to the Spirit, in the here and now, as the Founder was.

“In reality, – continues Paul VI – the charism of the religious life, far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself

⁶ Fr. Hiss also alluded to the need for the entire religious family to remain faithful to the spirit of its Founder if it wishes to survive: “In as far as it is animated by this spirit it will prosper; the day on which, by its own fault, it permits the soul of its father to vanish, as it were, or to escape, it forfeits, together with its reason for being, its vital principle and will not fail to perish. And therefore not sufficient for it is it to possess the common spirit of Christianity; in it must live the spirit of its Founder.” (ibid.)

⁷ Promulgated on June 29, 1971.

⁸ n.11.

to the modern world, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church.

It is precisely here that the dynamism proper to each religious family finds its origin. For while the call of God renews itself and expresses itself in different ways according to changing circumstances of place and time, it nevertheless requires a certain constancy of orientation. The interior impulse which is the response to God's call stirs up in the depth of one's being certain fundamental options. Fidelity to the exigencies of these fundamental options is the touchstone of authenticity in religious life. Let us not forget that every human institution is prone to become set in its ways and is threatened by formalism. **It is continually necessary to revitalize external forms with this interior driving force**, without which these external forms would very quickly become an excessive burden.”⁹

The key to creative fidelity within religious institutes is, as the Pope says, its “interior driving force,” namely, to live from those fundamental options of life which were formed deep within the founder. Discovering them and making them our own is ultimately what we strive for in keeping the founder’s memory alive.

1.3 The founder and one’s personal vocation

Everything that I have said up to this point in a generic way regarding the role of the founders in generating the particular form of life for the institute, could also be applied to one’s own personal vocation. In my last circular, I recalled that the concrete call to religious life experienced by each one of us, does not come about in a generic way, as in a call to “religious life” *in general*, which is then concretized in some “specific form” within that call. No, the call to religious life is, from the very beginning, and all at once, a call to that specific, concrete form. “The charism,” I said, “delimits the will of God for the religious and establishes ways to incarnate it. It concretizes both the way one lives community life, as well as the way one carries out the mission.”¹⁰

Therefore, the person of the founder is no stranger to one’s vocation. If this is a call to incarnate the charism, and it is based on and inspired by the founder, then as a result of divine design, the founder plays a special role as mediator of the call that each of us has received from the Lord. This is true, not just in the call, but also in the life generated in us by the Spirit, as we give our own assent to that call. It is possible that we are not very conscious of this, but it is a very evident truth. It should be enough to convince us of this truth simply to consider what would become of us if our Founder had not existed. Of course, there would be no Marianist vocation; we would not be here; we would not be what, in fact, we are.

⁹ n.11-12.

¹⁰ Cf. Circular n. 3, section 3.2.

Typically, this mediating function of the founder is not revealed to us at the beginning of the experience we all have in discerning our own vocation. Other mediations which are more contemporary, more immediate and recent – i.e. a particular community or person that imparts the charism; an experience of mission or fraternity – strike us much more evidently in our initial living out of our vocation. But, we cannot remain solely at that level without the risk of superficiality and inconsistency because, deep down, they are still secondary and transitory. Although we may have initially felt challenged or attracted to a particular witness, it is only a vestige, a sign of the true calling. In order to find its deeper meaning, to capture its true contents, we need to plumb the depths of the original mediation, down to the roots, which is none other than, as we have said, the very life of the founder. This is the reason why in every religious institute it is an overriding goal in any formation process, be it initial formation or ongoing, to introduce its members to this dynamic of deepening their understanding and living out their particular vocation. This is accomplished by helping them to live in spiritual harmony with the founder.

Thus, in our own personal history, the figure of the founder is not just an example on which to model our life – one of the many saints offered to us for our imitation. As we have seen, the founder has, and should continue to have, a particular role in the mediation of our vocation. The founder is, therefore, worthy of special attention and singular devotion within our heart. It is inconceivable to think that there could be authentic religious who do not feel a sincere and deep appreciation for their founder. Having an interest, even a true passion, for getting to know the founder and following him or her more and more faithfully is a *sine qua non* to be able to understand better and live in conformity with what the Lord hopes for each one of us.

II – VOICES OF THE WORD; PARENTS IN THE FAITH

Recognizing the mediating role of the founder in one's particular vocation to some form of consecrated life, to the living out of a concrete charism, it is natural to wonder what form this mediation will take. Is it only an exemplary mediation or is it something else? How can we understand it or describe it? In this section, I offer some biblical reflections which can help us find answers to these questions.

Why resort to the bible? Whatever the nature of this mediation, it corresponds to God's plan. It is inscribed within that plan, and, therefore, we must try to understand how it fits in to what we could call God's *modus operandi* throughout Salvation History. Moreover, the use of biblical narrative will make understanding it more experiential than theoretical. As such, this type of mediation remains open to description in theological categories. In the long run, it is not about writing a treatise on the mediating role of the founders, but rather about living

that role integrated into the history of our particular relationship with God, a relationship that feeds primarily on his Word.

2.1 “The God of Our Fathers”

Let us start by remembering that God’s revelation in the History of Salvation does not occur as a result of a philosophical speculation about God’s existence. Neither does it come about by a definition of God’s being, nor by means of a discourse. Rather, this revelation comes about through the lives of those elected to live in God’s presence. God’s self-revelation to Moses was as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”¹¹ And when Moses wanted to know who God was, by name, in order to be able to present God to the people, the answer was once again: “Thus shall you say to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. ‘This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations.’”¹²

Our God, the God in whom we believe, is manifest in the lives of those who preceded us on the path of faith. Their lives have been the “voice” through which God’s communication has been heard. The word of God, before it is expressed in written texts, is revealed in a life, in specific events of life, the personal and collective histories of the chosen people. As affirmed by the Council in a now famous expression with profound implications for our understanding of Divine Revelation, this “plan of revelation is realized by **deeds and words having an inner unity**: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them.”¹³

God’s communication with humanity is not, therefore, limited to a text. Biblical texts are intimately associated with the communication of the very life of God through the concrete lives of “our fathers in the faith.” On the one hand, without reference to this life, the text would be meaningless. On the other hand, without the text, the meaning of the communication would remain hidden. This principle acquires its full meaning in the case of Jesus Christ, the Father’s definitive Word. “By this revelation then – the conciliar text continues – the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.”¹⁴ “Then, after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, ‘now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son.’ For He sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God. Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh was sent as ‘a man to men.’ He ‘speaks the words of God,’ and completes the work of salvation which His Father gave Him to do. To see Jesus is to see His Father. **For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of**

¹¹ Ex 3:6.

¹² Ex 3:15.

¹³ DV n.2.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal.”¹⁵

God communicates, then, through “the presence and personal manifestation” of Jesus Christ in his humanity. Jesus is the mediator. St. Augustine confessed before God: “I sought, therefore, some way to acquire the strength sufficient to enjoy thee; but I did not find it until I embraced that Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus...”¹⁶ It was not in a reflection, nor in a book that communication with God was made clear to Augustine, but rather, in the embrace of the man Christ Jesus. It also comes alive because that embrace is an embrace by life itself, involving the communication of the Spirit, which brings us to live in God with Christ. The biblical discourse refers us to that communication, but it neither fully encompasses it nor produces it of its own accord. Life cannot be contained or transmitted in words and, therefore, Christian faith cannot be nourished by a simple philological approach to the texts of the Bible. However legitimate and beneficial it may be, it will never arrive at the ultimate meaning, the truth, nor will it arrive at the actual life that the words convey. For the same reason, there cannot be any type of textual fundamentalism within a correct understanding of the Christian life.

The principal of personal mediation in God’s communication belongs, therefore, time and again, to the economy of salvation. In other words, this principle applies not only to the genesis of all the canonical books that comprise the Holy Scripture; it remains a key principle throughout the actual history. The same full mediation, which is Christ, is made current through the mediation of true witnesses. Without the transmission of the Word of God through these witnesses’ lives, without living energy that the saints have generated and continue to generate, the Bible itself would have been relegated to being a simple literary testimony of the past. Therefore we confess in the Creed that we believe in the “Communion of Saints,” outside of which there is no way to receive God’s communication, or to commune with God. The author of the letter to the Hebrews reminded believers that, for one’s encounter with God, did not approach a blazing fire or listen to a terrifying voice speaking words that human ears cannot stand to hear. Rather, they approached the “heavenly Jerusalem”, the “assembly of the saints,” and “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.”¹⁷ As we explained in the previous section, among those saints who contributed to extend and embody the mediation of Christ, with whom and through whom we have discovered and experienced the encounter with God’s plan in our lives, the founders, of course, occupy a prominent role.

¹⁵ DV n.4.

¹⁶ *Confessions*, Book VII, Chap. 18.

¹⁷ Cf. Heb 12:18-24.

2.2 The Mantle of Elijah.

In order to further develop the principle of the human mediation of God's call, I invite you to meditate on the relationship between the prophet Elijah and his disciple, Elisha, and on the role that this relationship with Elijah had in the life of Elisha. This is one of the most important stories of the Old Testament when considering this theme. In fact, it serves as the backdrop for the New Testament in which we see the relationship between the disciples and Jesus, who is the supreme mediator of the Father.

Elijah went to meet God in the solitude of Mount Horeb and he prepared to fulfill one of the tasks that God had commanded of him: anoint Elisha as prophet and successor.¹⁸ "Elijah set out, and came upon Elisha, son of Shaphat, as he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen; he was following the twelfth. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak over him. Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, 'Please, let me kiss my father and mother good-bye, and I will follow you.' 'Go back!' Elijah answered. 'Have I done anything to you?' Elisha left him and, taking the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them; he used the plowing equipment for fuel to boil their flesh, and gave it to his people to eat. Then he left and followed Elijah as his attendant."¹⁹

Elisha, was a farmer, and probably rather rich (twelve yoke of oxen are no small thing!). Entrusted with the care of the fields, he sees in Elijah's gesture the call that is above all calls, the call of God. He responds with an unqualified "yes," leaving behind everything: family, possessions, job, etc. Unlike other prophets, he receives no direct message from the Lord. There was no mediation between him and Elijah, nor was there discourse or an explanation of his mandate or mission. There was only a gesture. Yes, only a gesture. But that gesture carried a deep and vital meaning, since the mantle symbolizes the identity and personal dignity of the one who possesses it. By this gesture, Elisha feels compelled to simply remain attached to Elijah from then on. For Elisha, the recognition of his own vocation from God and its fulfillment, are intimately mediated through a personal relationship with Elijah. Later, the same will be true for the disciples and their relationship with Jesus.

This attachment is so strong that when Elijah was walking toward his final meeting with God, as he was preparing to depart from this world, he repeatedly ordered Elisha to leave him. Elisha's response was always: "By the living God and your own life, I will not leave you!"²⁰ Three times he asked Elisha to leave, but all three times he got the same response. Elisha did not understand his life without the following of Elijah as its focus. This attachment had become an indispensable reference point. Without it, he would lose direction in his life.

¹⁸ 1 Kings 19:16.

¹⁹ 1 Kings 19:19-21.

²⁰ 2 Kings 2:2.4.6.

The physical separation was, nevertheless, inevitable. Elijah had to leave this world. He had to make his exodus, his final Passover. They had come to the Jordan. “Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up and struck the water, which divided, and both crossed over on dry ground. When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Ask for whatever I may do for you, before I am taken from you.’ Elisha answered, ‘May I receive a double portion of your spirit.’ ‘You have asked something that is not easy,’ he replied. ‘Still, if you see me taken up from you, your wish will be granted; otherwise not.’”²¹ Since he had no choice but to accept being deprived of the company of Elijah, Elisha desired, at the very least, to retain his spirit; to be the firstborn in the spiritual heritage of Elijah.²² But, in order for this to occur, he will have to be a witness to Elijah’s passing, to experience it at the side of the prophet. He could not inherit Elijah’s spirit if he did not witness the definitive encounter with God. It is in this encounter, that Elijah’s task, as mediator, ends. Though the voice of the mediator goes silent, God’s revelation is accomplished. Centuries later, other disciples would aspire to a privileged place as heirs to the Kingdom. To these, Jesus responded: “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”²³ To be a witness and participant in the Paschal Mystery, which is the culmination of life, one must become a true disciple, a true heir to the spirit of the master.

Elisha was given the ability to share with Elijah that moment in which he passed into the enduring presence of God. “As they walked on conversing, a flaming chariot and flaming horses came between them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind... Then Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle which had fallen from him.”²⁴ Elijah’s mantle had now become Elisha’s mantle. He had already received his inheritance. Now he would return with it to continue his mission back on the other shore of the Jordan. But, this biblical story shows us that there still remains one more step in his spiritual experience. The story goes on: “Elisha went back and stood at the bank of the Jordan. Wielding the mantle which had fallen from Elijah, he struck the water, but it did not divide. Then he said, ‘Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?’ When Elisha struck the water again, it divided and he crossed over.”²⁵

The first time he struck the water with Elijah’s mantle, the waters did not separate. It was not sufficient simply to possess the mantle or to be able to utilize it. Its power lay not in its material composition; there were no special properties within the fabric. The power stems from the fact that the one who wears it is a man of God. “Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?” This, and not the location of the mantle or what was to become of it, was the real question. For the mantle to truly become his, for Elisha to inherit the spirit of Elijah, he had to transform himself into a man belonging to God. He had to experience what it really meant to inherit, not the “mantle of Elijah,” but the “mantle of Yahweh,” the God of Elijah, from whom came true strength and power. Only then could he return to the other shore bearing that au-

²¹ 2 Kings 2:8-10.

²² The “double portion” refers to his desire to inherit twice as much as the other heirs, as was established by the Law (cf. Dt 21:17).

²³ Mark 10:38.

²⁴ 2 Kings 2:11,13a.

²⁵ 2 Kings 2:13b-14.

thentic spirit of Elijah, which the “disciples of the prophets,” waiting expectantly for his return, recognized.²⁶

We could consider the analogy that as the founder’s charism is to the living out of our vocation, so the mantle of Elijah was to Elisha. Our lives have also been called by the founder and wrapped up in him. But, in order to be true heirs, worthy bearers of his spirit, it is not enough to simply inherit the material object, the mantle. It is also not enough that we have within our grasp the work that he founded, that we are in charge of taking care of the inheritance which has come down to us though the ages. No, more than all that, we need to walk with him, following him personally, until we are identified with his particular experience of God. From there, we come to our own Pascal experience, from which flows the power of his spirit and the strength of his mission. Ultimately, we must become the “man of God” that he was. So, where in our lives is the “God of Chaminade, the God of his faith-experience?” Without this harmony with Chaminade’s own experience of God, the “mantle” inherited from him will be totally ineffective in our hands. For whatever talents we might possess, they will never give us the power to “divide the waters” so that we can go out into the world, where others need us and wait for us, with the true strength and effectiveness of our charism. We can hoist the mantle up, display it, and describe it, but, when all is said and done, it will always remain on the far shore...

2.3 “I have begotten you in Christ”

When Elisha saw how Elijah was snatched away from his presence, he explained: “My father, my father!...”²⁷ With the identical exclamation Elisha, himself, would be greeted by a visiting King Joash who had come to see the prophet, now near death.²⁸ When one follows a man of God and, in doing so, discovers his calling and the divine message for his life, that man of God will be seen as a father.

Indeed, the human mediator of God’s message is not limited to being a mere messenger. His mediation is generative. It participates in the generation of one’s life in faith, in the Spirit. It is analogous to the mediation of paternity with respect to human life. “Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” This is how St. Paul admonished the Corinthians who, dazzled by some other eloquent teachers who came after him, seemed to neglect his teaching. The distinction which the Apostle establishes between “father” – who is just one person – and “teachers” – who could be multiple persons – is that difference between the one who originally transmitted the faith, as mediator of the Word, and those who later help the person to understand and live it. In his making this distinction, we see clearly that Paul lived his

²⁶ Cf. 2 Kings 2:15.

²⁷ 2 Kings 2:12.

²⁸ Cf. 2 Kings 13:14.

mission as a mediator of the fatherhood of God. This was so true that he had no hesitation in concluding: “Therefore, I urge you, be imitators of me.”²⁹

It is clearly not the Apostle who generates Christian life, nor is this life reduced to mere imitation. It is not generated by his own power, by his abilities, or by his persuasive capacity to obtain followers of his doctrine. There is only one father, and that is God. Through the giving of His Spirit, this father begets children, brothers of Christ, the firstborn. Paul keeps this in the forefront of his mind. God is the Father before whom he “kneels” and “from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.”³⁰ “What is Apollos, after all, and what is Paul? Ministers through whom you became believers, just as the Lord assigned each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth.... we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building.”³¹ In spite of all this, nevertheless, his claim of a certain paternity is clear: “I have begotten you in Christ Jesus,” as we have seen him say to the Corinthians. In another place, he cries out to the Galatians: “My children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ be formed in you!”³² What leads Paul to claim for himself, before his faithful, not only the condition of a brother, but also, somehow, that of a “father”?³³

Another passage, also addressed to the Corinthians, helps us to understand that this claim has its foundation in that the Apostle experienced his ministry, not as a mere conduit of the evangelical message, but as an intimate collaboration with the Spirit in the generation of Christian life. To gain respect, recalls Paul, he needs no letter of recommendation. “You are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by all, shown to be a letter of Christ **administered by us**, written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets that are hearts of flesh.”³⁴

The image is profound and eloquent. The Apostle's ministry is not only to announce the Word, but to “write it” in their hearts. The text is Christ. The writer is the Spirit. What is the role of the Apostle in that “writing”? There is a commentary by St. Basil about the first verses of Psalm 45(44): “My heart is stirred by a noble theme...., My tongue is the pen of a nimble scribe...” in which he alludes to this passage in Paul. This commentary suggests a response to the question just posed:

“Just as the pen is a tool for writers when the hand of an expert is what moves to form the letters of the writing, so also the **tongue of the just man, moved by the Holy Spirit, burns, in the hearts of the faithful, words of eternal life**; instead of an inkwell,

²⁹ 1 Cor 4:15-16.

³⁰ Eph 3:14-15.

³¹ 1 Cor 3:5-9.

³² Gal 4:19.

³³ Inspired directly by this Pauline claim about paternity, proper to someone who is God's instrument for initiating the faith of a believer, Fr. Hiss affirmed: “Our Founder has been commissioned from on high to impart this life to us: in very truth, he is bound to us by the tie of a very real *spiritual paternity*.” (SF I, p. xv)

³⁴ 2 Cor 3:2-3.

it is the Spirit of the Living God. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the writer because the Spirit is wise and teaches all. The Spirit writes quickly because its mind is moving fast. The Spirit writes in our thoughts, ‘not on tablets of stone, but on those tablets which are hearts of flesh.’”³⁵

Clearly, and rightly so, we can consider the founder to be one of the “righteous men” whose “tongue” has written in our hearts the words of eternal life. I suppose, moreover, that this has been the ultimate desire of every founder as regards their disciples. Let us, then, allow Paul’s words to resonate in our hearts as if they were spoken by Fr. Chaminade himself: “shown to be a letter of Christ administered by us, written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God.” We can even see the Founder endorsing and proclaiming to us the words that follow in that Pauline letter: “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that of ourselves we are qualified to take credit for anything as coming from us; rather, our qualification comes from God, who has indeed qualified us as ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life.”³⁶

Allowing these words to resound in our hearts, we perceive how Fr. Chaminade, as a good Founder, lived with the primary concern of being a transmitter of life, a collaborator of the Spirit. With this in mind, we better understand that insistence with which he began his famous letter to retreat masters on August 24, 1839:

“My dear son: In my Circular of last July 22, I said to all my children of the two Orders: *‘You will see in the pontifical Decree that the desire of His Holiness, that even his will, is that you inculcate the spirit of our works, all of charity, while assuring yourselves that you will be rendering useful services to the Church, if you persevere.’*

A fine occasion is being presented to you, my dear son, to fulfill, to the best of your ability, the orders of the Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here you have coming to you the favorable moment for inculcating the spirit of our Constitutions and of our works which have so highly pleased his pontifical heart. I wish to speak of the retreat you are going to give. Penetrated with this maxim of Saint Paul: The letter brings death, but the spirit brings life, you will apply yourself with all your power to have duly appreciated the excellence and the special character of our divine mission.”³⁷

“Life mediating the presence and action of God;” “the voice of his Word which calls us;” “father” in the faith; in the receiving and following the Word; the “pen” that, moved by the Spirit, makes us a “letter of Christ”... are all images we have learned from biblical experience and they can illustrate the role that the Founder, by divine plan, has had and continues to have in our lives. May these images help us give the Founder his rightful place in our lives, as we live out our own vocation!

³⁵ Homilies on the Psalms, 44:3 (PG 29, 396)

³⁶ 2 Cor 3:4-6.

³⁷ *Marian Writings* II, n. 69.

A Note about the use of the expression “Good Father” in our tradition

In the Marianist tradition, it has become the custom to apply this title, not only to the Founder, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, but also to the superiors general who have succeeded him. As we have seen from the reflections above, it seems appropriate to attribute it to the Founder. Yes, provided it is in the Pauline sense, namely, as Paul understood his paternity in relation to the communities he founded. Otherwise, we would be disobeying the Lord, who commanded his disciples: “Do not call anyone on earth father, for only one is your Father.” Christ also admonished the rich man for calling him good because “only one is good.”

I am not so sure, however, that it is so fitting to apply such a designation to the superiors general. As for me, at least, I neither understand nor live my ministry as “father” but rather as “brother.” With all of you, I see myself as a brother, a son of the same “Good Father.” To pretend to possess a paternity which, as Paul reminds the Corinthians, is unique, seems out of place. Perhaps the most that we, as superiors general, may “aspire to” would be to be considered in the category of “teachers” of the community, following the terminology of the Apostle.

Is it time, therefore, to amend the tradition in this regard? That is a question I ask myself, and for which I have no answer clear enough to be considered *ex cathedra*. I know that there is always room for various interpretations and explanations, so I prefer to leave the question open to reflection and dialogue, without failing to express, as I have done, my preference for reserving the title for the Founder, thus emphasizing the uniqueness of his fatherhood in our lives.

III – BLESSED WILLIAM JOSEPH CHAMINADE, OUR “GOOD FATHER”

Considering everything said so far, it is clear that we need to know, love and follow our Founder if we know, love and follow our vocation. “To know”, “to love” and “to follow” – these are three verbs which I have chosen as the title of this circular; three verbs which are interrelated and should not be separated. We need to know, to love and to follow, but as I tried to show in the first part, “external” knowledge is not enough. This knowledge needs to be internal, affective, and practical – brought to life.

What have we done and what must we do in the Society of Mary in order to more deeply know, love and follow our Founder, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade? This is the question that I believe should concern us at this moment. I will dedicate the third part of this circular to an attempt to answer this question.

3.1. Luis Gonçalves da Câmara and St. Ignatius of Loyola

Let me begin with a striking example, that of Fr. Luis Gonçalves da Câmara, a Portuguese Jesuit of the earliest period of the order, faithful disciple and admirer of St. Ignatius, with whom he had the good fortune of personally interacting.

Eager to get to know him more deeply, Luis importuned Ignatius to set aside reticence and modesty and talk about himself. He convinced the saint of the need to share the story of his spiritual journey. Moved by Luis' interest, St. Ignatius thought and prayed about the request. Finally, he agreed to a series of interviews in order "to declare how far his soul has come up to now".³⁸ After each interview, Fr. Luis wrote down what St. Ignatius had told him and, in this way, thanks to him, the Society of Jesus had, from its very beginnings, the story of the life of its founder, known by the name *Autobiography*. It is the account in which the saint, realizing his interior growth, reflects on how the Lord had acted in his life and what had been his reactions to the signs and events which manifested God's presence.

My referring to this work as a "striking example" is not simply because it is a wonderful testimony of filial devotion towards the founder. What I find truly exemplary in Fr. Luis – and this is the reason I include it here – is not so much his interest in the life of St. Ignatius (which would be logical, given the passionate personality that he was), but the reasons for his passion, the motives that moved him to be so persistent in the task of exposing and communicating Ignatius' spiritual experience. What I find really worth emphasizing here is that these reasons flow from his living his own Jesuit vocation and, therefore, they were more theological than emotional. He himself stated these in another of his writings about the saint, called the *Memorial*, in which he includes some anecdotes and experiences he had with St. Ignatius:

"Since religious orders, are nothing other than particular ways of living according to Christ's precepts and counsels, ways that differ not only from the common obligation and rule applying to all in respect of the perfection of observance which is professed in these orders, but that differ also among themselves because of the specific ends and the means, which each order has chosen to obtain those ends, I have always considered that just as God called Bezalel, son of Uri, as Scripture says, and filled him with a holy spirit of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge to design and execute perfectly everything that could be worked in gold, precious stones, silver, copper, marble, and every kind of wood, indeed gave him Oholiab as his companion to construct the tabernacle, the Ark of the covenant, the propitiation, and all the other objects God had ordered

³⁸ This is how he relates St. Ignatius' determination to tell his life: "An hour or two later we went to dinner, and, while Master Polancus and I were dining with him, St. Ignatius said that Master Natalis and others of the Society had often asked him to give a narrative of his life, but he had never as yet decided to do so. On this occasion, however, after I had spoken to him, he reflected upon it alone. He was favorably inclined toward it. From the way he spoke, it was evident God had enlightened him. He had resolved to manifest the main points of his interior life up to the present, and had concluded that I was the one to whom he would make these things known." (Prologue of the *Autobiography of St. Ignatius*)

Moses to make, so also for the foundation and building of any religious order which God our Lord wanted to found and build in the world, his custom has been to call and choose particular craftsman, and to fill them with the grace and spirit which they specifically needed to be the immediate founders of these living tabernacles and arks of the covenant, dedicated to keeping the law and the perfect observance of the divine cult.

And for this reason, just as the other craftsman, who were occupied in the construction of that work, would have been more perfect the more they strove to imitate Bezalel and Oholiab, in the same way **I thought it absolutely necessary for members of religious orders, who aspire to perfect themselves in each one's way of life, to be very diligent in keeping the spirit of its immediate founder, and that a religious order would maintain the purity in which it was instituted as long as the imitation of the one God chose as the first founder persisted.**

For this reason, as soon as I entered the Society at Easter, 1545, I always greatly desired to see and have dealings with our Father, Ignatius of Loyola, **whom our Lord gave us as an example and head of this mystical body, of which all sons of the Society are members...**³⁹

This theological motivation was what moved the other disciples of St. Ignatius to beg him to talk about his life. They felt that something important would be lacking in the foundation of the Society of Jesus, if he did not do it. It is interesting to recall what one of them, Father Natalis, full of joy, said upon hearing that Ignatius had finally decided to open himself up to Fr. Luis Gonçalves. Fr. Luis, himself, relates this reaction:

“Father Natalis was overjoyed that a beginning had been made, and told me to urge St. Ignatius to complete it, often saying to me, ‘In no other way can you do more good to the Society, for this is fundamentally the Society.’ He himself spoke to St. Ignatius about it, and I was told to remind him of it ...”⁴⁰

3.2. Knowledge of the Founder in the Society of Mary

If I have chosen to mention here the example of Fr. Luis Gonçalves da Câmara it is because it can help, by contrast, to reveal one of the most lamentable gaps in our Marianist history: ignorance of the Founder. The Society of Mary had to wait for the biography to be written by Fr. Simler in order to begin to get to know him, more or less a half-century after his death. Fr. Simler, himself, recognized this in his prologue:

“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 the documents concerning Father Chaminade, the Founder of

³⁹ *Memorial*, n. 1-3.

⁴⁰ Prologue of the *Autobiography*.

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 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?...⁴¹

I believe that Fr. Simler was kind when he attributed the lack of the knowledge of the Founder to his modesty, ever true to the maxim of the *Imitation of Christ*. We may also consider other possible contributing causes, such as the fact that he never lived integrated in a particular community, or the ominous shadow that hung over his memory as a result of misunderstandings, tensions and problems with his relationship with the leadership of the Society during his last years. Actually, the primary cause, as we see it in contrast to the previous section, was that we did not have the fortune to have, among the first Marianists, men who had the theological insight necessary to grasp the importance that such knowledge would have for the understanding and living out of their own vocation, and those of the many who would come later.

We must be profoundly grateful, therefore, to Fr. Simler for having lived and having transmitted that "filial spirit" with respect to the Founder, which the Society certainly needed. Similarly, we are grateful that, being conscious of the importance of this knowledge for the entire Marianist Family, he was inspired to write Chaminade's biography. Thanks to him, we can begin to discover our Founder. A half century late, but "never too late if the news is good," as the saying goes.

The presentation of Fr. Simler's biography of Fr. Chaminade would be fully accomplished some years later with the publication of another work of great importance from our more recent history: *The Spirit of Our Foundation*. In his forward, Fr. Hiss, after recognizing the inestimable good for the Society that Fr. Simler's work had been, identified the need to extend it with another work about Fr. Chaminade's spirit. This is a work Fr. Simler had already had in mind, projecting that his secretary, Ft. Klobb, who had helped him with his historical and documental research, would complete it.

"But is it not also true, that the more closely you followed this history the more you desired to study profoundly the intimate thoughts of our Founder, in order to assure yourselves directly and from the authentic text, of the guiding principle that presided

⁴¹ SIMLER, J., *William Joseph Chaminade, Founder of the Marianists*, Trans. Joseph Roy, SM, Dayton: Marianist Resources Commission, 1986 p. xxv.

at our birth, and of the manner in which the spirit, end, and organization of our works have been conceived and defined from the beginning?”⁴²

And with the centenary of the Society on the horizon, he wondered:

“Would it be too early to think of that now and to begin at once to prepare for the celebration of an event to us so memorable? And will not the best preparation be to redouble our ardor, to maintain and renew in our souls the *spirit of the foundation*? For it is to its cradle that a religious family must refer if it wishes to preserve in its entirety its full vitality, its distinguishing spirit and the real perfection of its institution. There it will find its Founder, that is to say, the man whom God has chosen to perform the work decreed by His providence and upon whom he has conferred the plenitude of all the gifts of nature and of grace necessary for such a mission.”⁴³

It was this desire, to recapture the spirit of Father Chaminade and with it the soul of his foundations, which led the General Chapter of 1905 to decide to go ahead with the publication of *The Spirit of Our Foundation*, setting aside for later the publication of his letters. That spirit was contained in the vast documentation gathered and studied by Frs. Simler and Klobb. They attempted at that point to make this information known in some way. Thus, this work appeared in various stages. Its publication followed a systematic plan, in which they would treat the different aspects of our life and our apostolate by means of a selection of texts that would come from the Founder himself, or from the first followers, and could be considered “foundational.”

The Spirit of Our Foundation had the virtue of being the first instrument that called upon the Society to search out an understanding of the inspiration and thought of the Founder. Finally, the brothers, and especially formators, had in their hands a work that developed the main axes constituting its charism. Nevertheless, for the purpose of furthering the study and reflection of the charism, it was insufficient. On the one hand, the foundational documents cited were just a few. On the other hand, they were chosen according to a predetermined plan. Although excellent as a first informative summary of our spirit, the Society could not be satisfied, therefore, with this publication. To advance knowledge of the charism and to reflect on it from different historical and cultural contexts, it was necessary to access all the documentation, not only part of it, and to do it, besides, according to rigorous scientific criteria.

There was a very important step in this direction with the publication of the *Letters of Fr. Chaminade*. These original texts, well contextualized, offer the possibility of direct access to the thinking and feelings of the Founder. They are, therefore, indispensable for getting to know him interiorly. There still remained, however, all of the other documents – those less circumstantial, more general – in which he poured out his vision of the project that the Lord had inspired, as well as the doctrinal and spiritual principles that animated it.

⁴² SFI, p. v ff.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. ix.

Fortunately, since the mid-twentieth century, some of our brothers, encouraged by the example of their predecessors and a great love for the Founder, were filled with enthusiasm and commitment to the arduous task of bringing to light all that evidence, convinced of its importance in facing the future. Thanks to them, as we know, the life of Fr. Chaminade was investigated more deeply and a series of collections of the original documents published. These were carefully dated, described and annotated, including with indications, in many cases, of the sources that had inspired them.⁴⁴ With regard to this, how can we fail to recognize, with great gratitude, the many contributions to the Marianist Family through the work of Fr. Jean-Baptiste Armbruster or Fr. Joseph Verrier, for example?

All this effort has finally been completed with the publication of *Écrits et Paroles*, whose seventh and final volume just came out this year. As I wrote in my epilogue to this monumental work, its publication “is invaluable for the entire Marianist Family. With it, and with the volumes containing the letters of Fr. Chaminade, we have, for the first time, the possibility of having, on any given desk, all of the known documents of the Founder which are contained in our General Archives. Until now, we could only find fragmentary publications... Now, we have available this resource, with critical commentary and careful contextualization, attractive, not only to read (which can be difficult at times as a result of some documents being only fragments), but for study. Both are needed. Henceforth, our reflections on the thought of the Founder have the kind of support necessary to be able to reach the depth and rigor they need, and which, at times, has been sorely missing for lack of precise references to the sources or the context. With the complete edition of *Écrits et Paroles* we now have a precise and precious instrument to help us avoid attributing to Fr. Chaminade what he did not say and allow us to better understand what he did say, and what he meant.”⁴⁵

3.3 Following the Path – The Challenge Ahead

The fruits of this documentary work have appeared in the last fifty years. We have seen a series of monographs, some investigations, pamphlets, and studies about aspects of the Marianist charism, but very few go deep into the thought and the life of the Founder. Deepening our knowledge of him remains a work-in-progress for us. It is true that his life has become well-known in recent years, especially following his beatification. But, in general, we only know a little more than what we say. For most of us, knowledge of Fr. Chaminade continues to shrink to a few anecdotes about his life and a few ideas about his thought. These are sufficient to speak in general about him, but not enough to nourish our religious life as Marianists. We need to further deepen our knowledge of his life and thought. Throughout

⁴⁴ I refer here, as everyone knows, to the publications like *Notes for Instruction* (French and Spanish), *Notes for Retreat* (French and Spanish), *Marianist Direction*, *Marian Writings*, *Writings on Mental Prayer*, *Writings on Faith*, etc., which have contributed so much in these last 50 years to our knowledge of the Chaminadian spirit.

⁴⁵ *Écrits et Paroles* (EP), vol VII, p. 705 s. Note: This work is being translated into English by Fr. Joseph Stefanelli, SM, under the title: *The Chaminade Legacy*. So far volumes 1-3 have been published in Dayton by North American Center for Marianist Studies (2006, 2008, 2009).

the entire Marianist Family we need to vigorously enter into this study and this reflection. It is essential for us to be able to grasp ever more deeply his life and his fundamental intentions, with all of their implications for our spiritual and missionary life.

In order for the fruit of this effort to be genuine, we need to avoid various dangers which, in fact, we have not always avoided in what we have written or said in this regard. Too often we yield to the temptation of making a biased selection of the events of the life or words of the Founder, thus isolating them from the whole or taking them out of context, so as to better “please” our own thinking. Sometimes, unconsciously, we interpret from current presuppositions, completely anachronistic for him. It is important to keep in mind that it is one thing to update and put his thought in today’s language, but it is quite another thing to interpret it as if it had sprung from our own historical context. It is not easy, as some would make it seem, to know what Fr. Chaminade would do, if he lived in our time. First we have to learn more about his time, and how he lived. If not, we succumb to the temptation to supplant him; to transform ourselves into founders in his stead, by stealing some loose idea with which to justify our own project.

To avoid these dangers, to not fall into superficiality and to guarantee a consistent tie with the thought of our Founder, we need to be attentive to the historical and documental rigor of our studies about him. Regarding documental rigor, we have no excuse. As we have seen, we now have all the means. But, as always, it can be difficult for some to submit to the required discipline due, unfortunately and in part, to ignorance of the original language. In regard to historical accuracy, however, we do not have many means to assure it. We are still lacking good studies on the specific context in which Fr. Chaminade educated, nourished and developed his life and mission. Nevertheless, it is important to know these things: he did not fall from heaven; he is the son of an era and of circumstances. These shortcomings, nevertheless, do nothing but encourage us further in our efforts to move forward and, as much as possible, continue studying his life and spirit with all seriousness and rigor.

Realizing, therefore, the long road that lies ahead, allow me to make a formal appeal to the whole Society in general, and to each Unit, in particular. In the first place, I ask you to exercise great care in the study of the Founder, especially in specifically Marianist formation programs as well as initial and ongoing formation. Secondly, in order to provide adequate staff for Marianist centers of formation and research, we need to have brothers engaged in earnest study of Fr. Chaminade and the charism, in order to continue and extend the work of those who, in turn, continued and extended the work of Fr. Klobb and Fr. Simler. We must promote this service to the Society among the young religious as well as engage some who might be “not-so-young” but whose contribution, through their knowledge, interest or skills, could be very valuable. Do not be afraid to “lose” these persons to other ministries. Without this service, it will be the very future of Marianist life and mission that we will lose. Do not forget that, given that this touches the future so intimately, this effort is, if anything, more necessary and urgent in the younger Units and new foundations, where our life and our mission must be incarnated within new realities with the assurance that this incarnation in no way diminishes the strength and maturity of its Marianist identity.

Before concluding, let me re-emphasize a fundamental principle so that everything may be properly understood and its consequences properly interpreted. I have spoken extensively about the Founder, but as I mentioned repeatedly throughout this circular, such knowledge is not sufficient unless it leads to appreciation and following. The ultimate goal of our interest in the person of the Founder is to identify with him, to live in harmony with him. The richness of his inspiration and his charism is, as stated above, in the holiness of his life. What this means, therefore, is that when we speak of the survival of the charism into the future, it means extending the history, not only the doctrine and missionary works of the Founder, but, above all, the holiness of his life. It means that by knowing him, we acquire his spirit. For us to respond, as the Lord wishes, to our Marianist vocation here and now, documents, plans and proposals are not enough. We, ourselves, need to become his eyes and his heart in our world: eyes that look and see like he looked and saw, hearts that feel as he did, allowing what touched his heart to touch ours, and to love what he loved.

So, to conclude, permit me to quote a passage from the book of Ecclesiastes. In his introduction to the section remembering and praising parents who preceded us on the path of faith, the sage affirms:

“Some of them have left behind a name
and men recount their praiseworthy deeds;
But of others there is no memory, for when they ceased, they ceased.
And they are as though they had not lived,
they and their children after them.
Yet these also were godly men whose virtues
have not been forgotten;
Their wealth remains in their families, their heritage
with their descendants;
Through God's covenant with them their family endures,
their posterity, for their sake.
And for all time their progeny will endure,
their glory will never be blotted out;
Their bodies are peacefully laid away,
but their name lives on and on.
At gatherings their wisdom is retold,
and the assembly proclaims their praise.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Sir 44:8-15.

So, to the memory and praise of that singular “godly man” who has been part of our particular history of salvation, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, I have dedicated this circular. Inspired now by this wise passage from Scripture, I can only conclude with a wish already expressed: that with the grace of God, we might know how to be that descendant whose wealth remains; that faithful and holy life whose family will endure; whose virtues are not forgotten; whose hope never ends; whose wisdom is retold; and the Church proclaims their praise.

Your brother in Jesus Christ, Son of God, become Son of Mary for the salvation of all,

Manuel J. Cortés, SM
Superior General

Rome, September 12, 2010,
Solemnity of the Holy Name of Mary,
Patronal Feast of the Society of Mary