



Marianist Spirituality and Marianist Education

Marianist Spirituality

(9) The Characteristics of Marianist Education take their distinctive form from Marianist spirituality. Father Chaminade spent part of the French Revolution in exile in Saragossa, Spain, where he passed many hours in prayer and contemplation at the shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar. Guided by God's Spirit, he envisioned innovative missionary strategies that the signs of the time were urgently demanding.

(10) Upon his return to Bordeaux, Chaminade's sense of urgency led him to form a diversity of apostolic communities inspired by Mary: first, lay communities; then two religious congregations—the Daughters of Mary Immaculate and the Society of Mary; and finally, schools, teacher formation and other educational institutions. This work took many years. It was guided by and at the same time helped to shape a deepening, distinctively Marianist spirituality. All subsequent Marianist educational work has been inspired by this spirituality with its three characteristic dimensions: a spirit of

Marian faith, the building of communities of faith, and a deep sense of mission.^{xi}

(11) Marian faith, for Chaminade, was a faith of the heart as well as an intellectual assent, a faith so deep that, like Mary's, it could conceive and give birth to Jesus. Mary in her assent embodies the openness and cooperation with the action of the Holy Spirit that is at the center of Christian faith. Inspired by the Spirit, Mary brings Jesus into the world, dramatically showing us that with God, all things are possible.

(12) Secondly, Chaminade knew that transforming the social order required the action not just of individuals, but also of many people working together with a common mission. For Chaminade, communities of faith were the natural embodiment of a vibrant Christianity. He frequently cited the example of the first Christians who held everything in common, prayed and broke bread together. Moreover, as Mary, first of believers, gathered in prayer with the apostles in the upper room and gave birth to the Church, so she still stands at the center of all Marianist communities of faith.

(13) Finally, Father Chaminade worked to infuse these communities of faith with a deep sense of mission. Faced with the devastation of the Revolution, Marianist communities of faith aimed at nothing less than rebuilding the Church. Religious and lay, women and men, wealthy and poor, they came together and looked to Mary for inspiration in their great task. Mary, who formed Jesus for his mission, who despite her great faith had to ponder many things she did not fully understand, who despite an uncertain future uttered her fiat—this same Mary will form us, Chaminade believed, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to become like Jesus for the sake of others. The person and influence of Mary is a distinguishing thread woven throughout the entire fabric of Marianist spirituality.

Spirituality and Education

(14) Marianist spirituality deeply shapes the work of those educators who are open to be formed through it. The spirit of faith, for example, helps a teacher to be truly present to students, not only to teach them but also to love and respect them, created as they are in

the image of God. When an educator is truly present to students, students are changed. An educator personally transformed through a faith of the heart teaches students to be not only competent and capable but also faithful and compassionate. For Marianist educators, a solid grasp of subject matter and effective, creative pedagogical techniques are congruent with and necessarily complemented by a living awareness of the inescapably moral and spiritual dimensions of education.

(15) Chaminade intended the educational works he founded to be not merely functional and temporary communities, but enduring communities of faith. To bring and hold these communities together, Chaminade held up the ideal of “family spirit” of religious and lay persons, faculty, staff and students working together to achieve lasting relationships of friendship and trust, supporting and challenging each other in developing their mutual gifts. If a school is to be a community of faith, Chaminade saw clearly that its leaders, lay and religious, must see their work not merely as a job, but as a ministry of love and service.

How can a charism, a spirit, a spirituality, inspire a way of educating? The answer is obvious: through the anthropology underlying that spirituality. Marianist Spirituality itself contains a certain conception of the human person, and from this conception, certain educational characteristics develop.^{xii}

(16) Finally, Marianist spirituality calls for communities of faith to exist not simply for the sake of their members, but to share in the Marianist deep commitment to mission. Marianist schools, therefore, not only commit themselves to effective education and mutual support but also encourage teachers and students alike to emulate Jesus in love of and service to others. Virtue is impossible without some knowledge; but, unfortunately, even a great deal of knowledge can exist without virtue. Marianist educators aim to combine both valuable knowledge and genuine virtue.

(17) Therefore, Marianist educators define success distinctively—rejoicing when their students are faithful to the spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ, exemplifying joy and courage in witnessing to that gospel, forming communities of faith resonant with the vibrancy of early Christianity and using their knowledge and competence to serve and transform society. In countries where Marianist educators serve in a predominantly non-Christian context, we present the same ideal, though in an appropriate manner that respects and promotes faith and truth wherever they are found, rejoicing when they are lived courageously and in a spirit of service.

(18) In light of the contemporary situation, this mission seems a daunting one. Mass media daily confronts educators and students with vistas of grinding poverty, injustice and starvation, with the details of bloody wars and heartless political oppression. In the midst of the tumult, educators may wonder whether their efforts will ever effectively address the pressing needs of the world. At the same time that we work to alleviate immediate needs and work for social change, however, we remember that the deepest needs are those we ourselves cannot fill. The deepest hunger, the hunger that food by itself cannot satisfy, is the hunger for love, the hunger for God. The truest liberation, one that government structures alone cannot provide, is the freedom of being a child of God in solidarity with one's sisters and brothers. And the most valuable knowledge, which merely understanding the ideas of others cannot secure, comes from loving others.

(19) Educators who impart knowledge for the sake of love and who teach students to love freedom for the sake of service, sow seeds that will bear fruit for generations and prepare the ground in which can grow a pervasive culture of life, of peace, of love. This is a formidable task, but our lives and our communities strive to be witnesses to the hope of its possibility. Education in the Marianist tradition meets the needs of our times with a deep Marian faith, forged in communities with a mission that effectively manifests the Good News of God's mercy and justice.

(20) If Marianist spirituality profoundly shapes Marianist pedagogy, then the distinctiveness of Marianist pedagogy should

be recognized by the mosaic of these special Characteristics. Years of educational practice in the Marianist tradition reveal that distinctiveness in five Characteristics:

- educate for formation in faith
- provide an integral, quality education
- educate in family spirit
- educate for service, justice, peace and the integrity of creation
- educate for adaptation and change