

Men and Women on a Mission: Catholic Education in the Marianist Tradition

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In 1828 and 1829 Fr. Chaminade was setting many goals for himself, but chief among them was his dream of multiplying across France a network of normal schools. This goal had such great potential and would satisfy a true educational need. Elementary school teachers at that time were hardly prepared for their work. For the most part there was no teacher training at all in France, and Father Chaminade had some special qualities in mind in addition to the normal content courses. The Marianist schools he had in mind would teach the most modern teaching methods, and they would also teach the students to be catechists. The two basic teaching methods across France at the time were memorization and the cane or the cane and memorization. Catechism would often be absent or poorly taught. The Marianists were already involved in the beginnings of two normal schools in St. Remy and Courtefontaine.

Chaminade was also in correspondence with the Minister of Public Instruction in Paris, and the Minister knew and respected the work of the Marianists, favored the idea of this network of normal schools across France, and together with Chaminade was developing legislation to formalize government support.

I mention this event in Marianist history to illustrate that the now Blessed Chaminade was a man on a mission, and he had a vision for his country, his Church, and his countrymen and women. What we call Marianist Education today is the outgrowth of Chaminade's experience of pre-revolutionary Catholicism in very Catholic southern France near Bordeaux and his experience of the French Revolution with its bloody

evolution and aftermath of turmoil. Chaminade was a man on a mission even before the Revolution. He had religious vows, was a teacher and bookkeeper, studied theology in Paris and was ordained in 1785, all before the Revolution. Being an undercover priest under threat of the death penalty during the Revolution taught him courage, creativity, and commitment to serving the spiritual life of his people in Bordeaux.

Caught in the false springtime of short-lived benevolence, he was exiled for three years in Spain (1797-1800). Some might perceive this time as depressing years in a foreign country, but these years of thought, prayer, basic survival, and discussion made Chaminade “raring to go” when the reign of Napoleon made it possible for him to return in 1800. With new resolve, he worked toward the founding of the Daughters of Mary in 1816 and the Society of Mary in 1817. These are the vowed religious Marianists. They were soon actively involved in French schools, driven by the mission of revitalizing Christianity in France and bringing to life distinctive Marianist charisms in their work. Those charisms included Formation in Faith, Community and Family Spirit, Quality Education of the Whole Person, Justice and Peace, Mary, Diversity, and Mission.

Formation in Faith

One of the major characteristics of Marianist education everywhere is formation in faith. Our goal as Marianists is to help Catholics grow strong and in their faith, in their relationship to Jesus Christ, so that they can live it deeply and know it in such a way that it enriches every aspect of their lives from critical intellectuality and professional training to relationships and culture. Such faith would prompt good and involved citizenship and

fruitful debate in the public square. Our commitment to formation in faith sends all Marianists to transform the world.

This is the one reason why Marianist Universities have Religious Studies Departments and include religious studies in the curriculum. This is also a reason for offering graduate degrees in religious studies and theology, in order to produce solid scholars and leaders who can take their places in the academic, intellectual, and educational worlds and show the place, contribution, and advantage of religious faith in the world of intellect and society. Here at the University of Dayton (UD), for example, formation in faith operates both inside and outside the classroom. An outstanding Campus Ministry team, among the largest in our nation, has been set up to support the full life of faith among all our students, from their growth in their life with God and their community worship to their concern for any issue infringing on human dignity, whether individually or socially.

We also care for those who are not of the Catholic faith, that they grow in their own faith through the curriculum we offer and the broader life support found in Campus Ministry, campus activities, and residence life. We want all of our students to leave UD having grown in their faith because of their years here.

In Marianist education faith and reason are companions and collaborators. In the pursuit of truth, one cannot replace the other. Both are needed for the whole and should not be posed as competitors (a university without reason is a contradiction and one without faith either lacks a limb or is blind). In the general education program at UD, faith and reason is a central theme in the foundational sequence of courses called the Humanities Base. As with the other themes of the Humanities Base -- individual and society, autonomy and

responsibility, humans and nature -- full human development is unthinkable without considering both terms. In effect, faith has nothing to fear from reason, nor reason from faith. The harmony of the two, of course, is not simple. We do not pretend that. But faith in one God, Creator of all, gives us confidence that truth is ultimately one, and religious truth has nothing to fear from scientific truth.

At a Catholic university one should expect dialogue *between faith and culture*. Each partner is respected; each partner is needed. A nation comprised of consumers who see miracles in stem cell research, or advantages in assisted suicide, and mull over what to do with cloning, a nation cast as a superpower, whose citizens live comfortably while others in the world remain poor and whose leaders are planning to send women and men to Mars, needs highly sophisticated and deep persons of faith and thought to engage in conversation and serve as debate partners. And these faith partners must have some humility about their own human frailties and occasional arrogance, fear and manipulation. Indeed, any culture worthy of its salt can be prone to pride and prejudice.

Faith is an engine behind learning, leading, and serving. Learning is a natural for a university. Natural human desire plus the responsibility and opportunities of adulthood are strong motivators, and faith only adds to the energy to lead and serve. To lead has a natural foundation, but there can be more. A person of faith can have a sense that gifts are bestowed in order to be given, that gifts are meant not just for personal satisfaction but for the betterment of society. An American citizen can feel that the United States is worthy of her or his leadership and actually calls on each of them to lead. To serve often involves leading, but it is especially derived from respect for brothers and sisters and love of neighbor. Our creation in the image and likeness of God makes us brothers and sisters,

and our baptism even more makes us brothers and sisters. The globe is not simply a global market at the mercy of the swiftest entrepreneur, but a global family worthy of collaboration and dignity. Those formed in faith will see the globe as a market, a village, a multitude of states and cultures, but deepest of all, a community of brothers and sisters.

Community and Family Spirit

This charism has its roots in the theme and characteristic of community. The years of exile convinced Blessed Chaminade more than ever of the importance of community. Women and men have one gracious Creator, a Father and Mother, making them brothers and sisters and by their human qualities, images of “Godself.” And in human history the tribes and nations were called by God to be a people, the people of God, a community of worshippers. Through the redemption of Jesus Christ all are redeemed, one and all, and are called brothers and sisters in the life of Christ. In the visions of the Hebrew Scriptures and the prayerful vision of Jesus, all are dignified with the love of God and called to unity as one beloved people. As a Christian, Chaminade lived with the conviction of this unity, and the French revolution was fired with a grasp of human unity, *fraternite*’, when its spirit swept the country.

Though this revolutionary spirit of fraternity was often drowned in blood and lost in dictatorship, some of its spirit lasted. One of the first things Chaminade did upon returning to France was to organize a meeting, to start a community. There was a meeting within days, and then there was a community. The Marianist Lay Community celebrated the 200th anniversary of its first consecration in 2001, just a few years ago. Chaminade was committed to rebuild Christianity in France. By nature humans seek a

community, and by grace they become a community, even if their actions often belie this deep reality. So, Chaminade took the route of community. For him, community was humanity's vocation, a call to unity, strength, support, encouragement, and deepening conviction.

And this community of faith — called a sodality — was meant for everyone, so everyone was welcome. These were groups of married men, married women, young men, and young women. There was outreach to the very poor. The groups met separately, and they met as one community. There was union without confusion. Each group had its own identity and its overall unity. The Archbishop of Bordeaux acknowledged soon thereafter that all of the good being done in the archdiocese could be traced back to the members of Chaminade's groups.

In essence, these active communities of lay people were the origin of the religious Marianists, the vowed brothers, sisters and priests of the Marianist family. In most groups it is the religious order that founds the lay group. In our case, the lay groups were the origin of the religious congregations. All these groups are at the service of the Marianist goal and characteristic of community, sometimes called family spirit. And so community is central to Marianist education.

This sense of community is inclusive, respectful, welcoming, collaborative and persevering. Its origin is not an advertising campaign, using code words to trick an unwary consumer to hand over \$140,000 for a paper-thin reality. It is a serious challenge to how we live, as well as a joy to experience. When asked for a reaction to the booklet on characteristic of Marianist universities, a candidate to a position at UD said, "What's not to like?" — responding as if she or he had been shown photos of apple pie and

American flags unfurled in the breeze. Words like community can be clichés, advertising ploys, or literary chestnuts not worthy of serious evaluation or impact, but that is not the role of “community” or the other characteristics of education at UD. Although they may lack ideal implementation at times, they are at root our mission and our identity.

Faculty, staff, and students all sense a real spirit of community here. It is both genuine and characteristic. Our thousands of visitors remark on it, and our enrollment reflects its impact. But it’s not perfect and not apple pie. Inclusivity, equality, collaboration, justice, civility are all embraced but not fully realized. That is why we have had a study and action group on women’s issues for ten years. That is why the President asked for and issued a University statement on homosexuality. That is why we have child care at the University. That is why we examine and adjust our salary scales. That is why we offer literacy classes for our support staff. This characteristic reaches into hiring and firing, too. A community’s respect for its members shows itself in how candidates are treated and how people are dealt with when firings are necessary. That’s how a family acts.

The mutual respect and good fellowship of community does not end with a greeting and smile or a chat on the lawn. It also involves honesty in academic endeavors, respect for property, cleanliness of the neighborhood, and care for the well being of housemates and neighborhood. This is not martyrdom; this is just the beginning of living in a community of brothers and sisters. At a meeting the other day an employee said at UD “niceness” is made into a virtue or an absolute. Based on respect, love, and sensitivity, it is. When niceness is a cover for indifference, condescension, fear or cowardice, then it is not really respect or sensitivity and therefore not a virtue but a vice.

Such niceness is not an implication of community. A respectful, affectionate community also has standards, loves truth and calls itself to deeper maturity and effectiveness.

Quality Education of the Whole Person

Catholicism did not invent liberal arts education, nor did the Marianists. We owe it to the Greeks and others throughout history. But the Marianists do endorse it and the view of the human person, human development, and the human vocation it involves. True human development involves the whole human person, from the physical to the aesthetic, the intellectual to the emotional, and the spiritual to the technical. Through such education truth is more likely to be found, sound judgments made, and the common good respected. Music as well can be enjoyed, and a sound technology, which does not diminish or demean the humanity that created it, can advance.

We are right to pursue integrated learning, as complicated as it can sometimes be. We are right to pursue what it means to be human, by way of our Humanities Base program or an equivalent route. Nobel Prize winner, Saul Bellow, probed this central question in his own distinct saying:

Well, for instance what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition. In a mass. Transformed by science. Under organized power. Subject to tremendous controls. In a condition caused by mechanization. After the late failure of radical hopes. In a society that was no community and devalued the person. Owing to the multiplied power of numbers which made the self negligible. Which spent military billions against foreign enemies but would not pay for order at home. Which permitted savagery and barbarism in its own great cities. At the same time, the pressure of human millions who have discovered what concerted efforts and thoughts can do. As megatons of water shape organisms on the ocean floor. As tides polish stones. As winds hollow cliffs.... (Qtd. in McEwan A43).

We want our students at UD to think about who they are, who other thinkers say they are, what they are called to be, how it all might happen, what other great minds have taught, and how they have lived.

This exploration of what it means to be human does not take place in a void. It is done in the light of the Christian tradition. It is done with a critical mind and in the context of the United States in the 21st century. In addition, we want our students to understand that must be integrated: the same interest and concern for mature humanity shows itself in the classroom and the dormitory, on the playing field or at a party, or in the arena, lab, or concert hall. This integrated education of the whole person belies the description offered by a recent graduate of Harvard who said, “As in a great library ravaged by a hurricane, the essential elements of a liberal arts education is scattered everywhere at Harvard, waiting to be picked up. But little guidance is given on how to proceed with that task” (Douthat 95).

We do not want that. Nor do we want to be the Dupont University of Tom Wolfe’s novel *I am Charlotte Simmons*, called “pretty dead-on” in Yale’s Review of Books. Dupont University has a “cruel, oppressive cult of coolness, all point and purpose drains out of life, and a dull solipsistic hedonism takes over.” At this place “the soul is of no importance or interest because their elders believe it does not exist.” Columbia’s reviewer doesn’t know what to do with Wolfe’s black vision. “You got us good, Tom” she wrote. “You got us good...the parties, the alcohol, the vomit, our sheeplike adaptation to it all. Should we move to Sparta, instead?” (Donadio 31).

This is certainly not our vision of UD where liberal arts education is gladly and strongly adhered to, where it is integrated (when we are at our best) with all aspects of

our life, and accompanies a first class professional education that is strengthened and permeated by a tradition both Christian and humanistic. Fr. Chaminade's commitment to a revival of Christianity in France includes a vision of the human person highly developed and skilled in every dimension of heart, mind, and body, ready to be a striking asset to society in modern France.

Justice and Peace

The Marianists have committed themselves to be a “prophetic voice in the promotion of peace and justice” and to grow “in faith that leads to action for justice and peace.” (*Sent by the Spirit* #33, #34). We are committed to this by our Rule:

All our apostolic efforts aim to form persons and communities in a faith which creates a just and fraternal society. The gospel sensitizes us to personal and social sin, to those situations in which human freedom and dignity are denied through unjust structures of violence or oppression. The gospel also challenges us to tasks of liberation, reconciliation, and human development (*Rule of Life* 5.16).

So a Catholic and Marianist university is committed to the common good. Our American heritage of a Judeo-Christian foundation embraced this understanding of humanity in our Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights. Our Marianist universities committed themselves to Service, Justice and Peace very clearly in 1999:

The discovery and transmission of knowledge depends our understanding of God's creation. In particular, Marianist university communities are deeply committed to the intellectual life itself as a form of service to the Church and to the whole world. Committed to the common good, the Marianist university affirms the sacredness of human life from its beginning until its natural death. The Marianist university shows its commitment to human dignity, and to a just and peaceful society, first by establishing for itself just institutional policies and structures. Without

effective administration guided by just policies, the university community cannot hope to commend to others what they themselves do not practice.... In the spirit of Jesus who came to bring good news to the poor, those imbued with the Marianist approach to education remain always mindful of the poor and the marginalized....In Marianist universities, faculty and students are not afraid to undertake social analyses, and in the light of such analyses, propose and undertake initiatives that address actual social and moral problems. (*Characteristics of Marianist Universities* #40-42).

In a time of rising tuition, we are obliged to see that our commitment to the poor and marginalized is fact, not fancy. Fr. Chaminade did not ignore the chimney sweeps of Bordeaux and Besancon in organizing the sodalities nor those too poor to pay tuition when he opened schools. At a university where we pride ourselves on the excellence of our business education, we would not be surprised, we would even expect that Catholic social teaching would be a regular part of the curriculum.

Mary

It is important to indicate the importance of Mary to Marianists and to Marianist education. Fr. Johann Roten (Director of the International Marian Research Institute in Roesch Library) recently wrote a moving and magnificent portrait of Mary in the life and ministry of John Paul II, (*John Paul II: A Pope for Mary*), so the Marian character of Marianist education should be part of common knowledge on the campus.

As she was key to the spiritual life of Pope John Paul II, Mary was central too in the life of Blessed Chaminade. That is why his first sodalities (communities of faith) were dedicated to Mary and why his religious congregations were named after her. Chaminade was devoted to her. As a Catholic, he was also convinced that Mary was a special instrument for the coming of Jesus among us, the coming of the Redeemer to his

people. In fact, that is her mission in life, to bring people to Jesus, to bring Jesus to his sisters and brothers. This evangelical role of Mary, that is to say, Mary's active mission in the Church right now, was a special motivation for Chaminade. In coping with the bloodshed, societal chaos, intellectual whirlwinds of his time, Blessed Chaminade was especially inspired by the vision of the promised woman of Genesis who will crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15), and the promised woman of the apocalypse, the "great sign who appeared in heaven," clothed with the sun, crowned with twelve stars and with the moon under her feet. She vanquished the dragon who sought the destruction of her Son" (Revelation 12:1-12).

To Chaminade (and the Church) this means that Mary is a powerful and present instrument of God to bring Jesus to life among all people. He, of course, therefore wanted her part of all he did, because it would assure that the end result would be the presence and reign of Jesus Christ and the fullness of his reign. Mary's response to God is thus part of Marianist life and work.

She was open and receptive to God's word, she pondered it in her heart. Thus, we too try to be receptive to God's word, to truth, to the convictions of others, to facts, to great minds of all disciplines, to the conclusions of science and social analysis. We ponder as she did, especially God's word, the great tradition of our faith, our prayer life, the arguments of philosophers and engineers, business persons and educators as we seek the best solution or direction, the wisest, most appropriate, most just action to take. Mary stood by the Cross of her Son; she did not leave him (John 19:25-27). She persevered in her vocation, in her love and commitment. As our students must survive the stress of relationships and research papers, as faculty struggle with tenure reviews and continually

improve their teaching methods, as we all juggle outcomes and measurements, so we are committed to faithfulness in our mission, using the best means possible.

And beyond the Cross, Mary had then a mission to the Church and to the daughters and sons of the Church in all times. “Behold your Son” Jesus said pointing to John. (John was clearly a stand-in for all of us.) “Behold your Mother,” Jesus said pointing at Mary. Mary is hence our Mother too. Mary is also the woman of the Magnificat who praises God and deposes the mighty and raises the lowly, who confuses the proud and feeds the hungry (Luke 2:46-55). Her mission in the Church continues today until the head of the serpent is crushed, until the people of God are clothed with the sun, and the kingdom of God is fulfilled.

Diversity

Recently I served on a search committee, and members of the committee posed a question to each of our candidates: “How do we at UD, a Catholic university, cope with the issue of diversity?” Today, this issue is more prominent than ever in our history. Some said “no problem”; some said, “That would be a question, a challenge.” So what is to be said? I think it is a vital question to raise because of the University of Dayton’s commitment to Catholic and Marianist education, and to its mission of living out this identity in a very prominent and effective way. I say diversity is great; I say diversity is necessary. UD is not a monastery, not a seminary, not a religious congregation, not a parish; all of these are very different institutions. We are a university in the United States of America. We do have a particular tradition; we do have an explicit and powerful mission. We want others to join us on our collegial search for truth and light, for service

and success, for excellence and the transformation of society. Other voices and options are good to hear and essential to know for the best results to emerge. If a scholar or administrator, student or support person knows what we are about, knows our mission, is comfortable with it and can support it, we want her or him to be part of the family. A hostile diversity or an overwhelming diversity might be a different story. I know personally Protestants who are happy to be here; Jews happy to be here; Muslims happy to be here. I know recently arrived Hindus who are delighted with their work at UD. I know persons of no religious tradition who have made their career at UD and who support our mission more effectively than those whose commitment is not as strong. So nothing I have said makes me feel that diversity is a danger.

Mission

A final but very important aspect of Marianist Education is mission. The Marianists have a mission, and the University of Dayton has a mission. I find this approach, having a mission, energizing and essential to making things work in my everyday work and occasional times of sleeplessness, to satisfaction, to judgment about my life and activities, to evaluating what my colleagues and I are doing. That is why I gave this talk its title: “Men and Women on a Mission.” That is the way Marianists see our life at UD, that is the way the whole UD community is called to see itself, that is the way the mission of the university is to be understood. Our work is a vocation, a call we undertake, a mission accepted. It is a common endeavor of all of us, students, faculty and staff, from Stuart to Roesch Library, and from Art Street to the Bombeck Day-Care

Center, from the beauty of the campus to the most highly funded science project. It is mission of colleagues worthy of a life's commitment.

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