

Chaminade as spiritual director presentation

ENGLISH Version

Chaminade as a spiritual director

When we want to speak about Father Chaminade as a spiritual director we need to make some distinctions at the outset.

When Fr. Chaminade talks about a Director, what does he mean?

It seems to me that he thought of:

-a spiritual director: he makes a distinction between a confessor to whom people confess their sins and who absolves them and a spiritual director in whom people confide their inner lives and who helps or counsels them in their spiritual lives according to his best judgment.

-a director: of which there are various particular kinds.

There are: the **director of a local community**

The **director of novices** and other “candidates”

A **director** in general

For this reason Fr. Chaminade tried to write a manual of Direction for the Society of Mary, or to form Masters of Novices; – there is a series of letters, 10, written to a Novice Master, to give him advice in his task – or as the formation he gave to Fr. Chevaux when he was named Master of Novices (and Lalanne had complained that Chevaux did not know enough about direction in the SM – and for this reason Chaminade had tried to form him).

As an example of this idea we can look at a text from a letter of Father Chaminade’s to Mother Saint Vincent Labastide, the second superior general of the Daughters of Mary, who succeeded Mother Adele.

You tell me in your letter, that the need of having spiritual helps is always being felt in Agen. I believe it, and it has been foreseen, for this need is more or less great in all the other communities. It will be still more keenly felt in proportion as the branch planted in Auch will see greater development. It is also being felt in most of the establishments of the Society of Mary, great and small. If there were no other means of remedying the situation than what you call “spiritual helps coming from the clergy who happen to be on the spot,” we would have reason to despair, and, quite generally, all the Founders of religious orders of men and women, could have had the same fear and the same reason for despair. It is useless, at this time, my dear child, to explain to you all that happened in the different bodies, in regard to this subject. There is question of us, as there is question of you. The life of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary must be self-sufficient, and not depend on the crumbs that some might give it or even lavish upon it. The source of this life must be in the General Administration, forming secondary sources in the novitiates, and be in continual contact with all the communities. The food for this life must be in a truly spiritual direction, and this direction must be established and sufficiently developed to serve as a guide to the directresses. Real religious, well formed and well instructed in the principles of this life must make visitations more or less long, and give retreats according to needs in order to penetrate the religious sisters and the novices with the principles included in direction, whether in theory or in practice. In this way, the spirit of religious life would not depend essentially on the local secular priests, nor on religious in general of the Society of Mary, but on certain ones sent by its General Administration.

All that has been done up to the present time, my dear child, has been done according to this plan, but this plan has not been entirely carried out, either in theory or in practice. Not in theory, for the copy-book of direction that I gave you in the beginning, very good in itself, is not sufficient, as it presupposes in the superioresses and in the mistresses of novices qualities and an instruction which they can acquire only by experience, unless God gives it to them in some extraordinary manner.

Would you ask me, my dear child, why, before my death, I do not draw up the entire plan with which God has deigned to inspire me? I shall answer you: 1. That almost every day I am busy with it for myself and before God, and that it seems to me, not altogether uselessly; 2. that the affairs, be it of the Society or of the Institute, have until now absorbed practically all my time.... (Letters, vol. 4, no. 941, 8 February 1837; also quoted in the *Spirit of our Foundation*, vol. 2, number 887)

In your letter you tell me about the necessity of having spiritual help

It would be interesting to speak of Fr. Chaminade as a spiritual director. But to speak that way does not respond completely to the question what is Marianist spirituality?

Lorenzo has already spoken about the diversity of the idea of direction.

I ought to add that in Fr. Chaminade's time there was an expectation that the religious would speak with the local community director about their conscience. This is a practice that was finally suppressed by Rome. (though I have heard now and then that there are communities in which that is the practice even today).

Having said all this we can speak of the attitudes and the advice of Fr. Chaminade about how to be a director.

A summary of his thought is "to lead souls by faith, but after having won them by goodness."

Fr. Chaminade practiced this advice himself. According to Fr. Simler:

Our venerable Founder had meditated on the marvelous sweetness of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary and had experienced how strong and fruitful is the apostolic zeal when clad in meekness, as in a magic armor. Therefore, too, did he himself strive to excel in this virtue. How he captivated souls in order to win them for Jesus and Mary! All those who were fortunate enough to live with him or to know him closely agree in declaring that he won the hearts and according to one of his disciples, he fascinated them by his zeal overflowing with meekness, delicacy, attention, mercy, and loving civility. He has given us most valuable recommendations upon this subject; he tells us that meekness founded on faith ought to act as an unction or a perfume upon the relations of the religious of Mary among each other, with their pupils, and seculars." [E, I, 59; *Circular on the Characteristic Traits of the Society of Mary*; part 2, Distinctively, Maternal Zeal]

"all the aspects of this physiognomy: goodness, wisdom, moderation, prudence, energy, were based on and summarized in an absolutely characteristic trait, his serenity of spirit and expression" [Simler, *Life*, the end of chapter 24, in Ruggin, p. 38]

Fr. Lalanne also writes: "Chaminade was not only a saint but also a scholar"; (Lalanne to Chevaux, 4 October 1833) notwithstanding the enormous amount of activity and the vicissitudes of life to

which he was exposed, Fr. Chaminade never completely abandoned the study which he had begun at Mussidan and perfected in Paris. His preferences evidently were for spiritual authors of the great French School, the commentaries on Scripture, History of the Church, works on moral theology and philosophy. [Ruggin, p. 38]

Ruggin also notes a breadth of vision in the interpretation of the too rigid regulations of his time.

Fr. Chaminade has many pieces of advice of this type: It is necessary to give the the person what he is capable of understanding and appreciating.

When Lalanne was director at Saint Remy he had problems with Brother Dominique Clouzet. Fr. Chamnade advised him – it would be better to deal with Brother Clouzet as head of zeal/religious life with good counsels about faith. **[check letter]**

Mary and Community

In the Manual of Direction Father Chaminade begins with principles. The authors of the *Spirit of our Foundation* said that the three first principles are more particularly his own and the others are taken from Fr. Jean-Jacques Olier. In another version of the Manual that is rather “Advice to a Master of Novices” (that also became part of the Constitutions of 1839) Fr. Chaminade says in # 53 I cannot keep from quoting you a counsel, although it is quite long, from M. Olier to the young people in his seminary. It seems to contain all his doctrine, which is, indeed, ours also.

He used these ideas of Fr. Olier in other versions of the Manual.

From the *Manual of Direction to the religious life and virtues in the Society of Mary*

Manual *Direction*: #418 – 423

K 418 1st principle. The 1st principle with which a director should be penetrated is that, since the sanctification of a soul is at the same time the work of God and of man, he should be extremely careful to have his candidate correspond entirely to the divine action or the operation of grace. Development. Every Christian receives the spirit of Jesus Christ at his Baptism; he is, so to say, conceived by the spirit of Jesus Christ. It is this divine spirit that will make him grow even to the age of the perfect man, even to entire conformity with Jesus Christ. The Director needs only to direct the cooperation of his candidate to this continual operation of the spirit of Jesus Christ.

K 419. Counsel to the Director. The director should be imbued with this principle and act in accordance with it, but he will not teach his candidate about it until he is ready for it. Likewise in making him understand why the Holy Spirit is called the spirit of Jesus Christ in the work of sanctification, etc.

K 420. 2nd principle. It is a truth that Jesus Christ was born of Mary, *ex qua natus est Jesus* (cp. Matt. 1, 16). It should not be in vain for a Director that the Holy Spirit has deigned to reveal this truth. We have all been conceived in Mary, we should be born of Mary and be formed by Mary to resemble Jesus Christ, so that we may live only by the life of Jesus Christ and may be together with Jesus Christ other Jesuses, other sons of Mary. *Cum Christo unus Christus*. In accord with this principle, the Director will inspire his candidate with a great devotion and confidence in Mary so that he may increasingly gain through Mary the characteristics of conformity with Jesus Christ which the Spirit of Jesus Christ will effect.

K 421. Counsel to the Director. If the candidate is not yet capable of this, he will only induce him to call on Mary in the work of his conversion, in his combat, etc. If the candidate is more advanced, he will teach him to ask explicitly for this or that characteristic of conformity, etc.

K 422. 3rd principle. A Director should not expect any success in his labours except in proportion as he is careful to purify and increase faith in his candidates, and then to have them act in the spirit of faith. The Spirit of Jesus Christ brings about in us our conformity to this Model only in proportion to our faith. This is the doctrine of the Holy Council of Trent: *fides initium, fundamentum et radix totius justificationis nostrae*. “Faith is the beginning, the foundation, and the root of all justification.” These three words should be explained frequently: *initium, fundamentum, et radix*; beginning, foundation, and root.

K 423. Counsel to the Directors. This principle gives the Directors three objects of care in regard to faith: to purify faith, to bring about growth in faith, and to bring about action according to faith.

How are we conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ?

For me there are at least two things: prayer and the community.

We can speak also of all those things which are a kind of formation: the activity, for example of a director of the community, the activity of a spiritual director.

Fr. Chaminade knew something about the spiritual life. There is a text by Fr. LeMire in which he says:

According to the testimony of Rothéa it was during a conference on interior words that Chaminade let the words slip: “My children, I have seen you as you are here, and it was done in the twinkling of an eye, a long time ago.” This statement was heard by Rothéa, and he is not reporting what he would have heard from others. This text is of capital importance in answering the question of the nature of this illumination. Fr. Chaminade was well-versed in the matter of prayer and the ways of prayer: indeed even when travelling he was able to refer the recipient of his letter (Lalanne) to specific passages of St. John of the Cross. “It does not seem that you have read and seriously thought about the works of St. John of the Cross and, in particular, the second Book of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*” (L. III. 791; 4 August 1835).

This mention is all the more striking in that it deals precisely with a passage where St. John of the Cross cautions against the tendency to let oneself be led not by faith, but by visions and divine words, for these manifestations, even when they are true can still be the occasion of error.

Check out Jalons series 1/volume 1, chapter 4, about Bernard Daries and WJC’s experience at Mussidan. From p. 60 of the English text.