

## **Addendum to “Father Chaminade’s Son, Justin”**

by Father Joseph Stefanelli, SM

You might be interested in these two additions to the conference I gave on “Father Chaminade’s Son, Justin.”

1) Dumontet was among the last survivors who had known Chaminade and who were interviewed by Father Charles Klobb during the first five years of the 1900s. Klobb, as Simler’s secretary, was gathering information for Simler’s biography of the Founder. Dumontet shared a great amount of information on the Founder’s early years, before and immediately after the French Revolution. (Dumontet died in 1903; Simler in 1905; Klobb in 1906.)

2) During the debates on the animadversions on the Constitutions, the Holy See appointed Cardinal Mathieu of Besançon as Apostolic Visitor of the Society. He had known Chaminade personally and was happy to help restore his name. The Cardinal was over 70 years old; he shared the life of the community, asking neither special meals nor special accommodations. He interviewed 718 religious in person, and received 42 letters from America and Austria before presiding over the General Chapter of 1868, Nov. 16-19. Among the communications from the religious to the Cardinal is the following from Justin Dumontet:

September 19, 1868

Bishop:

One sign of the divine protection of the little Society of Mary founded by Father Chaminade is the favor granted it by our beloved Pontiff Pius IX in naming Your Eminence Apostolic Visitor.

Blessed be the Lord for this grace, and may the hearts of the Brothers of Mary always keep its precious memory! How our hope has been renewed after these troublesome days on reading the lines Your Eminence has deigned to send us on February 27! You tell us that it was the love of the Most Holy Virgin, whose sons we are, and the veneration of the memory of our Founder, Reverend Father Chaminade, which have led you to accept the mission of Apostolic Visitor to the Society of Mary. What thanks we owe you, bishop, for this great act of generosity of a Prince of the Church for the poor Brothers of Mary.

What draws our hearts even closer to Your Eminence is that you wish to associate with us and join your own thanks to ours for Father Chaminade, and thus pay the father through the children what Your Eminence feels he owes to the one whose kindness you are happy to recall.

After such encouraging words our hearts are filled with confidence, and we come to you as to a good father. We had a great need for this because what has been happening for some years has anguished many hearts, separating brothers and closing hearts to confidence in authority.

How different the early times of our Society from what we see now! How much all of this grieves those who saw how the spirit of charity and filial confidence animated the first members of the Society! For this reason we bless Divine Providence which has deigned to send us Your Eminence to reanimate this primitive spirit and reestablish the bases of the Society of Mary scattered by the multiplication of its works that cannot progress simultaneously together without being damaged or even destroyed.

The brother who has taken the liberty to express his thoughts has been in the Society of Mary since 1823. Received very young into its bosom, I grew up in Bordeaux under the eyes of Father Chaminade who was a good father to me. He gave me my First Communion, protected my youth, and admitted me to perpetual profession in 1836 at the age of 24.

In the great uneasiness that there is now in the Society since it deviated from the purpose the Founder had, there is now added another worrisome and deplorable thing, that is, the lack of confidence in the immediate successor of Father Chaminade.

All that has happened since 1845 at the time of regrettable events in the Society, and above all at the end of the life of our respected Father Chaminade, is far from contributing to winning hearts to his immediate successor. Father Caillet was not a staff of support in the old age of our respected father, a venerable old man and confessor who was exiled for the faith. Yet, he had so much right to the attentions that sons should give to the white hairs of an old father! Yes, our Good Father Founder had to drink the chalice of bitterness that his own sons gave him in his last days. Our older religious who were witnesses to the conduct shown to this good old man have recognized that all of the problems that have arisen for our Society in these recent times are a punishment from God and a lesson for the Society of Mary. We have no bad will toward those who were the instruments of God's trials which came to this saintly old man, but one cannot help but deplore the fact that the heart of our venerable Founder was saddened. Father Chaminade was our father. We all loved him, and to cause him the least pain was to hurt his sons. Father Caillet did not understand this delicacy of conduct toward the good old man. This is what has alienated the hearts of all of the older religious of the Society. One cannot but have a wounded heart when recalling what our Good Father Chaminade had to suffer.

Pardon, bishop, that I have allowed myself to speak this way. I had to open my heart to a Good Father, and that is what you are now for our dear Society who has not had one since the death of the one to whom we owe our vocation to religious life. I have great confidence in Your Eminence who has become our father out of the merciful goodness of God and as a great favor of Mary who wants to continue giving her attention to the work of our Father Founder. Ask our

Holy Father the pope to bless the activity we have undertaken in France for the education of its children.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eduardo Benlloch, SM, *Origins of the Marianist Family: Notes on Marianist History* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2010), pp. 338-40.