

**The Restoration of Christian Schools in Bordeaux  
During the Consulate and the Empire**

**[La Restauration des Écoles Chrétiennes à Bordeaux  
sous le Consulat et l'Empire]**

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Insertions into the original text are enclosed in square brackets [*like this*].

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## Introduction

In his biography of Father Chaminade, Father Simler indicated, among the works of the Servant of God, the involvement he had in the restoration of the Christian Brothers of St. Jean Baptiste de La Salle in Bordeaux.

He gave no details on that matter, and his very short presentation lacked precision on several points. The chronology in particular was imprecise. Clearly documentation was lacking to the author. Despite his conscientious research and later that of his secretary, Father Klobb, he had at his disposal only Father Rigagnon's manuscript "Vie de Mgr d'Aviau" and some very brief notes obtained from the secretariat of the General Administration of the Christian Brothers.

The *Histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes* (especially vols. 3, 4, and 9) has recently provided more information that is both invaluable and fortunate. M. Georges Rigault<sup>1</sup> has made available unpublished documents of the highest interest. A well-sourced dossier on Louis Lafargue, another on Joseph Darbignac, a history of the houses of Bordeaux by Brother Alphonse who lived in Bordeaux from 1812 onward, three letters of Father Chaminade, several from Archbishop d'Aviau, from Brother Frumence, and from Brother Gerbaud—more than was needed to reexamine the question. Full light has now been shown on the situation: persons are revived, facts are recounted with complete precision, and Father Chaminade's life and figure emerge enlarged by the truth better known.

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<sup>1</sup> [Georges Rigault (1885-1956) was a noted historian of the Church in France. Several of his works were awarded literary prizes by the French Academy, including a biography of St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort and three volumes of the nine-volume history of the Christian Brothers, which Verrier is discussing in this article.]

### Louis Lafargue

He was born in Bordeaux on August 23, 1771. When he was old enough to go to school, his father, a carpenter, sent him to the Brothers who at that time directed six schools in the city. For seven years he followed their teachings and was a model pupil. Was it not said that he would replace Brother Chérubin?

The instruction he received no doubt obtained a commercial employment for him in Bordeaux. He might not have had any other ambition. But then came the Revolution and the war which took him away from his commercial desk (*comptoir*) to send him into the battlefield.

He was enrolled on 8 Vendémiaire, Year II (September 29, 1793), in the fourteenth battalion of Bec d'Ambes. He was involved in the campaign in the Eastern Pyrenees and gained the rank of corporal-quartermaster. He became assistant secretary of the quartermaster of the 114<sup>th</sup> half-brigade. In March 1795, he was at Oyarsun, where the members of the Administrative Council of his battalion attest, on 5 Germinal, Year III (March 25, 1795), "that he has always done his service with zeal and the exactitude which characterizes a good republican and true defender of the Fatherland."

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The authorities who delivered this testimonial give a good example of liberalism and impartiality because, while serving the Fatherland with zeal, the "blue-coat" (*bleuet*) [during the Revolution, soldiers of the Republic wore blue uniforms] Lafargue did nothing to hide his faith. He had associated with friends who shared his feelings, and they never ceased living very Christian lives openly in the eyes of all.

The peace with Spain saw his return to Bordeaux where Georges Rigault loses him from view. "The functions which he had fulfilled under the flag allow us to think that his instruction and his intelligence had opened some doors in the commerce of the big city." It is very probable that he took up again the career he had embraced before he had departed for the army.

Now let us look to Father Simler. The biography of Father Chaminade indicates that he was surrounded, from the time of the Revolution, with many young men who assisted him in his ministry. Among these, Louis Lafargue was distinguished by his devotedness. At what time did he attach himself to the Confessor of the Faith? May he not have been one of the two unknowns of whom Father Lalanne speaks in the *Dictionnaire des Ordres religieux* when he recounts the beginnings of the Sodality of the Madeleine? It is true that he places the events in 1800. But he is writing [in 1859] according to what he had heard and at a time when all the witnesses had disappeared. In 1800 Father Chaminade knew—we have the proofs—at least five of the future

founding members of the Sodality. Why believe that he had begun with unknowns? Is it not fitting to interpret a little the narrative of Father Lalanne, more poet than historian, and to place in 1795 the scene to which he is alluding?

We are in May [1795]. Tolerance had returned. Small oratories appeared here and there. Father Chaminade opened his at 14 Rue Sainte Eulalie, not far from the Fosses des Salinières where Louis Lafargue was living. The latter had just returned from Spain. The faithful still hesitated to show themselves, so much had the Terror affected them and so much did they fear its return. Better than that of 1800, the situation resembles that which we find in the *Dictionnaire des Ordres religieux*:

Churches had just been reopened, but they remained devastated and deserted. Christians found themselves so frightened and isolated that, among the men who in that great city had preserved a spark of faith, each considered himself to be another Tobias, going to the temple and finding himself to be there alone.

Is it not reasonable that the future agent of the exiled Father Chaminade, the future president-founder of the Marian Sodality, had been one of the two courageous Christians who first approached the oratory of Rue Sainte Eulalie?

However that may be, from 1795 to 1797, during the months of tolerance as well as those of persecution—they followed one another in two repetitions—Louis Lafargue remained in the orbit of Father Chaminade. If it is true that he had belonged to what was called, in Bordeaux, the Sodality of Sainte Colombe, what must have been his joy in again encountering as

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guide one of the best friends of beloved Father Lacroix, then in exile in Portugal! Perhaps, from that time on, there was conversation about restoring the work but adapted to the new times.

They would have to wait longer, and, while waiting, undergo new trials.

We know how the reversal of Fructidor, Year V (September 4, 1797), sent Father Chaminade into Spain. He left France only after having charged Louis Lafargue to pursue efforts he had personally begun in July 1795 to have his name removed from the list of *émigrés* where he had been erroneously inscribed. He had left him a power of attorney to that effect, testimony to the confidence placed in a preferred disciple.

The latter himself soon suffered the consequences of events. Did his piety attract the attention of the “purists”? Did his relations with Chaminade prove incriminating? When, on 2 Vendémiaire,

Year VII (September 23, 1798), the Directory decreed the rounding up of all young men suspected of inciting disturbances; Louis Lafargue found himself presented by the police of Bordeaux with an order to join the army of Italy. The former soldier, now 27 years of age, protested. On October 20 he addressed “the citizen members of the Directory of the French Republic”:

A young man of a kind and peaceful character, who has always shown himself the soul of the Republic...who, since the Revolution, has conducted himself as a good citizen, whom no one has ever seen in the ranks of those misguided ones who have unfortunately gone to excess

cannot be the object of such a severe measure. Thirty-eight citizens of Bordeaux, his neighbors, “known and well supportive of the cause of liberty,” attest that

he has always manifested a most regular behavior...that he is occupied continuously with the work to which he is committed...that never, either by his proposals or by his action, has he ever manifested that he was not the friend of the government...and that if he has been drafted, it can only be by mistake.

However, our draftee took the road to Nice the very day of his protest. “He has made it a duty to obey...wishing to show his respect for the orders received.”

He probably had no illusions about the outcome of his protest.

Basing himself on Father Rigagnon’s manuscript, Father Simler wrote that Louis Lafargue had been wounded at the very beginning of the campaign in Spain in 1794 and had returned home. The document cited by Rigault questions that statement, or, rather, invites us to make a new substitution, that of the campaign of Italy (1798) for that of Spain (1794). In fact, on 5 Pluviôse, Year VII (January 25, 1799), Louis Lafargue received a certificate of recovery at Nîmes. If there had been a wounding, that is where it must be placed. It dated from the first encounters, and our soldier would not have penetrated very far into the Lombard plains.

On 15 Ventôse (March 5, 1799) he was back in Bordeaux. The Commissioner of War saw his certificate of recovery, but he did not obtain his discharge until 5 Vendémiaire, Year IX (September 26, 1800), some weeks before the return of the beloved director of his soul.

He was waiting for that return; he had even promoted it because it was on his request that Chaminade had been stricken from the list of *émigrés* on September 2.<sup>2</sup>

No document recounts the first meeting of these two men after three years of separation, and it would be impossible to recapture it. Let us limit ourselves to underlining its nature. For a year, and for the first time since 1789, France enjoyed a strong government that was concerned with the good of all. With eyes fixed on the master of the moment, the functionaries set out on the road of tolerance and appeasement. The hour had arrived for reconstruction. The two workers again met. One was 42 years old, the other 30.<sup>3</sup> The deepest trust united them. The same conquering faith guided them both. The same generosity animated them. The same zeal consumed them. They were ready for a work that would require strength and prudence, energy and patience, initiative and docility. The first, a priest for fifteen years, possessed a knowledge of hearts which the danger to be faced, the confidences to be received, and the responsibilities to be borne explain more than does his age. The other, having remained immutably faithful to the lessons of the teachers of his youth, had matured in the school of army barracks. The model of his companions had become a man who had tasted life. One day it will be said of the former: “His name is inscribed at the head of each of the works of Bordeaux.”<sup>4</sup>

Of the latter it would be written, in 1847, the day after his death:

A cheerful character...never did vice stain such amenity, such naïve gaiety, such irresistible charm which rendered his company so lovable. His soul, as pure and candid as that of a little child, was reflected on his face.

In autumn of 1800 the future founder of two religious congregations embraced, with all the emotion of his overflowing tenderness, the one who, under his direction, would restore the work of the Christian Brothers in Bordeaux and who, having become Brother Éloi, would play a

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<sup>2</sup> [Strictly speaking, Chaminade’s name was not stricken from the list of *émigrés* on September 2, 1800. On that date, Antoine Claire Thibaudeau, the prefect of the *département* of Gironde gave a favorable opinion to the request he had received from Lafargue. That opinion was then processed up through the bureaucratic ladder to the Minister of National Police for review and final decision after it had been evaluated by the authorities in the Consulate government. “In fact, Chaminade did not return to Bordeaux in virtue of the many efforts of Louis Lafargue made in his name. His return was made possible by a decree of the consuls on October 20, 1800, which opened the gates of the homeland to all ecclesiastics who had left French territory in obedience to the laws.” Joseph Verrier, SM, *Jalons: The English translation of “Jalons d’Histoire sur la Route de Guillaume-Joseph Chaminade,”* 4 vols. (Dayton: NACMS, 2001), vol. 1, p. 269.]

<sup>3</sup> [Actually, Chaminade (b. April 8, 1761) was ten years older than Lafargue (b. August 23, 1771). Chaminade arrived in Bordeaux sometime during the first two weeks of November 1800. In November 1800, Chaminade was 39 and Lafargue was 29.]

<sup>4</sup> [This is an observation made by Cardinal Donnet on a number of occasions around 1869 and 1870. See “Benoît Meyer Souvenirs” (Memoirs of Fr. Benoît Meyer), AGMAR 17.5.313, p. 21, and AGMAR 17.5.317, p. 60.]

principal role in Lasallian history. The father returned home. He found his oldest son. With him he would gather together again all his children to organize and rally, through them, all Christian youth.

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### **Like Teacher, Like Disciples**

The great difficulty of 1800 was the isolation of the baptized. It was an evil which had begun long before but which, during the Revolution, was considerably augmented. How could dispersed Christians live their religion, when Christianity presumes a close union of the faithful and their frequent contacts? How could individuals lost among the mass of the indifferent remain fervent, when fervor is born only from closeness? How could persons left to themselves overcome the difficulties which assault the children of God, when strength required cohesion? How could sinners abandoned to their fate return to the paternal home, when the

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wounded need a charitable aid to escape death? How could the indifferent be troubled in their conscience and fear not to follow a sure way where there exists only individual virtue, when numbers alone can make an impression on society?

From their origins, Christians have constituted themselves in organized groups. Parishes, which replaced the first Christian communities, had no other purpose than to maintain close contact among their members. The Revolution dispersed the parishes which centuries and human weakness had already considerably denatured. If they were resurrected, would they be for a long time anything other than administrative subdivisions where true Christians lived amidst the indifferent, the tepid, the self-centered without being able to depend on each other, to know each other, to help each other, and to love each other?

The isolation must be overcome. A new organization of the baptized must be set up in a way that the essential condition for normal Christian life, the union of the faithful, be realized. Appeal had to be made to new methods and a missionary mystique.

The enterprise was challenging and full of difficulties. But how could it not succeed if Catholicism could be revived only at that cost, and when the great Victorious Woman, the Immaculate Virgin, presides over all such works? *Nova bella elegit Dominus, Maria Duce!* "God wills it" again, under the auspices of Mary. Something new: a new institution which groups Christians closely together under the protection of Our Lady—the Sodality which was born in

Father Chaminade's oratory on December 8, 1800, the Sodality of which Louis Lafargue assumed the presidency on the following February 8.

The former corporal in the republican armies, the young man whose religious convictions had passed through all situations without weakening, merited the trust of his comrades. In a confidential statement which he made, in 1816, to his friend Quentin Lousteau, we have proof that he took his functions very seriously:

I was in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament that very day and before the election of the officers. I was suddenly very strongly moved by an inspiration and deep in my heart I heard these words: "You will be named Prefect." I withdrew from prayer with that strong conviction. The election was held. I was named. Immediately, by a spontaneous movement, I spoke these words: "May the most just, the most high, and the most amiable will of God be done, praised, and eternally exalted in all things." I also shared with the Director the foreknowledge which I had had of my election.<sup>5</sup>

The formula which sprang from the lips of the first prefect then became the one which all the officers pronounced at their taking up the office. The Marianists, who employ it regularly these days, do not forget that their tradition goes back to Louis Lafargue.

When, on June 5, the Sodality picked Jean Baptiste Estebenet for its second prefect, it had 20 members and 15 probationers. It had left the oratory of Rue Arnaud Miqueu to establish itself on Rue Saint Siméon. Louis Lafargue retained a position of responsibility as the assistant, but he had already chosen a total devotion to the service of children.

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Father Simler was not so bold as to place the opening of the first Christian School by Chaminade's disciple earlier than 1804. Georges Rigault takes us to 1801 with all the desired details.

It was on May 6, 1801, that Lafargue, this young man of Bordeaux, began the retreat that would definitively orient his life. He ended the retreat, in fact, only to begin a sort of novitiate. He consecrated himself to the education of children whose abandonment at that time was distressing. He would modestly take up again the work of his former teachers. At that very moment, one of them, their director, M. Peyras<sup>6</sup>—the former Brother Louis de Jésus—was still living in Talence,

<sup>5</sup> [AGMAR 47.2.11. *Simler*, chapter 11, pp. 159-60, fn. 5. See *Jalons*, vol. 3, pp. 289-90, fn. 59.]

<sup>6</sup> Antoine Peyras-Heritier, born at Abriès (Haute-Alpes) on February 11, 1748, began teaching June 16, 1762. Enrolled in the National Guard after the suppression of religious orders and congregations, he took the oath of fidelity to the Republic, 6 Messidor, Year II (June 24, 1795). A personnel certificate, issued 17 Nivôse, Year II



a suburb of the city. “He placed at the disposal (of the novice) several books of the former community. He probably also assured him of his desire to be associated with him.” The condition of his health prevented him from assuming an active role. No matter! The former religious, before dying, had had the time and the joy of passing on the torch into the hands of a younger man.

Well imbued with the Lasallian mentality, and initiated by Father Chaminade into the exercises of the religious life, our southerner rented a house in the Rue des Étuves on November 1, 1801, left his work as a commercial salesman and, on January 2, 1802, welcomed his first pupils.

At that moment, Father Chaminade fell gravely ill. Father Fabas informs us of this fact. He was one of his assistants for the administration of the Diocese of Bazas. In January 1802, he wrote to Chaminade and advised him “to take care of himself for the future, so as not to deprive the Church by a not-well-moderated zeal, of the great good which he procures for it by his continued works.”<sup>7</sup>

That is not a mere formula of politeness. Let us pause at this date of January 2, 1802 [when Lafargue opened his school], and cast a glance backward to the “works” of Chaminade, this man of action!

Barely a year had passed since his return to Bordeaux, fourteen months at the most. The Concordat had not yet been promulgated. All the churches of the city were still in the hands of the “jurors.” There was no bishop at the head of the archdiocese; thousands of people were without priests; children were without instruction or any notion of religion; displaced young people were seeking some direction. The civil authority followed orders and was tolerant, but without any goodwill on the part of the majority of its representatives. There were no certitudes about the future. And yet, a priest with a great heart had already set up an organization for gathering youth together (December 8, 1800). He guided Mlle de Lamourous in founding and transforming the work of the Miséricorde (January-May 1801), established the Sodality of young women (March 25, 1801), preached a mission to the Chartrons quarter (spring 1801), directed the novitiate of Louis Lafargue and the opening of his school for the poor (May 6, 1801 to January 2, 1802), and took stock of the remnants and the resources of the Diocese of

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(January 6, 1795), gives the following description: height 1.677 m., hair gray, nose large, eyebrows black, beard gray, mouth large, chin cleft. At the same time he had lost the use of an eye and was threatened with total blindness (Arch. dép. de la Gironde, série V: *Ex-religieux pensionnés*).

<sup>7</sup> [Pierre Fabas was born in 1761. He served as archpriest and assistant administrator of the Diocese of Bazas. After the Concordat, he remained in the Archdiocese of Bordeaux and was appointed pastor of Auros. He died on Mar. 9, 1818. See Fabas to Chaminade, Jan. 29, 1802 (AGMAR 26.1.90) in Pierre Zianz, SM, and Emile Wertz, SM, eds., *Répertoire analytique de la correspondance adressée au P. Chaminade: Boîtes 26-27-28* (Rome: Publications AGMAR, 1986), p. 21.]

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Bazas of which he was the administrator. At that time, without money—he is poorly lodged—without a hierarchical guide, without assurances for the next day, he founded, advised, preached, administered. What activity for this priest of slow speech! On March 22, 1801, the Sovereign Pontiff granted him the title and the powers of missionary apostolic. This Father Chaminade was indeed a missionary!

### [Guillaume Joseph Darbignac]

Louis Lafargue would not remain alone. From the middle of the year 1802, Guillaume Joseph Darbignac joined him, sharing his life and his apostolate. Limiting ourselves to the terms of a later letter of Archbishop d'Aviau—based, to all appearances, on information from Chaminade—Darbignac seems to have submitted himself to a year of trial at the same time as Louis Lafargue. He must, therefore, have made with him the decisive retreat begun on May 6 [1801]. There is no need to search beyond some personal reasons—health, family situation, professional commitments—for an explanation of the fact that one of them took action sooner than the other.

Darbignac did not attend the school of the Christian Brothers; his contact with them was limited to some catechism lessons. But he had known his companion for several years. Perhaps he was in the army with him in Spain. In any case, he had seen combat under the walls of Tolosa in 1794. Struck by seven blows of the saber to his head—also wounded by several bullets, Rigagnon adds—he was left for dead on the field of battle. Finally picked up, he recovered and attributed that miracle to the protection of the Virgin whose scapular he was wearing. Like Lafargue, this brave man had the courage of his convictions: still in uniform, “he did not forget, morning and evening, to recite his prayers.”

Rigault apparently did not find as complete a dossier on our hero as that of Brother Éloi. Still, we know enough to follow the former soldier “of a quite pleasant nature, it seems,” after his return to his native city.

Having recovered from his terrible wounds, he associated himself with a factory in Bordeaux. Nonconforming priests were turning to his good offices for their secret apostolate. In ceremonies carried on in secret, an improvised subdeacon chanted the epistle, contributed his voice on Palm Sunday, and on Good Friday at the recitation of the Passion: it was our commercial salesman.

It would not be jumping to a conclusion to suppose he knew Father Chaminade and received his counsels during this period. Accord to Father Bertrand, who follows Rigagnon, in recognition of

the Divine Providence of which he had benefited in Spain, he had “resolved to devote himself to the service of God as soon as his health would be restored.”<sup>8</sup>

Our family archives show him successively as member of the Sodality (December 8, 1800), first assistant (February 8 and June 5, 1801) and prefect (September 10). He was a *cartier* (playing-card manufacturer) by profession. Was he the one who attracted Lafargue by sharing with him first of all his plan of total consecration to the service of God? Or was it Father Chaminade who asked him to join Lafargue? Bertrand adopts the former hypothesis, Rigault the second. It makes no difference! Both were worthy of such a vocation.

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### **Reconnection (*La Soudure*)**

Meanwhile, a small Lasallian community had been reformed in Toulouse around Brother Bernardin, authentic representative of the Institute. In 1804 our two young men of Bordeaux, no doubt at the instigation of Chaminade, their director, decided to make contact with that community to better penetrate themselves with the spirit proper to the sons of Saint Jean Baptiste de La Salle. After having been well received, they returned more convinced than ever of their decision. Their call to make their vows would happen at the moment the religious family to which they belonged in their heart would be officially reconstituted.

Soon the news reached Bordeaux that Brother Frumence, named by Pius VII to be vicar-general of the congregation, had arrived in France and had installed himself at Lyons (November 19, 1804). Sure of his directees, Father Chaminade worked to obtain their incorporation into the reborn Society and to have former Lasallians sent to seal the union, affirm the humble beginnings, and open new schools. Father Rauzan, his friend, who preached the quadragesimal mission in Lyons, pleaded his cause. We do not know the details of the negotiations, but in the month of May 1806, two professed arrived in Lyons, Brother Séraphin and Brother Alexandre, both dressed in the black cassock and white bib. The author of the *Histoire générale* remarks:

Thus was carried out the reconnection (*soudure*) between the new times and the old: on the empty table of the work annihilated by the Revolution, there was needed a double set of tableware: a youth of goodwill sacrificing itself to provide the foundation and walls, together with qualified representatives of the old Institute charged with cementing and covering the edifice.

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<sup>8</sup> [Louis Bertrand, SS, *Histoire des Séminaires de Bordeaux et de Bazas*, 3 vols. (Bordeaux: Féret et Fils, 1894), vol. 2, p. 130.]

The archbishop [of Bordeaux] welcomed the new arrivals and presented them to the municipal authorities. The latter, on July 3, [1806] decided to suppress eight primary schools of the twelve functioning, and to use the 4,800 francs thus saved to reestablish “the four charitable schools that existed previously in the four parishes of Sainte Eulalie, Saint Michel, Saint Seurin, and Saint Louis.”

Four schools, eight classrooms, 800 pupils instructed and educated in the Christian way: the perspective is beautiful, but, for the moment, there were only four Brothers. On February 1, 1807, the small community was installed and opened two new classrooms, on Rue Sainte Eulalie, in the same building which the Institute had occupied before the Revolution. At about the same time that Lafargue and Darbignac took the habit of the Society with the names of Brother Éloi and Brother Paulin, Father Chaminade was thinking of how to multiply rapidly the number of educators.

He presented his plan to Archbishop d’Aviau who approved it: a novitiate would be opened.

However, Brother Séraphin hesitated and became reticent. What was going on? In the autumn of that year 1807, Father Chaminade received from his friend Father Rauzan a letter that explained everything.

I am charmed at having an occasion for recalling myself to you memory. For several (weeks?), charged to fulfill with you a commission

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from which there may result a very great good, I delayed, despite myself, to carry it out, absorbed by a thousand small matters which could not be postponed.

Here is what this is all about. The Brother Superior General of the Christian Schools has confided to me that His Excellency, the Archbishop, strongly desired to expand the establishment of these good Brothers whom you have, and that you would put the greatest zeal in agreeing with his views. But, I know not how it has happened—this is between you and me—that Brother Séraphin has taken some offense at your efforts. He is asking to be changed, saying that he can no longer be of any use in that house, even hinting to his superior that having completely captivated the confidence of the Student-Brothers—meaning Lafargue and Darbignac—you do not inspire in them either respect or openness of heart for him without which it is impossible to instill the spirit proper to their Institute.

When the Brother Superior let me know your name, I told him that I had the advantage of knowing you personally and that he could place the most complete confidence in the

purity of your intention as in the sustained activity of zeal which you give to the good works which you undertake. I explained to him in the greatest detail your kind of occupations, and I made him see that you could become very useful to his congregation in procuring for him a goodly number of subjects. I asked him whether there was not in Brother Séraphin a kind of hypersensitivity which he has not yet mastered, and which might harm the accomplishment of the views of His Excellency, the Archbishop of Bordeaux. He seemed to fear that, yet he did not show any less desire to leave Brother Séraphin in Bordeaux so as not to neglect the traditions until now maintained in their houses, especially at the moment when they are being reintroduced.

After a rather long meeting, I asked him for the liberty of informing you of all that had transpired, assuring him that I could have no doubt about your discretion, nor on the wise precautions that you would take to affirm and extend ever more the good that is already being done in that house. He agreed to that. That is the purpose of my letter. The Brother Superior would like that some sign of trust in Brother Séraphin be given and that you act in such a manner that, without putting any less zeal in forming this establishment, the good brother might become more tranquil, more content. No one more than you knows the approaches, the regards, and, if I may express myself thus, the saintly elements of charity.

I believe it would be good to keep all that I have shared with you a secret. No one, except for His Excellency, the Archbishop, needs to know what is going on. I need not insist on this point, nor on the measures to be taken in this circumstance. You will know better what might be more expedient. May the spirit of God guide you.

How difficult it is to do good! Father Chaminade may have made that reflection, but he was not a man who allowed himself to be stopped by a question of hypersensitivity. “Everything was in a perfect order once we understood each other,” he wrote about this incident.<sup>9</sup> In fact, he entered into direct relations with Brother Frumence and, early in 1808, the house on Rue Sainte Eulalie opened a novitiate, the direction of which was confided to Brother Paulin, and which Father Chaminade populated by appealing to his sodalists of the Madeleine.

### **The Novitiate**

In truth, this was not an ordinary novitiate, because, despite the name of “Brother,” the one in charge had not yet taken any vows.

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<sup>9</sup> [AGMAR 1.1.38, Dec. 2, 1809. “Observations Provided by Rev. W. J. Chaminade on Various Items from the Inventory of His Papers,” *Chaminade Legacy*, 7 vols. (Dayton: NACMS, 2006-2016), vol. 1 (2006), document 73, p. 249.]

Was that in some way what disquieted Brother Frumence? Or had Brother Séraphin again given way to mistrust? New frictions

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seem to have arisen during the first days of the novitiate between the director of the Brothers and Father Chaminade. On March 9, 1808, the latter wrote to Brother Frumence,

Your solicitude may have been disturbed by my recent letters.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the Superior had addressed himself to Archbishop d'Aviau: Was not the zeal of his canon indiscreet? Was Brother Paulin qualified to direct a novitiate? Would it not be better to send a religious from Toulouse for that function? The response of the archbishop was firm:

The letter which I received from you, my venerated Brother, is on your part a witness to the confidence by which I am flattered.

I would always have at heart supporting your holy rules whose advantages are known. Well, I believe I can reply that those are also the dispositions of the respectable priest, Father Chaminade. It is with that persuasion that I have given him special relations with our dear Brothers.<sup>11</sup>

He has assured me that he leaves very free the direction of the master of novices. As for Brother Paulin who is charged with that task as designated by Brother Séraphin, it is true that, under the *ancien régime*, he [Brother Paulin] himself was not able to follow the course of ordinary exercises of the novitiate. But you must know, my venerated Brother, that it is now the seventh year that he has practiced your rule with its religious and charitable observances—external practice into which he entered only after a serious study to which he applied himself wholeheartedly with Brother Éloi. Moreover, they both lived the exercises for some time at Toulouse. The beginners seem to be giving to this Brother Paulin an exceptional confidence, because they see in him a living rule, while he develops for them the letter and the spirit of the written rule.

However, should you judge it suitable, my venerated Brother, you might call him to you; after the suitable trials, you can return him to his important functions. But I would be quite unhappy to have someone come from Toulouse to replace him, someone whom, in

<sup>10</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 30b to Bro. Frumence, Mar. 9, 1808; vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 74.]

<sup>11</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, Archbishop d'Aviau to Bro. Frumence, Feb. 4, 1808, excerpt in commentary preceding no. 30b; vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 74.]

your letters, you admit not to know well, and who would bring us only a very slight guarantee.

At just about that time, Father Chaminade thought he saw a détente with Brother Séraphin. His happiness is reflected immediately in a letter to Brother Frumence. It was not without strain; in order not to keep anything hidden, it recalled that he had previously given some rather disagreeable news.

Today I have nothing to tell you except what is consoling. The novitiate formed by your authority under the auspices of the archbishop is going as well as anyone could have desired. At this time it is composed of seven novices. Brother Paulin, their director, has the confidence of all; all respect his virtue and obey him with pleasure. Brother Séraphin seems to be very content; he has great satisfaction in seeing the number of these good and fervent novices increase. His only discomfort lies in the fact that the house on Rue Sainte Eulalie, housing the whole community and two classrooms, is so small; he would rightly prefer that the novitiate have a distinct house. That is all the more necessary as we hope that the number of novices will increase more and more. I have conferred with the archbishop on this: his goodness and his zeal have led to his adopting my proposal. I hasten to submit it to you. I would have in view a building that is in the neighborhood of Sainte Eulalie.

I await your response before carrying out the proposal.<sup>12</sup>

Profiting by the circumstances, the zealous missionary wanted to give the Superior General every guarantee on the work at Bordeaux:

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All our correspondence passes under the eyes of His Excellency. The establishment of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Bordeaux is, so to say, the work of his heart; he has a great feeling for it. We must consider ourselves, you and I, as very fortunate to second the holy views that animate him. Bordeaux is already gathering very precious fruits: eight schools are open [he means eight classrooms] giving about 800 children the chance to learn and be formed in virtue.<sup>13</sup>

As strange as it may seem, Lafargue and Darbignac had not yet taken vows. Their spiritual father desired that their situation be regularized, and he interceded for them:

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<sup>12</sup> [Chaminade, *Letter*, no. 30b to Bro. Frumence, Mar. 9, 1808; vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 74-75.]

<sup>13</sup> [Ibid., p. 75.]

Brothers Paulin and Éloi had asked of you, on the occasion of this new year, permission to take their vows. I have the honor of attesting to you what their modesty keeps them from thinking: that they are worthy of that favor, that they truly have the spirit of their state, that they also have the talent and the knowledge of it. They have exercised it for more than six years, in keeping with all the rigor of the rule, not counting a prior year of examination and preparation. Never, in that long period, has there been any hesitation or disgust. I have never lost sight of them. I have directed them in their choice of this state; I have tested them. The lengthy experience they have made of it has been almost habitually under my eyes. I could also say many other things in their favor, but you have had the opportunity of hearing about them for several years; never have they wavered. Your Order will find in them a very good acquisition.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of that letter, Archbishop d'Aviau added in his own hand that Father Chaminade had conferred with him before writing it:

I am most happy with the novitiate, but it is much too restricted in the establishment on Rue Sainte Eulalie, and I would willingly make some expenditures to make it more suitable in the adjoining house referred to, without disturbing the direction in any way.<sup>15</sup>

Nothing could better show the impression this letter made on its recipient than these words in which he drafted his response:

It is with the greatest satisfaction that I received the honor of your last letter under date of March 9, 1808.

The consoling matters of which you inform me, especially that the dear Brother Séraphin is happy, have filled me with a joy that I cannot express.... It must be easy for you to have some idea of it after all that had seemed up to this point distressing for you and for me.... May infinite thanks be given to the Lord who had made such a change. I have no doubt that your prudence and wisdom for the continuation of the good work undertaken under the auspices of His Excellency, the Archbishop...have a good part (in those results, no doubt).... That is why I feel that I am obliged to express my thanks to you. It would always be useful that His Excellency, the Archbishop, and you do what you both think necessary for the good of the establishment.

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<sup>14</sup> [Ibid., pp. 75-76.]

<sup>15</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, addendum of Archbishop d'Aviau to letter no. 30b, *ibid.*, p. 76.]



I can anticipate only with renewed satisfaction that he should think of giving it more space by the acquisition of a building. And I have no hesitation in admitting to vows the Brothers Paulin and Éloi. The testing which you have made is sufficient enough that I can place my trust in you for the rest. The renewal of their complete consecration to the service of the Lord can only be most pleasing to me. I exhort them to follow your pious advice and to persevere in their salutary designs and in the practice of the rules of their state.

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The good superior is moved: he writes, he erases, writes again, seeking the expression that best translates his sentiments. With its repetitions and its erasures his rough draft is eloquent.

At Bordeaux the letter must have caused great pleasure. More than ever, there is thought of installing the novitiate in its own site. But it had to count on the owner of the building in view. On July 11, 1808, Father Chaminade wrote:

Your entire Bordeaux family is proceeding satisfactorily for both His Excellency, the Archbishop, and for the whole city. I delayed this letter for several days, thinking to be able to inform you that the archbishop had procured a separate building for the novitiate. However some difficulty has arisen, not from the side of the saintly prelate, who is ready for any sacrifice, but from the side of an individual who has reneged on his word, and is seeking more money.<sup>16</sup>

In 1809, the novitiate was still on Rue Sainte Eulalie. The number of subjects grew as did the number of classrooms opened. On the other hand, it seems that relations between Father Chaminade and Brother Séraphin were once again strained.

At the end of 1808, an observation of the ecclesiastical director on the occasion of the placing of subjects provoked the intervention of the Superior General. In a letter of October 6, 1808, Father Chaminade explained himself. Brother Frumence responded: no, he has never questioned, and he never will question, the zeal of his correspondent for the Institute after all that he and the archbishop had done. His only concern was that they should think themselves permitted to place subjects without the agreement of their superiors. He concludes:

On the other hand, I see that your intentions, which I had not understood as clearly as I do now, had for purpose the more exact observance of our rule and our customs.

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<sup>16</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 29a to Bro. Frumence, July 11, 1808; vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 77.]

Consequently, Sir, continue, I pray, to give your zeal all the extension you consider desirable.<sup>17</sup>

Father Chaminade continued. But the discomfort had not disappeared and, on August 24, 1809, it is the archbishop who writes to the “most honored Brother,” vicar-general:

The work whose establishment here you have agreed to continues, thanks be to God; it even experiences growth, which leads to expectations of fulfilling the most fortunate hopes.... May you find good what I tell you: this progressive expansion both of the novitiate and of the number of classrooms, in a truly large city, should make us desire a director in whom is found more activity, means, and resources for a large administration, which are not offered by our dear and, in many respects, esteemed Brother Séraphin.

And here, according to Rigault, the archbishop

as a result asks an exchange between the head of the Bordeaux house and Brother Chérubin, who is head of that of Castres and who is already esteemed in Bordeaux where he was stationed before 1792. Father Chaminade, constantly devoted with an enlightened zeal to the Institute of the Brothers, liked the plan—the execution of which favored the works and cares of the director of novices.

Brother Frumence did not agree with those views. And then, unexpectedly, Brother Paulin notifies him that the novitiate was moving to Chemin du Tondu,

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the property of Chaminade himself. What are the implications of that news? May that not be the signal of an internal schism, such as has been attempted, and even consummated, here and there in France! The Superior General wrote to Brother Séraphin on January 1, 1810:

The dear Brother Paulin tells me that, on this first day, you will transport the novitiate to the country property of Father Chaminade. I believe that that is to your satisfaction and that you will continue to have the direction of the two communities.

Weeks and months passed. The Brothers' schools, now situated in four parishes, were more prosperous than ever. The community had 11 Brothers and Saint Laurent housed 12 novices. A Brother Visitor who passed through during the year appreciated Brother Éloi very much:

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<sup>17</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 29b, cites Br. Frumence's rough draft to Chaminade, Oct. 6, 1808; vol. 1, part 1, p. 78.]

He is very virtuous; he has a great deal of judgment and prudence, superior talents for the school, not only for the sciences which he has to teach but also for the marvelous order which he causes to reign. He rarely punishes. He is of a natural goodness, patient, happy, open...speaks very well. He has great horror for the world and lives in his own country as a stranger who would be a hundred leagues away.

Brother Paulin is less well noted:

He is not strong in writing; he has not learned any grammar; his is not of a very lively nature...scolds the pupils with a little too much severity.

But he compensates for those deficiencies with the qualities of a true religious, and he has in addition (Would he be someone from Bordeaux to be without it?) the characteristic of being very jovial.

In short, the situation was satisfactory.

### **Bordeaux-or-Toulouse**

At the time the Visitor declared himself satisfied with what he saw in Bordeaux, the Institute underwent a trial. Brother Frumence died on January 27, 1810. The convocation of a Chapter to choose his successor created some disturbances. Several directors

see in their confreres of the Petit Collège [motherhouse?] some equals who take on shows of superiority. Self-love surges, criticism has free reign.

Whether directly because of that state of mind, or because of reasons unknown to us, the director of the house in Bordeaux did not attend the Chapter that opened on September 8, [1810], at the seat of the motherhouse. However, when he received information of the Acts of that assembly, he gave his adherence.

Brother Gerbaud, the new Superior General, was an energetic man. The circumstances demanded a firm direction: he knew that. The lacunae in the documentation gathered by M. Rigault do not allow us to know all the details of his action with regard to Bordeaux. However, it seems that, from some texts useful to the historian, one can form an idea of what followed.

To “remedy schisms” or to “anticipate them,” to remove “every subject of disunion,” the General Chapter decided on the suppression of all the novitiates, except three that it left to the discretion of Brother Gerbaud.

“Having been informed of the good direction of the novitiate at Bordeaux” (his exact words), he chose it for all of southern France. But then, when the time came to execute the measure, he learned that the property belonged to Father Chaminade; that the Institute could not dispose of it at its discretion; that no more than 12 novices could be lodged there; that they could not have daily Mass at those premises; that other persons shared the same buildings with them. Moreover, Archbishop d’Aviau and Father Chaminade would like a freewill offering for the archdiocese of Bordeaux. In such a case, would it not be better to set up the novitiate elsewhere?

That question, as well as others, relative to the payment of teachers must have been raised in the correspondence with Brother Séraphin. Brought up to date, Father Chaminade tried, on December 19, 1810, to have the point of view of Bordeaux prevail and to preserve a local novitiate. Unfortunately his letter has not been preserved in its entirety. The extracts which remain in the archives of the [Christian] Brothers enable us to follow the thought.

Since it was the first time [Chaminade] addressed himself to the new Superior General, he first expressed the satisfaction which His Excellency, the Archbishop of Bordeaux, and he himself had experienced at the news of his election. Both already knew with what wisdom and what zeal he had worked for the good of his Institute.

Your circular letter to all the houses filled us with consolation: we have found in it the true spirit of M. de La Salle.<sup>18</sup>

Chaminade would have strongly desired to write together with the beloved Brother Paulin, but the latter was ill, and he himself could not further delay entering into contact with the highest Superior of the Brothers. He had notice of the different letters sent by the latter to the dear Brother Séraphin; moreover,

various delicate circumstances urge him to make known to him exactly the true situation of the Brothers and the reasons for their establishment.<sup>19</sup>

In a first series of considerations, he recalled how the novitiate in Bordeaux had been founded to provide needed teachers for the schools of the city.

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<sup>18</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 40a to Brother Gerbaud, Dec. 19, 1810; vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 110.]

<sup>19</sup> [Ibid, pp. 110-111.]

Long before one could have hoped that the Institute of the Brothers could again appear in France, two young men, by divine inspiration, embraced that state and followed it with all possible exactitude, with the exception of the wearing of the habit. The Brothers made their appearance in Lyons. The archbishop asked for some for Bordeaux. Brothers Séraphin and Alexandre were sent by the venerated Brother Frumence. They were first received at the home of the two young men. The city gave them the former house of the Brothers near Porte Sainte Eulalie and had them open six classrooms. Brother Séraphin had some subjects come from Toulouse...and opened two more classrooms in the seminary buildings.

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Brother Séraphin had some other Brothers come. The archbishop asked permission of the venerated Brother Frumence to form a novitiate at Bordeaux; permission was granted and I was given the commission to set it up and to oversee it.<sup>20</sup>

A second paragraph presented the conditions under which the novitiate had been transferred to the property of Saint Laurent where it currently was.

The house on Rue Sainte Eulalie did not seem adequate for lodging the Brothers working in the schools and the numerous novices. The archbishop again wrote to the venerated Brother Frumence and obtained permission to separate the two houses. From the very beginning, he had also obtained for Brother Paulin the title of director of novices.

The difficulty of finding a suitable locale led me to offer to the archbishop a section of a country house which is a 12-to-15 minute walk from the house of the Brothers at Sainte Eulalie and from the parish church. That small country site has true solitude, entirely encircled by walls. I have had repairs made to the portion of the house occupied by the novitiate necessary for healthy living and for being independent of the part which I reserved for myself and for the neighboring country folk. I have had a chapel made next to their building and the Blessed Sacrament reposes there. I say Mass for them on Thursday, unless some feast prevents me from doing so. That part of the building can house only 12 novices.<sup>21</sup>

According to Brother Gerbaud's response, Father Chaminade concluded that the suppression of the novitiate ran the risk of creating a crisis for the teachers of the schools in Bordeaux and

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<sup>20</sup> [Ibid., p. 111.]

<sup>21</sup> [Ibid.]

rendered useless the sacrifices made for the establishment at Saint Laurent where, nevertheless, all conditions were found there for the proper formation of the novices.

The rest of the letter apparently points out that, in Bordeaux, the decisions made in Lyons on the question of lodging and salaries for the Brothers employed in the schools were somewhat burdensome. In addition, Father Chaminade had to excuse himself from organizing that year a single annual retreat for the Brothers on Sainte Eulalie and for the novices.

Finally, it was repeated that

His Excellency, the Archbishop, and Father Boyer, his first vicar-general, and he himself desire only the prosperity of the Institute and that they also desire to have it serve to the support of religion without changing its forms or its customs,<sup>22</sup>

perhaps expressing the hope that the director of the Bordeaux community be changed.

Brother Séraphin (we read) is a very good religious, full of the spirit of his state.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps a *but* comes then as Chaminade ends the letter:

Pardon, my venerated Brother, if I have tired you by too many details and by excessively long reflections. I hope you see there my love for your Institute and the confidence which I have in you, joined to the esteem I have for the wisdom of your administration. I will add nothing more than the very sincere wish for a good and happy new year and the assurance of my profound respect with which, etc.<sup>24</sup>

In Lyons the decision was taken irrevocably. On December 30, 1810, Brother Paulin is advised by a letter [from Brother Gerbaud] which Rigault analyzes [and paraphrases] thus:

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I have no doubt of the zeal of the Reverend Archbishop for the advancement of his archdiocese, based on the high reputation which he enjoys. I am in no way surprised at the magnitude of his sacrifices in favor of the education of the members of his archdiocese. However, the Institute should not, for that reason, be held captive. It

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<sup>22</sup> [Ibid., p. 112.]

<sup>23</sup> [Ibid.]

<sup>24</sup> [Ibid.]

behooves a pastor to have eyes only for his flock. However, those who collaborate in his apostolate must take to heart the interests of the body to which they belong. Archbishop d'Aviau asks for a preference in view of the creation of regular establishments within his jurisdiction: so be it! On condition, though, that the Superior General intervene and speak out. Otherwise the Brothers at Bordeaux cannot claim to be of the Lasallian family. Their director has given his adherence to the acts of the Chapter. But Brother Gerbaud detects "some small crevices." Besides, many concerns are justly aroused: the insufficiency of the locale, the formation of the novices in a house which does not depend on the center at Lyons, and the will to which the community in Bordeaux submits.

They provoke the firm and irrevocable decision:

Matured by the advice of my council and as the Father invested with supreme responsibilities, I name the house in Toulouse to receive the novitiate.

Brother Paulin is to move there with those of his pupils

who wish to belong to the Institute of the Brothers of Christian Schools and whom he would judge worthy.

In order to manage his "delicacy toward respectable persons" to whom Joseph Darbignac believes he has "obligations," the letter does not contain a formal "obedience." The religious will send to the motherhouse his "dispositions" and, if possible, "without imprudence" let him know the schedule of his departure.

The very next day, Father Chaminade's response is ready.<sup>25</sup>

To the first two "difficulties" pointed out by his correspondent, Brother Gerbaud answers<sup>26</sup> that the Institute of the Brothers having been reestablished by imperial decree of March 17, 1808, there can be no question of a special novitiate for the diocese of Bordeaux:

It cannot be that a novitiate would be for a single diocese, nor even for a single province; the Brothers, and all the Brothers, are for the whole Institute and reciprocally.

Bordeaux had at first been chosen to receive one of the novitiates foreseen by the Chapter, but what is needed is

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<sup>25</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 40a to Brother Gerbaud, Dec. 19, 1810; vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 110-112.]

<sup>26</sup> [In his letter to Chaminade dated Dec. 31, 1810, which is summarized on p. 112 of *Letters*, vol. 1, part 1.]

a house that can lodge at least 30 novices and in which they have holy Mass every day and a retreat which is not practicable in a house shared with seculars. All those advantages are found in Toulouse, and Brother Paulin would be moved there to direct the novitiate.

The archdiocese has nothing to fear for its schools for it has the following right:

to always find good administrators without having to be concerned either with placing subjects or providing them for different posts. Your novitiate becomes superfluous (Brother Gerbaud insists), for I charge myself with sending you already formed Brothers to the extent that you can employ them according to the prospectus. Moreover, in consideration of the sacrifices you have made for the novitiate, I will leave you and dispensed from the indemnities placed in favor of our house in Lyons. Here, then, is an

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easy way of making up for the novitiate: charge the costs which you have incurred against the salaries of the Brothers who are working, up to 600 francs each according to the terms of the prospectus. And, behold, you are freed of any other care except to oversee to your satisfaction the good running of the school, with full liberty and even a request made of you to bring to the superior all matters of complaint which you may have.

As for the dispositions of the prospectus, the Superior General declared himself most ready to modify them as much as possible “both as to the indemnities and as to the furniture”; but he cannot reduce in any way the 600 francs for food costs “because of the many functions of the Institute.”

Having the Brothers join the novices for the retreat presented no problem:

There will be a renewal in the spirit of humility and of dependence, faith, zeal, and fervor in all that is good.

How to end such a letter? It is clear that the dear Superior was making every effort to mask the bluntness of his firmness under a very ecclesiastical formality:

I agree with you, Sir, on the need of mutual confidence between founders and the superiors. I can assure you that mine in the archbishop and in you, Sir, is perfect. I am very strongly convinced that it could not be better placed. And no one can be more



devoted than I to you, nor more disposed to give you every testimony on every occasion, without being turned aside by any human consideration of whatever kind.

I have no reason to suspect the purity of your views. It is surely permitted to you to prefer to any other location that of your archdiocese and to favor it by all legitimate and possible ways. It is also my responsibility to oversee the preservation of the spirit committed to my care. Providence has ordered and regulated all things so well that all diverse interests, being well understood, come together to the general interest which, like a great river, draws into its majestic and swift current all the streamlets and all the rivers to conduct them surely to their center, the great Ocean of divine decrees for the glory of God and the welfare of humans. But, to ensure every detail, each must respect the limits of his influence and his just claims.

Should you have any matters of complaint, be kind enough, Sir, always to honor me with the same confidence which you have shown me, though I have not yet done anything to deserve it. Please, I beg you, count on the expression which I give you of my entire devotedness to the archbishop and to you, as well as to any other founder who asks our Brothers on the basis of our regulations and customs within all the primitive observance of our Institute.

To use the words of Rigault, Archbishop d'Aviau and Father Chaminade "respected the right of the Lasallian congregation."

In May 1811, "Brother Paulin leaves the Bordeaux novices in the hands of Brother Seurin for a time longer, and he takes his place with the young men of Languedoc in the suburban neighborhood of Saint Nicolas. Finally, in the month of September," the novices of Bordeaux join their former teacher in Toulouse.

But, worn out before his time, Joseph Darbignac ended his earthly sojourn on May 6, 1813. From December 1, 1812, onwards he had

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one of his former disciples as successor, another person who attended the meetings at the Madeleine, Antoine Céré, now Brother Apollinaire.

According to a balancing of accounts, dated April 11, 1811, Father Chaminade was owed the sum of 1,587 francs, 5 sols, and 9 deniers.

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In order to write good history one must generally have ample information. Still, Rigault, in his volumes 3 and 4, would have given a more correct picture of the situation of the Christian Brothers in Bordeaux if he had not known that Father Chaminade was the Founder of the Society of Mary.

In fact, [in Rigault's view], during the [First] Empire, the director of Louis Lafargue and Guillaume [Joseph] Darbignac was already thinking of the work that he was to bring to actuality only in 1817. When he is having difficulties with Brother Séraphin, when he houses the novitiate on his property at Saint Laurent, when he tries to save the presence of the novitiate in Bordeaux—it is [in the mind of Rigault] because he is acting according to the ideas that will later give birth to a new religious society. [Rigault surmises that Chaminade] would not even have undertaken a new foundation [in 1817] if he had succeeded in drawing the Lasallian community of Bordeaux into his field of activity.

Nothing justifies such speculation. The man who wrote, when asking Brother Frumence to admit Lafargue and Darbignac to the religious profession, “Your Order will find in them a very good acquisition,”<sup>27</sup> could not have been thinking, “I would have there two excellent subjects for the work which I am planning.” In 1825 he would write:

The good Brothers of the Christian Schools have nothing to fear for the honorable and important mission they are fulfilling. I have contributed too much to their spread in France and to their support to wish to do them harm. The Spirit of God is not in opposition to itself.<sup>28</sup>

In 1829, he had a prospectus modified which announced the “mutual” teaching method for the single reason that the Lasallian Institute refused to employ that method:

It would truly please me very little to expose the Brothers of Christian Doctrine to a new persecution in this regard, especially I who have contributed so much to their reestablishment in France after the Revolution.<sup>29</sup>

In 1841, seeking to improve municipal finances, the mayor of Soissons had asked the [Christian] Brothers to accept the principle of a fee for the children whose families could afford it. Referring to their rules, the disciples of M. de La Salle responded that they could not give paid instruction

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<sup>27</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 30b to Bro. Frumence, Mar. 9, 1808; vol. 1, pt. 1, p.76.]

<sup>28</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 343 to Caillet, May 19, 1825; vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 33.]

<sup>29</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 472 to Clouzet, Mar. 17, 1829; vol. 2, part 2, p. 266.]

and that they would withdraw if the character of the schools at Soissons was modified. The mayor then addressed himself to the Society of Mary that, at first, promised its cooperation. But as soon as Father Chaminade learned that his acceptance could have repercussions on the future of the Christian Brothers at Soissons, he hurriedly disengaged his dealings with the mayor. He wrote to him:

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It is very possible that in presenting positively to the Municipal Council both the monetary needs of the commune and the advantage of a teaching corporation (duly approved by the government) which accepts school tuition fees while not refusing pupils a free education, it is very possible, I think, to resolve quite easily the opposition of a number of friends of the Brothers of Christian Doctrine. But then the Society of Mary would give the appearance of having supplanted the dear Brothers who presently direct the communal school. Or, at the least, it would appear in their eyes as having been, in some way, the occasion of their withdrawing. You will therefore, Sir Mayor, allow me to obey higher religious propriety and to withdraw myself completely from this delicate affair.<sup>30</sup>

How surprised this priest, who expressed himself in this way relative to the Brothers of Christian Doctrine, would have been, if he had been told that one day he would be accused of creating a schism within the Lasallian Institute!

There was some friction between Brother Séraphin and Chaminade. The letter of Father Rauzan (unknown to Rigault) explains that. The novitiate had been transferred to Toulouse, but that was a general move of regrouping. The General Chapter had decided that there would be no more than three novitiates in France: that of Bordeaux had even been so little suspect that it had at first been designated as one of those which would be maintained. If, finally, Toulouse was preferred, it was above all for practical reasons: space, conditions of life. In order to organize in Bordeaux a novitiate as desired, a different locale was needed. The archbishop and Father Chaminade, no doubt, would have very much desired that the formation of teachers destined for Bordeaux would take place in Bordeaux itself—who could differ?—but neither one had the notion that this advantage could be achieved through a schism.

There is no need to insist: errors do occur. In a work of synthesis as broad in scope as that of Rigault, it was unavoidable that there be some imprecision on details. That will disappear as new editions are issued. As of now, a corrective note in volume 9, “Father Chaminade and the Brothers,” places the activity of the Founder of the Society of Mary into a more exact and more sympathetic context. The Marianists are grateful to the historian for helping them to better

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<sup>30</sup> [Chaminade, *Letters*, no. 1263 to M. Quinette, Mayor of Soissons, Dec. 18, 1841; vol. 5, p. 255.]

understand the activity of their Father and to better penetrate into his spirit. We still have so little documentation on his life during the [First] Empire that any discovery on that point is a Godsend. Our sources, until now, had presented us with the director of the Marian Sodality so that we were led to think that that work absorbed almost all his activity. What an error!

When we realize that this priest was concerned with the education of children as early as 1801, and that he fostered the opening of a novitiate as early as 1807, and that he contributed personally to the multiplication of Christian classrooms which in a few years reached 800 pupils; when we calculate the time he devoted to the novices and to the teachers; when we realize that he carried on this work with so many other occupations all equally absorbing at such an unsettled time under conditions so contrary to those which had surrounded his youth and his beginnings in the priesthood—how great a man does he appear!

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This priest, whose very compatriots know so little today about the role he had in the religious reorganization of Bordeaux immediately after the Revolution, died so little known!

Truly a typical director of modern works, he conceived and realized, innovated and maintained, advanced and reestablished, spoke, prayed, and acted, always alert, always ready to adapt, never discouraged, never stopping. “I did not know him,” said Cardinal Donnet later.<sup>31</sup> He is still unknown. The more he is known the more will a fruitful and irresistible grandeur develop around his name and his memory: admiration.

J. Verrier

Bordeaux, April 30, 1953

(302<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the birth of Saint Jean Baptiste de La Salle)

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<sup>31</sup> [Cited by Fr. Benoît Meyer in his *Memoirs* (AGMAR 17.5.313, p. 21). See ft. 4, p. 6, above.]

## Sources

In 1953, when Father Verrier wrote the French original of this article, most of the sources he quoted or cited were unpublished manuscripts. Since then many of them have been published and even translated into English. These sources are listed below and in the footnotes.

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