

Jacques Dujarié and Amédée du Roscoät

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Amédée du Roscoät was born in 1791 in the heart of the Revolution, two years before the commencement of the Reign of Terror. His family was to suffer much from the upheaval in their northwest corner of France. Amédée du Roscoät was the sixth of nine children born to Count Casimir du Roscoät and Françoise de Kerbiquet. Amédée's father was in the military, commissioned at age thirteen a second lieutenant in the Beauvais regiment. By 1881 he was a lieutenant of the Marshals of France and Knight of St. Louis but fled into exile to avoid capture by the Revolution.¹ Two of Amédée's siblings (Jeanne-Olive and Casimir) died young, and of the remaining siblings only Zoé and Cécile are important to the history of Holy Cross. Zoé was the woman who came providentially to Ruillé in 1818 when Jacques Dujarié was desperate for an anchor for his young community of Sisters. She was almost forty years old at the time.

In 1792 the family moved to Nantes since their estate a mile and a half outside of Pléhédél had been seized by the government because their father fought on the royal side. With the father off in the army, the mother sold her jewels and taught classes in a school for girls in Nantes. Then the mother and children moved to a house in Rennes and were joined by the father in 1795 when Zoé was fourteen and Amédée was four. The father's life was, of course, touch and go since he had fought on the side of the royal princes. By age fifteen, Zoé was teaching alongside her mother, the two earning the only income for the family. By 1805, with the

welcomed aftermath of Napoleon's 1802 Concordat, the family was able to buy back its estate in Brittany where their boarding-school for girls continued to operate until 1815 when Zoé was thirty-four and Amédée was twenty-four. Trained as a teacher in her mother's boarding-school, Zoé was early-on drawn to work with the poor. She had, in fact, wanted to join a group of Sisters when her father was still alive, but he was reluctant to let her go. After his death, her mother let her leave to join Dujarié's little group at Ruillé, the group at the "Petite Providence."

The Petite Providence, where Zoé arrived in 1818, is kept today in good condition by the Sister of Providence in nearby Ruillé. Located a few miles outside the town and away from the motherhouse (known as the "Grande Providence"), the little "Petite Providence" building was constructed by Dujarié himself out of fieldstone and sits isolated across from a small pond giving way to sedge. The Petite Providence is two stories high, the upper floor being one large room where the first Sisters slept. Halfway up the stairs to this loft is a small, windowless room, no more than a closet, where Mother Madelaine slept. In such reverence was she held that she merited a bed chamber of her own, even if it boasted no more space than would accommodate a small bed. Although she was a member of Dujarié's community but two years, she left an indelible mark on its early history. After the unsettling lawsuits of Marie Lair, who hounded Dujarié for years after she had left the Sisters—over a matter of money she claimed she had brought to the Sisters when she joined them—after this debacle, Dujarié and the first Sisters deserved the respite afforded by the coming of Zoé du Roscoät.

By the time that Zoé had left for Ruillé (July 1818), her brother Amédée was twenty-seven, firmly ensconced in a military career like their father had been. Fighting with the French Navy by 1810, Amédée was thereafter wounded at Leipzig in battle against the Germans. After receiving the Legion of Honor in 1814, he reenlisted and was a lieutenant in the Royal Guard by 1816 and a captain by 1819. Eventually he would become a battalion chief (1830). He resigned his commission in 1832. It is the correspondence between him and Dujarié, a series of sixteen letters (1822 to 1828), that will concern us for this paper.

The General Archives of the Congregation of Holy Cross holds ninety-two Dujarié letters (or copies of letters) dating from April 1810, four years after he founded the Sisters of Providence, to January 1837, one year before his death on February 17, 1838. Of these ninety-two letters, fifteen were written to Amédée, Comte du Roscoät, the brother of Mother Madelaine, Dujarié's saintly first mother-general, who died at her mother's Normandy estate in June 1822. The fifteen Dujarié letters to Amédée extend over the years 1822 to 1828,² the first three concerning the final illness and the death of Roscoät's sister Madelaine.

The first Dujarié letter to Amédée du Roscoät (dated June 9, 1822) is short, an inquiry into the health of Mother Madelaine, who had traveled to Brittany to check on her Sisters of Providence working in that area. She was staying at the Chateau du Roscoät with her mother and had fell ill with typhoid fever. Five days later Dujarié again writes to Amédée expressing a warm and heartfelt wish to be at the estate: "Oh, I wish I were near her!" Four days later, Dujarié writes to Mother Madelaine herself: "Not having a horse to get to Laval and fearing to find you dead, I

stayed here to console your dear little family...I'll come when you get better." Sadly, Mother Madelaine died five days later (June 23, 1822).

On September 16, Dujarié writes to Amédée, who is serving with the Royal Guard in Paris:

Oh, I am covered in tears. And I will weep my entire life. The memory of the worthy Friend will never leave me. She could have told you that I wished to do everything that could be done to make her well, everything that could contribute to her health and happiness...We never were at odds with each other. Oh! Such virtues I saw her practice! What humility! What a pure heart and spirit! What charity! Such zeal for the salvation of souls! What confidence in Providence!³

Dujarié has been given locks of Mother Madelaine's hair, which he promises to guard carefully—if Amédée wishes some of the hair, Dujarié will gladly send some to "her dear Amédée, about whom she often talked to me with the tenderest and most affectionate sentiments." Dujarié, of course, had never met Amédée du Roscoät. That fact is clear from the letter. Dujarié then quotes Mother Madelaine as having said, "I would be happy if you [Dujarié] saw him [Amédée] enter the ecclesiastical state." Dujarié tells Amédée that his sister had expressed this hope frequently. It seems, however, that Amédée was already well settled in military service, happily, we presume, so Mother Madelaine may have been a bit naïve in wishing for him a new career, and Dujarié equally naïve, even more so, in repeating the wish to Amédée. Moreover, the soldier Amédée was the oldest remaining son

in his family and had obligations to continue the family name and to maintain the heritage of the estate.

To this letter Dujarié appends a business-like request—he wants Amédée to check over the papers submitted by the Sisters of Providence for government approbation. Dujarié even specifies several people to see in this regard—Madame de Montmorency, the police chief de Laveau, and the sub-prefect de Fougères. This post-script is of an entirely different tone than the tone of the letter to which it is appended. It may seem as if Dujarié were warming up Amédée du Roscoät with a dozen paragraphs about the deceased Mother Madelaine before the priest gets to the meat of the missive. Amédée du Roscoät will eventually prove to be helpful as well in the matter of government approbation for the Brothers of St. Joseph, young men who were proving to be every bit as important in the priest's life as the Sisters of Providence had become. How worthy were these Brothers? How viable was this Community? Were they really worth Count Amédée du Roscoät's solicitude?

Of the 271 young men who joined the Brothers of St. Joseph under Dujarié's care and Brother André Mottais' direction 1822 to 1835, thirty-six eventually took vows after the Community moved to Le Mans under Basil Moreau's direction. Of these thirty-six, only two left the Community. Of course not all of the thirty-six took their vows in 1835. One (Romain Bouvier) in fact did not profess until 1867—forty-four years after his entrance in 1822! (He died in 1870, three years after taking his vows.) Most of the thirty-six, however, did profess within the first five years of the relocation of the Brothers from Ruillé to Le Mans. Apparently a man who lived without vows for decades in the Community was considered a “novice” until he

professed. Our focus here, however, is not on the length of a “novitiate” experience, but rather on the viability of the nascent Brothers of St. Joseph, and for that information we turn to another aspect of their Community—apostolate. Dujarié and André Mottais accepted into the Brothers only men who would teach in small parish schools. Thus we should be interested in how many of these men were recognized by the government as credible teachers and were awarded a diploma (teaching certificate). The Holy Cross General Matricule indicates that thirty-three such certificates were awarded between 1822 and 1835, in the years before Moreau assumed direction of the Community. Along with the certification, the Brothers of St. Joseph needed government approbation, a status achieved in August 1823 by regal order of Louis XVIII. In order to achieve this recognition, Dujarié needed a man who could move easily in government circles, and that man proved to be Amédée du Roscoät.

Proof of Amédée’s continued interest in Dujarié’s Communities came in an October 24, 1822, letter the priest wrote to the soldier stationed in Orleans:

I can’t thank you enough for the energetic interest you wish to continue showing our dear Sisters—nothing proves more to me the love you had for the worthy Mother than your support of them.⁴

Dujarié is looking forward to a visit from the count, hoping that gout will not keep him [Dujarié] in bed when the count arrives. Apparently all is not smooth between the two as the count has not replied to a previous letter by Dujarié. Or the circumstances may simply be such that in being moved from Paris to Orleans, Amédée may have been too busy to answer Dujarié’s previous letter. Dujarié

recommends that the count see a Mr. Deschamps about a carriage that leaves three times a week to arrive at Ruillé around noon. Dujarié also offers the count the use of a carriage or, if he prefers, a horse.

All our dear Sisters have joined to offer you prayers and their respects—they burn with a desire to see you as does the man who is honored to be devoted to you, your humble and devoted servant,
Dujarié, priest.

It would be the first time Dujarié would meet Amédée du Roscoät so his excitement is evident in this letter. With the count's interest in the Sisters, Dujarié probably thought the count would help with getting the Brothers officially recognized.

Amédée finally wrote to Dujarié on November 5, 1822, a long letter that can be divided into three parts: tender sections at the beginning and end with a business-like center sandwiched in-between. The letter begins by assuring Dujarié that he [Amédée] has not been indifferent to the priest's letters:

You will know, Monsieur, that the friend, the respected Father of my poor Sister, could not become for me an inconsequential being...She would know, Monsieur, we had the same respectful sentiments, memorable and affectionate sentiments, that she had for you...All my life I will weep for this worthy loved-one.⁵

Then Amédée spells out at length the state of the petition for royal approval of the Sisters: he has been to see de Fougères, who is well-disposed to the approbation, but everyone must wait for the Assembly to gather again and consider the request.

All does, however, look good. Amédée then turns soft again and ends with more thoughts about his dead sister:

What will become of us, Monsieur, we who had known her and can be consoled knowing we will find her again in heaven! Ah! yes, I believe with you, Monsieur, in Eternal Providence, smacking us with this terrible blow, perhaps wishing to show us the nothingness of earthly affections, to show us we must put our confidence only in God because He alone is the source of all goodness, consolation, and hope.

It is almost as if the soldier were lecturing the priest as well as consoling him. He closes by thanking Dujarié for an invitation to visit Ruillé, a trip he is looking forward to: “It seems the tears I will shed on the places where she had hoped to spend her life and where she was loved as she deserved, it seems to me those tears will become less bitter, reminding me of her piety, virtues, admirable zeal for the glory of God and the comfort of unfortunate people.” The sentiments of this soldier are sincere, his thoughts more on his dead sister than on the priest who has extended the invitation to visit.

Dujarié wrote twice to Amédée in the following March, the first letter explaining that Dujarié founded the Sisters of Providence at the request of the Vicar of the diocese of Orleans. The letter also notes that no government approval has been received yet for the Brothers. Dujarié has twenty novice Brothers. The second letter notes several Sisters are sick and one novice Brother dropped out of the Community. A June 1823 letter to Amédée states there is yet no royal approval for the Brothers, and there are twenty-four postulant Brothers—all living in the Ruillé

rectory! It must have been a crowded house indeed. Finally on June 26, Dujarié announces that the Brothers have been approved by royal order. But on July 22, Dujarié writes a sad letter to Amédée:

I can't know what to attribute your long silence to. Have you been sick? Were you unhappy with me? Did I say or do something that wounded you? You, the most loved of all my friends, our benefactor! Ah! Please tell me the reason for your silence—some lines from you would soothe and console me.⁶

The sentiments are more than warm, and we can wonder if Dujarié were letting his affections get the better of his judgment. Finally in August, Dujarié notes in a letter to Amédée that he has at last heard from the count.

The following January (1824) a letter to Amédée shows the two are back on good terms, and in May of the same year Dujarié writes about Amédée's sister Cécile, who had apparently joined the Ruillé Community. In October (1825), Dujarié writes that he would like to see Amédée, and in February (1826), Dujarié writes a short note thanking Amédée for a letter: "You wouldn't believe how much pain I suffered believing that you had abandoned me."⁷ We must allow here a possibility that Tony Catta either did not or would not entertain: Dujarié may have had an inordinate affection for the younger man. Several of the letters speak to that possibility. Of course, some historians will claim that sentiments of two hundred years ago differed from sentiments of today—such historians are whistling into the wind in order to sidestep an affectionate friendship they wish to write off as simply something we cannot interpret properly after such a long time between then and

now. But we should let the letters speak for themselves, and if we find in them an aging priest fondly affectionate of a younger man, we should not write it off as something we prefer not to discuss. Let the letters speak for themselves.

A final letter to Amédée is dated January 2, 1828. In it Dujarié writes that Amédée's sister Cécile has left the Sisters of Providence and the matter was not the Community's fault. Dujarié does not specify reasons for Cécile's returning to her family at Pléhédel, but Catta surmises the relationship between the priest and the Roscoät family had "chilled":

The beginnings of shadows had fallen over M. Dujarié's sensitive soul. Cécile du Roscoät, the sister of the beloved Foundress, had not been able to remain at Ruillé. As we already pointed out relationships between the du Roscoät family and the rectory at Ruillé had chilled: there were no more letters from the family which the good pastor had hoped to see identified with "La Providence."⁸

There is no way to trace the dissolution of the Dujarié-Amédée relationship short of letters that the family may have kept or may have destroyed. From the evidence at hand, we know there was an extraordinary warmth for Amédée on Dujarié's side but no sign of similar sentiments from the younger man. If Dujarié had any hopes of the man's going into "the ecclesiastical state" as he had earlier put it (quoting Mother Madelaine), his hopes were dashed by Amédée du Roscoät's successful military career and eventual marriage.

Amédée du Roscoät married Elizabeth Colas des Francs, who was fifteen years younger than he. He died in 1857 at age 60. He and his wife had a son in 1828

named Amédée Henri Roland du Roscoät, who died at Pléhédél in 1879 at age 51, three years before his mother's death and twenty-eight years after his father's death. Amédée Henri married Berthe Descantons de Montblace in 1866. She died in 1897 at age 57. Their son Louis-Marie-Rolland du Roscoät was born in 1853, became a lawyer, and died in 1930. The family name continues on today in a woman (Aulick du Roscoät), a right-wing politician who has distanced herself from the Le Pen policies, and in a man, Kevin du Roscoät, who is in corporate finance for a private equity firm. Another half dozen members of the family thrive in French businesses.

¹ Tony Catta, *Father Dujarié* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1960), 81.

² We also have one letter (dated November 5, 1822) from the count to Dujarié.

³ Letter, Jacques Dujarié to Amédée du Roscoät, September 16, 1822.

⁴ Letter, Jacques Dujarié to Amédée du Roscoät, October 24, 1822.

⁵ Letter, Amédée du Roscoät to Jacques Dujarié, November 5, 1822.

⁶ Letter, Jacques Dujarié to Amédée du Roscoät, July 22, 1923.

⁷ Letter, Jacques Dujarié to Amédée du Roscoät, February 26, 1826.

⁸ Catta, 102.