

A GIANT IN THE MIDST OF THE HUMBLE AND THE LITTLE ONES

Undoubtedly like many others of his time, Jacques Dujarié has not been counted among the outstanding personalities who have influenced the history of France at the time of the Revolution. Few are the historical studies which will mention his name unless it is about the more limited history of the Le Mans diocese or the department of La Sarthe. On the other hand, just like so many others at the heart of the upheaval, he was audaciously building the future and courageously witnessing to the Kingdom which comes about through history but which is not purely and simply a product of history.

According to the perspective in which one reads the life of Jacques Dujarié, one may discover and encounter a giant who quietly and without fulfilling any glamorous position literally gives his life for the humble and the little or, like the author of the *Chronique de l'Ouest*, see in him a dwarf trying to move mountains... And this chronicler goes on saying: that Abbé Dujarié was trying to do was, from the viewpoint of human wisdom, imprudent, temerarious, or even foolish...¹

It is probably this image both ordinary and yet so extraordinary, that we keep with us when we look closely into the life and work of Jacques-François Dujarié. In a very succinct way, I would like to share with you some of the features of that man of the Providence and try to identify what seems to be the main aspects of a heritage which in great part has made Holy Cross what it is today and which still remains a source of inspiration for us to appreciate better the gift we are for the Church and the world in the closing years of this second millennium and understand better the mission we are called to carry on.

IN A SOCIETY IN A PROCESS OF RADICAL CHANGE

Jacques Dujarié, like many other founders of his time, found himself at the very beginning of his adulthood in a society in a process of radical change with its accompanying violence and oppression against the Church.

Just a few dates to help us recall certain important facts of the history of that time and better appreciate what Jacques Dujarié had to live through:

- 1767 (December 9): birth of Jacques Dujarié
- 1789: the French Revolution breaks out (Jacques is then 21)
- 1791: closing of the Angers major seminary (March 20) -Jacques Dujarié must stop his regular theological studies. This closing down follows the refusal on the part of all the seminary directors, but one, to sign the oath of the civil constitution of the clergy
- 1795: priestly ordination conferred in hiding in Paris (December 26 -Jacques is 28)

- 1802 (April 8): signature of the concordat with Napoleon
- 1803: Jacques Dujarié takes charge of the parish at Ruillé
- 1806: foundation of the Sisters of Providence
- 1820: foundation of the Brothers of Saint Joseph
- 1835: resignation of Jacques Dujarié as superior of the Brothers of Saint Joseph and the handing over of the Brothers to Basile Moreau -1838 (February 11): Jacques Dujarié's death in Le Mans.

At the threshold of his life as a priest, Jacques Dujarié had to face some overpowering difficulties. Humanly speaking, there was enough to drop everything all together... Actually, why did he commit himself to a lifestyle which, right from the beginning, was becoming an immediate threat to his own life? Why, without necessarily abandoning his life project, did he not choose to delay its implementation until such a time when events would have allowed more freedom and security? What kind of future could he foresee as a priest, if not a dead end future, the main aspect of which, at least on a short term basis, would be oppression and persecution? As Tony Catta, his biographer, tells it, it is because, like many other founders of his time, he is under the urging instinct of Christian hope.²

From 1791 up to the signature of Napoleon's concordat, April 8, 1802, Jacques Dujarié had to make the maximum use of his talents to go around what had been forbidden by the Revolution and to give himself totally to those he wanted to serve as their pastor. Actually, he showed a cleverness and a creativity which were rather exceptional. He confounded those who were against him and even succeeded in winning the respect and sympathy of the civil authorities of the commune, even in spite of the report of the Prefect of La Sarthe (a former priest who had taken the oath of the civil constitution of the clergy) which stated that he was anti-Constitutional... not very well liked in the locality... a difficult character...³

On January 1, 1803, Jacques Dujarié was appointed by his bishop, Msgr de Pidoll, pastor of Ruillé-sur-Loir. That parish was considered as a "branch church" of the canton of La Chartre. And the law did not foresee any financial provision for the support of priests serving in "branch churches". The faithful had to look after them. In spite of this, the General Council of Ruillé agreed to provide for the financial support of the pastor on account of various reasons. One of them was the vast extent and the character of the territory where the villages he was serving were scattered. The General Council agreed to give him 1,200 francs a year (the law provided for an annual salary of 1,500 francs for pastors in first-class parishes and of 1,000 francs for those of second-class parishes).

On the whole, the pastor of Ruillé was rather lucky. The installation of the new pastor took place on May 27.

THE PASTOR AND THE "GOOD FATHER"

Jacques Dujarié faced many trials and lived through many difficult circumstances during that time of socio-political upheaval. However, he was born into a family that owned properties and which certainly could not be considered poor. The commune acknowledged that he was personally fairly well off. The minutes of the Council meeting recorded that he was the owner of furniture sufficient for his needs and that he had provided out of his personal needs for the carrying on of Catholic worship. And the Council concluded: This is one burden less for this commune.⁴

All the attention and the deep concern of Jacques Dujarié were directed to the poor. On the occasion of his installation as pastor of Ruillé, he said in his homily: I am a priest to be the consolation of the widow, the father of the orphan, the support of the poor, and the friend of those who suffer.⁵ Do not let yourself be discouraged by the defects and miseries of your children; all your dear confreres have to go through the same type of problems; in bearing with them with love you will be more blessed by God. The coarser, the more dishonest and inattentive and however bad they may be, the more worthy they are of your compassion. It is enough for us to know that Jesus Christ loved them for us to love them too. The one who is seemingly the more abject might be the more agreeable to Him...⁶ On his part, Father Moreau wrote the following about him: Fr. Dujarié's love for the poor knew no bounds. This explains why he was almost extreme in his practice of the spirit of poverty.⁷ And his biographer states that throughout his whole life, M. Dujarié was to deal with misery, either physical or moral, and he adds: The schools, the poor — everything will be taken care of; M. Dujarié will give them everything he has, his father's fields, his salary, his heart, and his life.⁸

This is in a nutshell his whole program. We also find there the evangelical inspiration of his work, especially his two religious congregations: the Sisters of Providence and the Brothers of Saint Joseph. In that specific context of the aftermath of the Revolution in rural areas of France, it is his concrete way of living out a clear preferential love for the poor, that is: the education and formation of the youth and the care of the sick poor. These two particular expressions of that love described also the content of a fourth vow which was made by the Sisters of Providence: the vow of generosity which remained in use in the Congregation from 1820 until the papal approval of their constitutions in 1881.

In 1801, a report was made on the condition of public instruction in France. Public education, it is said, is practically non-existent everywhere. The generation now reaching the age of twenty is irrevocably sacrificed to ignorance. Primary schools exist nowhere, and as a result the great bulk of the nation is without instruction.⁹ We have to remember that before the Revolution practically all primary schools were supported and run by the Church. The Revolution had broken down the system at once in confiscating all the Church properties and nothing had been immediately foreseen as a replacement, especially in the rural areas.

Little by little things started to shape up again, but the result was very mediocre. I know, wrote the grand master of the University in 1809, in a circular which opened an investigation on teaching personnel, that there are in their ranks some whom crass ignorance should bar from teaching or whom evil habits make unworthy of this profession.¹⁰

The primary education of children, whether academic or religious and the training of teachers worthy of their task were urgent needs. And Jacques Dujarié, pastor as he was, tried to answer them with what he had at his disposal. It is a similar urgent need that he had perceived in the field of care for the sick poor of the area.

PRESSED BY THE URGENCY OF THE MISSION

It is the pressing needs of the mission which urged Jacques Dujarié to make this preferential love for the poor, and he did so out of his deep awareness that he had been sent specifically for that. On the occasion of his installation as pastor of Ruillé, he practically quoted word for word that passage of St. Luke's gospel (4:18-19) where Jesus openly stated his mission after having read the passage of the book of Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth.

In 1806, the Sisters of Providence were founded. In his biography of Father Dujarié, Tony Catta calls them The servants of the poor at Les Hauts-de-Ruillé.¹¹ Their scope was precisely to visit and nurse the sick, (and) instruct the children¹². Father Dujarié sent the first group of sisters to the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Mary founded by Anne de la Girouardière (foundress of the house for the incurables at Baugé, in the diocese of Angers) for their formation.

Seen from the outside, Jacques Dujarié's foundation appeared clearly to be a service for the poor by the poor. To Zoé Rolland du Roscoat who was asking for admission into a poor community, one still in its swaddling clothes and devoid of all human guarantees of prosperity, Father de la Chapelle, a Jesuit from Laval, assured that so far as congregations of nursing Sisters were concerned, the Petite Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir was easily the lowliest and poorest in France.¹³ Once arrived at the Petite Providence, Zoé wrote to her family: This is exactly what we need; this resembles in some way the stable of Bethlehem.¹⁴

As for the Brothers of Saint Joseph they began also in a very humble and poor way to answer the needs for the education and formation of the children in rural areas. It is M. Bouvier, who later was to become the bishop of Le Mans (he was then vicar general of the diocese), who pressured Jacques Dujarié to begin that new foundation because it was the way to answer the concern of so many pastors in rural areas about the education of the youth. It was during a retreat for the priests of the diocese in 1819, that Jacques Dujarié agreed to the request of his confreres to start this foundation.

In other areas of France there were already some of these new congregations of teaching Brothers: the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine in Nancy (founded by Dom Fréchal); the Little Brothers of Mary in Lyon (founded by Blessed Marcel Champagnat); the Marianist Brothers in Bordeaux (founded by M. Chaminade); the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine in Alsace (founded by Abbé Mertian), and the Brittany Brothers (founded by both Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes) who later would become two separate congregations: the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploërmel and the Brothers of Saint Gabriel. Of course, the Brothers of the Christian Schools or the De La Salle Brothers were already existing, but they were mainly working in the cities: their Rule required them to be at least three together. In most of the small rural parishes, the pastors could not maintain so many brothers.

The needs were such that the formation of the Brothers of Saint Joseph would be really minimal. Obviously, this would cause many difficulties later on regarding the stability of the group. Brother André Mottais on whose shoulders rested very early the responsibility of forming the Brothers of Saint Joseph acknowledged that himself in the Minutes of what happened in the Institute of the Brothers of Saint Joseph during the annual retreat of 1835: The lack formation of the subjects who made only four, six or ten months of novitiate and were sent to a parish to teach in the schools without having been sufficiently tested nor being sufficiently educated. This is the seed of the disintegration which, without the help of the 1830 revolution to which it was falsely imputed, caused a falling away of about half of our subjects and establishments up to 1835.¹⁵ But we must also be aware that as minimal as it was on the academic level, the formation of the Brothers of Saint Joseph was preparing them in a more adequate way than what could be found among the teachers the grand master of the University was talking about in his circular quoted a little earlier.

It is with his heart as pastor and father that Jacques Dujarié responded to the needs and requests. And he did not seem overly concerned in having a well rounded structure in order to do that. Life was urging him and constantly challenging him and he tried to do everything he possibly could to relieve people's miseries and contribute to the development of the Church and the society of his time.

THE MAN OF AN UNFULFILLED DREAM

It seems that Jacques Dujarié never had the intention nor the ambition to create something new. He simply used what was already existing and tried his best to apply it to the particular situation that was his. He borrowed from Anne de la Girouardière for the formation and the conduct of the Sisters of Providence; he will do the same thing regarding the formation and the way of life of the Brothers of Saint Joseph: he borrowed from Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, Jean-Marie de la Mennais and from Gabriel Deshayes.

He also shared a vision of many founders of that time: he wanted his different congregations as parts of a greater unit which would include them all and unify them in giving them a more stable direction and providing them with a deeper spiritual life.

In his mind, wrote his biographer, they (the two congregations of the Sisters of Providence and of the Brothers of Saint Joseph) were one. They were to have one same direction, if not one same patrimony. But this ensemble had to be brought together in an organism of which the Curé of Ruillé had seen other examples elsewhere... It centered on the priesthood which was the heart from which everything else was to radiate; spiritual life, teaching, works of charity. It is here that the designs of M. Dujarié were, in some sort, forerunners of a great foundation which, after many disappointments, will be seen rising from the ruins of his own.¹⁶

The socio-ecclesial context at the time of Father Dujarié helps us the better to understand, it seems to me, some essential aspects of this project of a tripartite association. The religious renewal of 19th century is for all purposes in the hands of the clergy. The necessity of their ecclesiastical formation allowed them, even during the worst years of the Revolution, to have recourse to other priests for their studies and thus find the means to maintain a high level of education among themselves. Practically nobody else in the Church enjoyed that kind of privileged situation concerning the deepening of their faith and of their theological knowledge. And since the task of this religious renewal was beyond the possibilities of one person alone, the necessary personnel had to be looked for and formed. The religious congregations (probably most of them which were born out of the pastoral concern and creativity of priests) were in a way strictly seen as auxiliary personnel of the clergy. Since the priests were practically the only ones capable of reviving the faith through an appropriate religious education, they had to take on their shoulders the task of the new evangelization that had to be done. And the Church of France did not lack very generous people among the priests to take up such a tremendous challenge. This fact can also help us understand better why religious congregations in so great numbers came into existence in the different regions of France at that time.

Moreover, the image of the Holy Family played an important role in the spirituality of that time. Many congregations would take the Holy Family as a model and as an inspiration. At the very beginnings of the Sisters of Providence, Jacques Dujarié had chosen the Holy Family as titular of the chapel of the Petite Providence. The bas-relief over the altar attests to it.¹⁷

Jacques Dujarié had in mind forming a society of missionary priests who would be called the Priests of the Sacred Heart and who, with the Sisters of Providence and the Brothers of Saint Joseph, would form one association. But his dream never came true. In 1826, the Sisters of Providence were legally recognized as a congregation; that gave them the right to own properties and to administer themselves as a group. In 1831, an agreement was reached for the separation of properties between the Sisters of Providence and the Brothers of Saint Joseph. Moreover, the pastor of Ruillé, in spite of his trying, never succeeded in gathering around him a group of priests to form that association of missionary priests in rural areas. His dream remained unfulfilled.

Father Moreau himself readily identified with this intuition or this dream of Jacques Dujarié, but he brought it to completion and concretized it in a way which will be fundamentally different in many ways. In a letter addressed to Cardinal Barnabo, prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, Father Moreau attempted to explain to the cardinal what the Congregation of Holy Cross was and dispel the clouds in which the enemy of every good could have shrouded the issue that concerns us so much (the pontifical approbation), (in recalling) briefly the history of the congregation of Holy Cross... After having talked about Father Dujarié and of his Brothers of Saint Joseph, he stated: I also had the good fortune to develop the Society of Priests which my predecessor had tried in vain to found... I also realized another part of the project of my predecessor in founding at the same time a society of Sisters; but because of the reluctance manifested by His Holiness to my Procurator about it, I did not hesitate a moment to cut off that branch from the tree of Holy Cross...¹⁸.

This dream of the three societies in one was also in Brother André Mottais' mind. He was one of the very first brothers of Saint Joseph and the right-hand man of Jacques Dujarié. But he saw its implementation in a way different than was envisaged by Father Dujarié and what came to be in the hands of Father Moreau. But all these ways of concretizing the same dream spring, it seems to me, from the same inspiration and explicitate the same fundamental intuition. They also allow us the better to appreciate the richness and the nuances of this intuition which seemed to dwell in the hearts of those who have had a key role in the foundation of Holy Cross.

Brother André Mottais' perspective of collaboration is known to us through a confidential letter sent to Msgr. Bouvier then bishop of Le Mans, November 14, 1834. Following Father Moreau's suggestion, André Mottais made known to his bishop his overall plan of three societies in one which was to integrate the Brothers of Saint Joseph, priests who were to be known as Priests of the Sacred Heart and lay teachers who were to be called the Sons of Mary. He perceived this project as a means to consolidate, enlarge and bring to perfection the real scope of the congregation of the Brothers of Saint Joseph.

He wrote: The three societies in one would endeavor to contribute to the support of the foreign missions of the Propagation of the Faith, at least by their prayers and alms. (It is no wonder that we see later on André Mottais spontaneously offering himself for the first mission of Holy Cross outside France, i.e., in Algeria, in 1840). The relief of the souls in Purgatory would also be an object of their zeal... In a word, this holy family would undertake to reproduce in its conduct the Holy Family of which it would bear the name...

And Brother André added: I never mentioned this to anyone, except the other day to M. Moreau, and no one has ever put any such idea into my head. I do not know if all this is not just wild imagination. May God be so good as to enlighten me. In any case I can do nothing; I can only hope, for undertaking this plan would be for me like creating the world. Nevertheless, I feel an extreme desire to see this plan carried out for the glory of God. And still: Ideas or images which present themselves to my mind on the point in question are growing more and more and they are becoming always more clear. They make me experience great joy in God and an ardent desire to work for his glory. Nevertheless, at times, it strikes me that they are only wanderings of my imagination and that wise persons will not think any different of them. Come what may, I am only obeying my confessor.¹⁹

As André Mottais witnessed, Jacques Dujarié also, this man with a robust faith, an unflinching hope, and a flame of charity which nothing could put out, saw his dream taking shape with the beginning of the Congregation of Holy Cross, but its realization was going to be than had first imagined. His love for the poor and the little ones exemplified in the works of his two congregations, and his dream for collaboration in the spiritual life and in the mission were to find in Holy Cross a different visible expression but undoubtedly also more specific.

In looking back to that man and priest who has left to us the heritage of his kindness, his simplicity, his finesse and his zeal for the cause of good, may we find anew the evangelical inspiration which alone can really give a foundation to this preferential love for the poor and to collaboration at the service of life and mission.



Brother Gérard Dionne, C.S.C.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 September 21 1858 on the occasion of the consecration of the new conventual church of the Sisters of Providence of Ruillé -20 years after Father Dujarié s death.
- 2 CATTÀ, Father Dujarié, p. xiii
- 3 Ibid. p. 42
- 4 CATTÀ. Father Dujarié pp. 43-44
- 5 Ibid. p. 46
- 6 March 17 1832
- 7 Sketch of the life and works of M. l'abbé Dujarié, pastor of Ruillé-sur-Loir in Circular Letters of the Very Reverend Basil Anthony Mary Moreau, Vol. 1 p. xxi
- 8 CATTÀ, *ibid.*, p. 48 and 44
- 9 CATTÀ, Father Dujarié p. 53
- 10 Ibid. p. 105
- 11 Ibid., p. 73
- 12 Ibid., p. 68
- 13 Ibid., p. 80 and 89
- 14 Ibid., p.90
- 15 VANIER, *Le chanoine Dujarie*, pp. 473-474
- 16 CATTÀ, Father Dujarié, pp. 165-166
- 17 According to Tony Catta the chapel of the Petite Providence was built in 1811 or 1812. He mentions the plaster reredos but without indicating the date of it. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 74
- 18 April 3, 1856
- 19 VANIER, *Recueil documentaire passim* pp. 139-141 and p.458