

JACQUES-FRANÇOIS DUJARIÉ
*Reflection on the Life and Mission
of the Founder of the Brothers of Saint Joseph*

INTRODUCTION

Near the beginning of his brief biographical tribute to Father Dujarié, Basil Moreau writes:

Jacques-François Dujarié was among those men whose lives reveal one of the most striking characteristics of the workings of Providence. In all ages, indeed, Providence has seemed to delight in humbling the great and the proud of this world by choosing as its instruments those who to all outward appearances are the weakest and most unknown. (*Circular Letters of Father Moreau*, vol.1, p.i)

When we look at the life of Jacques Dujarié, this description seems quite appropriate. His physical difficulties surely gave him the outward appearance of being weak and his work in the tiny village of Ruillé makes him unknown in terms of other activities unfolding in France and Europe during his life time.

Yet, faith teaches us this is the way God works; the legacy which flows from the life and ministry of Jacques Dujarié is anything but weak and unknown.

In offering some reflections on the life and mission of Father Dujarié, I do not want to reiterate the content of resources you readily have at your disposal. Rather, I want to focus on four major phases of his life and mission, to identify the main characteristics of the rich legacy which he left to us.

through the country.

Dujarié lived for a while with one of his sisters and became a weaver. Nevertheless, he had to keep moving because he was, in all probability, under suspicion as one who had refused to take the Oath. He was known to have been a seminarian who interrupted his studies in the wake of the Oath.

As in other times of persecution, an "underground church" developed to respond to the pastoral and sacramental needs of the people. So, by 1795, even though the antireligious sentiment is still strong, Jacques is able to continue his theological studies. And, it is in this same year that he is ordained: December 19-sub-diaconate; December 20-diaconate; December 26-priesthood.

What is evident in this first phase of Jacques Dujarié's life is his extraordinary inner strength, his sense of determination, and the depth of his commitment. He is passionately faithful to what he has decided upon and committed himself to do; his fidelity is constant and consistent. Thus, he pursues the course he has chosen for his life with zeal and single-mindedness. In these are the roots of his greatness and the seeds of a second phase of his life.

Second Phase

Often, Father Dujarié's ministry had to be in secret. One of his contemporaries gives us a glimpse into his early ministry.

After his ordination, he (celebrated) his first Mass in the cellar of a house. He immediately began to exercise his ministry, in secret, in the (surrounding) parishes. He would sleep sometimes in stables, sometimes in barns or hay lofts or cellars. He was almost always with (another priest). In this difficult situation they both led a very hard and austere

Like the first Christians, he was forced to work in the dead of night, in secret places, with infinite precautions, under the constant risk of being killed if he was discovered. In these difficult circumstances he gave himself with zeal for the salvation of souls. (The people) would get up at night to travel a distance, in frightful weather and on terrible roads, in order to attend Holy Mass and to partake of the bread of the strong. They feared no danger, for they knew that if they were caught, death would be the price of their generosity in hiding the ministers of Jesus Christ. It was impossible to minister to so many people without the (authorities) knowing about it and trying to uncover it. A thousand times a price was on his head; he was exposed to the greatest of dangers...but Providence always saved him.

What is evident in this second phase of Dujarié's life is his role as a "bridge-builder." He is among those who helped to keep the church in Ruillé-sur-Loir alive. He builds bridges between the people's faith and the means for them to practice it; he builds bridges for those priests who had taken the Oath and yet desired to return to formal church ministry. Already, we have a glimpse of the characteristics marking the next phase of his life.

Third Phase

By the end of the 1790's, the situation of the church in France is dark to say the least. The clergy was decimated, religious houses had been confiscated or destroyed, religious education had been long neglected, and the people were divided over the integrity of priests - Which were those who had taken the Oath? Which had not? Fact and speculation merged to compromise the faith of the people.

Some light breaks into this darkness in 1801 with the Concordat between Napoleon and Pope Pius VII. Admittedly, there were

return to Ruillé, they form the beginnings of the Sisters of Providence.

In 1820, Dujarié invited the group to profess vows. The Sisters chose Sister Marie-Madeleine (Zoé du Roscoät) as the superior. The very next year, 1821, the building of Grande Providence was begun. Sister Marie-Madeleine died in 1822. It was a bittersweet time for Dujarié: joy at seeing the growth of the community, profound sorrow at the death of Sister Marie-Madeleine. Also, it is during these same years - the early 1820's - that Dujarié begins to experience a decline in his health with severe bouts of rheumatoid arthritis.

The Sisters responded effectively to the educational needs of the girls. Dujarié realized the need for additional personnel to take up education with the boys.

If we step back a moment to 1818, we see the roots of this project. During the diocesan retreat, Bishop de Pidoll of Le Mans called for the foundation of a group of educators. Dujarié accepted this challenge. Because of his work with the Sisters, this project did not begin immediately. But, in 1820, Saturday, July 15, the first postulant arrived. Others came, some left, others came, many stayed.

The first brothers lived in the rectory at Ruillé, they were known simply as the Brothers from Ruillé. Theirs was a very austere life style and a minimal schedule. Studies and manual labor comprised their day and competed for their time and energy. So, the quality of formation they were able to receive was often compromised and the time necessary for studies and common exercises was often given to the demands of ministry. The brothers took St. Joseph as their principal patron and thus became known as the Brothers of St. Joseph.

In October, a twenty-year old arrived in Ruillé to be a postulant for this new group - André Mottais. He was bright, generous, and eager to serve the people. From Dujarié's perspective, he had all the qualities

Father Dujarié did have a plan for a society of missionaries to share in the direction of the sisters and brothers and to be involved in preaching and retreat ministries. Though Dujarié took some initial steps to make this a reality, it never did come into existence.

What is evident in this founding phase of Dujarié's life is his role as an elder, a leader, who by his integrity and dignity guides his communities and protects their interests. His care for them, his concern for them, speak of the qualities we will see in the final phase of his life.

Fourth Phase

As the Sisters of Providence and the Brothers of St. Joseph continued to develop, Father Dujarié thought of them and spoke of them as a single community. One practical consequence was that he did not distinguish between funds for the brothers and sisters, he did not always follow-up on payments due to him, he did not always keep clear records of income and expenditures. After all, it was money from a common pot - at least, from his perspective!

The legal recognition of the sisters was the channel through which the financial transactions of the brothers were conducted. This arrangement caused tension between the sisters and Dujarié because they did not always have the anticipated funds available.

This situation continues to deteriorate until, in 1831, Bishop Carron himself came to Ruillé to separate the temporal goods of the two communities, including the furniture and the fire wood! Needless to say, tension was running high!

Through the 1820's, there was a growing discouragement among the brothers: political revolution, lack of formation, anti-religious sentiment in France, Dujarié's poor health, lack of legal recognition

In 1835, at the bishop's request and the brothers' insistence, Basil Moreau agreed to become the superior of the brothers.

What is evident in this declining phase of Dujarié's life is his pastoral character. He does everything he can for the brothers and for their continued existence, even at the costs of tensions with the sisters he founded and passing on the direction of the brothers to another. Dujarié dwells among the brothers as one who cares and is concerned, a true pastor.

Father Dujarié spent his final years at Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix in Le Mans with the brothers, watching the development of Father Moreau's projects which, in a sense, were the realization of his own dreams. In 1837 the Brothers of St. Joseph were united with the Auxiliary Priests which Moreau had founded, giving life to what we know as the Congregation of Holy Cross.

At 12:30pm on Saturday, February 17, 1838, Father Jacques-François Dujarié died. He was buried at Sainte-Croix. 35 years later, when Father Moreau died, the Sisters of Providence moved Dujarié's remains to their mother house in Ruillé.

QUALITIES OF LIFE

The qualities evident in Dujarié's life and mission reflect his true greatness.

Dujarié has an uncompromising passion for truth and justice. His life is marked by a fidelity to the choices he makes, the commitments he undertakes, and the responsibilities he accepts.

Dujarié seeks always the way of reconciliation. His life is marked by that mercy and compassion which understand the weaknesses of others, but also call them to unity and consistency.

with the community, of wanting to draw strength from one another for maintaining a solid integrity of life.

Thus, as much as feasible, the brothers remain in contact with and support one another, exchange experiences, encourage one another, look out for one another's interests, humbly acknowledging their own weaknesses and struggles and failures.

Fourth, the brothers are very much involved in the lives of the people. Their relationships with and sensitivities to the people extend beyond the formal aspects of their ministries. Their letters recount everything from the latest gossip floating around the village to the economic difficulties of this family, the poor health of that one, the death of a student, a visit from the bishop, a particularly impressive civil or religious ceremony. They write of visiting families and of residing with them occasionally when travelling made that necessary. They knew and they cared about the people they served, and were selfless and generous in discovering ways to help people with the basic necessities of life.

In their pastoral presence and activity, the brothers had taken to heart Dujarié's instruction. It had a profound impact on their own lives and on their ministry to others. Dujarié had written:

The spirit of the congregation is the spirit of peace and charity; the members will live together in perfect union, loving one another and helping one another reciprocally.
(*Rules of Conduct for the Brothers of Saint Joseph, in Vanier, ibid.*, p. 221)

GOD'S WORK

I close these reflections as I opened them, with a brief text from Basil Moreau's tribute to Father Dujarié.

Such were the early origins of the Congregation of the Brothers of St. Joseph. Certainly it required no small courage to persevere in the midst of such numerous contradictions and privations of all kinds. This, however, has always been the lot of all works destined by God to produce great fruits. In order to confound human prudence, God wishes His works to begin and develop by means which are largely disproportionate to the aim in view. (*Circular Letters of Father Moreau*, vol.1, p.xii)

When we look at the humble beginnings of the Brothers of St. Joseph and at the many places and cultures in which Holy Cross lives and ministers today - 175 years later - it is certain that we truly are "God's own work." So we pray with Brother André Mottais, "May the Lord grant us growth in spiritual goods which will make us more and more worthy of the name we bear" (to Fr. Moreau, 1 December 1841).

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OUR HERITAGE: A CHALLENGE AND A HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

I am grateful for having been invited to take part in this celebration in the United States of the 175th anniversary of the foundation of the Brothers of Saint Joseph with a reflection on how our heritage is still for us a source of inspiration for the present and the future. I feel really fortunate to be here with you.

Joel helped us to focus on this heritage by reflecting on the life and work of Fr. Jacques-François Dujarié. I would like now to expand this reflection a bit in trying to identify more clearly how our heritage can be, now and in the future, be a source of hope and challenge in our life and ministry.

It is not always easy to avoid two different pitfalls in reflecting on heritage: nostalgia and restoration on the one hand, and evasion from our roots, or flight into a reinterpretation of history disconnected from the context in which it happened, on the other. The first pitfall would make us prisoners of the past as if the past and its context were reflections of the best which could have ever been experienced in history -- the "golden era" syndrome. The second would make us prisoners of our present perspective and vision -- the "we know best" syndrome. In the attempt to make clearer for all of us how our heritage is a challenge and a hope for the future, I would like to avoid both pitfalls.

I would like also to say at the beginning of this talk that I don't feel familiar enough with the present context of the United States to propose anything very concrete for the present and the future drawing from our heritage. My reflection will rather focus on some general insights I offer to each of you to reflect on. It will be up to you to see how they can be

(the year Charles X was sent into exile; churches and convents were searched and a number of them sacked; salaries for the priests and religious teachers were suppressed; in Le Mans, priests and religious were insulted, stones thrown at them; many brothers -- more than half remembered Bro. Rémi in 1878 -- would leave during the year). In 1831, a very short letter was sent to the brothers in which Fr. Dujarié says: *The conditions of our time do not allow me to gather all of you this year; once more, they force me to take away from most of you the opportunity which, I would like to believe, you would have taken advantage of.* In 1832, he informed the brothers about a circular of the bishop of Le Mans asking the priests not to go out dressed in civilian clothes, and in 1833, he ordered the brothers: *Wear your religious habit; do not come dressed in civilian clothes.*

Only Fr. Dujarié could have the credibility to ask that from the brothers; he knew from experience what he was asking of them; he lived in hiding for about ten years, constantly risking his life. It might be difficult for us, here and at this time in North America, to figure out such a situation and understand what it really meant. It would be practically unthinkable today to have a superior issuing that kind of order, even if based on a faith rationale.

But all this shows very clearly the inner strength and the sense of determination Fr. Dujarié not only exemplified in his own life but which he was asking also from the brothers. The question for us is not so much how we would react to such a challenging order today, but rather how much do we have and live the kind of inner strength and sense of determination which our predecessors had? How do we face today a culture which is more and more secularized and whose values are less and less consistent with the Gospel values we base our life on? Many of them, in fact, contradict Gospel teachings. In his book entitled, *Psychology as*

*value, and prophets speak and act in the world as companions of the Lord in the service of his kingdom.*³

What happened to this important piece of heritage passed on to us by our predecessors? Where is and how do we concretely experience our hope for the future in the midst of our present difficulties within our congregation as well as outside our religious group, in the church and in society?

RECONCILIATION AND UNITY: TREMENDOUS NEEDS OF OUR TIME

As a second characteristic of Fr. Dujarié's life, Joel mentioned Fr. Dujarié's role as **bridge-builder**; *he builds bridges between the people's faith and the means for them to practice it; he builds bridges for those priests who had taken the Oath and yet desired to return to formal church ministry.*

The Brothers of St. Joseph, in their own time had also to be bridge-builders after the example of Fr. Dujarié. Their main ministry was to build bridges between the people's need for education and the means for them to get it, and they had to build bridges for themselves, so to speak, given the tremendous gap in their own education. Most if not all of them were illiterate when they joined the Brothers of St. Joseph. They were generally well received in the different rural parishes where they were sent (in spite of the fact that in some places a few got into trouble and left a bad example mainly because of inadequate academic and religious formation, according to Brother André Mottais himself -- their novitiate formation was much too short: 4 to 10 months altogether).

There are many gaps to be transcended in our society and in the church today: especially gaps in the relationships among people (in families,

³ C 5:45

lives. Our role is important, but still more important are the quality and integrity of our lives as disciples to which we have committed ourselves to live as community. Dujarié responded to the call of gathering people in the name of Jesus for the benefit of other people in need.

In spite of difficult situations they had to face, the Brothers of St. Joseph, as Joel stated earlier, *made the effort to stay in contact with one another and maintain some realistic balance between community and ministry... As much as it was feasible - and often it was not - they tried to keep in touch with one another... Thus, as much as feasible, the brothers remained in contact with and supported one another, exchanged experiences, encouraged one another, looked out for one another's interests, humbly acknowledging their own weaknesses and struggles and failures.*

As much as at the time of Fr. Dujarié and the first Brothers of St. Joseph, but for different reasons and in different ways, our world, I believe, is in great need of solidarity, communion and unity. Fr. Dujarié and the brothers sensed the importance of communion and community among them, challenged as they were by the demands of ministry and the particular social and political conditions of their time. Their example should help us today and in the future in deepening our own sense of the importance of communion and community among us for the benefit of the people *whose lot we share... supporting men and women of grace and goodwill everywhere in their efforts to form communities of the coming kingdom.*⁴ No more than they are we immune to the danger of sacrificing one to the demands of the other, that is, of sacrificing communion and community to the demands of ministry. We thus tend to put our commitment to live in community and our concrete ministry to the people in a dialectic relationship and so respond to the needs of our times on the basis of personal choice and decision (which, by the way, fits very well the more individualistic mentality of our time). If we yield to such a view, we

⁴ C 2:12

Not many of us here in North America are or will be called to be constantly at the foot of the scaffold to offer help to others. Again, our constitutions call us to reflect on this particular point: *The Lord Jesus loved us and gave up his life for us. Few of us will be called to die the way he died. Yet all of us must lay down our lives with him and for him. If we would be faithful to the gospel we must take up our cross and follow him.*⁷ Whatever the concrete circumstances we live in, as Fr. Dujarié, we must be men with hope to bring.⁸

CONCLUSION

Fr. Dujarié's life and the example of the first Brothers of St. Joseph cannot but be a source of hope for us today and for the future. The circumstances in which they lived were far more difficult than ours today: the post-revolutionary years were for French society as well as for the church a time of uncertainty and instability, calling for much discernment and courage. The situation of the small community of the Brothers of St. Joseph was not much better; from 1830 onward, many would leave and few would come in. Remember that only 13 of them in 1831 signed the agreement between Fr. Dujarié and the brothers to remain committed to their institute until death given the "sad condition of the present time which so to speak takes away from us any hope of prospering and even of remaining in existence for much longer as a group...". The entire text of this agreement⁹ is worth reading carefully and meditating because it conveys very clearly their deep conviction that God would not let them down whatever would happen. Their example is calling us forth to work toward "acquiring the mind of Jesus Christ", as Fr. Dujarié wrote to the brothers in 1825 inviting them to the annual retreat, to witness to the Gospel in our own time and circumstances.

⁷ C 8:112

⁸ C 8:118

⁹ See p. 27

2. *The second concerns the stand we take in our daily lives in the face of the secular values of our society. It might happen that we are so immersed in them that we can hardly identify them anymore, or at least a number of them, as contrary to the Gospel values we have based our lives on.*
3. *The third is about our inner strength and the sense of determination we have in facing the particular difficulties of our times.*
4. *The fourth is questioning the quality of our faithfulness to what we have committed ourselves to live through our vows. Are we as passionately faithful as was Fr. Dujarié even in very difficult circumstances?*
5. *Finally, how are we bridge-builders for the people of our time who experience so much brokenness? How can our ministries be truly oriented toward building bridges in the future for them to answer the needs of the time?*

The heritage bequeathed to us through the life and work of Fr. Dujarié and of the first Brothers of St. Joseph in a time of serious political and social difficulties is indeed a cause for pride, and hope for the future. They lived through a time of transition in the aftermath of the French Revolution which has much to teach us who are also called to live through a time of rapid changes in history though much less turbulent than theirs. Their example can help us to live our religious commitment all the more since our world is suffering from a confusion of values and an overemphasis on gratifying personal needs as the main goal of existence.

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