

JULY 2010

William-Joseph CHAMINADE and his collaborators

One cannot approach Father Chaminade without being struck by the influence he has on those around him. His impact on Mussidan, Bordeaux and beyond is undeniable. Many persons draw from their contact with him a renewal or confirmation of their commitment to Christian life. What is most remarkable is the variety of people: workers, students, intellectuals, common people; youth, adults and seniors; men and women; lay, religious and clerics ... It seems everyone finds a message at his/her level and for his/her good. Let us ask two of his closest aides for their witness!



ADÈLE DE TRENQUELLÉON (1789-1828)

For eight years she knew Father Chaminade only through letters and intermediaries. But from the beginning she was taken with him; she wrote to her closest friend, Agathe Diché, on March 15, 1809: "Well, my dear Agathe," what can you say about all the graces that come to us from Bordeaux? How M. Chaminade seems like a holy man! What a flattering reception he is giving us! Oh, let us try to deserve the good opinion he has conceived of the Society." Or: "Oh, dear friend, what holy men; how fortunate we are to have them!"

There are numerous testimonies to Adèle's growing esteem for Father Chaminade. Soon after the perpetual vows of the first Sisters, she wrote to him: "Your letters are always a great consolation for your children and your wholesome advice encourages them to march ever more boldly toward the goal to which they are called" (L

323). To Mother Thérèse Yannasch, she comments: "For here [in Agen], he accomplished so much: he gave a good sense of direction to our Council. He scolded us very properly, that Good Father, but the good he did was incalculable. At his departure we were at peace and very desirous of becoming true daughters of the Institute" (L 450).

In the rich personality of the Founder, she was struck by his zeal, but even more by the faith that drove him. "You may recall that our Father told us that with holy people we can do a great deal of good but almost nothing with imperfect religious." Take Father Chaminade for instance: he is unhurried and always self-possessed, and yet he accomplishes so much because grace works for him" (L 409).

"He gave us a wonderful conference on faith and promised another one on mental prayer" (L 445). "The Good Father's stay among us is a time of abundant grace because of the peace he brings, his solid instructions, his prayers-- not to mention the little mortifications!" (L 446). "Ask the Good Father to speak to you on faith and mental prayer: these are his two best conferences... Let us, as does our Good Father, dedicate ourselves to the greater glory of God... He asked us to hold our [Council] meetings more in the Spirit of God and of faith. Pray that we will profit by his recommendations. He is a true patriarch" (L 448). "Let us try to become daughters of mental prayer... We must pray better,... be more recollected, more united to God in our actions. Like the Good Father: let us whisper a prayer before speaking or answering, which will lessen our haste and will prevent many a remorse which an unwary word might cause us" (L 565).

JEAN-BAPTISTE LALANNE (1795-1879)

"Father Chaminade was one of those men whose wisdom and maturity are ahead of their years and who appear from the beginning born to enlighten and lead other men. His face, with its admirable

beauty and expressiveness, recalled the finest images in which we like to represent Christ. His speech was very slow, awkward, but full of meaning. His exquisite sensitivity was revealed by a slight alteration of voice and the tears that rolled under his eyelids; but his habit of containing himself held back his first reactions so that he was reputed to be impassive. Sober without austerity, quite removed from the world and almost too closed in his modest office, he had no business except his works of zeal and his conversation was definitely of God alone. Such was the founder of the Sodality from which was to come the Society of Mary. Father Chaminade, who had gathered around him that elite youth, having attracted them by holy and skillful work in very difficult times, was the spiritual director of most of them. He led them to a frequent use of the sacraments. Each year, his country house of Saint-Laurent in the suburbs of Bordeaux, was opened to them to make a retreat, which he preached. They came out fervent Christians, zealous not only for their holiness, but also for the edification of others. ... Under the influence of that permanent mission, the city of Bordeaux saw religion in its purest form come back to life and honor" (Lalanne, *Historical note on the Society of Mary*, p.13).



Testimony of M. Andrew Amédée, SM: "M. Lalanne never spoke about Father Chaminade without tears in his eyes. How many times I myself heard him say: 'Father Chaminade loved me so much and forgave me so much!' ... And he continued to speak with pleasure and admiration of his revered spiritual Father, as he called him" (L IV, p. 345).

GENTLENESS AND FIRMNESS...

The personality of Father Chaminade was very affable, but also very firm. He knew how to play these two sides of his personality according to the circumstances. In speaking to young people, he showed all his **affability**: *"The officers [of the Young Women's Sodality] of Agen have come to tender their respects to our Father [Chaminade], and have received some very good advice. He wants us to continue the work, using methods of gentleness joined to firmness, so that the objective will be reached almost imperceptibly, like a pill that is sugar-coated. That is the only way to influence young people. See how God acts, how he draws us to himself, how he waits for us... O Jesus, give us some of your Spirit, enroll us in the school of your Heart, where we can learn your divine lessons"* (Adèle, L II-321). In the same way, he often exhorted the teachers first to win the hearts of the students in order then to guide them and open them up to faith.

Father Chaminade knew how to express often his **affection** for his disciples. He often concluded his numerous letters with a sincere: *"I embrace you with tender affection."*

Listen again to this: *"Yes, my dear children, it is in Jesus, by his holy Mother, that union makes for strength, and so, be united to your old Father, love him as he loves you, and try to enter into his views which are those of the glory of Mary and of your happiness."*

May you all increase in faith and in the spirit of your divine mission! Here you have, my dear children, the most ardent wish of my heart. For what remains, you know that I live but for you. It is to you that I have vowed my life and my person, happy if I could assure to you the joys of the elect by the shedding of my blood!" (L V-1187). But he knew how to be very **demanding**, not hesitating to firmly reprove errors or abuses. *"Our dear Sister Sacrement has given us cause to rejoice. Father had her beg pardon right in the middle of his conference, which she did with great*

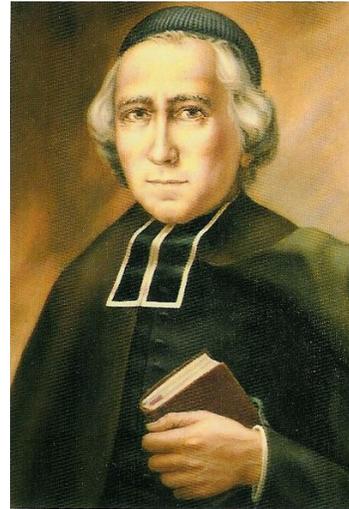
edification. Pray that the good Lord will grant her perseverance" (Adèle L 446).

To Father Fridblatt who was asking for a change of community: *"You say: 'It does not seem to me that I am laboring under an illusion...' You are mistaken, my dear son, and it seems that you have little understood what St. Paul intends us to realize when he says that Satan sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light. (2 Co 11, 14). Since he inspires you with these sentiments, which you call gospel-like, what real progress have you made in your duties? Satan knows well what he will do once he will have dislodged you from the place which the mercy of God has accorded to you"* (L V-1156).

To Father Leo Meyer, then Master of Novices: *"Have we been mistaken in believing that the novitiate of Courtefontaine was a work that God was asking of us? Answer affirmatively or negatively. If you answer negatively, "No, God did not ask for this work," well, then, all is said. We must stop receiving novices and take the means of wisely dispersing the postulants and novices who are there"* (L IV-959). *"I feel, my dear son, that it is time that your soul grows, so as not to spoil the work of God by narrow ideas and weak sentiments"* (L IV-966).

To the community at Saint-Remy: *"...should interest in money make us deviate from our principles? In that case, it would be better that the Society of Mary perish with its money than to exist and to follow false paths!"* (L IV-960).

Nevertheless, when necessary, he also counseled gentleness, as here with Father Chevaux, concerning a Brother who was thinking about



leaving religious life: *"My dear Son, try to bring back to God this straying soul. Use the kindness and zeal which faith prescribes. ."* (L VIII-S1188).

Ultimately, only **the spirit of faith** must lead us. To Father Chevaux at Saint-Remy, he wrote: *"Why, my dear son, do you not place all your confidence in Jesus and Mary? Do you believe that St. Peter established the Apostolic See in Rome by his education, by his knowledge, and his wisdom—his natural means? Do you not believe he succeeded only as a result of the confidence he put in the Master who was sending him? ... Where did you learn the twelve apostles and the seventy-two disciples drew upon their experience before working at the great undertaking that had been assigned to them? They had good will, that is true, and that's all they had.... They knew ... their insufficiency only too well; ... they had entire confidence in him for the mission he had given. Oh, how much we have degenerated! Where is then our faith, our faith in Jesus Christ? I have no intention here, my dear son, of humiliating either you or your collaborators, but to awaken you all from the kind of stupor into which you seem to have fallen and to recall to you what you all are by your entrance into the Society of Mary. You are real missionaries. ... to introduce everywhere, so to say, the spirit of faith and of religion and to multiply Christians.... You are all missionaries, fulfill your mission! ..."*

1. Real missionaries must in no way count on themselves alone, on their talents or their industry: rather they must put all their confidence in the grace of their mission and also in the protection of the Blessed Virgin, who is working at this undertaking for which she was elevated to the divine Motherhood.

2. All must be well penetrated with the importance of the salvation of souls redeemed by the price of the blood of Jesus Christ" (L III-725).

Dates of the month to celebrate: 26: 1817: First vows of FMI received by Father Chaminade. -- Summer 1808 Adele and W.J. Chaminade make contact.