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Louis-Joseph Francois**

Thomas Davitt, C.M.

Louis-Joseph François was born in the small town of Busigny, near Cambrai, on 3 February 1751, the son of Joseph François and Anne Legrand, the eldest child to survive of this farming family.¹ He was educated by the Jesuits in nearby Le Cateau. On 4 October 1766, not yet sixteen years old, he was received into the Congregation in Saint-Lazare, along with another lad from Busigny, Jean-Jacques Dubois, who was a year older.² There does not seem to be anything on record indicating why he chose the Congregation.³

At the time he entered the séminaire (Novitiate), the Congregation had in France more than forty mission-houses, twelve parishes, fifty-three major and nine minor seminaries. This figure represents more than half of all the seminaries in France. It also had charge of the Royal Chapels and parishes

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¹The main printed sources for the life of Louis-Joseph François are: Misermont: *Le Bienheureux François* (Paris 1929); Coste, in *Annales de la CM*, vol. 91 (1926), pp. 802-842; *Notices sur les Prêtres, Clercs et Frères Défunts de la CM*, vol. V, pp. 47-51; *Recueil des Principales Circulaires des Sup. Gen. de la CM*, vol. II pp. 605-6. Extracts from Boullangier's memoirs and Louis-Joseph's writings are from Misermont and Coste, except for *Mon Apologie* (cf note 19).

²After the revolution Dubois became Parish Priest of Sainte-Marguerite in Paris. He had somehow managed to rescue four of the eleven large paintings from the chapel in Saint-Lazare which were done for the canonisation, together with another painting of St. Vincent. In all there were twelve paintings in the chapel and many houses of the Congregation have the set of engravings of them. The five paintings are still in Sainte-Marguerite and another one is in the church of Bourg-la-Reine in the Paris suburbs.

³The confrères did not come to Cambrai seminary till 1773. (*Répertoire Historique*, p. 15.)

of Les Invalides in Paris, Versailles and Fontainebleau, and the chaplaincy of Saint-Cyr, the famous girls' school. It also ministered on the two French islands in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius and Réunion.

Louis-Joseph finished his *seminaire* in October 1768 but had to wait till 4 February 1769 to reach the minimum age for taking his vows. He finished his studies at the end of the first term of 1773 but apparently had to wait some further time before ordination, as dispensations from the minimum age would not be given for less than twenty-two years and six months.⁴ The exact date of his ordination is not on record.

During his last year in Saint-Lazare, one of his younger brothers, Jean-Baptiste, entered the *seminaire* on 25 August 1772, aged nineteen and a half. Seven years later, on 16 May 1779, another brother, Jean-Jacques, also entered, on the day after his nineteenth birthday, and one of their sisters joined the Daughters of Charity.

It seems likely that even before his ordination he was sent to teach in a seminary. In 1790, during the period of the Revolution, he was Superior of Saint-Firmin, Paris, the former Collège des Bon-Enfants, and he had to draw up an account of the seminary and its personnel. In this account he referred to himself as having worked in seminaries for eighteen years, either as professor or Superior.⁵ It is not known, however, in what house or houses he spent the early years of his priesthood. On 13 October 1781, at the age of thirty, he was appointed Superior of the seminary in Troyes. This had been in the care of the Congregation since 1638,

⁴Misermont, p. 19.

⁵Misermont, p. 21. In the Proprium CM for the Divine Office, both Latin and English versions, in the biographical notes before the office for 2 September, some items of information under Louis-Joseph Francois should refer to Jean-Henri Gruyer, and vice-versa: "... was assigned mainly to the formation of the clergy" and "... where he was superior" should refer to LJF, and "... devoted himself mainly to the parish ministry" should refer to JHG.

having been the fifth house founded outside Paris.⁶

At the time he became Superior there were certain abuses needing correction. Several of the students were allowed to go to Paris to follow courses at the Sorbonne, and some of these stayed in digs without any supervision. With the support of the Bishop of Troyes he made new arrangements. Such students would now need the permission of the Bishop to go to Paris and while there would be allowed to stay only with religious communities, and they would have to make known as soon as possible where they were staying and what courses they were following. They were forbidden to change residence without permission from the Bishop or from the Rector of the seminary. Louis-Joseph was entrusted by the Bishop with seeing to the implementation of these new guidelines.

In July 1786, at the end of the 15th General Assembly, the Secretary General, Marc-François Bourgeat, tendered his resignation for reasons of age and health, as he was seventy-five. Antoine Jacquier, the Superior General, appointed Louis-Joseph to succeed him.

That same month Louis-Joseph was also in the news for another reason, as one of the preachers at the centenary celebrations of Saint-Cyr. This school had been founded by Madame de Maintenon for the education of 250 girls of the nobility who were in reduced circumstances, preferably the daughters of noblemen who had died in the service of the King. Four years after its foundation Louis XIV forced the Congregation to assume its chaplaincy. Edme Jolly, the then Superior General, set up a house where Missioners could reside with the chaplains. On the 25, 26 and 27 July 1786 the centenary celebrations took place, and Louis-Joseph was the

⁶In 1654 two Irish regiments with their dependants were in Troyes. Jean McEnnery, from Co. Limerick, was on the staff of the seminary and Vincent asked him to take pastoral care of them (V-75). Gerald Brin was Superior there in 1657-58 (VI360). Philip Dalton, from the diocese of Cashel, was also there in 1658 (VII 332).

preacher on the second day. He delivered a eulogy of the foundress, which when published later ran to 78 pages of print.⁷

On 23 December 1787, Sister Marie-Thérèse de Saint-Augustin died in the Carmelite monastery in Saint-Denis outside Paris. She was the daughter of Louis XV and was formerly known as Madame Louise de France. Her Carmelite life was an expiation for the misconduct of her father.⁸ On 25 April 1788, in the Carmelite monastery in the rue de Grenelle in Paris, Louis-Joseph delivered the official funeral oration. This was also published, and ran to 95 pages.⁹

As Secretary General he was resident in Saint-Lazare and when he was to speak at the Tuesday Conferences “all the clergy of Paris” turned up, according to a note referred to in the collection of the Superior Generals’ circulars.¹⁰

On 6 November 1787, Antoine Jacquier, the ninth Superior General, died. The sixteenth General Assembly opened on 30 May 1788 and ended on 18 June. François Clet, Superior of the seminary in Annecy, was present. Edward Ferris, from Kerry, Superior of the seminary in Amiens, was elected Third Assistant to the Superior General.¹¹ The new Superior General was Jean-Felix Cayla de la Garde.

On 28 July 1788, the Superior of Saint-Firmin, Jean-Humbert Cousin, died at the age of fifty-seven. He was a native of Le Cateau, near Louis-Joseph’s native place, and had been Visitor. The new General appointed Louis-Joseph

⁷(Rosset): *Notices Bibliographiques sur les Ecrivains de la CM*, (Angouleme, 1898), p. 111.

⁸Coste, p. 806.

⁹Rosset, p. 111. =

¹⁰*Recueil* . . . (as above), vol. II, p. 606.

¹¹Acta of the Assembly (CM Archives, Rome).

to replace him as Superior in Saint-Firmin. In the past this seminary had not done too well. It attracted very few students and the buildings were in poor repair. It was thought that perhaps its name, Collège des Bons-Enfants, was not one likely to attract students, so at some stage during the 18th century the name was altered to Saint-Firmin, after the Bishop of Amiens who was titular of the seminary chapel. There had also been a long drawn-out lawsuit about the Congregation's title to the property. When this was finally settled in favor of the Congregation, the fourteenth General Assembly decided in 1774 to undertake a large program of reconstruction.¹² This was started, but the final part of it, a new chapel dedicated to St. Vincent, was not proceeded with because of the political situation.¹³ Louis-Joseph was chosen as Superior apparently because he was thought to be the sort of man who would carry on the policy of renewal decided on by the 1774 Assembly. He was thirty-seven years old, the oldest priest on the staff. Jean-Louis Dessesement was thirty-six, Etienne de Langres was thirty-four and the Bursar, Joseph-Mansuet Boullangier, was thirty-one. There were three laybrothers also in the community.

The Estates General opened in Versailles on 5 May 1789, and in about six weeks became the National Assembly. On 14 July came the fall of the Bastille. The previous day, however, at about 2:30 in the morning, a mob of about two hundred attacked Saint-Lazare and wrecked the place, breaking windows and doors and smashing furniture. Once the place had been broken into, the mob increased to about four thousand. The famous collection of paintings was hacked to pieces and so were books in the library. The grazing sheep in the grounds were slaughtered and the

¹²*Recueil* . . . (as above), vol. II, pp. 96-99.

¹³Misermont, p. 37.

outbuildings set on fire. About a hundred of the mob got drunk in the cellars and were drowned in the wine which they had let spill out on the floor. Others who broke into the dispensary were poisoned.¹⁴ Cayla and two of his Assistants were able to climb over the back wall and make their escape, taking refuge in Saint-Firmin. Edward Ferris did not fare so well, as "having gone out to fetch help he was followed and beaten up, and covered with blood he succeeded in escaping from such cruelty only by hiding in a succession of houses, each of which offered him asylum".¹⁵ The following day Cayla and some other confreres were able to return.

Shortly after this Cayla became a member of the National Assembly when one of the elected priests resigned; he had been elected first substitute. In spite of some advice to the contrary, he took his seat in the Assembly and took part in at least two debates, including one on Church property. In November 1789 it was voted that all Church property be confiscated by the State, which would then undertake to pay what was necessary for maintaining religious services, pay salaries to priests, and take care of the poor. The vote was that this should be done; the actual carrying out of the decision did not take place for some time. In connection with this vote, Louis-Joseph brought out a pamphlet, *An Opinion on Church Property*. It may have been in answer to one by an ex-confrère, Adrien Lamourette.¹⁶

On 14 April next year, 1790, the Assembly put into practice its decision on Church property. Hand in hand with this went a policy of doing everything possible to discredit the Church and the clergy in the eyes of the people. It is

¹⁴*Recueil* . . . (as above), vol. II, pp. 221 ff, and 562ff.

¹⁵*Annales de la CM*, vol. 72, p. 304.

¹⁶Lamourette was born in 1742 and after working in the Congregation for some years returned to his own diocese. He took the required oath and was elected a constitutional bishop. In spite of this, he was later arrested and imprisoned. In prison he retracted his commitment to the new system. He was executed in 1794. (Rosset, pp. 276ff).

against this background that the matter of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy arises.

Discussion on the Civil Constitution of the Clergy began on 29 May 1790 and lasted nearly two months, it being finally passed on 24 July. Article IV was a key article and it laid down that the Pope had no authority in France, that bishops and priests were to be elected to office by a panel of citizens (not necessarily Catholics). During the Revolutionary period there was a great fashion for demanding oaths of various kinds from different classes of people. On 27 November 1790 it was decided that an oath of fidelity to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy would have to be taken within a week of the decree receiving royal approbation. January 9, 1791 was the day for the priests of Paris to take it. They were to swear "to look after with care the faithful entrusted to them, to be loyal to the nation, to the law and to the king and to uphold with all their power the Constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by the king".¹⁷ Louis-Joseph was against the taking of the oath from the start, although at first he was not sure what exactly the wording was supposed to mean. No priest in Saint-Firmin took the oath; for some reason it was not asked of the priests in Saint-Lazare.¹⁸ Before the end of January Louis-Joseph was in print again with a pamphlet called *Mon Apologie*, which has to be understood as *Apologia* in the sense in which Newman used it and not as *Apology*. He began like this:

I have not taken the civil oath prescribed by the decree of 27 November. Reason and honor demand that I give an account of my behavior to all my confreres in the priesthood whose thinking differs from mine. I owe this account also to the people, to erase from all minds even the shadow of scandal. I am going to give the account just as I read it in my heart and just as I would

¹⁷Coste, p. 810, quoting from the Archives Nationales.

¹⁸Coste, p. 811, note 1.

wish to present it before God's tribunal at the moment of my death.¹⁹

Quite a large proportion of the work had to be given over to the rebuttal of arguments which had been put forward in an attempt to get as many of the clergy as possible to take the oath. One such argument was that a great many clergy had already taken it. To this he replies:

There are a great many who have taken the oath, but a still greater number have refused to do so, and a comparison of the number of those refusing with the number of those accepting should be enough to clarify all doubts.

Another argument is approached this way:

The Assembly claims that it has not interfered with spiritual matters. That is too old a trick to deceive even the simplest of men.

Earlier on he had touched on this same point:

Canonical institution and the Church's mission have always been regarded as the source of jurisdiction. Persons receiving their call or appointment only from the people or from a magistrate, and who with lay authorisation arrogated to themselves sacred functions, have always been regarded as intruders and thieves.

Another argument used was "Think what will happen to you if you don't take the oath." Louis-Joseph takes up this challenge too:

If you don't take the oath, look at what you expose yourself to — you will be struck from the registrar of active citizens; you will be dealt with as disturbers of public order; you will have no salary; you will be condemned to die of hunger . . . "You'll have no salary." I will rely on the charity of the people. I will continue to give them my work, my attention, and to lose my night's sleep for them.

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¹⁹*Mon Apologie* is printed in full in *Recueil* . . . pp. 577-578.

Shortly after this, up in Brittany, Pierre-René Rogue was writing letters to the local authorities to claim his full salary as professor and curate, which he was not receiving. He claimed that even though he had not taken the oath he was entitled to these by law.

One final extract from *Mon Apologie* is a eulogy of those priests who did not take the oath:

Jeered, slandered, heaped with insults, and with nothing ahead except the horrors of a violent death with which they were threatened every day by a mob whom nothing could restrain, they could expect only to be stripped of all they had, together with a life of want and suffering. They were branded as bad citizens, traitors to their country, yet one single word from them would have spared them all this. But how could their mouths utter a word which their consciences could not accept? How could they betray the interests of God to give in to those of men?

This pamphlet ran through at least seven editions. On 24 March 1791, Henri Grégoire, a constitutional bishop, in a pastoral letter on taking possession of his See, attacked it. Louis-Joseph came out with an answer to the attack, on 4 April, entitled *The Defence of "Mon Apologie" against Monsieur Henri Grégoire*. This also quickly reached seven editions. Between *Mon Apologie* and *The Defence* Louis-Joseph brought out five other pamphlets.

The numbers refusing to take the oath completely surprised the Assembly. They had badly miscalculated, thinking that the threats would have been enough to get the majority to take it. The numbers refusing also caused a change of mind in some who had taken it. These men tried to hand in to the Assembly a written retraction of their oath, but these letters were not accepted. They then published their retractions in the newspapers, where they did even more good.

These, together with the pastoral letters brought out by many bishops, had the effect of keeping many people on the right path during these confused times. To counteract all this, the Assembly decided to draw up a pastoral letter of its

own to be read in all churches in France and the writing of it was entrusted to Mirabeau. His draft was rejected after discussion in the Assembly. Louis-Joseph had prepared a reply to Mirabeau, but it was not needed. When the Assembly's new pastoral letter was published, he had a reply ready for this too: *An Examination of the National Assembly's Instruction on the Constitution of the Clergy*. It is a refutation of the main points of the *Instruction*, and it ends with a quotation from the *Instruction* neatly turned against its authors:

Frenchmen! Now you know the thoughts and principles of your representatives; don't allow yourselves to be led astray any longer by lying claims.

One of the arguments constantly repeated by those in favor of the oath was that refusal to take it would lead to schism. Louis-Joseph brought out another pamphlet: *Reflections on the Fear of Schism*. He briefly explained what schism meant:

You are guilty of schism when you cut yourself off from your lawfully appointed bishop, when you question his authority, when you refuse to accept him as your superior and instead accept someone else.

Since that is the case, then obviously to take the oath is to go into schism, rather than the other way around as the defenders of the oath would claim. He showed that when the defenders of the oath were really saying was that one should go into schism in order to avoid going into schism!

The Assembly was still annoyed and surprised that so many clergy, and the most important and influential were among them, consistently refused to take the oath. They were similarly affected by the reactions. What annoyed Louis-Joseph was that the published lists of clergy contained the names of many who did not swear. They also listed those who took the oath with reservations, but these reservations were not mentioned.

The Assembly's next attempt to deal with the non-swearing clergy was to suggest that they voluntarily resign their posts. In the case of bishops who resigned there would be a reasonably large pension. In February 1791 a decree was published giving the pensions to be paid to other clergy who would resign, linked to the scale of their former income, and with a fixed minimum. A number of bishops and priests were tempted by this offer as it seemed to provide a way of letting themselves off the hook. By not taking the oath they could salve their consciences, and by resigning they thought they could avoid compromising the Church. Louis-Joseph did not see it that way, and he took up his pen again and brought out *No Resignation*. It contained two basic theses: We do not have the power to resign, and, even if we had, we should not do so. He argues that a resignation is valid only if accepted by the superior authority, and continues:

The resignation which the Assembly demands does not depend on us, is not within our power. As long as the Church has not spoken, as long as it has not released us, resignation on our part can be nothing but an invalid act.

He then sets out to demolish four main arguments advanced in favor of the resignation scheme:

1. The people no longer want priests who have not taken the oath;
2. Such priests can do no good by resisting the law;
3. They will be hounded down no matter where they go and their stubbornness will lead to schism;
4. Their resignation could spare France this misfortune.

He addresses the civil powers:

It is not within your power to take from us something which we did not receive from you. Truth and the ministry of the word come from God. He commissions us to proclaim His promises and threats, His punishments and rewards. He strikes us with His anathema if we fail Him. He orders us to speak, you forbid us. He is our judge and yours, and we must obey Him rather than you. You speak to us of resigning and giving up our responsibilities. You have the power to deprive us of our

incomes, our honors and our privileges; we will let you have them all, but leave us the people. No human authority can withdraw them from our jurisdiction, nor snatch them from our zeal and love.

All these publications had a great effect on those members of the clergy who were hesistant and uncertain, enabling them to see the issues involved and to make up their minds correctly as a result.

Louis-Joseph next turned his attention to those who had already taken the oath, especially those who had taken it through fear or through having been deceived by the schism argument. He wanted to let them see that what they had done was not final and that they could still retract. He published a twenty-page booklet called *There is Still Time*, its title indicating its contents.

Reference was made above to a constitutional bishop. The first of these were consecrated in Paris on 25 February 1791. Among them were two confrères, Nicolas Philibert who had been Superior in Sedan and Visitor of Champagne, and Jean-Baptiste-Guillaume Gratien who had been Superior of the seminary in Chartres. Louis-Joseph brought out a refutation of Gratien's defence of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy but no accurate details of it seem to be available.²⁰

On 10 March Pius VI sent a letter to the bishops of France and on 15 April another to the clergy and faithful of France, and he explicitly condemned the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. As might have been expected, this was attacked by the authorities, and that attack was in turn counter-attacked by Louis-Joseph.

His next work was of a totally different kind. He thought very highly of a work entitled *Antidote against Schism* by Pierre-Grégoire Labiche, a theologian in the Sorbonne. Louis-Joseph brought out a popular abridged edition and called it *At Last the People See*. It refuted twenty-eight of the

²⁰Coste, p. 817, note 1.

arguments most frequently advanced in favor of the Civil Constitution. It ran into four editions, with some additional arguments refuted in the later ones.

In October 1791 a new Assembly came into power and took a much more hostile attitude to the Church, including new measures against clergy who had not taken the oaths. On 29 November it drew up a new formula for an oath. New penalties were also introduced, including the possibility of a year's imprisonment for those refusing to take the oath and two years for provoking disobedience to the law. On 19 December, Louis XVI refused to sanction the proposed law, and Louis-Joseph brought out a new pamphlet, *Apologia for the King's Veto*. Faced with the threat of penalties, he strikes a new note:

The penalties announced for refusal to take the oath are therefore a real persecution, and today the refusal of the oath is a profession of faith.

Those who suffer for refusing to swear suffer for truth and justice. The glory of confessors shines around them and the martyrs' crown rests on their heads.

That was his last venture into print, although he lived on until the following September. Most of his writings went through several impressions or editions. Joseph Boullangier, who was Bursar in Saint-Firmin and who survived the massacre, wrote later:

Fr. François was one of the most zealous and best defenders of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion against the oath demanded from priests by the French National Assembly, and also against the writings of those in favor of the oath.

In the civil administration of the city of Paris Saint-Firmin was in the section of the Jardin des Plantes. Louis-Joseph was on very good terms with the local authorities, and because there were no seminarians in the college he let one wing of it, with some other accommodation, to the local administration in February 1792. From the previous

November he had begun taking in priests who sought asylum from the persecution they experienced in their own localities. Also, because there were no seminarians to occupy his time, he spent much of it until mid-August away on pastoral work, mainly in the diocese of Versailles.

During this year of 1792, there occurred a succession of events which had their effect on the clergy of France. On 6 April a motion for the suppression of all secular congregations was introduced into the Legislative Assembly in Paris, and on the 28th there was a prohibition of the wearing of clerical dress except during religious ceremonies. On 27 May it became possible for priests who had not taken the oath to be deported if twenty citizens of a canton requested it. It could also happen without such a request if a priest was denounced for causing trouble.

During the early summer of 1792, the parents of Louis-Joseph up in Busigny were getting worried about their three sons who were priests, especially the eldest who was in the thick of things in Paris. They sent their youngest son, Pierre, down to Paris to ask Louis-Joseph to return to the less dangerous area of Busigny, a suggestion which he could not, of course, accept. On 11 July their father died. When word reached Busigny later on about the massacres in Paris, Pierre made the journey once again, only to discover this time that his brother had been among the victims.

On 10 August there was a take-over of the municipal power in Paris by a small radical group, and they got their take-over ratified by the Assembly. That same day officials were nominated to go all over Paris and to invite the citizens to take their own means to see that lawbreakers were punished. On the evening of the 10th a list of all bishops and priests who had not taken the prescribed oaths was drawn up and it was decided to arrest them all and to imprison them in the Carmelite church in rue de Vaugirard or in Saint Firmin. The following day citizens were invited to denounce conspirators and suspects to the authorities. Both terms

were extremely wide. The day after that, the 12th, there was a special denunciation of priests as troublemakers. Arrests had started around 11 o'clock on the morning of the 11th and continued all through the following days.

On the morning of the 13th a guard was placed on Saint-Firmin and all those inside automatically became prisoners, including Louis-Joseph. By the evening of that day there were sixty-three prisoners there. Joseph Boullangier, the Bursar, survived the eventual massacre and wrote an account of conditions there based on his personal observation. Because of his duties, he was one of the prisoners who was allowed to move freely around the house. The others were severely restricted in their movements and there were armed guards stationed at intervals all through the house. People from outside brought along food, but letters were not allowed in or out without first being seen by one of the officials. One of the weirder aspects of the situation was that some priests who had taken the prescribed oaths took their turns as guards outside the seminary.

Boullangier tells us that at the beginning of his imprisonment Louis-Joseph made a retreat and general confession, and provided the same facilities then for all the others. There was Mass every day, but it is not clear whether each individual priest could celebrate, or even whether all could be present, each day.

On 18 August the Congregation of the Mission was officially suppressed in France. On 6 April a motion for the suppression of all secular congregations had been introduced into the Assembly and on 18 August it was brought into effect:

The National Assembly, after having three readings of the project of the decree on the suppression of secular congregations . . . decrees the following: (1) the corporations known in France under the name of secular ecclesiastical congregations, such as those of the Priests of the Oratory, of Christian Doctrine, of the Mission or of Saint Lazare, of the Eudists, of the Holy Spirit, of Saint Sulpice . . . and generally all the religious corporations and

congregations of men and women, except those devoted solely to the service of hospitals . . . are extinguished and suppressed from the date of the publication of the present decree.²¹

Up till the end of August new prisoners were still arriving at the seminary. By the 31st there were definitely ninety-seven there, and probably about four more.

On 1 September an official came to take the names of all those who were in Saint-Firmin. On the following morning an official copy of a decree of deportation was delivered to the seminary. This was discussed by Louis-Joseph and the others and they interpreted it as indicating that they would soon be released. They had been threatened several times with death, but were inclined to think that it was just to frighten them. What they did not know, though, was that already on that same Sunday, 2 September, a group of prisoners in the Conciergerie prison, and about two hundred priests imprisoned in the Carmelite church, had been killed. The September massacres had already begun.

At eight o'clock in the evening Boullangier went down to the kitchen. The butcher's boy was there and he told Boullangier that all the prisoners were to be murdered that evening. Boullangier went up to Louis-Joseph to let him know about this, thinking that perhaps it might be a trap. The Superior was surprised, but not inclined to take it too seriously. However, he sent one of the seminary servants to try to find out more, while Boullangier went back to the kitchen. The boy was still there and this time he told him of the massacre at the Carmelites' church and that a delay of even fifteen minutes could be fatal. Two other youngsters had arrived with this news. Boullangier mentioned that the seminary was under guard, but one of the boys said that that was of little use against a mob of 4,000. Boullangier went back up to Louis-Joseph and told him all this, and this time they were inclined to take it more seriously, especially as the

²¹Pooler: *A History of the CM, 1625-1843*, (1973), p. 354.

servant had not returned. Louis-Joseph began to prepare for his departure, while Boullangier returned to the kitchen. There the three boys grabbed him and dragged him out into the street and got him away safely. Then the butcher's boy went back into the house but this time was met by a reinforced guard and he couldn't go in any further.

Word quickly spread that Boullangier had escaped and a few others decided to make their own attempt. Two got away across the roof into a neighboring property, and two more hid in the lofts. One priest, on the point of escape, went back for his breviary and was unable to get out again.

At 5:30 on the morning of Monday 3 September the mob arrived and broke in the gate of the seminary. Nicholas Gaumer, a confrère who had sought refuge there before 13 August, was the first to notice what was happening and he rushed to warn Louis-Joseph. Some of the mob saw what he was trying to do and followed him to kill him, so he had to change his plan. He knew the layout of the property and ran across a small yard and got up on a roof. A shot from his pursuers knocked off his hat and he left part of his clothing on a spiked gate as he climbed over, but he succeeded in escaping. He was the first of seven confrères who succeeded in escaping being murdered that day. In all, about thirty-five of the prisoners in Saint-Firmin escaped death, including seven who were officially spared.

The seven confreres were: Boullangier and Gaumer, already dealt with; Etienne de Langres, who was on the staff of the seminary. He sprained an ankle while getting over a wall but fortunately was picked up by a friendly man who gave him shelter; Philippe-Bernard Adam who had come to Paris in July 1789 in connection with a lawsuit and had remained on in Saint-Firmin ever since; he hid in a loft and on 3 September was by official decree given into the care of a gentleman, though the reason for this is not recorded; the three laybrothers of the Community, Louis Danois, Jean-Baptiste Ducroux, and one surnamed Leroy were able to

effect their escape, apparently because of their knowledge of the layout of the property.

The group of people who actually first broke into the seminary had the idea of turning some of the prisoners out into the street so that the mob there could finish them off, but surprisingly the mob indicated that they did not want to kill priests, so they were brought back inside. This group was led by a laborer-porter and they went into the hall which was being used as a refectory by the prisoners. The leader grabbed one of the priests and threw him out the window, and then the others set upon the rest of the prisoners, beating some of them to death with hunks of wood and dragging others out into the yard. Louis-Joseph, who had been making his preparations to get out (according to Boullangier) heard of the first killings and went in to the section of the building which he had let to the local civil administration in February. This was the ground-floor and first floor of the short leg of the L-shaped building, the part along the rue Saint Victor. He pleaded for the lives of the priests, but the officials were divided among themselves, according to Gabriel Perboyre: "The good he had done in the area, the reputation he had because of this, his exceptional even-temperedness, spoke in his favor and some members of the committee wanted to save him from death. But his writings against the oath were too well-known and had been so effective that the persecutors-in-chief had him specially marked out for their assassins."²² While the discussion was going on, some of the mob broke into the room and threw Louis-Joseph out of the window, either into the street or into the yard, depending on which window was used. On the ground he was finished off by a group of women with heavy wooden clubs used for pulverising plaster. As the massacre proceeded, others were thrown out from windows on all floors, some left dangling by their feet before being let drop.

²²*Annales de la CM*, vol. 73, pp. 665 ff.

On the ground there were the women with clubs already mentioned, and others with scissors who gouged out the eyes of some of those thrown out. Inside the seminary others were killed with sword-thrusts, while others who were thrown out the windows were caught on pikes by those below. The details of how they died are available for only six of the victims, including Louis-Joseph. Seventy-two were killed in Saint-Firmin that day, and the bodies were buried in different places of which no particulars are now known.

Misermont thinks that the September massacres were not spontaneous but were planned and organised by five or six persons, well-known to many. They organised and paid a band to carry them out, and, while a number of others joined in, the vast majority of the people of Paris were not involved.²³

Over the next few years there were some attempts to bring the guilty to justice, but, of the fifty or so arrested, only three were found guilty and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. The judges were reluctant to sentence those who were not the primary culprits. The latter were dead, or in exile, or simply safe in their homes.



Divine Providence is never wanting in things undertaken at Its command. Even though the whole world should rise up to destroy us, nothing could happen but what is pleasing to God.

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St. Vincent de Paul

²³Misermont, p. 214.

What do you think God asks of us? The body? Oh, not at all! What then? Our good will, a right good will to seize every opportunity of serving Him, even at the risk of our lives; we should have and should foster in ourselves this desire for martyrdom which God sometimes accepts as willingly as if we had actually suffered it.

St. Vincent de Paul



The greater the opposition to the affairs of God, the more happily also shall they succeed, provided our resignation and our confidence do not fall.

St. Vincent de Paul



Come, dear persecutions! Come, dear calumnies! Come, dear crosses sent from heaven! I propose to make good use of the visit you pay me, as messengers from God.

St. Vincent de Paul