

The Chapel of the Madeleine in Bordeaux, France

October 1st, 2017

The vicissitudes of history

In 1585, the plague carried off 14,000 Bordelais, a third of the inhabitants, and the entire religious community of the hospital. It took more than fifty years before a rich donor established a new convent and brought sisters from the Monastery of the "Reformed Daughters of Saint Magdalene" in Paris, known familiarly as *Madelonnettes*. Another donor contributed the construction of a chapel for the convent. On July 22, 1688, the feast of Saint



Façade of the Chapel of the Madeleine on Cours Pasteur with the statue of Blessed Chaminade by Callède, erected by Fr. Kramer

Mary Magdalene, the chapel was blessed and inaugurated by the Archbishop of Bordeaux. The sisters took care of women imprisoned by the courts. But the nuns, refusing to be secularized, were dispersed in 1790 by the Revolutionary authorities, the convent and the chapel sold as "national property," purchased by a merchant to serve as a warehouse for his goods.

When Napoleon, wanting to reconcile the French among themselves, enabled each parish to reopen a place of worship, the Church of Saint Eulalie was in such bad condition that it was unusable for almost a year. The Chapel of the Madeleine then served temporarily as the parish church.

When the Chapel of the Magdalene became available again, on August 14, 1804, Archbishop d'Aviau entrusted it to Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, to gather his sodalists there and to carry out his missionary activities. The next day, they celebrated there the Assumption of Mary.

The Great Chaminadian Times

The Chapel of the Madeleine became a radiant center, with the Sodality of young men, the Sodality of young women, the "Ladies of the Retreat" (a spiritual movement for married women), the Sodality of Fathers of Families. These Sodalities engaged in a variety of apostolates: the lending library of good books, a mission to the "little Auvergnats," in reality, to the streets, where the boys lived by chimney-sweeping, sometimes at the risk of their lives. There were also projects fostering literacy, catechism for young and old, clothing for poor children, a bakers' association, Ladies of the Mission, Christian Friends, Friends of Wisdom, visits to prisoners and sick people, preparation for the sacraments. . . .

A blow: in 1809, Napoleon abolished all the Marian Sodalities, including that of Bordeaux. Their activities did not resume until after the first abdication of the Emperor in 1814.

In 1816, the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate was born in Agen, with Adèle de Trenquelléon. That birth was followed by that of the Society of Mary, at the Madeleine in 1817.

King Louis XVIII erected the Chapel of the Madeleine as a relief chapel by order of September 29, 1819. Father Chaminade was then able to purchase the chapel and the adjacent convent, which were still owned by Citizen Lafarge.

The chapel then became the site of a "permanent mission": Sunday was the day of the Sodalists, with the morning Mass and preaching assured by Father Chaminade; then in the afternoon, an open meeting for all, an attractive catechesis for adults. The festivities proper to the Sodality were celebrated with great splendor: the Immaculate Conception, Saint Joseph, Our Lady of the Martyrs, the Holy Name of Mary. Throughout the week were held the weekly meetings, the retreats and the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

1830: July Revolution, very anti-clerical, which sounded the death knell of the Sodality. The chapel received a new orientation: morning masses and daily availability for confessions. This type of apostolate, with a few variants, remains until now.

Successions of Embellishments

A new altar, surmounted by a canopy, in 1830; renovation of the sanctuary, new tile, new pulpit, side altars, a large organ in the choir loft in 1835 ...

In 1902, the chapel and especially the "convent" were amputated by the creation of the Cours Pasteur.



Overview of the sanctuary of the Chapel of the Madeleine

In 1903, the law of confiscation of the goods of religious congregations: the chapel and the furniture, sold at public auction but redeemed by a subscription and reopened on the feast of All Saints' Day 1909.

In 1950, to celebrate the centenary of the death of Fr. Chaminade, a new entry was created for the chapel, a bronze statue of him was placed prominently in a niche that dominates the street.

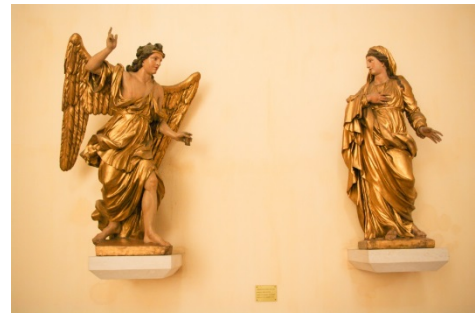
In 1978, in the aftermath of the Vatican Council, total renovation of the interior, with a new altar adapted to the post-conciliar liturgy.

In 2000, for the beatification of Fr. Chaminade, a new restoration, particularly successful: the blond Bordeaux stone revealed the beautiful balance of the nave; the restored side chapel of the *Madelonnettes* became the Chaminade Chapel, with an altar containing some first-class relics of the Founder.

An atmosphere of prayer and peace

When the faithful cross the threshold of the Chapel of the Madeleine, they are immediately enveloped in a peaceful atmosphere of beauty and harmony. They are welcomed by the beautiful statue of Our Lady of Victories, on the left side, and opposite it by the wooden statues acquired by Father Chaminade at the beginning of the Revolution, the Angel Gabriel and the humble servant Mary, and over the sanctuary a Christ on the cross, accompanied by Mary and Saint John.

If they penetrate further, to be welcomed by a priest in the Chaminade Chapel, also known as "Chapel of Confessions," they are in the company of Saint Joseph and his beautiful icon, and of Mary with "John the Theologian," and the icon of the Founder, before the tabernacle that evokes the Tables of the Law, and at the side of the altar the candles arranged like a "Burning Bush."



Annunciation in gilded wood, acquired by Blessed Chaminade at the beginning of the French Revolution



Altar of the Chaminade Chapel of the Madeleine, with first class relics (the skull) of Blessed Chaminade

Being in the heart of the city, the chapel is open most of the day, frequented by men and women of all kinds, mothers of families, academics, lawyers, white-collar and blue-collar workers, entrepreneurs, Blacks of the West Indies or sub-Saharan African countries, native-born or resident Aquitanians ... An on-going, quiet, discreet and prayerful apostolate that brings so many who have been wounded in life into a new path of hope.

Document prepared by B. Vial, sm