



STEPHEN  
LARIGAUDELLE  
DUBUISSON, S.J.  
(1786–1864)  
AND THE  
REFORM OF THE  
AMERICAN JESUITS

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Cornelius Michael Buckley, S.J.



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*Dedicated to the students, faculty, staff, alumni and  
benefactors of Thomas Aquinas College.*



We die with the dying:  
See, they depart, and we go with them.  
We are born with the dead:  
See, they return, and bring us with them.

T.S. Eliot,  
“Little Gidding,”  
*Four Quartets*



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# Acknowledgments

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According to Pascal, when writing a book the last thing one decides is what to put first. I have been working on this project on and off for a long time, ever since the late 1950s when I was a Jesuit scholastic [seminarian] studying at Les Fontaines, the erstwhile Jesuit theologate at Chantilly, France. Les Fontaines was a former Rothschild château, deeded shortly after World War II by that family to the Jesuits in recognition for the furtive aid the Jesuits had given to Jews during the Nazi occupation. High in rooms on the top floor of the château were stored the remnants of the famous archives of the Jesuit Province of Paris. As a result of the anti-clerical laws of 1880, the archives, the world-renowned library and the scholasticate were given refuge on the British island of Jersey, and there they remained until after World War II, when they were returned to France.

The newly appointed archivist at Les Fontaines was the well-known sinologist, Father Joseph Dehergne, S.J., himself a refugee from Communist China, and I was assigned to help him. He was doing his best to make the collection fit into a limited space. With admirable skill he had squeezed most of the holdings into tightly fitted slots between rows reminiscent of gangways in a World War II submarine, while pushing other valuable treasures into overloaded closets or piling them up in obscure nooks and crannies to await further attention. One day he handed me an armful of monographs dealing with French Jesuits who had come to the United States during the nineteenth century. “Take these. They are of more value to you than to us. Do something with them.” Over the years, I have published some of these manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> One holograph that remained has found a place in Chapter Nine of the present work.

So the first person I gratefully acknowledge for the publication of this book is Father Joseph Dehergne, who has long since gone to God. Along with him are the obliging librarians and archivists whom I have

consulted during the course of more than half a decade, and whose names I may have forgotten but whose interest and service I can never forget. Most of whom have undoubtedly by now followed the happy way of Father Dehergne. Particularly, I am indebted to the respective staffs at the following institutions: The Special Collections of Georgetown University; the Jesuit Archives in Rome and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Most especially I am indebted to my long-term friend, Robert Bonfils, S.J., the director of the Jesuit Archives, Vannes, France.

There are also a number of families in France and Italy who opened their private archives to my research, and a number of friends who have aided me in various ways: Father Joseph Fessio, S.J., Brother Daniel J. Peterson, S.J., archivist of the California Jesuit Province archives, Los Gatos, CA.; Eric Paul Ewin, Head Catalogue Librarian, Gleeson Library, University of San Francisco, and Rev. Thomas W. Franxman, S.J., adjunct professor of theology, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. A special thanks also to the unknown Jesuit who approved this manuscript for publication.

Probably the pages that follow would never have seen the light were it not for the prayers and encouragement of Ms. Caroline Lemon. Most assuredly, the book would never have been published without the advice and professional competence of Bridget (Mrs. John) Neumayr and Mr. Patrick Nichols, to whom I am ever gratefully indebted.

## Note

1. *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel: The Civil War Letters of Père Louis-Hippolyte Gache, S.J., 10th Louisiana Infantry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), *Nicolas Point, S.J.: His Life and Northwest Indian Chronicles* (Chicago: Loyola University Press 1989), *When Jesuits Were Giants: Louis-Marie Ruellan, S.J. (1846-1885) and Contemporaries* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999).

# Introduction

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This book is a serious historical study. It is also a story to be read by people who take little interest in footnotes and who make no pretense to be professional historians. The book has a twofold purpose. It is both a biography of Stephen Larigaudelle Dubuisson, a particular nineteenth-century Jesuit, and an account of the reform the American Jesuits went through during his lifetime. I have used him as a synecdoche of the elusive Ignatian Way, and as a point of departure for taking a look at what makes Jesuits and their institutions tick. The book also looks at how, during almost the first half of the nineteenth century, American Jesuits went through a torturous program of reform in their rediscovery of that Ignatian Way.

And what is the Ignatian Way? Like every other school of Catholic spirituality, it is a distinguishable spirit derived from the Living Word found in the gospel. Some saints have commented with a distinct accent, an identifiable tone, on specific parts of that gospel, and have urged their followers to implement this theme or that motif in organizational structures as a Way to God. This Ignatius did through his *Spiritual Exercises* and *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus, by the letters he wrote and by his way of life.

History indicates that the Ignatian Way has a chameleon-like ability to accommodate to hues of places and tones of time in order to achieve the end for which it exists—the Way to God for oneself and others. Ignatius wrote that the one who wishes to serve as a soldier under the standard of Christ should be open to adaptation, flexibility, inculturation.<sup>1</sup> But that can be dismissed as being vague or subjective. Are there no objective criteria to differentiate the pragmatic from the substantial in considering and implementing that Way? Indeed there are!

Three guides seem to serve as infallible tests to identify and gauge this authentic Ignatian spirit. Ignatius gave the first of these in the *Constitutions* when he defined how his men should act, mindful that motivations both conscious and subconscious have a way of undermining the best intentions.

All should make diligent efforts to keep their intention right, not only in regard to their state of life but also in all particular details. In these they should always aim at serving and pleasing the Divine Goodness for its own sake and for the incomparable love and benefits with which God has anticipated us, rather than fear of punishment or hope of rewards, although they ought to draw help also from them.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, those who choose to follow Ignatius' "Way to God" should avoid the temptation to make "adaptations" to principles in order to win or reach goals, however good these goals appear to be. The motives of those companions should be pure. Their primary goal is not to win, but to please God alone, to be at the service of neighbor, always joyful and ready to see authentic victory even in apparent failure.

Second. Even before St. Ignatius formed the Society of Jesus, he and his companions designated "special obedience to the sovereign pontiff in regard to the missions" as the "principle and foundation" of their group.<sup>3</sup> This bond, which constitutes an essential part of the Ignatian charism, is designed to unite those who follow the Ignatian Way through their unique witness to Christ within the hierarchical Church. That is the mission.

On this point, one of Ignatius' interpreters, the Jesuit St. Robert Bellarmine, wrote that all Catholics should be ready to obey "the Pope when determining anything in a doubtful manner, whether by himself or by his own particular Council, *whether it is possible for him to err or not.*" If this is true for the ordinary Catholic, it should pertain more especially to those who receive their mission and the specifics of that mission from the pope, through their superiors.<sup>4</sup>

Commenting on Bellarmine's position in 1878, Blessed John Newman added a codicil that should pertain particularly to those who follow the Ignatian Way.

[O]bedience to conscience, even supposing conscience to be ill-formed, tends to the improvement of our moral nature, and ultimately to our knowledge, so obedience to our ecclesiastical superior may subserve

our growth in illumination and sanctity, even though he should command what is extreme or inexpedient, or teach what is external to his legitimate province.<sup>5</sup>

In the pages that follow examples are given of policies and directives from superiors that can be classified as “extreme” or “inexpedient.” And yet when they were implemented, even embraced, an unexpected good at a later time—sometimes at a much later time—was realized. And conversely, when they were not followed so that some perceived unquestionable good could be attained, a greater evil resulted. In order to evaluate the present and map out the future with equilibrium, the question that must be kept in mind is: How did attitudes held and actions taken by the persons described in our chronicle “subserve” their own personal growth in illumination and sanctity, irrespective of the success or failure of their endeavors? And what do these dead show those who today identify themselves with the Ignatian Way?

Third. The Ignatian spirit is a missionary spirit. This feature follows directly from the two previously identified traits. Those who strive to follow the Ignatian Way are “sent” people in imitation of Christ. He Himself was sent by the Father, who in turn sent the apostles and then the seventy-two disciples to announce: “The Kingdom of God is very near you.” Matthew’s Gospel describes the prerequisites men and women must have in order to take on such a mission—confidence, poverty, mobility and joy.<sup>6</sup> For Ignatius, Mary, the mother of Jesus, incorporated these qualities in an exceptional manner, and therefore she is the model and preceptor of the type of poverty and availability needed to be sent.

There is no history more challenging, exciting and pertinent for understanding the contemporary Church than the history of this Ignatian “Way to God.” Somewhat like classic Western movies, it is a narrative full of white hats, black hats and frequent fade-outs into sunsets—only to reappear serial-like under the most unlikely circumstances. What seems to hold it all together is the imposing spirit of Ignatius of Loyola. One might make a comparison to François Mauriac’s observation about the spirit of Blaise Pascal. That spirit, he wrote, was such a powerful force that it could not be contained by the structures of Jansenism; it overflowed the levies of this sect and “like a river it flowed underground across the century of Voltaire and Condorcet only to reappear with greater power” in the twentieth century. He concludes: “After three centuries, Blaise Pascal is alive, involved in our quarrels today.”<sup>7</sup>

Could not the same be said of the genius of Ignatius and his spirit, a spirit that is contained in, but not limited to, the Society of Jesus? For example, in 1948, Mother Teresa of Calcutta branched off from the Loreto Sisters, founded by Mary Ward in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to live out the Ignatian ideal, to bring about the Missionaries of Charity. The charism of both the sisters and the priests of her group attest to the vitality and adaptability of the Ignatian spirit to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> And Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity are not unique.

The later part of John Paul II's pontificate became the seedbed for "New Movements" that have sprung up through the Church like the luxuriant flowering of a meadow after a frosty winter. Cannot we trace much of "John Paul's youth" to the "Ignatian Way"?

During an almost fifty-year period of the nineteenth century Stephen Dubuisson and the men and women one meets in the following pages presumed that they had discerned and lived out faithfully this Ignatian Way. Today some might judge them worthy of praise; others might see them as self-deluded interpreters of Loyola, unenlightened, quaint and even silly. During the course of his long life, Dubuisson could have floated easily in and out of a number of these categories and be judged accordingly. And if this was true for Dubuisson, could it not be true for many of his contemporaries?

With the passage of time, red-hot passions tend to cool; what was once a matter of vital importance easily morphs into something inconsequential so that one-time controversial questions can be looked at coldly, dispassionately from different sides. Isn't that also the way of postmortems? Postmortems do not pretend to account for motives that govern conduct, but they do give causes for death and decay. And so it is with the men and women who appear in our story. They show how little posterity, with its own prejudices and biases, is able to judge with accuracy the ideals and actions of those who lived and died within the confines of a distinctive time and culture, even when they acted with the purest motives and the loftiest principles. The result of their actions is a matter the reader can decide, and fortunately Stephen Dubuisson, who was a prolific commentator on a vast array of subjects, can aid in this process.

A few months before Dubuisson died, the superior general of the Society of Jesus wrote him an encouraging letter in which he made a promise about the fate of the dying man's collection of assorted monographs: "I am going to do my best to collect those precious materials that

you did not have time to put your hand to. . . . Some happy day they shall prove useful to others A.M.D.G.”<sup>9</sup> As for myself, I hope that a century and a half later the following pages will help to see dawn that happy day. A.M.D.G.

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## Notes

1. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, translated by Louis J. Puhl, S.J., (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1951), [136-147] 78-81.
2. ———, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, translated by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), [288] 165.
3. *Ibid.*, [238] 238.
4. Cited in John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame: UND Press, 1989), 86.
5. *Ibid.*, 87.
6. Matthew, 10: 1-42.
7. François Mauriac, *Les Pages immortelles de Pascal, choisies et expliquées* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1941), 26.
8. Mary Ward (1585-1645): Emmanuel Orchard, *Till God's Will: Mary Ward: Through Her Writings* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985). Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, alias Blessed Mother Teresa (1910-1997): Mother Teresa, *Come Be My light*, edited by Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007).
9. ASJR, Prov Tolos. 1, 1852-1863, Beckx to Dubuisson, Rome, March 14, 1863, 470.



# Abbreviations

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## Archives

AAB	Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Baltimore, MD.
AB	Archives de Bissy. Château de Gury, France. Private archives of the de Maistre family.
AN	Archives nationales, Paris.
APF	Archives of the Propaganda Fide, Rome.
ASJE	Jesuit Archives of the English Province, London.
ASJF	Archives de la Compagnie de Jésus, Vanves, France.
ASJI	Jesuit Archives of the Irish Province, Dublin.
ASJR	Archivi Societatis Jesu, Rome.
ASSP	Archives de la Société de Saint-Sulpice, Paris.
BN	Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.
JAGU	Jesuit Archives, Special Collections, Georgetown University, Washington D.C

## Journals and Books

<i>ACHRd</i>	<i>United States Catholic Historical Society, Historical Records and Studies.</i> 29 Vols. Philadelphia: U.S. Catholic Historical Society, 1887-1912.
<i>ADP</i>	Pfülf, Otto. <i>Die Anfänge Der Deutschen Provinz Der Neu Entstandeum Gesellschaft Jesu.</i> Freiburg: Gebundene Ausbe, 1922.
<i>AHSI</i>	<i>Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu.</i> Roma: 1932 - .
<i>AO</i>	<i>Acies Ordinata: Ephmerides Congregationem Marianarum.</i> (English edition). 36 vols. Roma: 1924-1996.

- BHG** Curran, Robert Emmett. *The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. 1993.
- BLK** Wurzbach, Constantin. *Biographisches des Lexicon des Kaiserthums Österreich . . .* 60 vols. Wien: L.C. Zawarski, 1865-1923.
- BSJ** Sommervogel, S.J., Carlos. *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus. Première Partie*. 9 vols. Paris: A. Picard. 1890-32.
- Cath** Mathon, G. et al. *Catholicisme, hier et aujourd'hui*. 13 Vols. Paris. Letouzey et Ané. 1848.
- CE** Charles G. Hebermann et al., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 16 vols. New York: Encyclopedia Press 1907-1914.
- CHR** *Catholic Historical Review*. 86 vols. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press. 1915 - .
- CIP** Darrah, David, *Conspiracy in Paris: The Strange Career of Joseph Picot de Limoelan, Aristocrat, Soldier and Priest, and the Gunpowder Plot Against Napoleon on 3 Nivôse, Year IX (December 24, 1800)*. New York: Exposition Press, 1953.
- CJF** Burnichon, Joseph, *La Compagnie de Jésus en France: Histoire d'un siècle, 1814, 1914*. 3 vols. Paris. G. Beauchesne. 1914.
- DAB** *Dictionary of American Biography*, 20 vols, New York: Scribners, 1928-1938.
- DBF** Balteau, J., M. Barroux and M. Prévost. *Dictionnaire de Biographie française*. 19 vols. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1933.
- DBI** *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani 57 vols. Roma: Istituto Della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960 - .*
- DCR** Bricout, J. *Dictionnaire Pratique des Connaissances Religieuses*. 8 vols. Paris: Letouzey, 1926.
- DHCJ** O'Neill, Charles E, S.I and Joaquín M. Domínguez, S.I. Eds. *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*. 4 Vols. Roma: Institutum Historicum, S.I., 2001.
- DHGE** Baudrillart, Alfred. Ed., *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie Ecclésiastiques*. 10 vols. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1912 - .

- DIP* Guerrino Pelliccia, Giovanni and Giancarlo Rocca. Eds. *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*. 8 Vols. Roma: Edizione Paolini, 1962 – .
- DMRFC* Maguer, Jean-Marie and Yves-Marie Hilaire. Eds. *Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France Contemporaine*. 7 vols. Paris: Beauchesne, 1985 – .
- DS* Viller, Marcel, André Rayez, and A. Derville. Eds. *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*. 14 vols. Paris: Beauchesne, 1937-1995.
- DTC* Manigenot, Vincent A. and É. Mann. *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1931-1967.
- EJF* Delattre, Pierre. Ed. *Les Établissements des Jésuites en France depuis quatre siècles*. 5 vols. Enghien, Belgium: De Meestre, 1949-57.
- EIPR* DeJonge, Ludivicus et alii. Eds. *Epistolae Ioannis Phil. Roothaan, 1785-1853*, 5 vols. Romae: Apud Postulatulorum Generalem, S.I., [1935]-1940.
- GDU*. Larousse, Pierre. *Grand dictionnaire universel du xixe siècle, français, historique, géographique, mythologique, bibliographique, littéraire, artistique, scientifique, etc.* 18 vols. Paris: Librairie Larousse. 1866-1890. (*Nouvelle Larousse*. 7 vols. (1898-1905).
- HSJNA* Hughes, Thomas. S.J. *History of the Society of Jesus in North America, Colonial and Federal*. 3 vols. in 4. New York: Longmans and Green, 1907-1917.
- JCP* Hanley, Thomas O'Brien, editor. *The John Carroll Papers*. 3 vols. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press. 1976.
- JLG* Koch, Ludwig. *Jesuiten-Lexikon. Die Gesellschaft Jesu einst und jetzt*. 2 vols. Patterborn: Verlag Bonafacius-Druckerei. 1934.
- KD* Kosch, Wilhelm. *Das Katholische Deutschland Biographisch-Bibliographisches Lexicon*. 2 vols. Augsburg: Hass und Grabherr, 1933-1939.
- LTJC* Guilday, Peter. *Life and Times of John Carroll, Archbishop of Baltimore, 1735-1815*. 2 vols. New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1922.
- MHSI* *Monumenta Historica Societas Iesu*, 154 vols. Romae: MHSI, 1898 – .

- NHV* *Guidée, Achille. Notices historiques sur quelques membres de la Société des Pères du Sacré-Cœur et de Compagnie de Jésus, pour faire suite à la vie du R.P. Varin. 2 vols. Paris: Charles Douniol, 1860.*
- PFA* *Kenneally, Finbar. United States Documents in the Propaganda Fidei Archives. 12 vols. Washington: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1966 – .*
- RAPC* *Recherches autour de Pierre de Clorivière. Actes du colloque public des 18 et 19 octobre 1991. Paris: S.I.P.S., 1993.*
- REM* *Darcel, Jean-Louis. Revue des études Maistriennes. 13 vols. Paris: Les Belles Lettres. 1975-1997.*
- RJ* *Lighthart, C.J., S.J. The Return of the Jesuits: The Life of Jan Philip Roothaan. Translated by Jan Slijkerman, S.J. London: T. Shand, 1978.*
- Speil* *Speil, Ferdinand. P. Léonor Franz von Tournély, und die Gesellschaft des heiligsten Herzens Jesu. Breslau: G.-P. Aderholz, 1874.*
- Vie* “Vie d’une famille de 1840 à 1861 d’après les Correspondances Maistre (archives de Biszy),” a 336-paged typed manuscript of selected letters written by members of the de Maistre family between 1840 and 1861 contained in AB.
- WL* *Woodstock Letters. 98 vols. Woodstock MD: Woodstock College Press: 1872-1969.*

# Chapter One

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## 1786-1791: A Cauldron of Horrors

### The Pillar and his Post

“Before us he stands . . .  
his way of life is not like other men’s,  
the paths he treads are unfamiliar.”  
(Wisdom, 2:13,15).

Stephen Larigaudelle Dubuisson died at the Jesuit novitiate in Pau, France, on August 14, 1864. He was buried simply, without any eulogy.<sup>1</sup> Had custom allowed for an oration in honor of this dead Jesuit, the eulogist, after reciting the customary platitudes, may well have mentioned that during the course of his seventy-eight years Dubuisson enjoyed delicate health. He would not have had to remind his hearers— young novices and a scattering of old, retired fathers and brothers—that in 1864 seventy-eight years was a long time to enjoy (or suffer!) any kind of health. If the eulogist had known Père Dubuisson well, and probably he would have scarcely known him at all, he might have relied on a series of paradoxes to capture the unique spirit of the dead man. Dubuisson seems to have wandered through a labyrinth of contradictions, sometimes tragic, sometimes heroic and sometimes whimsical to the point of being absurd, as the following pages will show.

On the other hand, there were those who thought they did know Dubuisson; they learned they scarcely knew him at all.

One such man was Father John Etheridge, the English Assistant to the Jesuit general in Rome.<sup>2</sup> In 1856 he wrote Father Dubuisson a letter to say that a research of the correspondence of the former Jesuit general,

Jan Roothaan, revealed that he, Dubuisson, “was for many years the Chief Pillar of the American Mission.” Although Roothaan was no second Ignatius, he is considered the second founder of the Society of Jesus, the man who successfully reinstated discipline and the Ignatian spirit throughout the order after its restoration in 1814. Thus one occupying the position of “Chief Pillar of the American Mission” carried a mighty responsibility indeed.<sup>3</sup>

When he wrote his letter, Etheridge was accountable to the whole society for that antinomian daughter, the far-away, discordant Mission - and after 1833 - Province of Maryland. Reading the faded words today, one can detect an all-but-silent sigh as the author of the letter shared confidences with his correspondent about the province: “Would that your health had permitted you still to remain there and support it by your counsels.”<sup>4</sup>

Certainly there was no indication at the time of Stephen Dubuisson’s birth that the cloak of greatness would one day be laid upon his shoulders. There was no reason to suppose he would become a colossus in the reestablishment of the Society of Jesus in the United States after 1814. Much less was there any hint that he would be credited with playing so important a role in redefining the Ignatian spirit in North America. There the Ignatian spirit seemed to have become but a faded palimpsest of what had been constructed, first by Spaniards; next by Frenchmen and then by the English: Juan Baptista de Segura and his fellow martyrs in 1556; Jean de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues and their companions in 1625 and Andrew White in 1634.<sup>5</sup>

## **Saint-Domingue (Haiti) and the La Rigaudelle Dubuisson Family**

“We rich men count our felicity and happiness to live in superfluities and not in those necessary things.”  
(Scopas Thessaly in Plutarch, *On the love of Wealth*).

There is no record of when the first Larigaudelle Dubuisson—or de La Rigaudelle du Buisson, as the name was sometimes written—came to Saint-Domingue, modern-day Haiti. Possibly as early as the seventeenth century, but most certainly before 1716, the year the parish and town of Saint-Marc were founded, the family was well established in the colony.<sup>6</sup>

During the following six years of the colony's rapid expansion, Saint-Marc had grown to become the principal port for the Artibonite, that arid central valley that runs east to west encasing the island's longest river, also called the Artibonite, which begins in the Spanish-speaking Santo Domingo and empties into the Gulf of Gonâve. The valley's soil and climate were ideal for growing tobacco, rice, sugar, indigo and cotton. The La Rigaudelle du Buisson family owned two *habitations* or plantations in the Laretibur district of the parish on which there were nine separate clusters of buildings. Five of these served as factories, where raw cotton was baled and stored, and four where the first stages of dye processing from indigo plants took place. The smaller plantation was on the riverbank, attended by docks and ramshackle warehouses. It stood sentinel over two of the largest factories, which combined business offices and manufacturing facilities. This group of buildings seemed to awaken from a lazy sleep only during the harvest and shipping seasons. The larger plantation was more isolated, having a commanding view of the valley and the sloping fields where teams of the family's slaves labored.<sup>7</sup>

The family's chief residence was the townhouse, 55 rue Dauphine, in the very center of Saint-Marc, and it was here on October 29, 1786, that Étienne (Stephen), the second son of Sieur Anne-Joseph-Sylvestre de La Rigaudelle du Buisson and Dame Marie-Elizabeth-Louise Poirier, made his entrance into the world,<sup>8</sup> and was promptly turned over to one of the house slaves who would serve as his wet nurse.<sup>9</sup> The fact that the child survived was in itself remarkable. According to a contemporary source, "either out of revenge on the part of black wet nurses, who would often poison their nurslings, or because of the climate," infant mortality among white children was high. "One sees very few white children in the colony who are not either puny, sickly or otherwise debilitated" was the observation of this same source.<sup>10</sup> Both of young Étienne's parents would have been considered fortunate for they had overcome the obstacles to reaching the adulthood that was denied so many of their peers. Étienne's father was born in the parish of Saint-Marc in 1748; his mother at Port Dauphin, in the northeastern part of the island, where her father, a supervisor of the city of Cap Haïtien, was likewise a large landowner.<sup>11</sup>

Like his parents, the newborn's godparents were Creoles, that is, native whites born in the colony. They belonged to the class of *grands blancs*, members of the high-ranking military and civil strata, most of

whom were also Creoles—planters, rich merchants, financiers—all of pure European blood. The social, economic and political conditions of this class give a hint of the world, with all of its complexities, into which the child was born. As a class, the *grands blancs* were careful to distance themselves from the *petits blancs*—laborers, farmers, lower middle class tradesmen—and on the lowest rung, what might correspond to “white trash” in the antebellum American South.<sup>12</sup>

Ostensibly, for the defense of the colony and the welfare of its inhabitants, the *grands blancs* had been authorized to form a type of *milice* or militia, which was culled exclusively from members of their own caste and was organized into regiments of infantry and cavalry. Influenced by the ideas that led to the American Revolution of 1776, many of the officers of the *milice* were imbued with aspirations of self-rule for their native island. Indeed, they stood up to the troops from France in 1779, and in 1790 they were in open revolt against the army of the imprisoned Louis XVI.

During the decade before Étienne’s birth many *grands blancs* had grown enormously rich and, in these fading days of the Age of the Enlightenment, they shared with the continental *philosophes* tastes, prejudices and grievances. The *grands blancs* of Saint-Marc had built a garishly ornamented theatre where local and mainland-imported actors and musicians performed. The architectural style of the theatre stood as a symbol of the tastes of those who frequented it, and the stage presentations that entertained its audiences were more often than not either thinly veiled lampoons against existing institutions or bold demands for alterations of the mercantilist policies of Versailles. More than fifty journals and reviews were published on the island. Most of these ranted against taxation, trade restrictions, administrative entanglements, and the bungling policies of the colonial government. A small number of periodicals bemoaned the loss of vision and morale among the leading families of the colony. All were superficially read by a population whose education, refined tastes, and moral fiber were in no way parallel to its lust for wealth, power and pleasure.

Étienne de La Rigaudelle du Buisson’s godfather, after whom the infant was named, was François-Étienne Théard, the lieutenant governor of the French Crown at Saint-Marc. As such, he was in principle a loyal functionary of the court at Versailles. The infant’s godmother was his own paternal grandmother, the widowed Dame Anne Marlet de La Rigaudelle du Buisson, who had retired to Nantes in France to live the

rest of her days in an atmosphere of civility and luxury. Her proxy at the ceremony was a family neighbor and close relative, Dame Elizabeth Raffineau, whose husband, like the baby's father, was an officer in the *milice*.<sup>13</sup> If there were any political or philosophical tensions between the participants at the christening ceremony, they were minor and unstated. For all external appearances, in 1786 Saint-Domingue was at relative peace, conscious of being France's richest colony, an opulent pearl of an island, washed by currents of abundance, prosperity, industry and luxury. At the same time, even at that date, one would not have had to be a keen observer to note that the colony was threatened by a legacy of class, caste, and color that gave it the social components of a powder keg and the moral consistency of an overripe banana.

Creole men who could afford it often sent their wives and children to France. There the "foreign" children had to endure the mockery of their classmates, while the guests of Creole women like Dame Anne Marlet, were not above attending their dazzling soirées and all of the time secretly despising them for flaunting newly acquired wealth. In France and the Indies the loose sexual mores of Creole men were considered excessive—even by eighteenth-century norms, which were not reputed rigid for moral behavior. Although not openly mentioned in Saint-Domingue's polite society, men having Negro and mixed-blood mistresses had been taken for granted for more than a century. The result was that by the year of Stephen Dubuisson's birth, another social caste, the *gens de couleur*, many of whom had been recently manumitted, had increased considerably compared with the modest increment among the *grands* and *petits blancs*. Wedged between the *grands blancs*, whom they despised but emulated, and the *petits blancs*, whom they resented and held in contempt, the *gens de couleur* were subjected to discrimination and repression, sometimes even by their own white half-brothers and sisters. They had their own *milice*, and many had fortunes and slaves; yet none had the legal, political and social equality enjoyed by the whites. But it was the black-slave caste that constituted the largest group in Saint-Domingue. Some authors go so far as to say that in the year Stephen Dubuisson was born, 27,000 new African slaves were transported to the island where nine out of ten people were already slaves.<sup>14</sup> So the tinder was there; all that was needed was the spark to set off a conflagration.

As so often happens in history, a syndrome of events thousands of miles from where the explosion would occur began to flare up shortly after Étienne's birth. This combination of occurrences caused the devas-

tation of Saint-Domingue and forever altered the fortune of the Larigaudelle Dubuisson family. The first incident occurred in February 1788, when a small group of *philosophes* gathered together in far-off Paris to form a philanthropic society dedicated to abolishing Negro slavery and the slave trade in all French possessions. They named their organization the *Société des Amis des Noirs*. To counterbalance this growing influence of the abolitionist movement, a paltry number of *grands blancs* living in France met in the Paris townhouse of the Marquis de Massiac, a Saint-Marc neighbor of the Dubuissons, to form the *Société Correspondante des Colons Français*, better known as the Club Massiac. But in just one year's time, the *Amis des Noirs* counted almost 150 members, among whom were the Comte de Mirabeau, the Marquis de Lafayette, the Marquis de Condorcet, the Abbé Grégoire, Bishop de Loménie de Brienne, and a number of others whose stars would rise during the Jacobin republic. Meanwhile, the Club Massiac was easily dismissed as being representative of a dying society, and even in Saint-Domingue its members were disparaged by the planter families, who were becoming more interested in establishing themselves as an aristocracy in control of the colony's political and economic interests, separate from French interference. Joseph-Sylvestre de La Rigaudelle du Buisson identified himself with this Creole faction.

The second incident took place at Versailles in October 1789, some five months after the Estates General convened there. At this date the newly formed National Assembly recognized all property-owning, free-born *gens de couleur* in the Indies to be equal to whites. The new criterion was property, not class, not race. The *grands blancs* felt themselves betrayed. During the following months, the various classes in Saint-Domingue began to react to the radicalization of the revolution on the mainland. The island's governor called for an election of representatives from the white population to draw up a constitution for the island colony. This body met in Saint-Marc in early 1790, and for all practical purposes it declared itself free from the National Assembly and answerable only to the king. In October that same year, a Paris-educated patriot of mixed blood who had close connections with the *Amis des Noirs* and the National Assembly, led a revolt on the island that was crushed with terrible cruelty. By this date the *grands blancs* families were beginning to turn their plantation homes and townhouses into fortresses, from which they dared to leave only during daylight hours. In the following August, after months of tension, the situation took a radical turn: 50,000 slaves rose

up under the leadership of a priest and set the northern part of the island afire. Thousands of whites and *gens de couleur* were put to death in a manner unprecedented in modern history. The few thousand Creoles, wealthy *gens de couleur*, and *petits blancs* who managed to survive, appealed to the mainland for help. But it was not until September 1792 that an abolitionist Jacobin army arrived proclaiming conditional emancipation for all slaves. By this date France had become a republic and almost all of the whites and many of the *gens de couleur* had left the island for an uncertain fate in the blood-soaked mainland of Revolutionary France or on the more peaceful shores of the Spanish colonies or in towns of the newly formed United States. In August 1794, the government of Robespierre, much to the consternation of the *gens de couleur* and the whites who remained, confirmed the 1792 proclamation. More emigration ensued.<sup>15</sup>

## Separation, Exile and Dysfunction in France during The Terror

“Before I formed you in the womb  
I knew you.  
(Jeremiah, 1:5).

In a letter he wrote in 1833, Stephen Dubuisson stated, “We left Saint-Domingue in 1791, before the troubles” that resulted from the emancipation of the slaves.<sup>16</sup> This naked detail solves one problem without offering solutions to others arising in its wake. In December 1791, Stephen’s mother died and in the following May, his forty-five-year-old father remarried a woman thirteen years his junior. Her name was Adélaïde-Marie Favereau, a native of Saint-Nicolas, a small town in the parish of Saint-Marc, and it was from this union that more daughters were born.<sup>17</sup> We can only conclude that, either before their mother’s death, Stephen’s father took his young boys back with him to France and then returned to Saint-Domingue,<sup>18</sup> or, while he and the boys’ mother remained in Saint-Marc, he had someone else—possibly the children’s uncle and his wife—escort them to Nantes, in March or April 1791.<sup>19</sup> In either case the boys never saw their mother again, and there is no record of when they were reunited with their father. It was a separation that could have lasted another seven years for it seems that Sieur Anne-Joseph-Sylvestre may have played a conspicuous role in the Haitian wars until 1798.<sup>20</sup> For

young Dubuisson it was also a turning point in his life. The separation from his parents and the adjustment to a new environment must have been a traumatic experience for the five-year-old boy, who claimed later that he had vivid nightmares of life in Saint-Domingue along with memories of the horror of the Revolution in his adopted home.<sup>21</sup>

The year 1792 was also the turning point in the history of France. The extremists had taken control of the Assembly in April and promptly declared the war that would last until 1815. By September the Revolutionary armies were routed on the eastern frontier, the monarchy had fallen, over one thousand people were slaughtered in Paris and the republic had been established. But reports of these far-off events did not touch the Larigaudelle Dubuisson children. The challenge of simply remaining alive must have been their chief concern. The following year brought hostilities to their doorstep. Nantes, a city of 80,000 people, was first occupied by the Vendéan-Breton Catholic Royal Army. After its defeat, local radicals, the *Marats*, seized control of the city and in a frenzy of apocalyptic abandon proceeded to cow all opposition into quiescence. From September 1793 to May 1794, the city, whose wealth was due in great part to the commerce of Negro slaves, witnessed horrors unknown since the conquest of Gaul by Caesar. Unable to dispatch victims fast enough, the violent insurgents crammed barges with chained ordinary citizens, picked up indiscriminately. Then, through an ingenious system of trapdoors, hundreds of them were dropped to the bottom of the Loire. When the decaying bodies of these *noyades* were washed to shore they caused a cloud of pestilence to infect the beleaguered city, and the stench of rotting corpses lingered on as a reminder of the price of defiance.

Would it be an exaggeration to conclude that, even after the eidetic memories of horrendous scenes on both sides of the Atlantic had blurred, a permanent scar of fear and unarticulated anxiety stayed branded on Stephen Dubuisson's psyche? An affirmative answer would help better understand his reactions to events he was destined to face later in life. His obituary notes in its staid Latin prose that he was a comely lad, a detail unusual in Jesuit obituaries; it neglects to say that from his earliest years his personality had been permanently wounded.<sup>22</sup> Then there were his brothers. The younger one, Noël-Marie, died in early adulthood and the elder, Joseph, suffered from an unstable personality. One of Joseph's teenage sons committed suicide and another went mad during the Paris Commune of 1870.<sup>23</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Reflecting on his early background and on his family's emotional malfunctions, it is incredible that Dubuisson would have developed into the reputed pillar of the Society of Jesus in America, the man that Roothaan relied upon to implement the Ignatian spirit among the troublesome Jesuits of Maryland. But there were other components that intervened in a decisive way shortly after his arrival in France that affected his character. These factors intensified as he entered adolescence and adulthood, providing within him a bedrock of intellectual and spiritual values. The following chapter will give a panoramic view of these catalytic agents, so essential for understanding Stephen Dubuisson at the time of the reestablishment of the Society of Jesus and development of the Ignatian spirit in the United States.

## Notes

1. "P. Stephanus Dubuisson" *Necrologium Provinciae Tolosanae, 1864*. Toulouse: 1864, 58-59.
2. John Etheridge (b. Redmarley, Worcester, England, January 27, 1811; d. Liverpool, December 21, 1882).
3. Jan Roothaan (b. Amsterdam, November 23, 1785; d. Rome, May 8, 1853): *EIPR*; *RJ*; *DHCJ*, 2:1665-1671.
4. ASJF, "Dubuisson," Q 9 53. John Etheridge to Stephen Dubuisson, Rome, December, n.d., 1856.
5. Juan Baptista Segura (b. Alcalá, c.1530; d. Ajacán Mission [present state of Virginia], February 4, 1571): *DHCJ*, 4:3549-3550; Clifford M. Lewis, S.J. and Albert J. Loomis, S.J. eds., *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1570-1572* (Richmond: VHS Press, 1953). William B. Hill, *The Indians of Axacan and the Spanish Martyrs: The Beginnings of Virginia, 1570* (Clarksville, VA: Prestwould House, 1970); Frank Marotti, Jr., "Juan Baptista Segura and the Failure of the Florida Jesuit Mission," *The Florida Quarterly*, 43 (1985): 267-279. Jean de Brébeuf (b. Condé-sur-Vire, Basse Normandie, March 25, 1593; d. Saint-Marie, Heronia, Canada, March 17, 1649), Isaac Jogues (b. Orléans, June 10, 1607; d. near present day Auriesville, New York, October 18, 1644) and six of their Jesuit companions were canonized saints by the Catholic Church and are known as the North American Martyrs. François Roustang, S.J., *Jesuit Missionaries to North America: Spiritual Writings, Biographical Sketches*, trans. Sister M. Renelle, S.S.N.D (San Francisco: Ignatius,

2006). Andrew White (b. London, June 13, 1579; d. London, December 27, 1656): With two Jesuit companions he accompanied the Lord Baltimore expedition to Maryland in 1634. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 vols (New York: McGraw, 1967), 14:892; *DHCJ*, 4:403.

6. ASJF, "Dubuisson," Q 9 53, Fond-Colombe, May 17, 1844. In this memo Stephen Dubuisson recorded the following details about his origins: "My father told us that the paternal side of our family (La Rigaudelle) originally came from the Agen region." Agen is a city in the present *département* of Lot-et-Garonne, and before the Revolution of 1789 it was in the province of Aquitaine. "We were of the nobility," he concluded, "And we had a coat of arms."

7. BN, *Liste des propriétaires-colons de Ste-Domingue qui ont fourni certificats de résidence conformément aux lois des 25 août et 20 décembre 1792. Paroisse numéro 27, Saint-Marc, 227-28*; Gabriel Debien, "Les projets d'un ancien planteur canonnier de Saint-Domingue [Joseph La Rigaudelle Dubuisson];" *Revue d'histoire des colonies*, 41 (1954): 83-102. A "parish" was, as it is to this day in Louisiana, a civil administration division corresponding to an American county. In one of the great battles of the War of Independence, Cristophe defeated the French on what was the Dubuisson plantation in Saint-Marc, *Thomas Madiou, Histoire d'Haïti* (Port-au-Prince: Deschamps, 1985-1991), 4:227.

8. AN, 5 Mi 27. "Registres d'état civil" (*naissances*): E-1. *Saint-Domingue-Saint-Marc 1782-1788*, 5 Mi, 20 à 100, February 4, 1787. This baptismal certificate gives October 29, 1786 as Stephen's date of birth and February 4, 1787 as the date of his baptism.

9. *Ibid.*, December 12, 1791. On this day an infant daughter of Joseph-Sylvestre Dubuisson was buried in the cemetery of Saint-Marc. The priest noted that soon after she was born she was handed over to a wet nurse. This practice seems to have been the custom in Saint-Domingue, and so presumably Stephen was treated in the same way.

10. Jean Marion, "Un Nantais à Saint-Domingue (1756-1792)," *Bulletin de la Société archiologique de Nantes*, 78 (1938): 122.

11. AN, "Registres d'état-civil": Saint-Domingue, 5 Mi 20 à 100, "Saint-Marc, 1782-1788" (marriages): Joseph-Sylvestre de La Rigaudelle du Buisson was born in Saint-Marc on July 6, 1750. *Ibid.*, E 1 21. Marie-Elizabeth-Louise Poirier, was born date unknown at Port Dauphin. Joseph-Sylvestre died near Nantes, April 30, 1836. ASJR, Maryl. 5 8 15. Stephen Dubuisson to Jan Roothaan, Munich, May 22, 1836.

12. The description of Saint-Domingue or Haiti that follows is taken from a number of secondary sources that include Robert Debs Heintz, Jr. and Nancy Gordon Heintz, *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1995*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 1-61; Jonathan Brown, *The History and Present Condition of St. Domingo*, (Philadelphia: W. Marshall & Co. 1837),

1:132-266; Martin Ros, *Night of Fire. The Black Napoleon and the Battle for Haiti*. Trans. Karen Ford-Treep, (New York: Sharpedon, 1994), 1-67. An excellent description of the social and economic classes is given in Blanche Maurel, *Saint-Domingue et la Révolution française. Les représentants des colons en France de 1789 à 1795*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1944).

13. AN, 5 Mi, 27. “*Registres d’état civil (naissances)*; E-1, *Saint-Domingue-Saint-Marc, 1782-1788*,” February 4, 1787.

14. Heintl and Heintl, *Written in Blood*, 25. Contemporary experts of Saint-Domingue prior to the Revolution of 1789 were not in agreement about the colony’s total population, much less on the breakdown of the races. Jean Marion, “*Un Nantais à Saint-Domingue*,” 122. That disagreement seems to persist among modern scholars.

15. For an overall description of the events that took place in Saint-Domingue between 1789-1792, see Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d’Haïti*, 1:45-173.

16. ASJR, Maryl 3 8 41. Dubuisson to Roothaan, Philadelphia, October 30, 1833, 4.

17. AN, E1-1670. “*État civil, Saint-Dominigue: Saint-Marc, 1791*.” Table; *Ibid.*, December 15, 1791; E1-21 (Marriages), May 23, 1792; E1-49. (Naissances), A Dubuisson girl, Adelaïde, was born, 21 Florial An II (May 10, 1793).

18. ASJF, Dub. Q 9 53, Memo, May 17, 1844. According to one source, which is not reliable, the family settled first in Marseilles and then in Nantes. *WL* 19 (1890): 167.

19. In 1842 Dubuisson made mention of “an old uncle of mine (an honorary inspector of the University) and his wife, who always loved me as my own mother and father [did settle in Mareilles].” ASJR, Dub. 1 3, Dubuisson to Roothaan, Marseilles, April 30, 1842. This “second father to me,” died the following year. *Ibid.* 1 16. Dubuisson, Beaumesnil, to Roothaan, September 2, 1843.

20. Madiou, *Histoire d’Haïti*, 2:159.

21. ASJR, Maryl. 3 8 4. Stephen Dubuisson to Luigi Fortis, Georgetown, April 22, 1826, 4.

22. P. Stephanus Dubuisson, “*Necrologium*.”

23. AN, “*Registres d’état-civil. Saint-Domingue. (Naissances)*, 5 Mi, 20 à 100. “*Saint-Marc, 1782-1788*.” Joseph-Marie (b. May 6, 1786); Noël-Marie (b. March 27, 1788).

