

Louis-Joseph François

- * Born in 1751 in northern France, the son of a farmer
- * Joined the **Congregation of the Mission** when he finished his secondary education
- * Worked in **seminaries as professor and superior**
- * In 1786, at the end of the 15th General Assembly, he was appointed **Secretary General**
- * Famous as a **preacher**; some of his sermons were printed and published. When he spoke at the Tuesday Conferences more than the usual number of priests came to hear him.

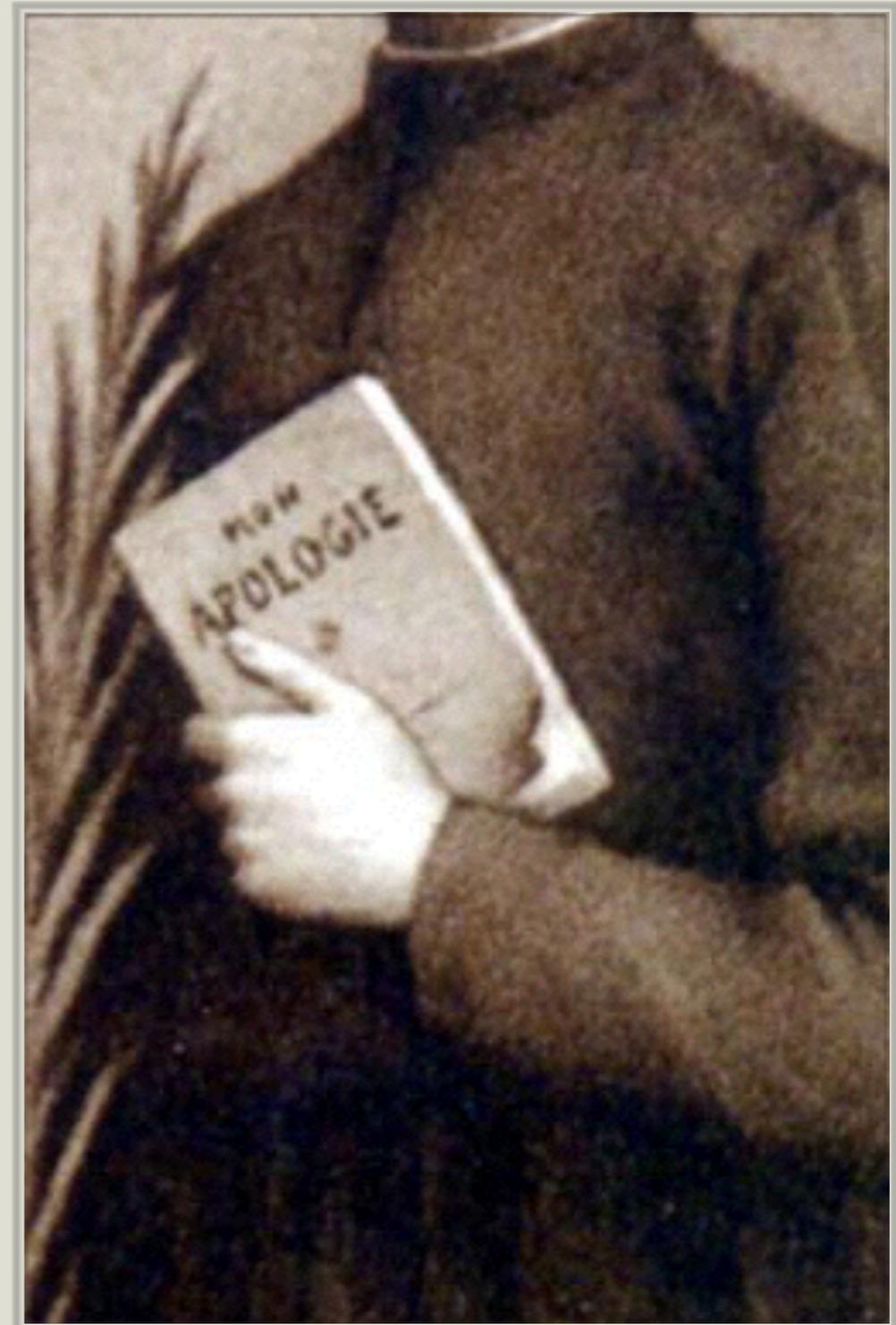


- * Appointed **superior** of the former Collège des Bons Enfants, known as Saint-Firmin at the time, in the summer of 1788
- * Chosen as being someone who could **carry on, and complete, a program of renewal** there
- * A year after his appointment to Saint-Firmin came the fall of the Bastille, on 14 July 1789; the mother-house of the Congregation, Saint-Lazare, had been attacked and vandalized the previous evening.
- * In November of that year the National Assembly voted that all Church property be confiscated. François **wrote and published a pamphlet** against this decision.



Saint-Firmin

- * The Civil Constitution of the Clergy became law in July 1790. It stated that the Pope had no authority in France, and that bishops and priests would be elected by a panel of citizens.
- * January 9, 1791 was the day fixed for all priests in Paris to take an oath of fidelity to this Constitution. François produced **another pamphlet** before the end of January, called *Mon Apologie*. It explained why he would not take the oath and why no priest should take it; it went through at least seven editions. He brought out **six other pamphlets in three months.**



- * The number of priests who refused to take the oath surprised the authorities. The authorities drew up an Instruction, which they ordered to be read in all churches; François wrote **another pamphlet** against it.
- * The authorities tried a new approach, inviting all priests who had not taken the oath to resign their parishes or other posts and to live in retirement on a State pension. François immediately brought out **another pamphlet called *No Resignation***.



- * All his pamphlets had great effect on priests who were puzzled or hesitant about the real significance of the oaths, and helped them to make up their minds not to take the oaths. He also paid attention to those who had sworn, **writing a pamphlet called *There is Still Time***.
- * In November 1791 there was a new form of the oath, with various penalties for those refusing to take it. The King refused to sign this into law and François brought out **another pamphlet supporting the king**; it was his last.



- * By 1792 there were, for obvious reasons, no seminarians in Saint-Firmin.
- * François had kept up good relations with the civil authorities in that part of Paris, and because so much of the seminary was empty he let some rooms to the city authorities as offices.
- * He made the rest of the rooms available to refugee priests who had fled from persecution in their own districts.



- * On 10 August 1792 power in the city of Paris was taken over by a small radical group. They drew up a list of all priests who had not taken the oaths and decided they would be imprisoned in the Carmelite house in rue de Vaugirard and in Saint-Firmin.
- * On the 13th a guard was placed on Saint-Firmin and everyone inside thus became a prisoner. New prisoners were sent there and by the end of August there were definitely ninety-seven, and possibly more, in the seminary.



- * On the evening of 2 September the butcher's boy told them that all the priests in the house were going to be massacred the following day.
- * By that time about two hundred priests imprisoned in the Carmelite house had already been killed.
- * At 5.30 the next morning, 3 September, the mob attacked Saint-Firmin. François tried to plead with the civic officials, who had offices in the building, for the lives of the priests. Some of these men were against killing priests, but some of the mob went for François, because of the trouble he had caused with his writings, and threw him out of the window into the street below, where a group of women battered him to death with wooden clubs.

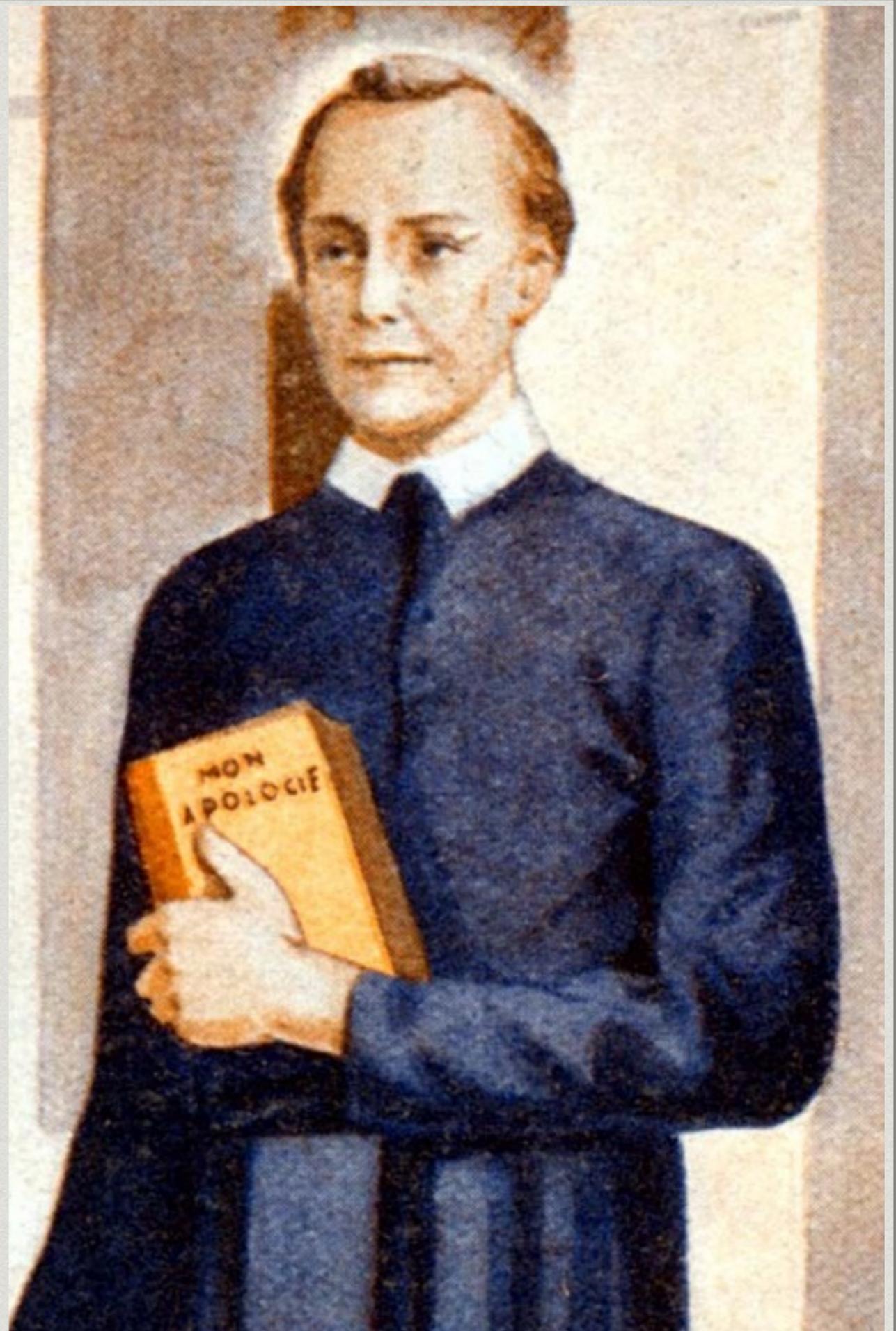


- * Seventy-two were killed in the seminary that day, and they were taken off and buried secretly in different unmarked graves.
- * It would appear that this was not a random mob, but a carefully organized group who were paid to do the work.



“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.”

- Joseph Boullangier, the bursar in Saint-Firmin who survived the Revolution



based on a presentation by Thomas Davitt, C.M.

<https://cmglobal.org/en/2013/09/02/vincentian-martyrs-of-the-french-revolution/>

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