

Historical note

Here are the origins of the free church and the work of evangelization of Béziers.

It is thanks to phylloxera(?) that they began. It was mainly due to the religious needs of a few and the real faith of a few that the formalist cults and rationalist preaching in the Reformed Church could not satisfy. We cannot specify when the first Protestants settled permanently in Béziers. It was not, however, until the second half of this century that a regular cult dependent on the Consistory of Bédarieux was established there and that a pastor settled there.

A house had been converted into a temple in what is now Victor Hugo Street, and the owner had expressed a desire to give it as a gift to the Protestants when she died. The parish was then not very considerable, the audiences very limited; light and life were almost totally lacking. It was at this time that, as phylloxera was rampant in the Gard and a large part of the Hérault, a good number of farmers and especially wine merchants went to Béziers. In the number, the proportion of Protestants was considerable, and what was better, true Christians were found there, who brought an absolutely new element. It cannot be forgotten that Messrs. Delord (?), Benoît and then Allin Peyron (??) exercised a preponderant and salutary influence for several years. A certain number of socially important families, and many people who depended more or less on them, were the nucleus on which we relied to demand the assistance of our evangelization commission.

At that time - 1875 - this commission had a post in Bédarieux and the evangelist Mr Marshall was asked to go regularly to Béziers. The temple had been freely disposed of for worship on Sunday afternoon; several times even Mr. Marshall replaced the official pastor Mr. Jaubert. They wanted more; This pastor, having failed to get a suffragan of his choice approved, considered that they were only trying to put him aside and definitively broke with the orthodox element. The municipality gave a room to set up the Reformed worship - the house of the schools in the rue Diderot - and the old temple was guarded by the independent element who obtained the removal of Mr. Marshall. Béziers became the post and Bédarieux the annex. It was then and for a few years afterwards that Mr. Peyron opened an evangelization room in the Faubourg du Pont.... he was actively occupied, although without very appreciable results.

At that time, and although under the direction of the commission for the evangelization of the Free Churches, the work of Béziers did not present any definite ecclesiastical character. There was no constitution of a church; it was simply an independent evangelical worship. There was the great liberal temple and the small Orthodox temple, the Protestant public was supposed to choose between the two with full knowledge of the facts. Mr. Marshall stayed 4 years in Béziers and was replaced in 1880 by Mr. S. Delord(?) currently in Madagascar. Around 1883 began the movement of reflux which caused a certain number of the most serious and wealthy people to leave Béziers and return to the Gard or Montpellier. Mr. Peyron himself left Béziers and the pastor(?), melancholy noting that his audience was melting away quite quickly, left himself in 1883(?). Until 1886, the situation was most precarious from the material point of view, especially with regard to the lack of continuity in the work accomplished. Mr. Rochedieu (?) spent about a year. After him, Mr. Henriord(?) stayed for a few months, then temporarily replaced by Mr. Diez(?), returned the following year to leave definitively in 1886. This departure coincided with a resolution which was perhaps necessary, but which was none the less regrettable. The claims of the heirs of the owner of the temple - the latter having not given legal effect to her intention to give the building for worship - these claims, shall we say, increased and the price of the rent asked suddenly rose from 6 or 700 francs to 1000 francs, and it was decided to settle elsewhere. A room was set up in the rue de l'Argenterie and in October 1886, shortly after the arrival of the new pastor Mr. Luigi, they moved in. It was large and quiet enough, but had the great disadvantage of being very inaccessible to strangers. It cost only 400 francs.

The ministry of Mr. Luigi, which has been the most prolonged so far (9 1/2 years), has passed through three rather distinct periods.

First for 4 years (86-90), everything was continued as in the past, either for the work of Béziers, or for the fortnightly service to Bédarieux. Then arrived in the official church a pastor, a suffragan of the preceding, a

pupil of the free faculty of Lausanne, consecrated in the chapel of the Luxembourg in Paris and who, after a few years of residence at Bédarieux, repudiating more and more his first opinions, took serious care of the parish. A movement towards the national temple then took place, several of the most assiduous of evangelical worship having entered this movement, a crisis inevitably occurred. It was then that Mr. Luigi, indicating what our free churches are, asked the people who were taking the Last Supper if they wanted to group together and form a church. Some remained on the side of expectation or indifference; others pronounced themselves in favor, especially outraged at the conduct of the defectors. There were then 30 members plus the pastor. But it must not be forgotten that this was for the most part an adherence to the evangelical church rather than a resolution inspired by ecclesiastical or even Christian convictions.

Shortly before, the annex of Bédarieux was abandoned as not giving sufficient encouragement. It was, moreover, too incompletely served. Mr. Luigi then agreed to take care of Narbonne and Coursan on a temporary basis, which depended on the Evangelical Society of Geneva. This lasted about a year.

Finally, a third branch of activity was found in the work of the popular conferences that the mission (???) had founded in Béziers at the same time as in Montpellier and Cette (Sète) and for which it had an agent residing in Montpellier, Mr. Chéradame. He was sent elsewhere and the committee of the mission instructed Professor Blanc, director of the Félix Neff School in Montpellier, to serve the 3 existing rooms with the help of his students. Soon, a financial crisis occurred, the committee decided to abolish its agent, and a fixed allowance was made to Mr. Luigi to have a popular hall in Béziers. This room, which was always located in the station district, regularly had its conferences and its Thursday school with alternating ups and downs often repeated.

We thus arrive at the year 1895. A sudden demolition of the building where the worship hall was located forced the church to move into a store that served as both a temple and a popular hall. It was in the meantime that Mr. Luigi left Béziers for Montpellier in 1896.

The same year, Mr. L. Guibal took possession of the post. He did so with the firm and clearly stated intention of seeing closely whether the work was viable and capable of development both from the ecclesiastical and the evangelization point of view. He immediately pointed out two obstacles to the future of the small church, which was reduced to 21 members: lack of conviction among the members, lack of material resources. All efforts were made in this direction, and after explanations and a meeting of the members and friends of the church, in a special session it was decided: 1) The constitution of a church council; 2°) The establishment of a monthly cult of Holy Communion; 3°) a financial organisation on the basis of quarterly contributions; 4) The foundation of a relief fund for the poor. A sewing meeting and Bible evenings were also established. Finally, the fundamental principles of our churches were explored in various ways. For another year, a modest hall housed worship services and popular meetings, and in 1897 the situation finally improved, as can be seen from the reports presented by the secretary and the treasurer. Here is the essential part of these reports:

Reports by Messrs. Portal and Loup

Let us add, to put our report on the point of view of the present situation, that since the beginning of the year, the number of our members has been reduced by one (it is an old friend who left Béziers) that nothing salient has marked the spiritual life of the church and that from the material point of view we have had a very pleasing (???) with our annuity. Almost no one was counting on its success, some even expected it to fail completely. In spite of this, we were able to gratefully note a gross pension figure of 615 francs, and all expenses deducted a net result of 535 francs.

The sobriety (???) to such a relationship makes us (?...?) on these precise indications. Has the situation of the church improved significantly? Have the barriers already reported decreased? Can we hope for more considerable results in the near future? This is not the place for particular opinions. We simply note with gratitude that so far we have been rescued.

On behalf of the Board

(signature L. Guibal)

The Pastor

List of Pastors who have practiced

- ❖ Mr MARSHALL (1875-1880)
- ❖ Mr S. DELORD 1880-1883)
- ❖ Mr ROCHEDIEU (1883)
- ❖ Mr HENRIORD (1884)
- ❖ Mr DIEZ (1884)
- ❖ Mr HENRIORD (1884-1886)
- ❖ Mr Charles LUIGI (1886-1896)
- ❖ Mr Louis GUIBAL (1896-1927)
- ❖ Mr ARNAL (1927-1930)
- ❖ Mr A. ROY (1931-1941)
- ❖ Mr Camille PACHE (1941-1948)
- ❖ Mr MARTIN (1948)
- ❖ Mr SCHAFFNER (1949-1959)
- ❖ Mr Charles GUILLOT (1960)
- ❖ Mr VIVIER (1961-1965)
- ❖ Mr Camille PACHE (1965-1972)
- ❖ Mr DEJARDIN (1973-1981)
- ❖ Mr Pierre MATHYS (1981-1985)
- ❖ Mr Jacques LAUZET (1987-1992)
- ❖ Mr Jakob HOLLAND (1992-1995)
- ❖ Mr Pascal GIRARD (1995-2004)
- ❖ Mr Raymond BRUNEL (2005-2008)
- ❖ Mr Gil TARASSENKO (2008-2018)
- ❖ Mr Cicéro DUARTE (2019-)