**Significance:** The Zhao group reports the activation of primary amines by carbonyls. Using an N-quaternized pyridoxal catalyst for the direct asymmetric Mannich reaction of glycinate with aryl $\alpha,\beta$-diamino phosphino imines, $\alpha,\beta$-diamino acid esters were obtained in good yields and excellent stereoselectivities.

**Comment:** Based on their recently developed chiral pyridoxal and pyridoxamine catalysts for transamination reactions (J. Am. Chem. Soc. 2016, 138, 10730), the authors developed a catalyst that activates primary amines through carbonyl catalysis. In contrast to other $\alpha$-functionalizations of primary amines, this fascinating catalysis strategy does not require protecting-group manipulation.