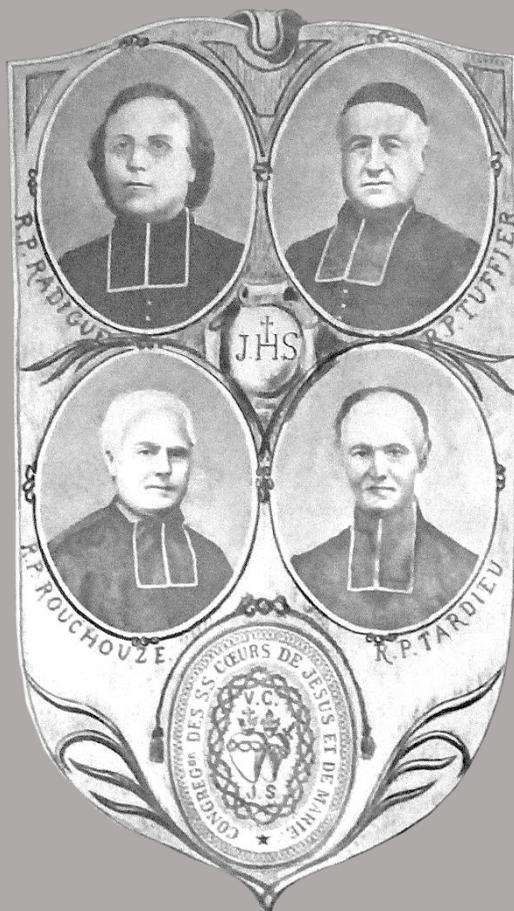


Cahiers of Spirituality - n° 23

Pierced  
for love of the Church

Alberto Toutin ssc



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Congregation of the Sacred Hearts



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**FOR LOVE OF THE CHURCH**

Alberto Toutin ssc

**Cahiers of Spirituality - n° 23**  
**2022**

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Cover Photo: Martyrs of Picpus

*In memory of Fr. Henri Planchat rsv*

*and our Brothers:*

*Ladislav Radigue ssc*

*Polycarpe Tuffier ssc*

*Frézal Tardieu ssc*

*Marcellin Rouchouze ssc*



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## INTRODUCTION

We remember with gratitude our ssc brothers who gave their lives for “the glory of God and the salvation of the world”. They shed their blood, united in communion with Archbishop Georges Darboy and Fr. Jean Marie Sabatier of the diocese of Paris, the seminarian Paul Seigneret, the Jesuit Fathers Olivaint, Decoudray, Caubert, Clère and de Bengy, and the Dominican Father Louis-Raphaël Captier and his confreres Bourard, Cotrault, Delhorme, Chatagneret. Indeed, we remember all who died during this “Bloody Week”. A civil war is a fratricidal war in which there are only the defeated and wounds that remain forever open.

Thinking of our brothers, they were faced with a death that was not only unavoidable, but which came upon them with violence and contempt. Life is a great good, both precious and fragile. The violent know this and can take life, abuse it, even destroy it. But what they cannot touch is the heart of a person, where the deepest options and the most deeply rooted feelings reside. It is from the heart, as from an impregnable fortress, that the meaning and value that each person gives to the events of life, however violent and obscure they may be, emerge.

In fidelity to the Lord Jesus, our brothers chose to love in adversity, to give their lives, even to the point of being shot, thus

fulfilling the Christian love that consists in carrying one's cross every day and following the Lord. The cross is not an inevitability, nor is it a misfortune suffered. It is the consequence of a way of loving like Jesus, sharing in the sufferings of those whom we want to love like him, in spite of everything and to the end.

This was a form of love that was slowly nourished in the fire of friendship with the Lord Jesus; a friendship cultivated in daily service, in the study and meditation of his Word, in prayer, in the fascinating and sometimes arduous construction of brotherhood. Friendship with Jesus does not make those who love him immune from evil; still less does it blur their fragility; but it does put them in a position where, at different times in life, sometimes even in quite obscure conditions, they can once again be captivated by the Lord Jesus, who loves them unconditionally in their fragility, who urges them to love as he does, despite everything.

This love is part of a long history of love that precedes all of us and makes us who we are. Jesus weaves his story into the fabric of our lives, so that we become who he wants us to be: his brothers and sisters, his friends, sons and daughters loved, as he was, by his Father and our Father. The philosopher Simone Weil speaks of this long history of love, often carried by women, which germinates in people a capacity and a desire to love by participating in the sufferings of those we love.

“A mother, a wife, a fiancée, who know that those they love are in distress and they can neither help nor reach

them, would at least like to undergo suffering equivalent to theirs, in order to be less separated from them, to be relieved of the heavy burden of impotent compassion.”<sup>1</sup>

But there is a leap of excellence in this capacity to love when people, touched by the love of Christ, are able to transform and deploy their capacity to love to the point of assuming responsibility for the fragility of others, even to being able to love their enemies, those who hate and crucify them. Bishop Darboy died forgiving those who riddled him with bullets. Basically, it means consenting to the fact that—in our vulnerable and fragile flesh, in spite of our fears, in spite of that which appears to be inescapably and irrationally violent, Christ continues to love through the members of his Body which is the Church.

It is precisely this form of love that Simone Weil admires when she speaks of the way in which Christ and those who follow him love:

“To enter into the affliction of another is to take on, for a moment, that person’s misfortune, to voluntarily bear that which has been imposed on the person by force and against their will. To do this is impossible. Only Christ can do this, Christ and those men and women in whom Christ occupies their whole souls. Such people, by entering

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<sup>1</sup> Simone Weil, “L’amour de Dieu et le Malheur” in *Œuvres*, Gallimard Quarto, Paris 1999, 715.

into the lives of those unfortunates whom they are helping, put into them not their own being, for they have none left, but Christ himself.”<sup>2</sup>

The journey of our brothers allows us to understand more deeply their choosing to live and love in this way: how did they come to love so much? Moreover, experiencing in their own flesh the enigma of the violence that was unleashed against them, against the Church and its members, we can ask ourselves: why was there so much anger against the Church?

Finally, when death appeared increasingly imminent, how did they prepare for it? What spiritual resources did they rely on?

### **Why are they attacking us?**

Ladislas Radigue, Superior of the Picpus community, writes his impressions of the moment when the Communards burst into Picpus on 12 April, 1871 at 4pm. They are found in a letter dated 1 May, which was written in the Mazas prison and addressed to the Superior General Sylvain Bousquet who was in Versailles. While knowing that other religious communities - Jesuits, Dominicans, Priests of Saint Sulpice - had been attacked by the communards, it was thought that the community was

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<sup>2</sup> Simone Weil, “L’amour de Dieu et le Malheur” in *Œuvres*, Gallimard Quarto, Paris 1999, 710.

somewhat safe in Picpus, as the congregation was low-profile, situated on the edge of the city:

“How could we think that we, the least of all, ignored by the whole world, situated on the outskirts of Paris where all was calm, would run into these dangers? Three delegates of the Commune had already come to our house to ask if we had weapons. On my negative answer, they had gone to ask the same question of our sisters, always in the most appropriate terms. I concluded that we had nothing to fear from the administration, that the danger could come only from a popular riot, but being that our neighbourhood was very calm, we were not exposed.”<sup>3</sup>

A few days before, one particular act spoke volumes about the turn of events that was taking place in the Commune. On 30 March, 1871 the communards climbed the dome of the Church of Saint Genevieve, sawed off the horizontal arm of the cross and hoisted a red flag: “the flag of work, peace and equality”.<sup>4</sup>

This was part of a strong movement that was particularly anti-church. The church was perceived by some thinkers as an institution whose hold on morals and social life prevented society from moving forward towards a progressive future promised by

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<sup>3</sup> “Letter of Fr. Ladislav Radigue to the Superior General Sylvain Bousquet” (Paris, Mazas prison, 1 May 1871) in *Positio super Martyrio*, Roma 2020, 667.

<sup>4</sup> *Journal officiel*, 31 March 1871, 112.

science, and that the hierarchy was an obstacle to the desire for a more egalitarian society. This debate, which called into question the Church and its representatives, was not new. It was the resurgence of a malaise that certain sectors of society felt towards the Church; a malaise conveyed by the press and heightened by caricatures and sometimes, even at that time, via “fake news” that circulated and found echo and amplification in a kind of street anti-clericalism.

How can we understand this gap in perception between the prior of the Picpus community and the turn of events, once again anticlerical, that were taking place in the Commune?

In truth, it was not due to a lack of information. Since its installation in Picpus, the community had experienced the eruption of insurgents both in 1830 and 1848. Moreover, the city of Paris was emerging from a long period of siege by Prussian troops that lasted from 19 September 1870 to 26 February 1871. During the bombardment of the city by Prussian forces at the end of December 1870 and the beginning of January 1871, Picpus, like other religious congregations and diocesan clergy, had opened its doors to house a field hospital. During the days of respite between the end of February and the beginning of April, thanks to the good done “without fanfare” in the enclosure of Picpus, outside the town, there was no reason to fear an untimely irruption of the militias of the Commune.

However, hard facts were to show otherwise: the siege of the city had brought Paris to its knees, and supplies were becoming difficult to obtain. In addition to the hunger that affected the poorest sectors of the population, there was the bitter taste of the defeat of the French forces by the Prussian forces evidenced by the armistice signed with Bismarck. Perhaps the spark that finally ignited the powder keg was the decision of the provisional president Adolphe Thiers to abolish the pay of the National Guard troops stationed in Paris; these soldiers would become, for the most part, the federated soldiers of the Commune.

One can imagine the 'Molotov cocktail' that was produced by starvation, lack of supplies, defeat, austerity measures and a lack of economic compensation for the troops of the National Guard. Too much misery was boiling in the bellies and minds of large sectors of the population. To make such misfortune bearable and to gain group cohesion, it helps to have a common enemy, a 'scapegoat'. The church once again became the target of this deep social unrest. Rather than a malaise against the faith, this troubled period brewed and manifested an anti-ecclesial - especially anti-clerical - exasperation.

### **What fuelled this anti-ecclesial, anti-clerical exasperation?**

It was felt that the Church was devoting more energy, resources and personnel to the wealthier groups in society, rather than to the more disadvantaged groups. A new social group was

emerging in the big cities, including Paris, namely the working class population or the 'industrial proletariat'. In this respect, the data was quite impressive, as this industrial proletariat was composed not only of adult men, but also of women and children - from the age of eight onwards. The working days that were long and exhausting, more than 12 hours, were limited by the Law of 22 March 1841, to 8 hours for children aged between 8 to 12 years old, and to 12 hours for children who were 16 years or older.

Moreover, measures taken to reorganise the city, initiated under Napoleon III by the Prefect of Paris, Baron Hausmann, had resulted in the fraying of the social fabric and the discarding of the working-class population to the extremities of the city.

The Church in her pastoral networking knew little of what was happening among these communities. Its preaching, which was too theoretical and abstract did not speak to their sensibilities and confusion. These people felt abandoned by everyone, by the State and by the Church, even though some pastors and religious were increasingly concerned about the de-Christianisation of these working masses. In short, many people did not feel at home in the Church.

Since the revolution of 1848, the social divide between the rich classes and the world of the workers had been growing. The bourgeois world (with which the clergy was associated) and the industrial proletariat were two worlds that did not mix, that

ignored and distrusted each other. Only a few clear-sighted people saw the earthquakes that were stirring in this social divide. In 1868, Charles de Montalembert warned the pastors in the Church about the malaise that was stirring in this population, which could erupt and spill over against the members of the Church.

“The interregnum of fifteen years which our most essential liberties have undergone has prepared a revolution in comparison with which the crises of 1830 and 1848 will seem like child's play. A thousand symptoms clearer than day show that this future revolution will have as its watchword an explosion of irreligion [...] This does not mean that it will have any greater respect for public order, family spirit, property, or morals; on the contrary, it will kill the members of the social body by striking at the heart.”<sup>5</sup>

This sad observation of the growing de-Christianisation of the industrial proletariat with its consequences in the social fabric was still to be found, almost 100 years later, in the book *La France, pays de mission?* published in September 1943 by the abbots Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel. They do not mince their words in describing this situation as an apostasy on the part of

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<sup>5</sup> Montalembert, 25 May 1868, quoted by Édouard Lecanuet, *L'Église de France sous la troisième République*, Paris 1910, 44-45 ; Article by Jacques Gadille, *La place des catholiques dans l'opinion conservatrice française*, in *Pariser Historische Studien*, Paris 1990, 309.

the church and its pastoral care of the working world.<sup>6</sup> They did not stop there. On account of their contacts with the world, they also showed how the expectations of many workers were visible opportunities - not to be missed - to make the Church closer to this world in a way similar to that other leading figure in the pastoral care of the working class, Madeleine Delbrêl, who made the Church more lovable and more loving.

### **Forerunners who stood in the breach**

A group of young lay Catholics who were more sensitive to the situation of the working class population - including lay people such as Emmanuel Bailly, Frédéric Ozanam, Jean-Léon Le Prevost and Maurice Maignen - wanted to get closer to these people and make contact with them. Sister Rosalie Rendu (1786-1856), a nun from the Congregation of Saint Vincent de Paul, brought them to the Mouffetard district where she was accompanying the poor. Their initial concern was to accompany these people, especially children, and to lead them to an encounter with God.

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<sup>6</sup> "In our populous parishes in big cities, we have 15 to 20% of people who are sympathetic to Christianity, of whom 5 to 10% are connected to the Christian community and who more or less practise (at least on Easter). But if we exclude from this number those who do not live in the parish, the percentage rarely exceeds 2% and decreases as we descend to the lower classes. One vicar was challenged to find twelve manual workers who were really good Christian in his parish numbering 40,000, and he was unable to meet the challenge. Is this an absolutely unheard of fact?" Henri Godin- Yvan Daniel, *La France, pays de mission?* Henri Godin- Yvan Daniel, *La France, pays de mission?* Paris 1943, 65.

They also hoped that some priests would accompany them in this apostolate and “that, in the charity and humility of the Lord Jesus, they will accept us as brothers and friends”.<sup>7</sup> This was already a beautiful intuition of a close presence with the poor, and also of a relationship between laity and priests on an even field, a relationship symbolising fraternal friendship.

This question, which burned in their hearts, led them not only to take an interest in the poor, but also to walk with them; this first translated into the choice of domicile, the place to live. In order to be close to the poor, the brothers of Saint Vincent de Paul settled in the suburb of Grenelle, not the posh Beau-Grenelle, but a neighbourhood inhabited by the poor and workers. Then, they became bridge builders or “social poets” who put into practice through multiple initiatives, the “charity of Christ” that lived in them. This could only happen if it was accompanied by a rethinking of the way they acted, by respecting the poor and being well aware of the greatness of the mission that went beyond them. As Jean-Leon Le Prevost wrote in a beautiful letter to his first companions in fraternity, Maurice Maignen, Clément Myonnet, M. Louis Paillé:

“It seems that the glory of Christianity has failed to spiritualise and ennoble modern industry, as it has

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<sup>7</sup> Jean-León Le Prevost, Letter n. 208 to Abbot Levassor, of the diocese of Chartres, who had thought joinin the community, 19 September 1850. General Archives of the Religious of S. V. of Paul, Rome in *Positio super Martyrio*, 104.

enlivened and raised up labour in all ages. Could it be that industry, as it is constituted today, the product of jealous competition, of the selfish claims of some, of the unjust demands of others, of the greed of all, is radically perverse and rebellious to any change? I don't know, but seeing the immensity of evil, one is frightened and tempted to believe that it has no remedy.”<sup>8</sup>

These questions or challenges did not weaken their commitment to the poorest. Father Henri Planchat joined this family of brothers the day after his ordination to the priesthood (23 December, 1850). It was a beautiful actualisation of the God who in Jesus took flesh in Nazareth and became one of us. The charity of God-with-us stimulated their pastoral imagination and made their apostolate fruitful through patronages, the poor's cooking pot, popular libraries, schools or orphanages, boarding houses for workers, a house for elderly couples, and of course chapels and oratories.

In 1869, Jean-Marie Le Prevost looked back on the road travelled up to that point and his heart was flooded with apostolic charity, which still burned for this vast population that remained outside parish life. This charity did not leave him in peace, but pushed him to go to the margins, to meet those who lived there. The charity of Christ also shaped their pastoral style of

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<sup>8</sup> J.-L. Le Prevost, Letter n. 184 to M. Maignen, M. Myionnet and M. Paillé, Duclair, 26 August 1848 in *Positio super Martyrio*, 106.

presence: they went about as brothers and as poor, among their poor brothers and sisters.

“Since the needs to be met are immense, we have taken them boldly (too boldly perhaps) to the fullest extent; we have embraced all ages, from the child to the old man; we follow the poor and the worker in their education, in their work, in their spiritual and temporal necessities and even in their leisure; we have made ourselves poor for them, we have shared out abode with them, and we live like them. If we have gone too far, God will tell us, but at least we have not lacked the essential substance of a true religious vocation; we have cordially accepted renunciation and sacrifice.”<sup>9</sup>

How many pastoral conversions must have taken place in this community that wanted to serve the poorest like Jesus! They verified the fulfilment of the promises of the Risen One to his Church, who works with them, or as Simone Weil says, they were disciples who renounced themselves and let Jesus love and make good through them.

This profound desire to accompany, to be close to, to effectively love the poor, was the criterion that also governed the discernment that Ladislav Radigue made with his brothers of the Picpus

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<sup>9</sup> J.-L. Le Prevost, Letter n. 1484 to M. de Varax, Chaville, 6-8 December 1869 in *Positio super Martyrio*, 109.

community and which led them to choose to remain in Paris. In spite of the threats of insurgent attacks on the community, the conviction of being “useful to the Church” and therefore to stay in Paris was the strongest. Ladislas shares in his letter to the Superior General the dilemma he had to face in conscience: to let the brothers leave to escape the searches by the communards or to stay.

“These considerations did not leave me without fear, especially for the majority of priests who were in charge of ministries in the various communities. In all the churches in Paris services were being held. Were we to flee, would it not be necessary to deprive communities of Mass and confessions? I did not believe that I had the power to do that. Although free to go, our Fathers thought no more of flight. Out of dedication, each remained at his post. One might say that this dedication was a lack of prudence. I would rather qualify their prudence than state its absence: it is better to be too devoted than lax. If we had all taken flight, who would have the right to quote such a thing?

Today, with what is happening we can say we have done well; before this, there would have been only a cry of indignation directed against our timidity.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Letter of Father Ladislas Radigue to the Superior General Sylvain Bousquet” (Paris, Mazas prison, 1 May 1871) in *Positio super Martyrio*, 668.

## **The confession of faith *in extremis***

As I reread the letters written by our brothers from prison, I was moved to see how imprisonment and the proximity of death had tempered their religious consecration. As the long days went by, their pastoral sensitivity was increased and their communion deepened. In the solitude of the dungeon and also through the rare exchanges with the other companions in prison, through their letters to brothers or relatives, they helped each other to enter more deeply into that permanent dimension of Christian life which, paradoxically shines in weakness and apparent inactivity: "Our life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).

Let me leave to them the last word - their spiritual testament. Their feelings, greetings, confessions, even prayers become more and more important. It is basically their sharing of what sustains them in life and in approaching death: the brothers of the community or family, a father or mother, friends, become their interlocutors and confessors of the last hour.

## HENRI PLANCHAT RSV

Henri Planchat, in a letter to Father Louis Lantiez, one of his confreres, asked that he send a letter to be read to the children of the oratory who were preparing for their First Communion. This is the heart of the shepherd who never ceases to deepen the ties that bind him to his flock. Unable to celebrate Mass, he offers his prayers for all, including the city of Paris.

“See if you think it appropriate to read to our dear children tomorrow something of the following: “Dear children, I am with you at heart. I know every hour of the day what you are doing during your good retreat. I am sure that you are praying for me. For my part, I can say that from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m., I pray for you. Not that I am on my knees the whole time. You pray as you walk, with your rosary. Well, I often do the same.

The prisoner is in his narrow, arched cell like a bird in a cage. If he wants to get some exercise, he has to hop around. Even when I walk, I do not always recite prayers; but apart from quite a few rosaries and psalms, everything I do, I offer for you and for our poor city of Paris.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Letter of Fr. Henri Planchat to Fr. Louis Lantiez” (Paris, Mazas prison, 17 May 1871 in *Positio super Martyrio*, 662.

Here is one of the last letters written by Abbé Planchat (23 May 1871) to one of his younger confreres, Brother Deryn. Transferred to the Grande Roquette prison, he felt that death was approaching. In these crucial hours, it is once again the bonds of friendship with M. Le Prevost, an early companion in the adventure of the Brothers of Saint Vincent de Paul, which provides a glimmer of hope for “his old friend”. In his letter he confides how hearing from his old friend would bring him great consolation. The letter gives us a glimpse of the spiritual attitudes with which Henry Planchat faced his death. Finally, his letter concluded with a humble request for forgiveness to his brothers.

“If it were possible, without any inconvenience, it would please me, at this critical moment, to receive a good word from my old friend, M. Le Prevost.

We were able to confess. Pray and have someone pray for all of us, not only for me.

Farewell, my dear friend, always do as much good as you can for our dear children and for everyone: the reward up there is infinite.

Your very affectionate and grateful friend,

Abbé Planchat, priest.

Forgive me for all my malice towards you and towards everyone.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Letter of Fr. Henri Planchat to Brother Deryn” (La Grande Roquette, 23 May 1871) in *Positio super Martyrio*, 666.

## LADISLAS RADIGUE SSCC

The confession of faith, born out of physical fragility, leads Ladislas to recognise that he is happy in adversity, because in his flesh he is sharing in the sufferings of the body of Jesus in the Church. He then discovers what he already knew, the consequences of which will soon prove to be a support, an “amen” upon which to lean in uncertain times, namely, the superabundance of grace in tribulation. In this context, the accounts in the Acts of the Apostles or the Epistles of St. Paul resonate with vibrant relevance. Even the Eucharistic adoration that he undertook in his cell, with his body turned towards the chapels of Picpus, united him to the vast body of the Church and the Congregation in prayer.

He wrote his letter on the Feast of the Holy Cross; it is true that he had celebrated it several times in his life, but it was only then that he felt more than ever united to the Cross of Jesus, to his sufferings in the members of his ecclesial body. He realised then that the cross he takes up, united with those of Jesus, becomes above all the expression of a love to the end, the source of a discreet and unshakeable happiness. The ties that bind him to the congregation are stronger than ever, especially in the knowledge that he is supported by the prayers of so many brothers and sisters. On the other hand, he shares what he understands to be the reason for his imprisonment: ultimately,

it is the fulfilment of his religious profession as a child of the Sacred Hearts, in whose service he wants to live and die.

“First of all, my beloved Father, I will tell you that my weakness has been subjected to a rather strong test; if, thanks be to God, courage has never been lacking, physical strength has often been lacking. You know my infirmities, a neurosis which I feel in my whole body and especially in my heart, which in ordinary times causes painful feelings at the slightest commotion; judge for yourself, then, what I have experienced in the midst of such painful circumstances, painful, even for those less impressionable than me. I believed several times that I was going to faint. Fortunately, the soul is still holding on a little to the body which is weakening. All this must tell you that my health is not brilliant, and that these days of my captivity cause me pain. But in the end, I am still living, and I shall get away with it, I hope, unless a bullet comes to stop me on the way.

Do not conclude that I am unhappy; I can tell you, my beloved Father, I have never been happier in my life. I have experienced how good the Lord is, and what assistance he gives to those he loves for the glory of his name. I even understood a little more after having savoured it, the *superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione* of Saint Paul (2 Cor. 7:4). Is it not true, Father, that in the eyes of faith we are not to be pitied? For me I find myself very honoured to suffer for the religion of Jesus Christ. I do not

regard myself as a political prisoner at all. I do not want to have any other politics than that of my Saviour Jesus. So I am now proud to be in the footsteps of so many glorious confessors who have borne witness to Jesus Christ. I think of the glorious apostle Peter in Mamertine prison; every day I lovingly kiss a facsimile of his chains, which I am happy to possess. I think of the great Saint Paul, reading of his sufferings in Acts and in his Epistles. What I suffer is nothing in comparison; it is much for me, because I am weak. I go through so many other saints who are praised for suffering what I suffer, and then I wonder why I should not be happy for what has made the saints happy. The feasts of each day still provide me with encouragement. How can I complain when I read the office of St. Athanasius, and today, 3 May, how can one not be glorious in carrying a little of that cross whose triumph is being celebrated? I think of the Congregation whose members all pray for us; I think especially of you, beloved Father, who suffer as much as we do from our sufferings. I am joyful to take your place here and to know you are safe: you can comfort the family and lead it. I'm trying to unite with the Holy Sacrifice celebrated in our chapels, to the adoring men and women who replace us at the foot of the Tabernacle. As Daniel turned himself towards Jerusalem, so I face in the direction of the altar in the

Motherhouse and along with the members of my family who are in captivity, I adore.”<sup>13</sup>

The Superior General, Fr. Sylvain Bousquet writing from Versailles, replied to him in a letter dated 14 May 1871, which unfortunately never reached Fr. Ladislav Radigue. In his reply, he speaks as a man of faith: he echoes what it means to be children of the cross in these circumstances and encourages Fr. Radigue to accept contempt and to offer his life as a last confession of faith in Jesus the victor over death and as a witness of his love to the end. The depth of this exchange becomes a source of consolation, happiness and mutual encouragement in the faith that each is called to profess. The Superior General dares to ask Father Ladislav one thing only, that even if he should die, to remember him in his prayers.

“My dearest friend,

How can I express to you all the consolation which your letter of 3 May has brought me! How much I thank Our Lord for the feelings he inspires in you and the graces he grants you in your dungeon! In the midst of my sorrows, I find your words softening. I pray unceasingly to the divine Hearts to support you, to strengthen you, until the end of the trial. We do not know when it will end. Alas,

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<sup>13</sup> “Letter of Fr. Ladislav Radigue to the Superior General, Sylvain Bousquet” (Paris, Mazas prison, 3 May 1871) in *Positio super Martyrio*, 670-671.

we do not yet dare to promise ourselves that the end of our troubles is near!

Courage, my friend and my Father; I do not know what God has in store for you. If you are called to martyrdom, ah! rejoice. You don't get two chances to die the death of a martyr. I envy you and I often wish I could take your position of honour. No doubt nature suffers on more than one side; but the virtue of Jesus Christ will appear in your weakness. You will overcome in him who has overcome the world.

We do not cease to pray for you. Every day I offer the Holy Sacrifice for you and for the captive members of the family. I unite myself with your pain and share in spirit your captivity.

Farewell, dear friend, write to me if you can. I embrace you, as I love you in God, with all my heart. If you die, remember me who remains in the midst of the storm.”<sup>14</sup>

Is it not also our consolation to know that our brothers and sisters in the communion of saints are praying for us all?

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<sup>14</sup> “Letter of the Superior General, Fr. Sylvain Bousquet to Fr. Ladislav Radigue” (Versailles, 14 May 1871) in *Annales de la Congrégation des Sacrés Cœurs, T. 1* (1872-1873), 17-19.

## POLYCARPE TUFFIER SSCC

From Mazas, he writes letters to his cousin Charles Tuffier. In his letters, he gives a day-by-day account of the events that punctuated his long days in prison, cut off from everyone and isolated. He also opens his heart and gives an account of his inner journey, the maturing of his feelings, his vision of the country's political situation and even his faith which sustains him.

It is in the crucible of his hours of isolation and uncertainty that he feels paradoxically accompanied by his family of origin and by his brothers and sisters in the congregation, and strengthened by the ineradicable certainty of God's love, and that he blesses the insurgent "populations".

*30 April*

"My God, how favourable Mazas is to a meditation on the Passion of Our Lord."

*2 May*

"This evening, we have been in captivity for three weeks: Lord, when will it end? ...] It is a religious persecution, not a political one, and in this sense we must expect everything" [...]

9-10 May

“I hope you will write to me soon and as often as possible. I am not ill, but I suffer so much from this cellular existence that I have no appetite and give a portion of my meat to the poor. Man does not live by bread alone; my food is to do the will of my Father in heaven.

Let my dear cousin bring me neither the *Vengeur* nor the *Cri du Peuple*, but only the *Moniteur Universel* (newspapers of the time). Oh God! The people are being corrupted, and by massacring us they think they are doing the right thing! Forgive them, they do not know what they are doing. Moderate newspapers explain this well [...].

When will our captivity end? But I have resolved not to complain anymore [...].

As you say so well, Charles, it is only God can get us out of here, yes, of course, but whatever they do, they will not be able to take away God's love and blessings for them. So let us pray to him to come to our aid.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “Letter of Fr. Polycarpe Tuffier to his Cousin Charles Tuffier” (Paris, Mazas, 30 April, 1 May, 9-10 May, 1871) in *Positio super Martyrio*, 674-677.

## MARCELLIN ROUCHOUZE SSCC

In the letter to his cousin, Mrs. Magnin, Marcellin shares his impressions of the treatment he is receiving in prison, and then his inner journey, marked out by silence and a faith which becomes an expectation and confession of praise for the will of God in adversity and uncertainty:

“Every day there is one hour of solitary walking in a small triangular courtyard for each of the twenty inmates at a time; there is a warden inside. With this system, Mazas is for me a real school of silence, where I will perfect my taste for philosophy.

Besides, it would be wrong for us to complain about the employees, whether they are superiors or subordinates; they are all very kind to us, not the slightest improper word.

One of our young Fathers, of Dutch origin, after spending six days with us, obtained his release through the mediation of the Dutch *chargé d'affaires*: he wrote a letter to each of us to inform us that it was impossible for him to remove his belongings from our house, since it is occupied, as are the other communities in the Rue de Picpus, by the national guard, and no one is allowed to enter or leave.

In the meantime, I have been a prisoner for 26 days. The holy and adorable will of God be done in everything and everywhere.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Letter of Fr. Marcellin Rouchouze to Mrs Magnin” (Paris, Mazas, 8 May 1871) in *Positio super Martyrio*, 683.

## FRÉZAL TARDIEU SSCC

The idea of his last letter addressed to M. Decordey came to his mind as a distraction. With a touch of humour, Frézal realises that the memory of friends, in these circumstances, becomes a sort of lifeline which helps him not to sink in the lonely hours.

“I have nothing in particular to say to you; but the thought came to me to write to you and I did not hesitate to seize that thought as it passed; it is a good and very pleasant distraction for a prisoner to be able to talk for a moment in writing with his friends.”<sup>17</sup>

Among the prayers he wrote, one was found that was composed seven years before his imprisonment. In it he asks the Lord for the grace to be ready for the possibility of martyrdom. This grace does not come all of a sudden, but is received and distilled, little by little in the friendship cultivated with the Lord in the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist, matured in a life given daily in the service of brothers and sisters, especially the suffering members of the body of Christ. Such a grace, secretly awaited, can come about in a surprising way, as it does for the servants who await the return of their Lord: “Blessed are

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<sup>17</sup> “Letter of Fr. Frézal Tardieu to M. Decordey” (Paris, Mazas, 15 May 1871) in *Positio super Martyrio*, 685.

those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching.” (Lk 12:37).

Let us conclude with this prayer written by Frézal Tardieu and make his words our own, uniting ourselves with him and with our brothers and sisters who, yesterday as today in the world, suffer because of their faith in Jesus, because of their effective love for the poorest, because of their hope in a God who is one with the peacemakers and those who hunger for justice.

“I am here, O God, to do your will; engrave your holy law within my heart and give me the grace of doing always what is pleasing to you. O Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, my God and my All, I adore you and give you thanks for the blessings of my creation, of my vocation to the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary...

Prostrate before you, O my God, and covered with the blood of your Son, I offer and consecrate to you all that I have, all that I am, my thoughts, my words, my actions, my infirmities, my illnesses, my possessions, my reputation, my life. You have given everything to me. I give all back to you to be used for your glory and the salvation of my neighbour.

Grant me, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the grace... to always do your holy will. Help me reach the perfection of my vocation according to the

spirit of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, so that my joy may be perfect. Give me a firm and persevering good will and a profound peace. Let me walk always, in your presence and find you in all things, and grant that I may constantly reach out to you out of love and gratitude, and come to you with the palm of martyrdom, so that I may praise you, bless you and eternally sing your mercies forever. Amen.”

## CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

In 1843, shortly before settling in Paris, the young Karl Marx published the introduction for his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Intellectually, he was settling accounts with a form of religion that postponed the final triumph of justice, justice for the oppressed, to the afterlife, to the heavens; this form of religion did not question the causes of the oppression of large sectors of the working class in order to transform them and thus foster a more just and egalitarian conditions for all. Marx thus concluded that religion is a source of alienation for these oppressed people, it is “the opium of the people”!

However, this conclusion was preceded by a description of what this form of religion revealed at depth: its role in the world and its way of conveying the deeper aspirations of oppressed creatures; “religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions”.

Indeed, this form of religion continued to convey a firm hope to those who were burdened by various forms of subjugation, and against all odds, carried them through ‘this valley of tears’. However, something essential to Christianity had been lost along the way. The author of the *Letter to Diognetus* (120-210 A.D.) reminds us of this when he describes the place that faith in the

God revealed by Jesus assigns to Christians in the world: “What the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world.”<sup>18</sup>

On the one hand, God does not contemplate from afar the course of humanity, waiting until the end of history for the resolution of the grave contradictions that overwhelm it. In Jesus, God became God-with-us and man-for-us all. The strength of his promises is verified “*hic et nunc*”, when his actions, and subsequently those of his followers, take care of the wounds of men and women, lift up the oppressed and feed the hungry.

On the other hand, to fulfil his promises, God relies on the capacity of men and women to do good within the whole of humanity: thanks to their intelligence and empathy, the sufferings of others become their own; also, by denouncing the social constructions that produce these sufferings, they arouse, through their actions of solidarity, the human and spiritual resources buried in each person and in every culture. These men and women, inspired by God, have thus been able to create forms of living together where peace and justice are now embraced. When Christianity forgets these essential dimensions, it reveals only the sigh of the oppressed, like a world that has lost its heart and soul.

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<sup>18</sup> “*Letter to Diognetus*” VI, 1 [Introduction, critical edition, translation and comments by Henri Irénée Marrou] Cerf Editions (*Sources Chrétiennes*, 33 bis), Paris 1965, 65.

There have been and still are disciples of Jesus, enamoured of his way of loving, available to continue to love and serve even in the most difficult conditions. Like Jesus, they come close to the poor and the disenfranchised; they take upon themselves a share of their sufferings. In this closeness, they realise that the Lord already precedes them and acts in a discreet and effective way in the heart of each person. It is the encounter and contact with the wounded of life that leads them to discover that Jesus, through his Spirit, is already in their midst. It is the God who is on the side of those who hunger and thirst for justice who gathers them and makes them walk together. In faithfulness to this God who is hungry and thirsty for justice, to the Lord who gives himself up to the end, these disciples stand in the breaches that break up humanity. With Jesus, they bind up the wounded, helping them to discover that they are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, beloved of God. Like Jesus, they are willing, if necessary, to pay with their lives. It is the compassionate heart of Jesus that beats in this way in a heartless world. It is the living blood of Jesus and the members of his Body, his martyrs, that irrigates the heart of the world.



