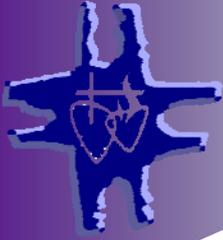


**Congregation of the Sacred Hearts
of Jesus and Mary**

October 2008



16

Com-Union



***SS.CC. Sisters and Brothers
victims of the world's violence***

Cover

Hawaii, Honolulu; Malia O' Ka Malu Sisters' House: mosaic of the ship "Marie Joseph"

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Introduction

March 2008

Dear brothers and sisters:

This edition of Com-Union will be published on the webpage just as we are celebrating Easter. At the center of the mystery of our faith is the cross, which we celebrate as the tree of life and source of salvation. But the cross is also the expression of the cruel and violent death that Jesus suffered. It is a devastating symbol of the mystery of evil and hatred. It is a perennial reminder of the suffering that envelops the world.

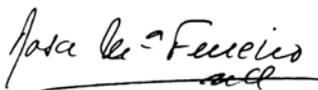
Throughout the history of the Congregation, many brothers and sisters have experienced devastating violence at first hand. We are referring to those who suffer from sickness or old age, even if they are a precious part of our institute. This issue of Com-Union is not so much about “suffering” in general but about violence and specifically about violent death: brothers and sisters who have died in accidents, who have been murdered or who were among the numerous victims of war or disaster. We are not speaking only of those who could be considered “martyrs”, those who lost their lives violently for the faith. Many have suffered violence and have died brutally without that being the occasion of their making an act of faith. As is often said, it was just “their destiny.” This issue is about all of them.

We live in an aggressive world and we participate in its violence when we react viscerally to others, when we disdain those who are different, when we mercilessly hurt others and when we harbor feelings that fuel rejection and division. We must be converted from such violence in order to respond to our vocation of reparation and reconciliation.

Right now let us look at how being “victims” affects us. Let us not think that we “merit” something just because on some occasion we were the object of aggression. Let us see this more from the perspective of our solidarity with the multitude of victims all over the world. We as a Congregation bear our part of the suffering provoked by the brutality and violence of the world and humanity. It would be strange if with all the adversity and suffering in the world, we passed through history unscathed and unmoved.

Many brothers and sisters have suffered in a particular way the violence that condemns huge masses of people to an existence burdened by suffering and darkness. These articles invite us to know them better, to reflect on the implacable mystery of evil and, with eyes that are perhaps confused but always hopeful, to look upon the crucified, who opens for us and all victims the door to Life.

Affectionately in the Sacred Hearts,



Rosa Mª Ferreiro ss.cc.
General Superior



Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ss.cc.
General Superior



Jesus' Mission of Reconciliation –

Our Mission of Reparation:

A Prayerful and a Pastoral Response to Violence

Patrick Lynch ss.cc.



Over the last four months two experiences have brought home to me in a very forceful way the destructive impact violence has on individuals, families, communities and societies. Firstly, as a commissioner of the Independent Asylum Review here in England I had the opportunity of hearing evidence from asylum seekers from many different backgrounds and from many different parts of the world. Again and again men and women, often in tears, described in vivid terms the beatings and injuries they received, the persecution they faced, the isolation they now feel and the fear they have of returning to their country of origin. It has become very clear to me that the scars of violence are very deep and all embracing – physical, emotional, familial, societal and international.

The second experience was on the last day of my trip to Ghana when I had the opportunity to visit El Mina. The fort at El Mina near Cape Coast was built by the Portuguese and was the site for the first Catholic Church in Ghana. However, years after the Portuguese were expelled the fort became the centre for the slave trade in West Africa. Seeing how and where the slaves were imprisoned, hearing how they were treated and seeing where they were sold and then shipped to Europe and to America never to see their country or loved ones again left me lost for words. It was the same feeling that I had experienced some years ago after visiting the Holocaust Memorial in Washington D.C.

Violence has always been a part of human history and whilst violence takes many forms – person against person, group against group, nation against nation – the focus in this article is not a political, social, cultural or even a moral analysis of violence but rather a reflection on violence from the perspective of our Christian faith and our SS.CC. Charism.

I always find visiting the graveyard in Picpus a very moving experience. The graves of those who died at the guillotine remind me that our Congregation was born at a time of great social upheaval and terrible violence but the graves of the Good Father and the Good Mother remind me of their courageous and faith filled response. Our Founders' response to violence was both prayerful and pastoral. Our Founders did not close their eyes or their hearts to the reality of violence but rather like St. Paul saw the violence through the eyes of faith. Again and again in his letters Paul reminds us of the reality of Jesus' death by crucifixion. Paul doesn't just tell us that Jesus died. Again and again he stresses the point that Jesus died on the cross. He speaks about '*Christ being crucified*' (Gal. 3.1): he speaks about Jesus '*shedding His blood on the cross*' (Col.1.20); he speaks about Jesus being '*obedient to death on the cross*' (Phil. 2.8): he speaks about how Jesus '*reconciled us to God through the cross*' (Eph. 2.11.). For Paul the crucifixion is much more than a historical detail. Proclaiming the Gospel for Paul involves much more than using eloquent words it involves proclaiming a '*crucified Christ*' (1 Cor. 1.17). He

sees the crucifixion as a very profound expression of God's love because *'God has given Him(Jesus) to be the victim who, by his blood, obtains our forgiveness'* (Rom. 3.25). That is why the language of the cross is nonsense for some (1. Cor.18).

How can we, therefore, understand and make sense of the *'mystery of the cross'* in our own lives, in history and in the world in which we live? Many great philosophers have tried but it is my belief that the gift and the legacy of our founders in relationship to the cross was that we appreciate and appropriate the mystery of the cross first and foremost through prayer. Many of us have, in our pastoral work, ministered to and accompanied people who have experienced the terrible effects of violence. When someone dies violently or experiences violence it triggers off a whole host feelings and questions among those directly and indirectly affected – family, friends, fellow students, fellow workers, fellow parishioners – feelings we can't fully express and questions we can't fully answer. Our SS.CC. starting point is to bring it to prayer. It is in and through prayer and for us it is especially in adoration that God teaches us to see Christ in the sufferings of others and gives us the heart to respond like Christ to the sufferings of others.

St Luke's account of the Passion can be a particularly rich source of reflection and meditation in this regard. Luke's Gospel is often called the *'Gospel of mercy, compassion and forgiveness'* because those themes are woven into Luke's description of the meals Jesus shared, of the miracles Jesus worked and of the parables Jesus told. These themes reach their climax amidst the violence of the Passion. In the Passion, Luke like the other evangelists describes how Jesus is betrayed and beaten, tortured and scourged, ridiculed and abused and finally crucified. Yet in the midst of his suffering Jesus heals the ear of the servant in the Garden of Gethsemane (Lk. 22:51), He forgives Peter (Lk. 22:23), He forgives the guards (Lk. 23:24) and He shows mercy to the repentant thief (Lk. 23:43). Even Herod and Pilate are affected and reconciled (Lk. 23:12). For Luke Jesus is, therefore, both the victim of violence but also the healer of violence and nowhere is this better. For Luke the crucifixion is clearly a moment of God's forgiveness, healing grace and conversion through Jesus for those who are open to it. For Luke the Passion of Jesus is also intimately linked to the prayer of Jesus. Just as Jesus (in Luke's Gospel especially) frequently turns to his Father prayer in life so too he now turns to his Father as He dies – first in the Garden of Gethsamane and then with His final words – a prayer of submission to his Fathers' will - *"Father, into you hands I commend my spirit"* (Lk. 23:46). Luke seems to be inviting us not just simply to read the Passion but to pray the Passion – to read it, reflect on it, enter into it and allow oneself be healed and converted by it. Article 4 of the Constitutions expresses it beautifully: *"Our reparation is in communion with Him, whose food is to do the Father's will and whose work is to reunite by his blood the dispersed children of God"*.

Our mission of reparation, however, invites us to go further – *"to be in solidarity with the men and woman who are victims of injustice, hatred, and sin in the world"* and to *"collaborate with all those who, led by the Spirit, work to build a world of justice and love, a sign of the Kingdom"* (Art. 4). Just as our Founders were not blind to the reality and horror of violence neither were they numbed by the experience of violence. Like Jesus our reparative mission begins in prayer but is then expressed in healing and reconciliation. Nowhere does Jesus speak more clearly about the mission and ministry of reparation than in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25 – 37).

When reading the story of the Good Samaritan it is important to note that the incident takes place as the man is going from Jerusalem to Jericho. For the Jews Jerusalem was God's city – it was the centre of their faith, their culture and their identity. Jericho on the other hand was a very worldly city. The fact that the man was going from Jerusalem to Jericho had for Luke a

spiritual as well as a geographical significance. Secondly, it is good also to remember that the Samaritans were despised by the Jews. They were considered to be heretics and foreigners. Thirdly, it is helpful to remember that Jesus is talking to a lawyer. At that time many Jews especially those versed in the law would have believed that salvation is obtained primarily by knowing and keeping the Law.

The parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us that it is not enough simply to know (like the lawyer) what to do; we must actually respond and do it. If we look carefully at the story we see that the Samaritan 'sees' the effects of violence and he 'responds' immediately to the suffering and pain that the man has experienced. Furthermore, he 'sets up a structure' to heal the wounds and scars of violence. The Samaritan sees the pain and suffering of the man who was beaten but also he allows himself to be moved by that suffering. Unlike the priest and the Levite who were too busy - he stops, he listens and he responds with care and compassion but then he stays with the suffering. Not only does he bring the man to the inn he returns on his way back to make sure that he is recovering. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a call to conversion, compassion and commitment – a call to 'see' the suffering of our world', a call to 'respond' with compassion to that suffering and a call to 'be in solidarity' with those who are suffering – a call that is mirrored in our Constitutions: "*Our faith moves us to welcome and to serve Jesus himself who suffers in the victims of human greed and injustice to the end of time*" (Art. 30. 4).

Our Congregation has proudly borne witness to this call to give witness to God's healing and reconciling love in the face of violence and to those who have experienced violence over many years and in all parts of the world – in France and Spain, in Germany and Poland, in Mozambique and the Congo, in Chile, Columbia and Argentina, in Indonesia, China and more recently in India. Like Jesus' mission our mission of reparation and reconciliation is both prayerful and pastoral. It is the call to 'see' Christ's presence in those who suffer and to 'be' Christ's presence for those who suffer - a call that has been beautifully summed up by the Chilean Commission on spirituality:

"In the silence of our small chapels, we recall the events in the mortal life of Jesus, from his birth to his death, contemplating in them the suffering of our people and the work of our brothers in the Sacred Hearts..... We ask the Risen Lord, Who lives mysteriously in the Bread we offer, that he give courage to the poor and the sick, to the afflicted and the abandoned. In adoration we are in solidarity with the passion which Christ undergoes in the history of our times.....

In adoration lies (also) our missionary strength.....it derives from the same Christ, alive and committed, that we adore. He it is who grants us unity as Brothers and Sisters, the strength to leave all, and the joy of taking His message to distant peoples."

(Our "Vocation and Mission", p. 160,
by Patrick Bradley ss.cc.)

The experience of violence in the life of the Good Mother

***“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”***

(Matthew 5:10)

Katherine Francis Miller ss.cc.



Born on August 11, 1867, Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie knew a life of ease and grace for all of her growing-up years. The death of her father when she was ten brought the reality of the Cross into her young life, but her mother assured that Henriette enjoyed the finer things life had to offer in terms of education, fashion, and social status. With the title Countess of Malta and a charming personality, Henriette could look forward to a very successful and prestigious marriage and a more than comfortable life. But circumstances changed drastically when revolution broke out in France.

In the years 1787 to 1794, hundreds of the nobility and higher clergy were executed and thousands exiled, including Henriette's two brothers, Louis and Dominique. The town of Poitiers, where Henriette and her mother lived, saw more than thirty persons guillotined between 1792 and 1794.

During this time of violent upheaval, Madame Aymer de la Chevalerie and her daughter, Henriette, stood courageous and firm in their convictions. Defying the law of the revolutionaries, they hid priests who refused to take the oath of loyalty to the state in their home on Rue de Haute Treilles. Denounced by a servant, the women were arrested on October 22, 1793 and placed in the Hospitalieres prison of Poitiers until September 11, 1794. Daily, they risked losing their lives on the guillotine.

In the face of violent persecution, Henriette could have responded, as many of her peers did in the prison, with denial, despondency and a desire for revenge. Instead, Henriette's time in prison was the occasion of a profound change of heart. She took a serious look at herself and, in the light of God's grace, experienced a radical turning around: now she surrendered her life totally to God. Gabrielle de la Barre writes about Henriette's experience in her [Memoirs on the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts](#). Once the young countess had made a general confession of her life and received communion, she never deviated from her chosen path.

In his teachings, as well as, by his actions, Jesus challenges us to forgive those who hurt us, to reach out to all with compassionate love:

“You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect”. (Matthew 5, 44 – 48). “Father, forgive them they know not what they do.” (Luke 23, 34)

The Good Mother never used the words, "*Father, forgive them*", but her life in prison and out of it was a testimony to the forgiving love Jesus asks of all who would follow him. In prison, she befriended a noble woman who espoused the cause of the revolution. She had renounced her noble title and had become a "citizen" only to find herself imprisoned with Henriette and disdained by the other prisoners. Henriette reached out to her in her desolation and abandonment. Then there was the jailor's daughter. Henriette had reason to consider the jailor a persecutor and to shun his daughter. Instead, she spent time with the young child showing her kindness and love.

Even after her release from prison, Henriette experienced persecution of various types. At first, she was shunned by members of the Association of the Sacred Heart who thought that her former worldly life made her unfit for their group. The primitive community lived in constant fear of being arrested by the police and needed to hide their activities.

What was Henriette's response to all these forms of persecution? It was to cling to God's love revealed in Jesus and Mary and to carry out God's will. Together with Father Coudrin, Henriette devoted her whole self to repairing the ravages that violence wreaked on the society of her time. Through Eucharistic adoration, she and the community she founded would contemplate God's redeeming love in Jesus. From this fount of inspiration and energy would come the power to act in Christ's name in the world. Preaching, education, missionary work would flow from this source to construct the Kingdom of God. There is a scene in the film The Passion of the Christ, where Jesus, on his way to Calvary, is crushed to the earth by the cross. His Mother Mary runs to him, their eyes meet as he whispers to her, "*See, Mother I make all things new!*" It is this same vision, this same energy that worked in Henriette Aymer as she lived through the experience of persecution and violence in her life.

Looking at ourselves today, we can ask, "*Do I suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness?*" "*Do we as a community suffer persecution?*" If I/we do not suffer, is it because I/we live in a righteous world? Or is it because we have blended in so much with the status quo that I/we do not really make a difference. Henriette stood up against the injustice of her time in acts of righteousness. What am I called to do? What are we called to do as communities and Congregation?

Our Founder in the midst of violence:

a meditation at his tomb

Edouard Brion ss.cc.



Dear Good Father,

In my mind I go to your tomb where you have been resting for 171 years as of this March 27. That's more than twice the 69 years that you lived. Like the Good Mother and the others of the Congregation there with you, you are linked forever to the other bodies that surround you in this cemetery. They are in this place because they are somehow connected to "the horrors of the Revolution." Among the numerous victims buried in the common graves at the end of the garden are certain members of their families. They wanted to rest close to them forever.

The names of those victims, more than a thousand of them, were always before you on the walls of the Picpus chapel. The majority were common folk. Chateaubriand pointed that out in his "Memoirs from beyond the grave." *Opposing the priest and the nobleman, the Convention immolated thousands of workers from the lowest classes of the people. This is something that we must never forget.* (IV, 11, 2). Your adoration, as that of the sisters, was meant to be a perpetual reparation for those crimes

"*Led by the hand*" of God, you were able to escape that revolutionary violence, as were those family members of those guillotined who surround your tomb. In fact, there are only members of the rich and noble families. Doesn't that bother you? Even if you were not from among the poor, you were not of the aristocratic class. But you were viscerally attached to the legitimate monarchs, the Bourbons, and the violence against them deeply wounded you.

We see it when the pretender to the throne, the Duke de Berry, was assassinated on February 10, 1820. Even more serious was that the future of the monarchy was threatened, as he had no son. One week later in a circular letter to all the brothers and sisters of the Congregation and not only to the superiors as was usual, you let out a cry of pain: *When by our vows and prayers we sought the return of our Princes, could you have believed that one of them, the one upon whom rested the most precious hopes of France, would redden with his blood the soil where his ancestors reigned? The impious doctrine, which led to this fatal event, threatens us with other misfortunes. After such a detestable crime, we can expect anything. Yes, our beloved brothers and very dear sisters, we must not deceive ourselves. The enemies of the altar and throne are plotting other evil projects. The august victim that has just been sacrificed is not enough for them. They want the family of our Kings to disappear entirely and religion to be blotted out.* (Annales, n. 23, p. 189) You also ask prayers for the deceased, *the worthy nephew of the martyr King Luis XVI*, and that the anger of God against France relent. A few months later you were clearly relieved when you learned of the posthumous birth of the victim's son, the Duke of Bordeaux, the future Henry V. The future of the lawful monarchy

seemed assured. But that consolation would be short lived. From Rouen you shared in the violence and destruction that Picpus suffered during the revolution of 1830 and you saw a usurper, Louis-Philippe, ascend to the throne.

A few years later, you would join these great ones in your grave,. They were family members or relatives by marriage of the victims of the Revolution. There was Lafayette, who had himself begun the Revolution according to a remark of Chateaubriand. There was Mathieu de Montmorency, colleague of Lafayette in the Constituent assembly, partisan of the abolition of the nobility during the revolution and then defender of the monarchy during the Restoration, minister of foreign affairs and especially grand master of the "knights of the faith" and as such a close friend of yours (Lestra II, 302-303). Still today, descendants of these families continue to be buried in this place. During the Picpus program last year from a distance I saw the cortege of an admiral, who was buried just to one side of Lafayette's tomb.

At the end of this short meditation at your tomb, my thoughts go to the violence that has just touched your family, our family, in the state of Orissa in India. May peace in justice come there to open a path. Remembering my last trip to the Holy Land, my prayer echoes the song of Théo Mertens: *And may peace finally resound in reality, not as a dream, and may peace finally resound to the very hills of Judea...* I remember also the little pebbles that we placed on your tomb during the Picpus 2007 program. We shared them with one another as signs of unity and our taking responsibility for one another. May they be little stones that look toward a world of justice, of peace, of non-violence and of love. Good bye, Good Father, rest in peace.

The Experience of Suffering, Persecution and Violence in the Primitive Community

Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.



When I was asked to write an article for this edition of *COM-UNION*, it was specified that I was to make “a real historical presentation.” I was not to show how our brothers and sisters confronted violence but rather how violence was present in their everyday existence.

The history of revolutionary France is very complex. I will only touch on a few aspects, and try to reconstruct, through several flashes, the atmosphere in which the primitive community lived especially in Poitiers and Paris.

Everything began quite well...In the streets of Poitiers you could hear people singing:

*Finally the good times of France
Are going to reawaken our hope
And put an end to all these problems
Hail the Estates General!*

The bells of France’s churches were pealing. It seemed that the hour had finally arrived when the burdens of the Old Regime and everything remaining of the feudal period was going to be swept away leaving greater justice in its place. On August 8, 1788 King Louis XVI had convoked the Estates General for the following May 1. He invited the French people to send him their complaints. However, right from the first days of the assembly conflict appeared inevitable between the delegates of the nobility and clergy – the privileged classes - and those of the Third Estate. Rapidly passions built, rumblings of revolt began in Paris, and the Bastille was taken. Barricades were erected and trenches dug in the capital. Quickly the King, who a short time before had refused to use force against the Assembly, appeared to be a has-been, when Bailly, the mayor of Paris, invested him with the tricolor cockade, symbol of “*the august and eternal alliance between the monarch and the people.*”

The revolt spread to towns and the countryside. Customs offices were sacked; toll gates burnt, transport watched, coaches searched. At the end of July 1789, the alarm sounded from bell tower to bell tower and the Great Fear took hold in the most remote villages. That gave way to the universal tendency to exaggerate the worst news in the midst of calamity.

During the months and years that followed, the Constituent Assembly tried to rebuild France by rethinking the nation’s institutions: the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*, administrative decentralization and some other reforms.

The flight of the King on June 21, 1791 was decisive. It confirmed the irreconcilable opposition between the royalty and the revolutionary nation that France had become. Everything was heading toward chaos. A declaration of war with Austria (April 20, 1792), resounding military setbacks, fear and the incapacity of those in leadership ended in the suspension of the royalty and the convocation of a Convention charged with developing a new Constitution. It was a time of change, insecurity and instability. Some historians speak of chaos.

It was in that heavy atmosphere and one clearly hostile to everything related to the Church that all the members of the future primitive community of the Sacred Hearts grew up. How could they not be affected forever, for the good as well as the bad, by the violence, hatred and persecution?

More than one brother, more than one sister, from the aristocracy or not, had known members of their family who had to emigrate, who were hunted, who had property sacked, confiscated, whose friends and acquaintances were arrested, put in prison, ridiculed. People and possessions were constantly in danger. How many of them were hit full force by news like that of the arrest of those accused of being *"fences for fanatic priests?"* This was the case of Sister Ave, director of the hospital of Incurables in Poitiers, who was put in stocks twice.

Suspension of religious vows (November 2, 1789), interdiction of the religious habit (April 6, 1792), closing of all convents of women (October 1, 1792), so many laws which caused such damage and which had such effects for so long and which in some way subordinated the church to the state.

At that time in France's history hatred caused destruction and disgust but, at certain moments, it appeared to triumph. How many pages stained in blood were written and turned! It was a time when *"it was night"* at Coussay-les-Bois and in the grain loft of La Motte d'Usseau... *"It was night"* in Saint-Georges-de-Noisné... *"It was night"* in the prison of the Hospitalières in Poitiers... *"It was night"* in Montbernage as well as at the Grand'Maison... Along the roads of France and in the cities and countryside, it would be night. And the night would extend to Mende, to Cahors and to Paris. It was also very dark on the Place du Trône in Paris, especially around the common graves dug and filled with bodies in the rear of the property of the Canonesses of Saint Augustine that had been bought in 1796 by Mr. Le Jemptel and Mr. Cordival. In all this darkness, in the midst of tragic persecution and inhuman violence, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts was born.

The hassles of establishing the little community on the rue des Hautes-Treilles in Poitiers forced them to be perpetually on the watch. *"For some time, we had to fear night visits by the impious and being taken by surprise. To avoid that danger, especially at times where there was particular reason to fear (and that was often enough), our Venerable Mother, after remaining three or four hours before the Blessed Sacrament, would spend the rest of the night in an attic that had a dormer window overlooking the street, watching to see if the police were coming. She was a sentinel. While the little community slept or prayed to God, she watched with great care to make sure that the gendarmes did not prowl around the house trying to surprise us."* (Hilarion Lucas, *'La Bonne Mère - sa vie'* - p. 28) There were sleepless nights of worry and prayer. Suspicion was the rule of the day, people were denounced shamelessly. Even if you were on your guard, you could still be taken by surprise. And so Hilarion reports that *"at the beginning of 1798, the revolutionaries made a search. Mother Henriette saved herself by climbing over the wall with several of the sisters. The government agents interrogated the house gardener. That*

good man simply swore that Mass had been said in the house and that he had served it. M^{lle} Lussa de la Garélie, who was supposed to be mistress of the house as prudence demanded, was arrested and taken to prison” (Hilarion Lucas ‘*La Bonne Mère - sa vie*’ - p. 29)

What a paradox and what a sacrifice it must have been for the budding community that wanted to have adoration to not *“always have the Mass in the house because the persecution was still going on.”* (Testimony of Sister Geneviève Pigeau quoted in « *La Bonne Mère - Sa vie* » by Hilarion Lucas, p. 36).

This was the general atmosphere because a fundamental and truly revolutionary principle of the church born of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was the election of priests by the citizens. That was the reason Father Coudrin fled the village of Coussay-les-Bois on April 8, 1792, after the principle Mass of Easter and took refuge in his dark hiding place in the Motte d’Usseau, living there from May until October of that year. Furthermore, in 1790 it was decided to restructure the parish network and so in Poitiers twenty-four parishes were reduced to six. That meant the closing of numerous churches. *“Both fanatics and the devoted of Poitiers were hit hard by the closure of the churches.”* Suzanne Geoffroy alluded to that event in her account of the birth of the Association of the Sacred Heart, the pious group that met in hiding. Finally, after the decree of August 26, 1792 which gave fifteen days for the refractory priests to leave France, many went into exile.

The Terror, June 2, 1793 to July 27, 1794, concentrated all the passion and hatred and some men became known for their extremism and for imposing themselves often brutally so as to expose and purge the opposition. This period saw the height of the persecution of priests during which deportations on the hulks of La Rochelle meant for many a slow death and for all unmerited torture. Sick and elderly ecclesiastics were shut up in schools and convents, set up as makeshift prisons.

In 1797, the trauma was not wholly ended and the terror still flared up now and again in Poitiers. The ecclesial landscape had totally changed. More than two hundred religious houses and buildings had been auctioned and sold as property of the nation. That made all the more paradoxical, the opening of a new convent on the rue des Hautes-Treilles...for in the streets of Poitiers people still saw priests pass who had been arrested, in chains, shamefully frisked before being deported...The Grand’Maison was not a safe place. So the Good Mother, with the help of a carpenter, ingeniously built trap doors and hiding places where they could disappear at the least sign of trouble. There was also the parlor arranged and decorated for the celebration of Mass. Augustin Coudrin, the founder’s nephew, reports in his journal, *“You could not see the tabernacle. You had to lightly hit a pillar separating two panels and to the left of the opening in the right panel, a wooden panel opened and inside you could see the tabernacle.”* In the monastery there were no cloister and no stalls. Seated on the armchairs of the parlor turned chapel, the Sisters were both fervent adorers and fine embroiderers.

It is not at all surprising to read in the Good Father’s circular letter announcing the approval of the first Constitutions, *“Our Institute began in a time when the blood of God’s servants flowed from the scaffolds. We were preserved during fourteen years of an oppressive government, aided by the favor of Heaven; we were able to hide from the clever and perfidious police knowledge of our Institute and especially the relationships between our different establishments...”*

Was it chance or providence? After the Concordat of 1802, it was on the site of a massacre that the seed which had just begun to germinate in Poitiers was sown in Paris in the soil of Picpus. The founders or the first brothers and sisters, Parisians by adoption, do not really mention the state of the place where so much blood had been shed, so many families humiliated and so many bodies stripped. But the spirit of reparation reigned and prayer oozed from the place...However the flame of revolution was not totally extinguished and we can well imagine that the presence of the mass graves *"in the rear of the garden"* was not totally unknown.

During the Napoleonic period, suspicion was everywhere; persecutions of religious establishments began once more. Father Hilarion reports different things in his Memoirs.

On May 10, 1805, just weeks after the arrival of the Sisters in Picpus, the first policeman ventured into the convent and noted *"land put to gardening, with many things planted. In the middle...the main building... there is a small oratory with a Latin inscription on the frontispiece...One or two Masses are said every day, two or three on Sunday."*

And so it was *"that in October 1808, the mayor of Sées (a foundation made in 1807) denounced the two houses we had in that city, as belonging to a religious corporation whose leaders reside in Paris."* In that little provincial town, the Sisters had to spread themselves out among the faithful during Mass in the Cathedral.

In 1812, the Brothers' house in Paris was denounced to the Council of State as a dangerous gathering that should be dissolved.

During that same year, the University, founded by Bonaparte, wanted to take control of all education. The rector of the Academy of Cahors harassed the director of our school and wanted to force him to send his students to study at the academy.

In Mende the prefect persisted in wanting to submit the house of the Sisters to an inspection by women that he would name, giving them the right to examine the boarding school, to visit the dormitories and even the kitchen.

The years following the fall of Napoleon were hardly more tranquil. In Cahors, where the sisters were living in the former convent of the Mirepoises, the commandant of the national guard wanted to force Sister Françoise de Viart, Superior of the house, to fly the tricolor flag. In February 1831, the house of Picpus was wrecked, some brothers were taken to the station of the National Guard at Faubourg Saint-Antoine and others fled. Soldiers of the guard stayed in the house for thirty-six hours and as Hilarion stresses *"during that time took the liberty of doing the most impious and revolting things."*

Persecution and violence were the source of great suffering in France right from our origins. To what extent were our brothers and sisters first hand witnesses? It is difficult to say. And news did not circulate as it does in our day...

“Marie Joseph”: first SS.CC. victims

Courageously braving possible natural disasters

Dolorine Pires ss.cc.



It may be presumed that when we hear the word “violence,” we tend to relate it primarily to forces doing physical harm to human beings--war, terrorism, maltreatment of any kind. Yet violence can also be experienced from natural forces such as earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, shipwreck, etc.

It is in the latter sense that we can link the tragic loss of the mission ship *Marie Joseph* to the theme of violence. Although some details about that disaster remain unknown, most of us know the story of how a courageous group of religious of the Sacred Hearts set sail on a perilous voyage by sea to the distant Sandwich Islands located in the middle of the vast Pacific Ocean.

When the ship left the port of St.Malo in France on December 15, 1842, that group of pioneers must have been acutely aware that they would experience much inconvenience on board ship during the trip that would last for several months--cramped, uncomfortable living space; poor food; seasickness; homesickness. They must also have known that navigation itself would be a problem, since sailing at that time was not advanced to such an extent that storms at sea could easily be weathered. News of shipwrecks and of ships that did not return must have been known to them. So, too, was the danger of rounding Cape Horn known to at least some of them. After all, in 1834, Bishop Rouchouze had made the trip from France to the Congregation’s mission posts in the South Pacific. Moreover, he had just returned to France from the mission in Honolulu and had only recently experienced the difficulties and threats such a long trip entailed.

So, it must have been with indomitable courage and admirable missionary zeal that the group of pioneer Sacred Hearts missionaries undertook that hazardous journey. There was as yet no Panama Canal, and persons responsible for planning the trip were well aware of the dangers to be faced in sailing through the Straits of Magellan particularly in winter. This explains their decision to begin the journey in mid-December, when it would be winter in the Northern Hemisphere but summer in the Southern.

How different traveling is today from what it was some hundred and sixty-six years ago! Today we can make long international flights in a few hours, seated in relative comfort, served several meals, and entertained along the way. In some instances, we may keep in phone or computer contact with family and friends. Granted, there is always risk involved in any flight, but we have the assurance of more advanced technology and instant electronic communication. Information on dangerous weather conditions can be forecast, and radar control is possible.

Not so in 1842. It is understandably difficult for us in 2008 to imagine the amount of preparation needed for such a long voyage. Consider the simple matter of food. Provisions had to be taken aboard for months on the sea with few stopovers possible along the way. A huge stove would be needed not only to bake bread and cook what dried supplies were available, but also to distill sea water. We are told that large crates served as pens for farmyard animals: a goat, a fat pig, rabbits, pigeons, and sixty-three chickens.

Undaunted by possible danger, the pioneer group embarked on their missionary journey. Bishop Rouchouze, in particular, must have begun that trip with high hopes and joy. He had obtained what he had come to Europe to obtain for his fledgling mission in the South Pacific and in the Sandwich Islands: a ship to make communication easier between those missions and Europe, as well as between Honolulu and missions farther south in Eastern Oceania; six priests; a subdeacon; seven brothers (among them, two of the same Coulanges family); and the first ten Sisters of the Sacred Hearts. A native youth was returning with him.

On board were desperately needed supplies of various kinds: for liturgical worship and general devotion (sacred vessels, vestments, missals, baptismal and holy water fonts, statues, etc.) and materials for education, especially classroom texts.

Despite seasickness and stormy weather that took the *Marie Joseph* north nearly to the coast of Ireland, the ship moved steadily southward. In about a month it was able to stop at Sao Thiago, the main isle in the Cape Verde Islands. Fresh fruits and vegetables were welcome additions to the diet, and supplies were again brought aboard.

As the journey continued, increasing heat announced the ships approach to the equator. On this part of the trip tragedy struck when Sr. Caliste Le Gris died suddenly a month before her twenty-fifth birthday. Not wishing to bury her at sea, the captain heeded the request of the religious that the ship sail to the island of St. Catherine off the coast of Brazil. Sr. Caliste was buried in Florianopolis on January 23, 1843. The native youth, who had died while the ship was in port, was also buried on the island.

Until recently, the exact date when the *Marie Joseph* sailed south from Brazil was not known, but a fairly recent discovery of the diary of Fr. Saturnino, S.S.C.C. (Rio de Janeiro, 1843) specifies the 19th of February as the date of departure. Once the ship had set sail again, nothing more was heard of it. Although searches were made by the French and the Chilean governments, its disappearance remains a mystery. Some conjectures were made, but nothing was verified. For example, there was circulated a report that a sailing vessel had been sighted some miles south of Cape Horn, but no identification was possible. On March 6, 1843, another report said a ship had been sighted far to the south; it was surrounded by about twenty icebergs and its mast, surmounted by a cross, had been stripped of its sails and hung with distress signals. If this was the *Marie Joseph*, we can imagine the lingering death by both starvation and freezing that came to all aboard.

Suppose that had not been the mission ship, or that the ship had been able to free itself from the imprisoning icebergs, what then? Several rumors have been recorded about foreigners landing on the beaches of different Pacific islands, only to be killed by unfriendly or frightened natives. (Fuller details about these rumors may be found in the booklet entitled *Shrouded in Mystery*, published by the Sisters of the Pacific Province in 2000 to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Sacred Hearts Congregation.)

So, we can ask ourselves the question: How did a natural disaster at sea claim the lives of the heroic pioneer Sacred Hearts missionaries? No one on earth really knows. That information awaits us in heaven. The register of the port at St. Malo from which the ship had sailed reads simply: "*Marie Joseph*, No. 679, Captain O'Sullivan. Absent without news. Supposed lost with passengers and cargo."

However, of one fact we can be certain: the twenty-five Sacred Hearts religious who embarked on the ill-fated ship were motivated by courageous missionary zeal. Having virtuously done violence to their love of family and homeland (missionaries did not usually return home in those days), they faced the dangers inherent in a long voyage by sea in order to serve in a field afar. They overcame the natural fear of how a stormy sea can damage and/or destroy a small ship tossed about on its treacherous, violent waves. Fired with the same zeal which characterized their founder (whose name the ship bore), they were eager to reveal to others the love of the Sacred Hearts as Fr. Coudrin had envisioned their mission in the granary at la Motte d'Usseau. Their desire was to contemplate and live the love of those Hearts, and to proclaim it in the distant islands of the Pacific Ocean. The heroism of their self-sacrifice is no mystery to Sacred Hearts religious today. It lives on and continues to inspire us.

Religious Persecution -- In Paradise!

Dolorine Pires ss.cc.



The Hawaiian Islands are often called “The Paradise of the Pacific.” and its people of many ethnic backgrounds are often cited as examples of racial harmony. One would hardly expect, therefore, to read of religious intolerance in these fair isles. Yet, in 1827, when pioneer Sacred Hearts Catholic missionaries tried to establish Catholicism in Hawaii, they were violently oppressed. The missionaries were constantly harassed, and many converted natives experienced imprisonment, hard labor, and physical abuse.

The Sandwich Islands (as Hawaii was then named) was a Hawaiian kingdom ruled by monarchs and powerful chiefs. In 1820, members of the Congregational Protestant Church had arrived and begun to proselytize. They quickly allied themselves to the native leaders, who had already been strongly influenced by the British and now welcomed the Americans. European political rivalries were already strong in the Islands, and so would be the Protestant influence the American ministers brought.

When the Catholic French missionaries arrived, these rivalries led to intense opposition to them and to the Roman Catholic religion they professed. Although he was not subjected to physical abuse and imprisonment, Vicar Apostolic Alexis Bachelot, leader of the pioneer group was constantly antagonized and eventually forcibly exiled on December 24, 1831. He and English-speaking Fr. Short were banished to California, where they remained until 1837. Fr. Short would engage in education there, and Fr. Bachelot would become the first resident priest of the pueblo *Nuestra Senora de los Angeles*, today the important city of Los Angeles. When they tried to return to the Islands on March 28, 1837, they were again fiercely opposed by the Hawaiian monarchy, the chiefs, and especially the Protestant ministers. Fr. Short left for Chile, and Fr. Bachelot planned to go to a Sacred Hearts mission in the South Pacific but died at sea on December 5, 1837.

Much to the missionaries’ regret, Fr. Armand, one of the three pioneer priests, and Brothers Boissier and Portal, who had also been in the pioneer group, had already returned to France. The converts were sustained in their faith by Bro. Melchior Bondu who, against opposition from the Protestant leaders, was allowed to remain because the chiefs knew he was non-clerical and they admired how he supported himself by working as a skilled carpenter.

The courageous loyalty of the native converts during the religious persecution has been well documented, especially in the fairly recent book by Emmett Cahill, *The Dark Decade 1829-1839: Anti-Catholic Persecution in Early Hawaii*.

Actually, persecution had begun while Fr. Bachelot and Fr. Short were still in the Islands and could encourage the newly converted natives to remain steadfast. Understandably, these pioneer missionaries keenly felt the irony of their situation since the hostility they and their

converts experienced was instigated by other Christians who had also come to the Islands to preach the Gospel and peace! They knew that the bigoted ministers equated Catholicism with idol worship because, for the Protestants, veneration of sacred images was idolatry. The newly baptized Catholics were told they no longer were worshiping the true God, and were warned that this offense would incur punishment.

Anything that favored the new false Catholic faith, therefore, could not be pardoned. Joining in Catholic worship was forbidden. Refusing to attend Protestant classes and services was unlawful. Refusing to build a Protestant church, refusing to destroy a Catholic chapel, failing to keep the Sunday holy in the strict way prescribed by Protestants--these were offenses punishable by imprisonment and harsh or demeaning labor. For example, a zealous Protestant teacher once brought before a judge a group of youngsters who had not kept the Sunday holy because they had spent some time that day watching a French ship coming into the harbor and dock.

Imprisonment was the usual punishment and could last for several months. Displeased by the disobedience of the converts, Queen Kaahumanu added hard and degrading work to their sentences. Stone walls had to be constructed, rocks had to be cut and carried to the building sites, filth and excrement had to be collected, carried publicly and emptied into the ocean, while bystanders mocked and derided the humiliated prisoners.

Names of persecuted men and women have been listed, and accounts of remarkable courage have come down to us. We know, for example, of blind Kikimi who was nevertheless sentenced to cutting and carrying stones. His mother, Uheke, would locate the rocks; together they would dig them up, and carry them to the work site. We read of Luika who defied the law when, in August of 1829, the governor issued a proclamation forbidding Hawaiians from attending Catholic services. Asked where she was going briskly one morning, she replied, "To the Catholic church!" Later, when a new wave of persecution broke out, she was placed in a small boat and abandoned at sea. After landing on another island (Maui), she spent months in exile before she was finally able to return to Honolulu. There she became both catechist and supporter of other converts. There is also the pathetic story of twenty-one year old Alokia, who was already a widow when she was arrested at the beginning of 1831. She was nursing her infant when the police broke into her grass hut and took both mother and child to prison where she was chained hand and foot. She was denied food for four days and condemned to harsh labor. Such treatment led to her death, and it was Fr. Bachelot himself who rushed to the prison and gave her the last rites. Her infant was adopted by a Catholic family.

Men were also persecuted. Two examples are Akeroniko Keawahine and Kimeone Paele. Torn between loyalty to the king who opposed Catholicism and loyalty to his new faith, Akeroniko yielded to temptation and declared himself no longer Catholic. Later, repenting of his apostasy, he imposed upon himself the sacrifice of not speaking for a whole year except to pray and to instruct others in the faith. When faced with the ultimatum of going either to the Protestant service or to prison, he chose imprisonment. Bound in chains, he suffered hunger until he was freed. Kimeone was arrested on December 29, 1835, while instructing five catechumens in his home. Because he was a leader, he was given less food but more works than the others, was forced to sleep on the dirt floor instead of the customary lauhala mat, and was frequently whipped. His wife, Mariana, was imprisoned for six days after the Protestant leaders visited the prison but could not shake the faith of the converts. She, too, was sentenced

to demeaning and harsh labor. When released from prison, Kimeone continued his mission as catechist until his death on December 2, 1839,

Some writers say that even after religious freedom was granted on the feast of Our Lady of Peace in 1839, harassment continued up to around 1850, perhaps in less public or severe ways,

In heaven, the pioneer missionaries and their noble converts must now rejoice in the knowledge that full religious freedom blesses the Hawaiian Islands, and Catholicism is well established. Today the Diocese of Honolulu is the largest Christian denomination in the Paradise to the Pacific.

The “Martyrs of Picpus”¹

Looking back at a Painful Story

Eric Hernout ss.cc.



When you are in Picpus you are not far from the place where four brothers of the Congregation met their destiny, in the Paris neighborhood of Belleville, in the 20th “arrondissement”, a bit to the north of our ss.cc. parish of St. Gabriel, where the bodies of the martyrs have been since 1959.

During the Picpus 2007 program, Friedhelm Geller gave a good introduction to the neighborhood. Like that of Ménilmontant, Belleville is a working-class neighborhood. It is the section that the singer Edith Piaf (1915-1963) came from, celebrated in the film “La Môme” (Olivier Dahan, 2007), known in some places under the title “La vie en rose.” The life of Piaf was anything but rose colored.

One of her most well known songs is “Non, rien de rien, non je ne regrette rien.” (No, absolutely nothing, I regret nothing.) That could have been the motto of our four brothers who were massacred on the rue Haxo in Belleville on May 26, 1871.

They had no regrets about choosing a life in the Congregation. Witnesses of their faith and of the Church, they were literally had the life crushed out of them.

Before retracing the last days of our brothers, we must first take a brief look at the historical context.²

A short historical overview

The second empire had transformed Paris: modernization of the capital, a new plan of the city by Haussmann and the development of different kinds of public facilities. But the working class neighborhoods were forgotten in that modernization. At the time Paris had a population of 1,850,000. Workers lived in precarious conditions and misery was widespread. A workers movement began to be organized. Paris began to get restless. During the Spring of 1879 there were revolutionary rumblings. Napoleon III was trying to gain greater popularity.

Internationally, France was worried about the power acquired by Prussia after its victory over Austria-Hungary in 1866 and also the desire of Bismarck to unify Germany under Prussian hegemony. Therefore France declared war on Prussia on July 19, 1870 but that quickly ended in debacle. On August 7 Paris was in a state of siege. Mac-Mahon would be obliged to surrender on September 2 at Sedan, where the Emperor Napoleon III was prisoner along with 100,000 men. The surrender was followed by the declaration of the Third Republic in Paris,

¹ By Eric Hernout, ss.cc, taken from different sources such as Horizons Blancs for the drawing, Annales ss.cc, a book by Father Mouly, Bro. Marin Fouquet, Fr. Cor Rademaker, the booklet « Bref historique sur l’Eglise de Notre-Dame des Otages » (A Brief History of the Church of Our Lady of the Hostages), et « La Commune de Paris », Fayard, 1986.

² Cf. Talk by Friedhelm Geller, ss.cc, during the Picpus 2007 program.

Lyon and Marseille on September 4. At the same time, Paris was under siege by 180,000 Prussians. The siege led to the death of 10,000 Parisians and lasted until January 29, 1871. On January 28 Paris capitulated and signed an armistice and the beginnings of a peace treaty at Versailles on February 26. The Germans paraded from l'Étoile to Concorde. Picpus became lodging for more than 800 soldiers. But the radical republicans and the Parisian socialists wanted to continue the war.

It was in such a context that the "Paris Commune" rose up. Thiers, the head of the government, decided to disarm the city and recoup the 227 canons of the national guard in place at Belleville and Montmartre. The regular army did not succeed in taking control of the canons on Montmartre. And there was good reason. They were fraternizing with the crowd and the national guard! So on March 18 an insurrection began in Paris. After the murder of two generals of the Communards, Thiers ordered the evacuation to Versailles so as not to fall into the insurgents' traps. A revolutionary government would control Paris from March 26 to May 29, 1871, refusing the capitulation of France and opposing the government troops of Adolphe Thiers. The "Commune" declared it forbidden to celebrate Mass in the prisons of Paris. On March 25 there was a decree of the separation of Church and State. On the night of April 5, the Commune published a "Decree of Hostages," written by Protot:

« The Commune of Paris,

Considering that the Government of Versailles openly tramples underfoot the laws of humanity as well as those of war: that it is guilty of horrors that those who invaded the soil of France did not even commit

Considering that the representatives of the Paris Commune have the pressing duty to defend the honor and the life of two million inhabitants who have placed in their hands concern for their future : that it is important to take all the measures necessitated by the situation;

Considering that the city's political leaders and magistrates must reconcile the common good with respect for public liberty;

Decrees:

Art. 1: Any person judged to be an accomplice of the Versailles government will be immediately declared prosecuted and incarcerated.

Art. 2: A jury of prosecution will be instituted within twenty-four hours to consider the crimes to be referred to it.

Art. 3: The jury will give a ruling within twenty-four hours.

Art. 4: All the accused affected by the jury's verdict will be hostages of the people of Paris.

Art. 5: Any execution of a prisoner of war or of a partisan of the regular government of the Paris Commune will immediately be followed by the execution of three times the number of hostages detained in virtue of article 4. They will be determined by lot.

Art. 6: All prisoners of war will be brought before the jury of prosecution, which will decide if they are to be freed immediately or held as hostage."

On May 21, 1871 the troops of the Versailles government led by Mac-Mahon entered Paris, a city bristling with barricades. And so began the "bloody week," May 21-28.

From May 23 to 26 the Communards set fires but there was also the massacre of 700 of these Communards (also called "Federalists") at the Pantheon on May 24. After a series of massacres by one side and the other, there would be the killing of the hostages on the Rue Haxo on May 26. That was followed the next day by the massacre of 200 Federalists at the Père Lachaise cemetery. In all there were more than 15,000 Communards killed by the troops of Versailles between May 22 and June 15 and some 4,000 would be deported to New Caledonia.

The "Paris Commune" and Picpus

On Easter Wednesday, April 12, two groups of Federalists broke into the houses of the Congregation on the rue de Picpus, the brothers' house at 33 rue de Picpus and the sisters' at 35. The Superior General, Marcellin Bousquet, was absent at the time. Twelve fathers and one brother were taken to jail at the Conciergerie. The Communards arrested those who were wearing a cassock.

On the same day the house of the sisters was searched. The tabernacle was forced open and the sacred species profaned. Half the Communards took up residence in the convent. The sisters no longer had any privacy. The Communards claimed to have found human bones and instruments of torture in the convent. They claimed to have even found young women in cells with bars. Newspapers published articles on the mysteries of Picpus. The curious came to see the beds of planks that occasioned such excitement. The Mother Superior's room was turned upside down. A good number of documents were taken.

On May 5 numerous sisters were arrested (Cf. Decree of Hostages). The "White Ladies" were condemned to prison. Seventy-four sisters and ten novices were transferred to the Saint Lazare prison along with the Superior General, Mother Benjamine Le Blais. On May 24 government troops took the prison but it was only on May 29 that the sisters were able to return to Picpus. The ten novices would make their profession on the feast of the Sacred Heart.

The brothers' novitiate in Issy also endured some hard blows. The house had been damaged by shells during the attack by the Germans. When the Communards took power, some members of the community were taken to the prison of la Prévoté. On May 18 the fathers who were being held were freed by government troops and so escaped death.

The story of the fathers who were imprisoned

After Picpus was searched on April 12, 1871, twelve fathers and a brother sacristan were taken to the Conciergerie. Among them were the Superior General's four Councilors: Ladislas Radigue, Prior of the Motherhouse, Polycarpe Tuffier, Econome General, Marcellin Rouchouze and Frézal Tardieu, General Councilors. On April 17 they were all transferred to the Mazas prison and at that time Brother Stanislaus Beunat was arrested. He was then freed as his arrest warrant was not in order. On April 25, Father Severin, a German national, was freed thanks to the intervention of the Ambassador of the United States. Father Lafaye was sent to la Pitié, after the intervention of his nephew, an accomplice of Rigault.

On May 22, the troops of Versailles approached the city and the hostages at Mazas were transferred to the Prison of la Roquette, near the Père Lachaise Cemetery. The next day, more than 300 Federalists were massacred at the Madeleine. The response was immediate. On May 24 the Communards killed six hostages, among them Archbishop d'Arbois. The next day 700 Federalists fell at the Pantheon and five Dominicans from Arcueil were killed.

On May 26 the government army was 300 meters from la Roquette prison where there were more than 200 hostages, among them a number of priests and religious.

Toward 3:00 in the afternoon Colonel Gois and about sixty Federals went to the prison and demanded that the prison director hand over 50 prisoners: gendarmes, priests and any traitors who had worked with the Versailles "police." Antireligious and anticlerical sentiments of the Communards can not be denied. Handed over were 33 Parisian guards, 2 gendarmes, 4 informers and 10 ecclesiastics chosen at random : 3 Jesuits, 2 other priests, 1 seminarian and four ss.cc. : Ladislav Radigue, Polycarpe Tuffier, Marcellin Rouchouze and Frézal Tardieu.

Flanked by Federals, the hostages went on foot to Rue Haxo arriving at 5:30 PM. In spite of the reticence of the military leaders, they gave in to the crowd crying for blood. The Communards lined the hostages up against a high wall along the rue du Borrégo and shot at them for a quarter of an hour, killing all.

"It was to this place that eight religious, two ecclesiastics, thirty-five Parisian guards and four civilians were led in a mournful procession from the prison of la Roquette arriving here towards six o'clock in the evening on the next to the last day of the Paris Commune, May 26 1871.

In the presence of the last representatives of the Commune, these forty-nine hostages were massacred by a frenzied crowd.

Priests were sacrificed to anti-religious hatred. Parisian guards and civilian prisoners were victims of political passion. They did not all die for the same cause but they shared the same suffering and suffered the same fate. If we must severely condemn those responsible for the crime, we can not forget the tragic events which then followed in the capital, the recent suffering of war and siege, the bitterness of defeat and the inhuman repression which, in those days, brought an end to the excesses of the Commune. Let us not forget these dramatic events, not to perpetuate hatred but, as followers of Jesus Christ, to work for peace among men." (Text of the inscription on the monument commemorating the centenary of the massacre of the hostages.)

The day after the massacre the bodies of the "Martyrs" were thrown into a common grave. The Federals were massacred at Père-Lachaise. They would still have time to kill three more hostages and Bishop Surat. The Paris Commune was put down.

On May 28, the "Martyrs" were buried in the Belleville cemetery. On May 30, Brother Marin Fouquet marked the martyrs' grave and identified their remains.

On April 4, 1889 a priest of the Society of Jesus celebrated Mass for the first time in a little oratory (3 by 4 meters) in the place where the hostages were executed. He returned every Thursday to do so. In 1894 a small chapel with a seating capacity of 250 was built on the site. It had several rooms on an upper floor. Catechism classes were given in two adjoining sheds. A larger chapel of light material was inaugurated on April 25, 1898. It was only in 1936 that the construction of the church of "Our Lady of the Hostages"³ was begun. It was blessed on October 23, 1938 by Cardinal Verdier. The Jesuits staffed the parish until 1974.

Each year the "Annales" of the Congregation would commemorate the event and there seemed to be a real "devotion" toward our brothers.

³ Cf. Pamphlet (in French) on the church Notre Dame des Otages

Since 1959 their remains have rested in a crypt of the Church of Saint Gabriel.⁴ The tomb stones, from when they were buried in the chapel of the brothers at Picpus, are now in a small chapel located in the sisters' garden at Picpus. Introduced in 1964, the cause of the "Martyrs" was stopped by the General Chapter of 1970, leaving any future initiative to the Archbishop of Paris.

Today when we remember this painful part of the Congregation's history, we think also of all our brothers and sisters, who have tragically lost their life in the course of their apostolate. First our thoughts go to those who died in the sinking of the Marie-Joseph. And then there was also Father Alexandre Nogue who died in China on January 1, 1928 and Father Teofilo and Companions who were killed in Spain in 1936. And let us not forget our brothers and sisters who died in war or in the death camps in Indonesia (Fr. Vitus Bouma, 1945).

Today when we stop for a while at the church of Our Lady of Hostages, as we did during the Picpus 2007 program, we pray for all hostages throughout the world...

Prayer of Father Frézal Tardieu⁵...

"Here I am, O my God,
I come to do your will; engrave your law in the depth of my heart
and give me the grace to do always what is pleasing to you.

O most Blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
my God and my all, I adore you
and I give you thanks for the blessing of my birth and my salvation,
for keeping me in your care,
for the indelible sacraments that you instituted for me,
for my vocation to the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary
and for all the other innumerable blessings you have poured forth on me and on all people.

Prostrate before you, O my God,
and covered with the precious blood of your Son,
I offer you and I consecrate to you all that I have,
all that I am, my thoughts, my words,
my health, my weakness, my sickness,
my goods, my reputation, my life.

You have given me everything,
I give everything back to you to be used for your glory
and the salvation of my neighbor.

Take from me all that displeases you



⁴The last brother of the Congregation murdered was Fr. Jean Struillou, shot in January 1995 in the church of St. Gabriel.

⁵Annales 1898, p. 240

and give me all that pleases you.

Guide me and take possession of me according to your good pleasure.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary,

give me the grace to never offend you

but to do always your holy will.

Allow me to arrive at the perfection of my vocation according to the spirit of the Sacred
Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

so that my joy might be perfect.

Give me a will that is good, firm and persevering and deep peace.

Walking always in your presence may I find you in all things.

Allow me to grow always closer to you through love and thankfulness

and to come to you holding the palm branch of a martyr,

so that I may praise you,

bless you and sing your mercies forever!

Amen”

Martyrs? Yes, martyrs

Carlos Barahona ss.cc.



The ambulance arrived with several wounded at the temporary field hospital in El Escorial, which had been set up a few days previously in what had been the scholasticate of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts. The vehicle came from the nearby front in the mountains of Guadarrama in the northeastern part of the province of Madrid. It was not even a month since the beginning of the military uprising in the Spanish protectorate of Morocco (July 17, 1936), which the next day had spread to the rest of the nation with rather different results. The driver looked at the director of the hospital. *“He’s a priest in camouflage. He should get out of here,”* he said. He knew him because the priest, **Father Teófilo (Benjamín) Fernández de Legaria Goñi**, had often helped him when he was superior of the Martín de los Heros school in Madrid.

That same hot night of August 11 Benjamín was eating with the doctors and nurses. Two cars that had been requisitioned roared into the premises of the scholasticate-hospital. Several members of the leftist militia, pistols in hand, ordered the superior-director to follow them. Without any trial, in the purest revolutionary style then prevailing, they took him three kilometers south of El Escorial on the Valdemorillo road. The two cars stopped at a place called “La Piedra del Mochuelo.” Teofilo understood their intentions. He was at the death’s door and he asked some time to pray and to write some words of farewell to his dear mother. Once that was done they ordered him to walk toward the granite wall that marked the boundary of the nearby farm. Teófilo, beloved of God, went murmuring a prayer, courageous and experiencing the terrible tension of the moment. While he was walking, a sharp rifle shot hit him in the back. He fell on his face dead. Just minutes later three diocesan priests from El Escorial were killed. It was their turn to take “the walk” that night. The next day the four bodies were found. Teófilo was buried in the cemetery of El Escorial. He was 38.

Reasons for writing

That is the account of the awful murder of Father Teófilo. It is based on historical facts. It is much like those of our other brothers and of the more than six thousand eight hundred priests, sisters and religious killed especially in the first days of the Spanish Civil war, which lasted thirty two and a half months (1936-1939). In fact the religious persecution had already begun with the proclamation of the republic in 1931. There were some more intense moments in 1934 during the revolution of Asturias, provoked by the Socialists, and then during the first months of the war. Teófilo is the best known of our martyrs and his ordinary diocesan process was the first to be begun. It was finished in Madrid on December 21, 1951. The other four diocesan processes were concluded in Madrid on July 13, 1963. There are nine other brothers whose diocesan processes were never begun. Five of them died in the province of Madrid, three in Barcelona and one in Torrelavega (Diocese of Santander).

When **Radek Zięzio** asked me to write about the martyrs in the broader context of violence in the life of the Congregation, I thought about it first. It is certainly a polemical topic and perhaps it would be better to let time pass in order to make a more objective analysis. Less than 72 years is not a long time. There are still elderly Spanish folk who lived through those painful events and who generally prefer not to speak of them. Surely the victims themselves would not want to go over it all, with the risk of stirring up disagreements and fratricidal hatred. But I decided to do it for one reason: our brothers were **innocent** people, victims of a tremendous **injustice**. Either they had no trial or were put through a parody of one, concocted by the so-called “people” without any guarantee or impartiality. It makes me think of the Servant of Isaiah, the silent lamb led to the slaughter, as so many other innocent people in the course of history. We can not let ourselves forget the innocents. Their names have to resonate among us. They must be present, alive, remembered. Even beatified and canonized. When I was a child, I would see holy cards in my house with the image of Father Teófilo produced by Reinado Social. Over time cards like that became less common, in as much as we thought we were looking to the future by emphasizing the reconciliation of the two Spains. We are still waiting for that to be complete.

However, if we have learned something from the truth and pardon commissions created in countries shaken by violence – we can think of South Africa, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ulster – we know that there can be no real reconciliation without recognizing the truth as clearly as possible and acting in justice not out of vengeance. Of course this is true for the victims of both sides. Beatifying them is in a certain sense doing justice to the innocents who gave their lives, being coherent with themselves and faithful to the call they received.

There are some who would say that that the Church had victims at some points of its history due to its clericalism, its enormous social influence, its desire for power and the control of peoples’ consciences. And so they understand some being killed as a part paying for the whole. But this is completely unacceptable. Human Rights refer to individual responsibility. No one can be judged, and even less condemned, for a crime he has not committed.

Some of our Brothers were intellectuals who were well educated and influential in society personally or through different associations. Teófilo had a doctorate in Theology from the Gregorian and a licentiate in Philosophy and Letters from Salamanca. **Isidro (Juan) Iñiguez de Ciriano** had a doctorate in Canon Law also from the Gregorian and was Professor of Moral Theology. **Gonzalo (Fortunato) Barrón** was a splendid preacher, worker and enthusiastic director of Reinado Social and apostle of the Enthronement and Night Adoration in the Home. He recruited forty thousand adorers. But he committed no crime, according to the law then in force. They were simply regarded as enemies to be destroyed by the anti-clerical extremists of their time.

Attitudes in the Congregation

In May 2007, when **Emilio Vega** finished his service as postulator, I interviewed him for the newsletter of the Spanish province. To my question concerning the heaviest burden that he bore during his ministry, he responded, *“The skepticism of brothers and sisters concerning the real sanctity of our brothers and sisters and the martyrdom of some of them.”* When I commented on his words in the community in Miranda, one of the brothers added the nuance,

"It is not that we do not believe in the sanctity and martyrdom of our brothers and sisters. We do not believe in the method, the canonical procedure that is followed."

In fact I remember that in a provincial assembly in Spain about fifteen years ago, one brother used that argument – the expensive and anachronistic canonical process- to speak in favor of freezing the causes of beatification of our martyrs. But another brother, now deceased, said, *"I think the same thing as him but I come to the opposite conclusion. Let the process continue."* The processes were stopped in our province even though a good number of the brothers were not in favor. At the time I myself was in favor of halting the processes, but that was another time, as we will see. And you have to take circumstances into account.

Wasn't that the orientation of the General Chapter of 1970? You can look at the decisions (numbers 58-67). Five years after Vatican II, the Chapter *"fully acknowledges the value of the cult of the saints, which is in keeping with the tradition of the universal Church."* However it wanted to take explicit account of the fact that *"in some countries, ministry and ecumenical activity demands a new and changed perspective."* (58). It added that although, *"it did not consider itself able to make a definitive judgment on the procedure before the Roman authorities as regards causes of beatification or canonization, however it had to state that this procedure is a cause of scandal for many people both outside the church and within it."* (59) The Chapter even asked *"the new central government to take measures as soon as possible, together with other congregations (...) to insist with the Roman authorities that this state of things be ended."* (60) The Chapter decided to halt the cause of **the Good Father**, while encouraging the continuation of historical studies on the founders, and all the others leaving the cause of **the martyrs of the Commune** to the initiative of the Archbishop of Paris and continuing that of **Father Damien** because *"he is an object of universal interest,"* because *"it is desired by great numbers of the faithful"* and because *"it would only be an official confirmation of an already accepted fact."* (63)

As a member of the Chapter of 1982 in El Escorial, I remember well that the posture was the same except that the Chapter accepted the initiative of the Diocese of Belo Horizonte concerning the cause of **Eustaquio Van Lieshout**. However since then things have changed. Not only has Damien been beatified, but also Eustaquio. The diocesan phase of the cause of the Good Father has already been concluded in Paris, the sisters have proceeded with the cause of the **Good Mother** and here in Spain besides the three already named - Teófilo, Isidro y Gonzalo - **Eladio (Leoncio) López Ramos**, shot on August 8, 1936 at the age of 32 and **Mario (Luis) Ros Ezcurra** also killed during the night of August 14-15, 1936 at the age of 26, seem to be close to being beatified.

According to what **Bruno Benati** tells us, the beatification is not imminent as their causes and that of other martyrs have been put aside for a few years by the Roman congregation of Saints. The director of the Office of the Committee of the Spanish Episcopal Conference recently recommended to the postulators of the Spanish martyrs that they put more pressure on the Congregation of Saints so that the different *positio* of the causes presented between 1997 and 2007 be studied without further delay. Those of our five, introduced in 1997, are included. If all are accepted some 550 will be beatified. Bruno believes that the moment has come to bring together in one place the mortal remains of our five so that the faithful can come to pray at their tomb. The Provincial Government has begun to deal with the matter.

New circumstances

Changes in the church with regard to beatifications were due without a doubt to the desire of John Paul II. The postulator at the time, **Ángel Lucas**, took advantage of the new situation and encouraged us to restart the processes. Emilio Vega and Bruno Benati have continued that, each in their own style. In the final analysis only the essential must endure in the church. Many other things depend on circumstances, the times and what seems to be good at the moment. There will always be Christians in favor and others opposed. Each individual can think as they want and act in consequence of their belief.

Along with a new atmosphere in the church there are particular circumstances in Spain in the last four years. A president, who was just reelected two weeks ago, has exercised power by reviving ghosts that most Spaniards, including many who voted for him, thought were already something of the past. He belongs to a part of the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) that represents masonry and a long-established, anachronistic, antiquated, retrograde and counterproductive anti-clericalism. In a society that is largely indifferent to Christianity and the church it seems ridiculous and once again make appeal to outdated struggles. And even more so when we have a Declaration of Human Rights that is in full force. He is proposing to modify the Constitution of 1978 using illegal means, taking his inspiration from the Constitution of 1931 of the second republic, which even eminent Republicans recognize ended as a resounding failure. It is something that the majority of citizens have absolutely no interest in. And many of us are opposed to it. These are things of the past, now we have other concerns. We should look to the future.

The picture is completed with a law of Historical Memory, which the president wants in large part so as to vindicate the memory of his grandfather, an infantry captain shot on August 18, 1936, near Leon after a council of war condemned him as a double agent. This is something that happens in all wars. The letter that he wrote to the director of the newspaper *El Socialista* on February 2, 1934 offering himself as an informer on the political tendencies of his fellow officers in the 36th infantry regiment is available for anyone who wants to read it. The law being proposed is meant to manipulate history and rewrite it from the point of view of those who were defeated in the Civil War. It is meant to forget the searches, the abuses, the summary executions, all at the limit of the law. And that is unacceptable. We have to speak the truth and condemn to excesses and outrages committed by both sides.

And so I am in favor of the beatification of our martyrs. As I already said, they were unjustly treated. They were valiant and consistent with what they believed. They took seriously what they had professed. They are eloquent witnesses of what happened at that moment in history. They were killed because they were religious and priests. Few people want to be martyrs, like Saint Theresa when she ran away from home with her brother to go live among the infidels. The occasion usually presents itself as an accumulation of a series of circumstances. When our own ran up against such circumstances, they were not intimidated. They admitted who they were and were eliminated as lawless fanatics. Martyrs? Yes, martyrs. Until proven otherwise.

Father Alfons (Walter) Spix

Congregation of the Sacred Hearts (Picpus)

*** June 17, 1894 in München-Gladbach (today: Mönchen-Gladbach)**

+ August 9, 1942 in the Dachau Concentration Camp

Stefan Gerhard Diefenbach

Walter Spix was born on June 17, 1894 in München-Gladbach, today Mönchen-Gladbach. He was the child of Franz Spix and his wife Berta (Otten). Early on he came in contact with the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts as a student at its mission seminary in Simpleveld, Holland. The First World War set back his entrance to the community, as he had to serve in the military. He began his novitiate with fifteen other young men on September 24, 1919 in Arnstein, the first house of the recently established German province. He received the religious name "Alphons." He was 25. In 1925, after his theological studies, religious profession and ordination in Simpleveld, he was assigned to the Mission School in Lahnstein. It was not long before he was elected as a member of the council of the local community. In 1928 he was named superior and then in 1933 superior of Arnstein. Two years later he became a member of the provincial council and in 1938 vicar provincial. His students and religious brothers remember him as a man who was pious, severe, just and concerned for those confided to his care. He was an enthusiastic photographer and filmmaker.

At the beginning of 1941 Fr. Spix was interrogated by the Gestapo, the secret police, in Koblenz. They reproached him for having admitted Polish forced laborers to Sunday Mass and for having given them coffee afterwards. Spix explained that in Arnstein they were not aware of the prohibition against letting Poles come to Mass with Germans and that they had been poorly informed. He also said that it was normal to give something to eat and drink to anyone who came to the door of the monastery. That was done without distinction. The interrogation in Koblenz ended with a severe warning and a prohibition of any contact with Poles.

The chronicler of Arnstein claimed in 1946/47 that the Polish forced laborers in the neighboring town of Singhofen had met among themselves and that the leader of the Poles had spread the word about some going to church. It was the leader himself who had notified the Gestapo, happy to have something against the convent and its superior.

It was probably this leader who, on November 16, 1941 sent Poles to Arnstein to see if the prescriptions were being observed. In Arnstein they knew that it was strictly forbidden for the Poles to participate in the Mass but they had not foreseen what they would do if they did participate. And so that Sunday Father Spix was quite worried when during the sermon he noticed Poles among the faithful. When the Mass was over he asked the sacristan to see that in the future the Poles did not assist at Mass with the Germans. They would have to find

another way to minister to them. That Sunday Alfons remarked to some friends, "*Now I have to be prepared for the worse.*"

Three days later Spix was arrested, taken to Frankfurt and once more interrogated by the Gestapo. In the documents of the Secret Police preserved in Frankfurt there is this note: "*State of things: he was detained on November 19, 1941 for having allowed Polish farm workers to participate in a public religious service and for giving them something to eat and drink.*"

The interrogations, many times including torture, certainly caused Alfons great suffering. Josef Albinger, chaplain and companion in the prison of Klapperfeldstrasse, told how tears would flow from Alfons eyes when he would ask him something about the interrogations. They kept in contact with the help of a guard. The day that he was transferred to the prison of Hammelsgasse, Alfons gave his ration of bread to Fr. Albinger.

The records say that Fr. Spix was transferred from Klapperfelstrasse on December 12, 1941 at 11:00 and interned in cell 375. On December 23, 1941 the prison doctor examined him for "venereal diseases." They also examined the general state of his health and his "*aptitude for being transported to a camp.*" Shortly after Christmas he was assigned to "paper work," which meant gluing bags and folding cardboard.

We have two letters from that period. The first is dated December 12, 1941. He carefully describes his situation, "*...and here I am and I am going to put up with my lot.*" He is clear in instructing his replacement in Arnstein, Father Binz, "*...keep the Poles at a distance. It's enough that one of us is in prison.*" In spite of everything he was looking toward getting out of prison as he asked them to send a suit for his return trip home.

The other letter is dated December 29, 1941 and contains many questions showing the prisoner's interest in what was going on in the outside world. He tells the community that he has made a request to be freed and he repeats his request that they send him a "good" suit of clothes.

Three times the brothers tried to visit Alfons in Frankfurt. The Gestapo called them to bring clothing, books and letters, as he confirmed in his letters. But they were not able to speak with him. Even a young official, a religious student, Ludolf Signon, was not able to see him.

The community in Arnstein tried to have Alfons liberated through a friend, a notary in Koblenz. This Doctor Nöthen, in a letter of January 12, 1941, gave the prisoner hope. According to him there was no punishable offence. However a request to the district attorney in Frankfurt in December 1941 resulted in the disappointing and worrying statement "*that the Spix affair does not depend on this office and is now entirely in the hands of the state police.*" Dr. Nöthen suggested asking an attorney in Frankfurt, Dr. Wedesweiler, to intervene. On January 26, 1942, he wrote to the Arnstein community saying that according to his investigation the case had already been taken to the "Reichssicherheitshauptamt" (the central office of security of the Reich) in Berlin. They would probably impose three months of arrest for reeducation and then Fr. Spix would be released.

However a short time later he had to communicate what he had found out through another source, "*First the director did not want to give any information concerning the case. After he said that Father Spix had not abided by the ruling that prohibited Poles and Germans from*

coming to Church together. And after the illicit visit to the church at the same time as the Germans, he invited the Polish farm workers for coffee that afternoon together with the Germans. His obstinate contempt for the prescriptions in question was the basis for his arrest. The matter now goes to the Reichssicherheitshauptamt in Berlin for a final decision.” Doctor Nöthen tried to do something quickly through a colleague in Berlin, *“Naturally everything depends on presenting arguments in defense of Father Spix.”*

Before other steps could be taken the superior wrote the community on February 2, 1942 saying that he was in the concentration camp at Dachau. He was transferred on January 29-30 and was now prisoner 29 126.

From the admission block, Alfons moved to barracks 28, which housed Polish priests and religious. Along with them Alfons had to engage in very hard work on farms cultivating aromatic herbs and at meal times dragging huge buckets of thin soup or bitter tea to the different barracks. With his companions in misfortune from Poland and other European countries he was exposed to continuous humiliation.

After Easter 1942 Alfons moved to Barrack 26, room 3 reserved for “German priests of the Reich.” The German priests and religious detained with him, writing about their imprisonment after the Nazi period, do not mention him. In the mid 80’s some priest survivors of Dachau were asked about Fr. Spinx. Only two, already failing in memory, remembered him as serious, uncommunicative and depressed.

We have six letters from his first four months under arrest in the concentration camp. As the letters passed through the censors, they only provide insinuations as to his situation. But the recipients must have understood that the prisoner was in a very perilous situation. In each letter, sometimes repeatedly, he asks that they pray for him and he promises to include all in his prayer. He was convinced that he was in the hands of God, even in Dachau, and that gave him strength, *“Even here I see the hand of God and I let him lead me.”*

In March he still hoped *“that finally they will give me my freedom.”* But after some weeks more of privation in the camp, toward the end of July 1942, he hints to the provincial that the same will happen to him as happened to the brother of Father Sigisbert. This was Father Gustav Vogt who on July 12, 1942 went to the barracks for the sick and died that very night. The official cause of death: heart and circulatory failure with an intestinal grip.

In summer 1942 the Spix family made a request for clemency and sent it to Berlin but it was of no help to the prisoner. The chronicler of the Arnstein community tells us, *“They gave his brother more details. On August 7 Father Alfons was very bad off. They offered him all kinds of specialized treatment in the infirmary. However the illness was already well advanced and he died on August 9. The camp leadership expresses its sorrow to the family for its loss.”* The official cause of death was listed as “intestinal grip.” Many surviving witnesses testify that during the summer of 1942 medical care was very bad. Whoever went to the barrack for the sick was already as good as dead. No one attended to the dying.

The family informed the Congregation of their brother’s fate. The death notice says briefly but meaningfully, *“He died of intestinal grip at the age of 48 on August 9, 1942, when least expected, far from his beloved community. He lived the spirit of victimhood and reparation proper to our community that he had preached so many times to his subjects, especially in the*

last year of his hardworking life.” Death card reads, “Purified in the brazier of suffering, may he rest in the heart of God.”

On August 25, 1942 a requiem Mass was celebrated in the monastery church in Arnstein. His family, his religious brothers, priests and faithful of the surrounding parishes were present. An urn with what were supposed to be the mortal remains of Alfons arrived in Arnstein only at the end of October 1942. The urn was buried in the little circle in the community cemetery in Arnstein on October 30, 1942.

After the war the provincial wrote, *“If they were not the mortal remains of our dear deceased brother, they were with all probability the remains of some other victim of inhuman cruelty.”*

In 1987 a commemorative plaque was erected at the entrance to the church in Arnstein.

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The Dutch Province during the Second World War

Jan Wouters ss.cc.



In the Netherlands In the Netherlands

In the morning of May 10th 1940 the German Army invaded The Netherlands. That very morning our houses in Valkenburg (brothers) and in Meerssen (sisters) lay in occupied country. Our only parish in The Netherlands, in Rotterdam, was from the very first moment confronted with acts of war. On Whitsunday May 12th the occupants of the minor seminary in Sint-Oedenrode saw the German troops drive past. On the same Sunday Bavel was evacuated. The occupants of the house and the noviciate had to flee. The novices ended up with other refugees first in Belgium and after a long journey finally in France. They only could return to the noviciate in August 1940.

The members of the community in Nuland fled to 's-Hertogenbosch, where they during the German attacks bivouacked in the bishop's house. On Monday May 13th they returned to the occupied Nuland.

That's how the five difficult years of occupation began for the Dutch province. The provincial government tried to assure that work and education could go on as much as possible. Not an easy task. Thus solutions had to be found for the newly ordained who had already received an assignment for the missions, but could not depart to that mission.

The German occupier time and again needed new accommodations for the military machinery. Often monasteries and convents were very suitable for this and we experienced that!

The first couple of years we had a lucky escape, but in September 1942 we had to give up our house in Nuland. In that house we had philosophy. Our philosophy students and their teachers went to Valkenburg so this house was full in no time. The other members of the Nuland community lived for the rest of the war in a part of a convent in the neighbourhood of Nuland.

A year after, in September 1943, the Germans requisitioned the minor seminary in Sint-Oedenrode. After a true search temporary accommodations were found for students and teachers: the Damianeum of the German province in Simpelveld for the three highest forms, a cigar-factory in Sint-Oedenrode for the middle-forms, and for the youngest students the parish-centre in Zeeland and from February 1944 on two sheds in Helenaveen.

Some brothers were taken away by the occupiers. In February 1942 the Austrian brother Bartholomeus Prüner, teacher in Sint-Oedenrode, had to report for service in the German army. He ended up in Russia, got wounded there, and just returned to Austria after the war.

Father Andreas Scheijen, teacher in Sint-Oedenrode, was imprisoned from July 1942 (he was then 29 years old) until December 1943 in a hostage-camp in Sint-Michielsgestel. In this camp hundreds of prominent Dutch people were taken hostage, of whom very many died before the firing squad as revenge for the defeats suffered by the Germans. Fortunately Andreas did not fall a victim to this kind of act of war.

Father Christoffor Meulendijks was taken prisoner in May 1944 in Venlo. After a tour through several prison camps, he died in April 1945 in Bergen-Belsen, 50 years old.

One of his fellow-prisoners wrote later on about him: *'Father Meulendijks, called Uncle Chris by other prisoners and Chris by ourselves, was very esteemed by the other prisoners, especially for his unpretentious, genial companionship, coupled with a pious and real priestly spirit (...). In Bergen-Belsen Chris fell ill after a couple of weeks, taken ill by typhus. He went to the isolated sick-barracks. (...) I talked with him only once, at the barbed wire. He looked very badly and emaciated. Nevertheless he was not depressed. He was in good spirits and optimistic. We were not allowed to enter the sick-barrack, consequently I could not follow the rest of the process. While we thought that he was a bit on the mend, we heard that he also had died'*.

At the end of September 1944 brother Leonard van Rutten got picked up by the Germans in the village of Helenaveen and carried away as a convict to Germany. Leonard went to the village to buy bread and was taken along together with five other men. Only some months after the liberation we received the report that Leonard had been sent to work in a coke-factory in Watenstedt. He had to do very hard work there, twelve hours a day without sufficient nourishment. As a consequence of hardship and illness Leonard died on February 4th in the camp, aged 37.

Still other brothers spent shorter or longer time in labour camps: the lay-brothers Willy van Lieshout and Wim Berkvens and the Brother-scholastic Wim de Bruin. They all suffered from war traumas until long after the war.

The sisters also were hit by force of arms. During the liberation offensive in the south of The Netherlands in September 1944 their convent in Meerssen was on the front line between the German occupying forces and the allied liberation forces. On September 15th a mortar shell hit the kitchen. The two sisters working there were fatally wounded and died the same day. These were the Dutch sister Anna van Ruyven and the Lithuanian sister Judith Simanaviciute.

In Indonesia

The Dutch province was hit most seriously in Indonesia, a Dutch colony at that time, where many brothers were working on the islands of Bangka and Belitung and in the Riau-archipelago.

In February 1942 the Japanese armies occupied Indonesia. Almost all Dutch missionaries were confined in internment camps rather quickly after the occupation. In The Netherlands we only now and then received some news, a single telegram, a short letter that arrived through the Red Cross. They were usually in the manner of 'Here all is well'. But in October 1945 the terrible truth came out: Vitus Bouma, apostolic prefect, had lost his life together with one lay-brother and nine fathers during the war and the occupation. This news was a great shock for the whole of our provincial community. Correctly the provincial-secretary wrote after arrival of that news: *'Up till now our province was not yet hit vitally, now it has been'*.

The fathers who were working in the Riau-archipelago endured camp-life reasonably well. They were imprisoned in an internment-camp where life was less hard than elsewhere. Quite different was this for the brothers of Bangka and Belitung.

When the Japanese army started the attack on the islands, Mgr. Vitus Bouma saw to it that the Dutch Providence Sisters, working on Bangka, could depart for the island of Java and he sent father Edmund Corijn and brother Antonius Bruijns along with them. Both survived the war.

The first brother who was victim of the war in Indonesia was father Piet Lahaye. He was chaplain in the Dutch army and was killed during the fight between the Dutch East Indies- and the Japanese army on March 3rd 1942, aged 45.

All fathers on Bangka were arrested on April 9th. They were allowed to take only along toilet things and clean underwear, plus 30 guilders. They were taken to the prison of Pangkalpinang, the capital of Bangka.

They were told that it was a temporary imprisonment, only two weeks. But in the end they did not leave that prison for two years. Together with other religious, in all 26 fathers and brothers, our confreres were locked up in a cell of 5 by 3 meters. It was impossible for all to sleep at the same time. That situation fortunately lasted only a couple of days. After that they were transferred to a space in which there were two 'balai-balai', large wooden elevations on which everybody had his own small sleeping-place.

The prisoners continually got little food, much too little. In the beginning the Chinese diocesan priest from Bangka, Bun Thiam Kiat, who was not imprisoned, was allowed to visit his fellow-priests. With that he could secretly slip some extra food to them. But this was discovered after some months and Bun was no longer allowed to visit the prisoners. Consequently they were completely left to the systematic starvation by the Japanese.

During Advent of that year the missionaries were so weakened by hunger that Mgr. Vitus Bouma started a 'perpetual recital of the rosary'. 'I hoped that this could perhaps prevent a disaster' he said. It did not help much, only that Monsignor himself could regain his strength a little bit when he because of dysentery was hospitalised in the sick-barrack and got better food there.

In the space with the 'balai-balai' the fathers were allowed to say the Holy Mass every day at a self-made altar. Those who were strong enough were happy to use that opportunity.

On May 10th 1943 the first father, Alfons Mars, died from the deprivations he suffered. He was 33 years old.

At the end of April 1943 all prisoners were transferred by truck to Mentok, a seaport town some 137 km. farther on. The journey was terror. The prisoners were sitting or laying with their emaciated bodies on the wooden platforms of the shaking and jolting lorries. In Mentok there was the happy (?) reunion with two brothers who had been working on the island of Belitung and at the beginning of the war were imprisoned there. They were at that time directly transferred to the prison in Mentok.

The situation there was better insofar as they were accommodated in normal (but kept under close guard) houses, because the prison was already overcrowded. The food was also better there, but there was no sick ward. Also hardly any or no medicines were given even though there was an outbreak of malaria and many suffered from scabies and other skin-diseases. Not until Monsignor was taken down again by dysentery a doctor came who gave him medicines.

The prisoners also suffered heavily in a psychological sense. Total loss of privacy was not the worst thing. The worst was that the Japanese took great pleasure in belittling the prisoners time and again and making a fool of them, leaving them standing to attention for hours and letting them bow like slaves before their lord. Nevertheless some of them knew how to make

life a little bit durable. Like father Benedictus Bakker, who set up a male choir and through choir-appearances often heartened his fellow-prisoners.

During the stay in Mentok the following brothers died:

Dionysius van Gorp, on July 21st 1944, aged 38.

Plechelmus Nieuwe Weme, on November 22nd 1944, aged 31.

Ladislaus van Gelder, on December 9th 1944, aged 39.

Pacomius Heuver, on December 23rd, 1944, aged 47.

Pascalis van der Knaap, on February 10th 1945, aged 35.

In March 1945 the prisoners were again transported, this time to Lubuk Linggau in the interior of the island Sumatra. The prisoners were transported in three groups, the strongest first. From the prison in Mentok they went by truck to the port and then by row-boats to the cargo ships that would take them to Sumatra, a journey of 12 hours, during which the prisoners were laying in the hold of the ship. After arrival in the port of Palembang there was still a journey by freight train of 12 hours more. They did not get any food during the journey, so several prisoners died along the way.

In the internment camp of Lubuk Linggau malaria and dysentery were raging. Added to those was 'beri-beri' as a consequence of undernourishment. Sometimes somebody was lucky when he could catch a mouse or a lizard. He then had some extra food. In despair one even ate the lice and fleas one could find in abundance.

The situation in Lubuk Linggau was so pathetic that in two months time four brothers died. They were:

Vitus Bouma, on April 19th 1945, aged 52.

Thomas Mul, on April 21st 1945, aged 46.

Arnold Nijssen, on June 6th 1945, aged 34.

Benedictus Bakker, on June 14th 1945, aged 42.

On August 15th the Japanese army surrendered and the three surviving brothers, Callixtus van Thiel, Sylvester Wouters and Theofaan Alberse could leave the camp. These three together with the two brothers who on the isle of Java had survived the Japanese war, resumed the mission of Bangka and Belitung till new missionaries from the Netherlands arrived.

Only on January 11th 1950 the bodies of the four brothers who died on Sumatra could be transported to Bangka. Amid great public interest, they were reburied there near the six brothers who were already buried there earlier.

Brothers and Sisters, victims of violence in the world.

And in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

Paula Teck, ss.cc.



Christina and Radek proposed that I write an article about "the violence in the world where our SS.CC. Brothers and Sisters are sent" and to share a little of the experience of our communities in Africa. I said yes, but I especially counted on the witness of my Brothers and Sisters who have endured a long journey in the Congo, where I have served in mission for a long time... Mercedes Paramo answered me in writing: I transcribe it willingly. Others shared their experiences with me.

I apologize to our Brothers and Sisters who experienced great insecurity of violence and war in Mozambique, such as our Brother Andre van Kampen who lived as a missionary there for **50** years, passing through highs and lows during wars and persecutions. Now, he can live more peacefully in the Novitiate at Boane, Mozambique, where he witnesses, to the African novices, the unconditional love of God for his people through the SS.CC. religious.

We recall several significant and intense moments of fear, insecurity, and violence in the **Congo**. I go back to 1972.

In the face of the nascent dictatorship of Mobutu, Cardinal Malula, an African genius, denounced the strong centralization of power. From that moment, violence of the word against the Catholic Church, priests and religious was released on the radio, on television, and in the streets... to the extent of menacing and summoning the Cardinal to appear before a popular tribunal and expelling the missionaries ... at the moment that Kinshasa counted only 5 indigenous priests. Our Brothers and Sisters continued their work of evangelization in solidarity with the other missionaries.

During the years of strong dictatorship, in the Church we searched for new ways of evangelization. When all the Catholic Schools had been nationalized, religion courses suppressed, and Christian movements abolished, the missionaries redoubled their efforts to reach the large numbers of youth in the densely populated districts on the periphery of Kinshasa, by organizing extra-scholastic catechism classes and calling upon many lay professors to accompany the thousands of children and youth in our churches. These were years of total self donation that filled the hearts of men and women consecrated to the Sacred Hearts. We were witnesses of the faith, convinced by mothers and fathers who saw the necessity of transmitting the faith to the children of their areas; many of them became catechists as well. Father Matondo, CICM, had the holy inspiration to convoke the youth into types of basic communities that gathered in the districts to read and share the Gospel, especially that of St. John. From here arose the well known movement, "Bilenge Ya Mwindi" (Children of the Light). Yes, we have seen how these times of persecution forged the faith of all

and a Church based on the laity, because one of the priorities of the Archdiocese became the permanent formation of the laity. This gave birth to many priestly and religious vocations. I can say, that during these difficult years of Mobutu's dictatorship that lasted until 1997, we, Brothers and Sisters of an international family, belonging to different Provinces, were able to live, and profoundly rediscover that we are, since the foundation, children of the cross who wish to be and remain useful for Evangelization in the outskirts of Kinshasa.

The end of Mobutu's years was marked by anarchy of the State which resulted in great insecurity leading to an explosion. We remember the looting of 1991 and 1993 that caused fear, misery and total insecurity in our area.

In 1986, the Brothers and Sisters decided to welcome vocations for the Congregation. We opened the first houses of Postulants in 1989 and 1991. The first Novitiates began with Camille Sapu, Paulin Kadumu for the Brothers and Colette Buhangize and Celestine Mpolo for the Sisters.

Here is how **Mercedes Paramo**, the first mistress of novices, remembers the first looting that led to the *flight* of the novices to Masina, Father Damien:

It was in 1991, that the Sisters prepared to begin the novitiate in Kinshasa with the two first Postulants: Colette and Celestine. The situation was very widespread and caused great insecurity. This led us to consider seriously if this was the time to begin the Novitiate. I remember the reflection of Celestine, "...but Sister, we are as at the time of the foundation; we can begin clandestinely..." and it is thus that our first novitiate began in Kinshasa. The pillaging grew systematically in the city, and during the night we heard shooting around the house. One morning, two young soldiers knocked at our door and demanded our car. I gave them the key and they left. Immediately the neighbors came to see if anyone was hurt, and they decided to spend the night in our house to protect us. During a certain time, six men of the basic community slept in the garage to accompany us. In all of this insecurity, we felt the solidarity of the people who lived around us and of the Lord's Providence that never abandoned us. It is true that we experienced moments of fear, but we were with the neighbors of the district who could not go elsewhere. In regards to the center of the city, we ascertained that we were more secure in our neighborhood of Masina than in the city itself. One night, around 2 o'clock, we heard a noise that resembled a bomb at the house of our neighbor, Mr. Henri. Two robbers wanted to enter his home and shot at them. We got up, dressed ourselves and tried to see what had happened. The next day, one of the two robbers was lying on the ground, almost naked, injured by a bullet. I remember that our prayer, at that moment, was a prayer of abandonment, thanksgiving for the Lord's protection, pardon for all the attacks against these poor people, and of confidence that these barbarous attacks would cease as soon as possible. We can say that we lived all of this time in insecurity but not in anxiety; the people themselves edified us. Also, we learned to share what we had and to live with what was necessary. We truly felt that the Sacred Hearts were with us.

In 1997, Laurent Kabila, a warrior with the aid of the Rwandans, entered Kinshasa as a liberator, chasing out the dictator, Mobutu, who had ruled more than 35 years... All hope was placed in Kabila and it is thus that the population of Kinshasa received him without any resistance... But, despite the promises, the economic and social condition did not change... Quickly enough, war was declared against the rebels who threatened to seize Kinshasa as in other strategic areas of the country. With the aid of the armies of Angola and Zimbabwe, a war

of three days broke out in Kinshasa: the area in which our houses are situated was surrounded by rebels. The army of Zimbabwe showed their power on Lumumba Boulevard with rifles and canons!!!

Brothers and Sisters, dispersed, lived “imprisoned” in their homes during several days without knowing much about what was going on outside. From the airport, the people fled and passed in front of our doors... 'Where are you going? To the city with our families...' And us, where are we going? Happily, one or two Brothers who had come for breakfast in our houses were blocked and stayed with us. By the grace of God, we were assured the Eucharist in our houses... and the presence of a Brother in these moments of anxiety, because at every moment our houses were in danger of attacks of the gunfire and canons of rebels who were very close to us... The houses of our Brothers had very few priests... Mikondo remained with two young Brothers... the Postulant with Father Manuel ... We tried to remain in contact with each other by telephones that were well hidden... And, when we could go out, the young brothers made a relay between different communities to bring news and support.

Meanwhile, the wars continued in the East of the country because the ground is rich in minerals and exploited by many powerful foreigners... Kabila turned very quickly toward his friends-allies with “communist” leanings... and he was assassinated. His 'son', Joseph Kabila, immediately took his place...

After many Peace Conferences and free transparent democratic elections, the war continues to this day, and with the war, the exploitation of the riches...

The economic and social situation changes very slowly. Movements of strikes began in education, health and administration... Also, today, Brothers and Sisters, through parishes, social works and education, place themselves at the service of evangelization of the people who are thirsty for justice, peace and human dignity. Since the government never has money to assure the education of children and of youth in the different districts, Brothers and Sisters assure quality education in Father Damien College and the primary school of Father Damien Center. The promotion of young women and mothers remains a priority for the Sisters; this is accomplished through centers of alphabetization and post-alphabetization. The marginalized and handicapped children find a place among other children... Thus, Damien continues to inspire us in our works... and our parishes in Kinshasa.

When will our dream of a better Congo be realized? After more than thirty years of the Congregation's evangelization on the periphery of Kinshasa, we have become numerous: actually, there are 17 Brothers of which 11 are Congolese and 1 Mozambican; 17 Sisters of whom 11 are Congolese and 1 Mozambican. There are about 40 members of the Secular Branch from three communities. Together, nourished daily by the Eucharist and reparative adoration, by the fraternity and missionary zeal that characterize us, we have reason to hope, and we transmit this to the young and to the Christians in the parishes confided to us.

Our inspiration? It is the same as that of Pierre and Henriette who made Love known.

Today, the celebration of Holy Week in Kinshasa, with a multitude of the faithful in the churches, can question and even evangelize the masses that have lost their faith in Jesus and in his Church...

The Holy Spirit breathes where and when He wills!!! We have many reasons to hope!

The Death of our Innocent Brothers and Sisters

André Kibeti ss.cc.



In this article I am going to try to express my feelings about the reality of death and especially what death means in the reality of our society. After some considerations on death and listening to some witnesses, I will attempt to show that people die innocently in Kinshasa because of a political structure that I do not believe is very concerned. I always saw man as subject to an “innocent death,” sort of like a thing or an animal and consequently destined to nothingness. Man moves into the realm of nothingness when he ceases to be a subject open to “communion and question.” And yet man is not just something or “nothing.” He has value and dignity before God.

It is true that death is a natural phenomenon. Every human being is confronted by this reality. And in order to die each of us must have his executioner who acts as the causal agent. On Calvary it was the soldiers who hung Jesus on his cross. Each person on earth has his executioner who in the final analysis nails him to his cross. It could be an accident, some sickness or just growing old. The causes of death are very diverse.

However man has never really accepted that fact. However it might be, death is an enemy who has never been able to walk along with man for too long, except when man is no longer conscious of it. Death snatches from us our dads and moms, our brothers and sisters, our friends and relatives... leaving tears forever streaming from our eyes.

I was seven when my father died. Given my age I was not that affected by his death; however the endless tears of my mom, of my sisters, brothers and others made me cry also. For me – in the past more than now – people crying around a dead body make me reflect on death. Their tears mean that death brings an end to everything here on earth and that the person crying senses himself empty before that reality. I cry because there are others. Others challenge me about my own death. I am lead to think then that it is man who gives meaning to death.

In the African tradition, as can also been seen among the Hebrews, there is good death and a bad death. The later has never really been accepted by the African. It might be a premature death and often man-made. A quick death caused by another is reason for great desolation and profound disturbance. In Kinshasa, if someone dies unexpectedly and especially if it is a young person, people look for the cause of death elsewhere than in the person himself. And so it is understandable that the culture of witchcraft is still very prevalent in all of Africa and in particular in the Democratic Republic of Congo especially in Kinshasa. It offers a reason for this type of death.

In Kinshasa there are people who die suddenly, deaths caused by other people out of human pride, social insecurity, people not helping others in danger, a unconcerned and fragile political structure etc. I think of the death of a girl that has always seemed to me completely

unbelievable. It was around 9:00 and this girl was grilling fish to sell on the streets of Ndjoko/Kinshasa. A policeman from the local station who was across the intersection from where she was running her little business came over to keep her company. Seated on the same bench as her, he had his gun on his legs pointed in her direction. She said to the policeman, "*Point your gun in another direction.*" He said, "*No! It's no problem.*" She answered, "*But I'm afraid.*" He was changing the position of his gun when it went off and the young girl got a bullet in her stomach and she died. How can one interpret such an event? For some, it was because he was drunk. Others said, the man wanted to go out with the young woman and she kept refusing. But death was not the consequence of her refusal. For the murderer, the bullet was in his gun and it was when he reached for her hand that his movement caused him to fire and he was not even aware of what he was doing.

Five months ago today an airplane crashed destroying a number of houses in the neighborhood of Kingasani/Kinshasa and causing the death of some one hundred people. The cargo plane, after take off from the international airport of Ndjili, had just lost one of its two motors and began to destroy houses and the people within and finally ended up on a house where a novice of the "Amour et Liberté" community was visiting a sick family member.

I can not imagine or begin to understand the effects of such a catastrophe. People and their possessions are no more. What struck me in the midst of it all was the behavior of the population and of the national authorities. Not even one day of city-wide mourning was observed. I can not stop asking myself if all those victims of the crash were really Congolese or just Congolese that were negligible! Without evidence to the contrary, why should we be satisfied with what happened? Some people came not to express sympathy but to pillage the plane wreck. Why should we pay honor to political authorities who just buy coffins to bury the dead? Does authority merit the population's applause when it just fulfills its obligations? It is sad when we see political duty become a system of "gift-giving" in order to merit acclaim. That becomes clearer when we remember that man is a being who enjoys rights and as a result has duties. We must respect his right to life because we see him in the light of faith. The human being is created in the image and likeness of God and destined for a better world.

In the end we must entrust all to God. The Good Mother would say, "*...abandon yourself to God who will never abandon you.*" In all things God is the one who has the last word. Blessed are we for we always must be men and women of hope. In order that our hope be fulfilled, we must always preach the truth in filial obedience so that the world might be transformed according to the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Sister Célestine Mpolo's Death in a Car Accident

Willy Mpia Makila ss.cc.



Death is always something that causes consternation and grief. In all the cultures of the world, the separation that death entails is experienced as tragedy. Sister Célestine Mpolo's death in an accident was a loss for so many. How awful it is to see such a dynamic and talented young woman leave us, taking with her so much promise for a bright future.

I was so appalled at the loss of someone so important for our mission at a time no one could imagine. During the Eucharistic celebration that united us to Sister Célestine before her burial, the presider said that he could feel the pain of all those who had come to participate in the funeral. But at the same time, he invited us all to think of elders and parents burying youth from whom they expected to receive a funeral worthy of their age.

In the Mbun culture that Célestine came from, the death of a child or a young person is not accepted. The culture immediately looks for the cause of death. It was the same at the time of Sister Célestine's death. There was much speculation. Rightly or wrongly, the people tried to establish who was responsible for such an event. My feelings mixing with those of others, I tried to see the responsibility at several levels.

It is very true that the state of the roads in Congo leaves something to be desired. The roads that serve Congo at present are part of the heritage of the colonial period. City and national governments change, but the construction of roads has not really received much attention at either level. Roads in Kinshasa are full of holes, which become like swimming pools when it rains. The best driver is the one who knows how to avoid all the holes along the road. It is not surprising at all to see on the pavement banana peels, stones, tree trunks or other objects that can be a problem for drivers. The government and the people share responsibility for many traffic accidents.

Rightly or wrongly I think that the Congregation also bears part of the responsibility for Sister Célestine's death. The car that sister was using to go on an outing was not in good enough condition for such a trip. It was an old car that was poorly maintained. The lack of attention and the desire to save money, possibly, had colossal consequences. It is in that sense that I see the Congregation bearing responsibility for the accident that took the life of Célestine.

Finally there was the personal responsibility of the driver. The road is always a temptation and a danger for a driver. From the moment the vehicle is on the road, the tendency of the driver is to gauge his/her performance and what he/she can do. And once he/she feels in control, there is always the risk of forgetting basic safety rules, rules of the road and prudence and relying too much on one's ability to drive.

Wearing a seatbelt, being attentive to the route, keeping a safe distance, maintaining the speed limit indicated for different parts of the road...are things that drivers can easily neglect. Certainly Sister Célestine fell into the trap of forgetting one of these rules. Personal imprudence can aggravate the errors committed by the society and with serious consequences.

I was curious to understand the different levels of responsibility in an accidental death like that of Sister Célestine Mpolo. The society of which we are a part can offer many risks on our journey through life, but our own weaknesses can also play a large part. It is good to rely on our own strengths but it is better to admit our imperfections. That is how my outlook changed.

Death is incompatible with life...

Nicolas Malaba ss.cc.



From our experience of death, we could define it as the separation of a person from his body and from his community (his family, neighbors, friends and acquaintances). Thus death is not merely a biological phenomenon. It has always been something understood as having a moral and religious sense.

There's no need to repeat that death is as irreversible as ever in spite of the medical progress humanity experiences. It is this cruel aspect of death that has traumatized humanity from the dawn of time.

Soon it will be ten years since the death of my father. He succumbed to a lack of oxygen. He was in a coma. A three minute lack of oxygen was enough to bring him face to face with death.

We were around his sick bed in the emergency room: a doctor, a nurse, his younger brother (my uncle), his wife (my mother) and I (his son), a whole network of relationships anguished by death.

For me particularly, it was the first time in my life that I had seen someone die and it was my father who was leaving us in total silence. The grief was so strong that even my body was gripped by sadness. His wife and younger brother were in tears. I only cried the next day. It was at the moment that my father handed over his soul to God that I realized how much I loved him. And it was the irreversibility of death that made me see so clearly my affection for my father.

Since then, I no longer regard a person as a duality of body and soul. We are but spirit. And the body is but an envelope that we make use of to make ourselves visible during this earthly life. From that perspective, fear of death makes no sense. All good and all evil reside in sensation but death is the privation of sensation. A consequence of this conviction that death is nothing for us is that we appreciate clearly the joys that this fleeting life offers us because life does not give us unlimited time but rather tends to take away the desire for immortality.

When speaking of a human being, dying does not mean perishing but rather experiencing the loss of a world of attachments and investments, a world where power and possession are essentially symbolic, falsely appreciated not for themselves but as regards their relationship to other people.

That said, death forces us to invent reasons to live in spite of our precarious, threatened and threatening existence. Anthropologically speaking, death is always and first and foremost a painful separation. As the philosophers say, with death being becomes non-being; presence gives way to absence. As informed as we might be about our immortality, we are always shattered first by the brutality and then by the inevitability of our mortality.

This would explain why in funeral celebrations, developed by each culture to counteract the disruption of death, there is always some kind of mechanism to get beyond death, a societal way of counteracting grief and not death as such.

In the Old Testament as in the New, there were always two attitudes that had to be addressed in the face of death. First, there were tears and the many varied ways of expressing sorrow. Second, it was not so much the dead person who was addressed but death. As illustration, there are parodies during the mourning period, behaviors which are somewhat burlesque, bizarre get-ups, dances, shouting and weeping.

Thus understood, fear of death is unjustified. It is but a separation or a change of condition. Earthly existence is a time to get ready for the beyond. (Mt. 22:40)

Humanly speaking, the ordeal of death is a shock. There is always something tragic involved, even something frightening. But happily we have something which helps us overcome the fear that death produces. For without Christ, death is an abomination. Thanks to him it is a passage to eternity (Jn. 11:25-26) In Christ death becomes the necessary transition to come to authentic salvation which is the vision of God. (1 Cor. 15) Just as medicine does not destroy death but only sickness, so death does not destroy life but only the body.

Violence as an Everyday Occurrence in the Life of our Brothers in Colombia

Miguel Habacuc Ortega Moreno ss.cc.



We share our life with a people that have suffered from structural violence. Death walks in our midst.

One day Adalberto, the first SS.CC. to arrive in Colombia, went up to look at something on the ceiling of the church of Maria Reina in Medellin. He fell and died on impact. Juan Teck, went home to Belgium for vacation. He fell ill, went to the doctor and after a few tests they discovered that he had a very advanced form of lung cancer. He came back to Colombia to say farewell and after a few months he died in his native land.

Just a few examples to give you some ideas of our reality. One family had to abandon its land just to survive. It had been taken from them during the war between Liberals and Conservatives. They had to begin and put down roots in another town. Once some men began fighting, someone pulled a gun and shot and the bullet lodged in the leg of one of our brothers who was passing by. Another brother spent his childhood and adolescence in Medellin during one of the most difficult periods. Many of his friends are no longer alive to tell of it.

During the nineties the paramilitaries caused people to be displaced in one whole region. Another family had to stop cultivating their land and leave. It was quite a while before they could return. When he was a child, a neighbor of another brother of ours said that he was going to come to his house and harm his family, without saying when or how. What our brother remembers most is that in their fright they prayed the rosary. The man came but went off and nothing happened. When this same brother was an adolescent, he helped get a community leader out of the village because they were after him. This meant that he too was in danger. A young man had been told to kill him. The two met and our brother told the other that he did not fear dying but what he did fear was the death of his soul.

One Friday evening we went out with two SS.CC. brothers who were visiting in order to show them something of the culture of our area. What we got was a big surprise and an even bigger fright! As we were walking along two men began arguing, a third came along and opened fire. We got out of there quickly as we thought that they would come after us since we were witnesses.

The death of Ramón

One day last December José called to tell me that Ramón had been hospitalized. The first thing we thought was that it was just some passing thing. Of course we wanted to go see a brother who was in the hospital. A bit later we were told that it was serious. All of a sudden we

thought that he could possibly die but only “possibly.” Then we prayed, talked with brothers and friends...the uncertainty, the hope. The next morning there was another call, unforgettable, our brother had fought for his life and lost.

It was all so quick. We were just so confused. We were with our brother, with the local community, with his family, with his parish. Our hearts ached as we looked at him and we could not believe that someone so young was just lying there inert.

Amidst the pain and the astonishment we experienced the strength of God being together, being in communion with the bishop, the diocesan clergy, the people of the parish, the family of our brother, the faithful from elsewhere. The Mass in the Cathedral, the arrival in Algeciras and all the people waiting. Then we took his body to his hometown of Suaza.

Ramón and the closeness of God

Sadness was accompanied by thanksgiving for a brother who was so close to all. From the youngest to the oldest, everyone was in mourning. The one who sang mariachi, the one who turned into a performer holding something like a microphone, the one who did the decorating, who loved sports, who brought life to all our get togethers, birthday parties, as well as Mass, the one who when he went out walking befriended everyone and got to where he was going very slowly...he was gone. Ramón was gone and in our midst he left the image of a God who is close and merciful.

Ramón spent a large part of his priesthood in places deeply affected by violence: Medellín and Algeciras. He was not a man who made great plans and projects; he just made alive the refreshing and life-giving closeness of God who is always with us.

After his death God continued to accompany us along the way. He was with this little community who had lost a brother. Life must go on. We know that. Ramón's life and ours goes on in communion and hope.

Father Bolesław Wartałowicz

Victim of the Second World War

Radosław Zięzio ss.cc.



None of us know what the providence of God has prepared for us. Knowing something of the history of our sisters and brothers allows us to discover how God works through people and world history to accomplish His plan of salvation.

The beginnings of the Congregation in Poland are linked to the life and vocation of Bolesław Wartałowicz, the first Polish ss.cc. From a historical perspective, he is a paradigm of one who magnificently fulfilled God's will.

Bolesław was born in 1902 in a Poland partitioned by Russia, Austria and Germany. His family home was a bit to the northwest of Warsaw. At baptism he received the name Alexander. He was only 16 when Poland once again found its place on the map of Europe and the First World War was over.

Young Alexander finished his secondary studies in Warsaw and entered the university there to study Polish literature and philosophy. At the same time he was in inner turmoil and began seeking God's path for himself. The congregations that were well known in Poland did not attract him. Then he came across the book of Father Mateo, *Jesus King of Love*. From that time on he was sure what was being asked of him. He only had one semester left in order to complete his studies but he did not want to wait and he did not. He went off to Braine-le-Comte in Belgium to meet the book's author. In his heart he had already decided to enter the Congregation. The Superior General sent him to the novitiate in Montgeron on the outskirts of Paris. He then made his theological studies in Châteaudun, France.

He was ordained to the priesthood in 1931. Right after that he returned to his home parish to celebrate his first Mass. Each time he visited Poland he took the opportunity to recruit candidates. A number of seminarians as well as some elementary school boys expressed interest in joining the order. His idea met with the approval of Flavien Prat, Superior General. The religious formation of the first Polish Picpus Brothers took place in France, with the idea that later they would return to Poland to start a Congregation.

Beginning in 1931 Father Bolesław himself worked as a missionary to the Poles living on the outskirts of Paris while being a member of the community in Montgeron. In 1939, as on many other occasions, he went on vacation to Poland. On September 1 of that year Germany had attacked Poland and the Second World War began. Father Bolesław was not surprised but he knew that he could not return to France and would have to remain in Poland. As a priest and a great patriot, he zealously gave himself to pastoral ministry taking the place of priests who had been imprisoned. He feared nothing. He spoke German well and he was thus able to be

useful in many situations. At the time the Nazis did not have much sympathy for church or for priests. Everyone was being watched and many persecuted. Father Bolesław moved from place to place always at the service of the people beaten down by the occupation. He lost much weight and it showed in his face. The Gestapo watched him constantly. He was arrested in the fall of 1942. His family, especially his valiant sister-in-law, did everything they could to have him freed. They paid the guards; they sent clean clothing and a heavy coat. The shirts they received back were moldy with dried blood all over.

After five months of imprisonment and torture he died on February 14, 1943 in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki.

Father Ładysław Dudzikowski, first cousin of Father Bolesław, was in formation in France at the time. Some years later he spoke of a dream he had during what would have been the last days of Father Bolesław: *"One day I had a dream that was so out of the ordinary and left such an impact on me that I will never forget it. In the dream I saw Father Bolesław wearing a shirt filled with blood. He was in a shower. He looked at me, raised his eyes and his hands...He made it clear to me that he was in a barracks and I saw here and there German soldiers."* A few days later the mail arrived from Poland with news of the death of Father Bolesław Wartalowicz.

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