

A BLOODIED INFO

Alberto Toutin ssc
Superior General

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Dear brothers,

The first issue of the *Annals* of the Congregation in 1872, what is *INFO* today, opened with a panoramic view of the life and mission of our religious family of that time. It addressed the impact that the execution of the four councillors of the General Government had on the community as a whole: those executed were Ladislav Radigue, Polycarpe Tuffier, Marcellin Rouchouze and Frézal Tardieu. They were killed on 26 May 1871, in what were the final days of the *Commune* of Paris. The Superior General, Sylvain Bousquet, was spared, as he was not at home when the Communards broke into Picpus. 84 sisters were imprisoned. Included among those shot were Mgr. Georges Darboy, the Archbishop of Paris, a number of diocesan priests, religious of other congregations (Jesuits, Dominicans), Father Henri Planchat of the Fathers of St Vincent de Paul and some lay people. The *Positio* of our confreres and of Fr Planchat has already been presented and we hope that it will soon be approved by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The first news item in the *Annals*

The first news item in the *Annals* was a page written with the blood of the Brothers who had lost their lives. Their life as religious of the congregation was closely linked to the tensions and conflicts that society and the Church of that time was undergoing. It was an inspired way – through the *Annals* - to share the spiritual life of the brothers and sisters of the community and to show, concretely, what devotion to the Sacred Hearts can mean and what might be its ultimate consequences. The report demonstrated a beautiful coherence present in those who through their religious vows had committed themselves to be configured to Jesus in all the stages of his life, especially his crucified life. With the shock of the shooting of our four Brothers still fresh in his mind, the author of this page in the life of the congregation invited the Congregation to question itself on the meaning of these events. To do so, he delved into the spiritual roots of our religious family:

“After the horrible storm that has devastated the leaders of the congregation and the torrent of anguish that has flooded our souls, I believe it is not necessary to prove that we have participated in the crucified life of Jesus. Are these days of expiring and mourning over? Is the blood-soaked tomb that has received our four Fathers closed? Only God knows the future. But as for the children of the Sacred Hearts: can they remain indifferent to the trials of the Church?” (*Annals of the Congregation 1872-1873*, Volume 1, 15).

In this same first issue of the *Annals* is a letter written by Fr Sylvain Bousquet that was a reply to the one sent to him by Fr Ladislav Radigue, from the prison of Mazas. Unfortunately, Fr Ladislav never received the letter. Once again, it is striking to see how that time of trial which the congregation and the Church in France were going through, challenged both of them to recall the words pronounced at their religious profession of consecration to the Sacred Hearts “in whose service we want to live and die”:

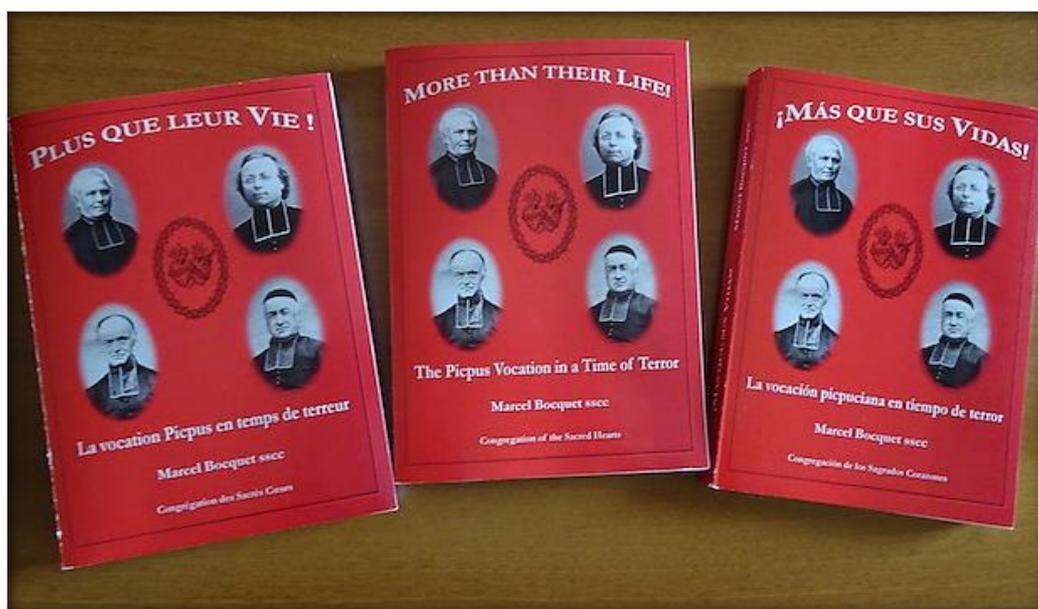
“Courage, my friend and my father. I do not know what God has in store for you. If you are called to martyrdom, ah then, rejoice! One does not have twice the chance to die the death of the martyrs. I am envious of you and often find myself longing for your place of honour. No doubt nature suffers for more than one reason. But the virtue of Jesus Christ will manifest itself in your weakness. In him who has conquered the world, you will be victorious”. (Letter of Father Sylvain Bousquet to Father Ladislav Radigue (May 14, 1871) in *Annals of the Congregation 1872-1873*, 19).

For both of them, the possibility, the grace of martyrdom was an expression of religious profession understood as a life surrendered to the Lord and to their brothers and sisters. In Eucharistic adoration they nourished the desire to give their lives in the services entrusted to them by contemplating the love that handed itself over even unto death. Thus, when violence was unleashed against them for being religious, for being members of the Church of Jesus, there arose a new call within the call to religious life to which they must respond in the first person: the call to unite themselves more closely to Jesus by transforming violence in their own flesh into a gesture of love and dedication to God and to their brothers and sisters.

The depth of the spiritual life

In the correspondence between Ladislav and Sylvain, I find myself moved by the depth of their spiritual life. The quality of faith, the simplicity with which they share it, is neither improvised nor is it the fruit of circumstances alone. It is simply the opening of the heart of one brother to another, it is the sharing of faith that makes them alive, even unto death. It is a beautiful form of accompaniment in faith, between brothers. I wonder if it would not be good for the spiritual health of our inner self if, with simplicity, we could each open our hearts to the brothers and simply share the faith that makes us live.

In the present context, where in many parts of the world religious persecution against Christians is happening on a daily basis (1 in 6 Christians in Africa, 2 in 5 in Asia, 1 in 12 in Latin America) or where the name of a "God" is perversely profaned in the killing of innocent people or to protect murky economic interests, the question of faith in God and its consequences is particularly disturbing and urgent. With all our intelligence, with all our will, with sensitivity, in the journey together of the religious and Christian community, we must be able to confess that God does not abandon his sons and daughters. We believe that he makes the sun rise on the just and the unjust, he lets the wheat and the tares grow, and he invites us to concretely serve our brothers and sisters by placing ourselves decisively and courageously on the side of those who hunger and thirst for justice, those who cry, those who are persecuted for wanting to obey God. Only then will we savour the deep happiness of the beatitudes to which Jesus invites us. Only then can the beauty of his own life, given with no noise and without stridency, shine in our own flesh. The life we have is a life that does not belong to us, it is a life that we have already handed over on the day of our baptism and on the day of our religious profession.



I invite you then, brothers and sisters, to read or re-read Marcel Bocquet's book *More than your lives!* Rome 2020. You can download it from the Library of the Congregation's website:

<https://www.sccpicpus.com/en/sscc-martyrs-of-the-commune>

The human and spiritual journey of our four brothers is collected in this book in a powerful way, in which we can see them being prepared and led to respond to this new call of the Lord and of the Church in the dark hours of persecution. It is true that they did not seek martyrdom and the circumstances that led to their execution were unforeseeable. However, they were prepared to give such a response on account of their time in formation and out of an "inner self" that grew day to day in doing good and doing it well, without noise, in the form of a life surrendered.

“How could those who had consecrated their lives to the reparative love made visible in the hearts of Jesus and Mary not find themselves in the gaps that were opening up in society. How could they not, for the sake of justice and in fidelity to the indefatigable mercy of God place themselves alongside the many others who were being persecuted?”
Marcel Bocquet, *More than their lives*, Foreword, Rome 2020).

May the witness of our four Brothers and that of so many men and women today, martyrs of our time, help us to respond to the calls of the Lamb who was slain.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts.

Alberto Toutin ssc
Superior General