
Students from the Catholic Faculty of Law in Lyon killed during the Great War

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BULLETIN

CHRONIQUE UNIVERSITAIRE

Notes pour le Livre d'Or de notre Université
(Suite)

A significant number of students from the Catholic Faculty of Law were mobilized, and many of them died during the Great War. At the opening ceremony in 1919, Dean Charles Jacquier announced in his report that 55 students or former students had been killed during the war. This is probably a slightly low estimate, according to data published in the *Bulletin des facultés catholiques de Lyon*. This newsletter was first published in 1880 and was initially edited by Abbé G. Wedrychowsky, director of the subscription fund. The *Bulletin* served to liaise between subscribers to the Catholic University, informing them of what was happening in the faculties and the progress of the subscription fund. A key source of information on the life of the Catholic faculties of Lyon, it was published until 1935. All students and former students of the Faculty of Law (as well as other faculties of the Catholic University of Lyon) who died during the war were listed in the editions of the *Bulletin* published between 1915 and 1919. We have thus identified 31 former students and 26 students of the Catholic Faculty of Law in Lyon who died in the war.

Each issue of the *Bulletin des facultés catholiques* includes a section entitled “Morts pour la Patrie” (Died for their country). Being considered a big family, the Faculty of Law naturally includes former students who died for France in the published lists. In the post-war issues of the *Bulletin*, the rector himself portrays some of the fallen students. These posthumous portraits not only aim to revive the memory of those who are now nothing more than names on the war memorial, but also to convey Christian values.

One of the first students from the Catholic Faculty of Law to die in combat was Jacques Jacquier (1893–1915), a second lieutenant in the 97th Infantry Regiment, who was killed in Pas-de-Calais in June 1915. In October of the same year, André Crétonon (1894-1916), a student who was completing his second year when the war broke out and an officer cadet in the 299th Infantry Regiment, also died. The *Bulletin des facultés catholiques de Lyon* paid tribute to him, recounting his bravery while transcribing some of his personal notes to bear witness to his great faith: “For Christians who have faith in God and His justice, death is the greatest good, for it is the beginning of perfect happiness, which cannot be achieved by any means here on earth” (*Bulletin des facultés catholiques de Lyon*, January-June 1919, p. 33).

Students’ extensive correspondence with their families provides a fascinating insight into life during the Great War. To honor students who died in combat, the Catholic Faculty of Law published a book containing letters, thoughts, and even poems written by current and former students.

Some show strong patriotism and extol the spirit of sacrifice. Naturally, the “Livre d’Or” aims to highlight the faith of students who died for France.

Such is the case with the portrait of Henri Blanchon (1891–1916), who had a degree in literature and law and was pursuing a doctorate when he was called up. His brilliant studies and results in his first doctoral exam promised him a career as a professor in the Catholic Faculty of Law. He passed his first doctoral exam getting all the white balls and praise. At the time, students’ work was assessed using a system of different colored balls. Initially, there were only three (white, red, and black), but a decree dated December 26, 1875, added two more (white-red and red-black). White balls being an excellent result, Rector Fleury Lavallée himself was “convinced that he would one day be associated with our higher education work, without ever having spoken to him about it” (UCLy archives, Lavallée collection).

In tribute to the young student who was killed at the age of 24 in July 1916, Rector Fleury Lavallée wrote an article in a brochure. The 40-page brochure, followed by excerpts from Henri Blanchon's notes, is kept in the UCLy archives, Lavallée collection, and the rector's article dates from January 31, 1918. Various traits are highlighted in this poignant portrait. First, his concern for the future of the country and, consequently, his concern for the political future of France. In his war diaries, the young Henri Blanchon voices his criticism of the political situation and laments the excessive centralization and strong push toward individualism at the expense of the collective. Next, the rector emphasizes the student's patriotism by mentioning his essay on courage, in which he praises patriotism and militarism. The rector also alludes to a novel written by the young man. Far from being a light work of pure imagination, this novel, entitled *Mémoire de Jean Durafour*, is actually a work of ideas in which he describes the memoirs of a fellow man who was "lost in atheism and anarchy" but who, faced with "the impotence of his doctrines," returned to the Catholic faith. Once again, particular emphasis is placed on the Christian values of the students who died for France.

Charles de Saint Pierre (1894–1915) was another law student killed during the Great War. Assigned to the 59th Artillery Regiment when his class was called up in 1914, he volunteered to serve on the front lines in the infantry. A second lieutenant in the 101st Infantry Regiment, he was killed by a bullet to the forehead on August 25, 1915. In a special tribute, the rector recounts his war diaries to highlight this student. He too embodies the Christian values instilled by the Catholic faculties of Lyon. The emphasis is thus placed on his willingness to fight and sacrifice himself in place of a father or husband. He also advocated the values of camaraderie and wrote a letter to his younger brother to this effect. According to his portrait, he wanted to enable soldiers without families to get military leave by setting up a program to hospitalize soldiers on leave. This would have allowed them to be housed, fed, and cared for during their six days of leave, giving them the opportunity to escape the daily grind of war for a few days. This testimony highlights the student's solidarity and altruism.

Finally, amongst others portrayed in the *Bulletin des facultés catholiques de Lyon*, we can mention Joseph Ratiaray, known as Razanamahery (1896-1918), a student from Madagascar. Having come to mainland France to fight, he decided to take advantage of the opportunity to study law. He obtained his law degree in two years and, while he

wished to continue his studies (his student file indicates that he first enrolled in November 1916 and last enrolled in March 1918), he contracted tuberculosis while serving and died on May 4, 1918. His funeral was attended by the rector, the dean of the law faculty, and several professors. In his speech, the dean highlighted the unusual career path and Christian values of this father of two young children. In his speech, the dean emphasized that he had died far from his family but surrounded by the community of the Catholic Faculty of Law in Lyon. Finally, in further praise of the young man's patriotism, the dean pointed out that, as a member of the nobility, he was under no obligation to join the army.

Once the war ended, the Catholic faculties in Lyon made sure to pay tribute to the students and alumni who had been killed during the Great War. In this spirit, on February 27, 1921, a war memorial was unveiled in the lobby of the law faculty at 30 Rue Sainte-Hélène: a stone panel engraved with the names of 104 students (from all faculties) who had died for their country. Breaking with the past, the Catholic Faculty of Law moved premises at the end of the war, leaving Place Vollon and relocating to the Hôtel de Cuzieu on Rue Sainte-Hélène for the start of the 1918 academic year.

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Bibliography

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