



**Roland CLAVERIE**  
**1938-2007**

Roland was born in Pau on June 21, 1938 in a workers' family. His father was a laborer in metallurgical plant and his mother was a saleslady. He has two sisters. He attended high school and college in Nay and said that he felt an early call to dedicate himself in the steps of Jesus Christ and to become a priest.

He entered the Bayonne seminary in 1957, as he said *“but the idea of being a priest ‘otherwise’ was beginning in me, because I was influenced by those of my family who were rather Spanish republicans whose generosity and human richness I admired. It said something of the Gospel to me. I owe much to Uncle Eugene, an agnostic, ignored by the local Church and who encouraged me to go on with my quest for a genuine solidarity and for the working class till the end. I figured he was sincere, a listener and very honest.”*

After two years of seminary he leaves for Algeria for twenty-eight months. *“There I discovered what a colonial war is, and also its political dimension. And also the experience in such an atmosphere of violence and of despite for man, of absence of God... unless it was my own absence before God’s presence, or my own blindness?”*

In 1961, on his return from Algeria he chooses to enter the Sons of Charity. *“It was the road to take in order to accomplish my “dream” of an eighteen year old: to live that “aching for God and for the people” of Fr. Anizan that the Sons would later on help me to understand better and to serve the working world as a priest “otherwise”.*

He took his first vows on October 13, 1963. He went on with his studies with the Sons at St-Sulpice and was ordained a priest at Pau by the bishop of Bayonne on July 3, 1965. That year he becomes vicar at St-Jean-Baptiste parish in Belleville; he takes his perpetual vows on October 13 1966. His main responsibility is the Y.C.W. It is the start of a long road in that neighborhood where he would live and be an activist during 38 years.

In 1968 he works part-time at the Monoprix République. *“It was a time of great turbulence in the society and in the Church. Those were the years of Échange et Dialogue<sup>1</sup> with its discussions for a different “status” for the priest, closer to the people, and for a more credible Church. I took part in that, I believe -in spite from its excesses, of its driftings- more through solidarity than a will to question the Institute.”* It was also for him, after a long strike, the first repression. He had been hired in a printing shop and was fired because he had wanted to organize the elections for union representatives in the shop. In 1970, he takes training as a milling-machine operator. In 1974 he works at BBT a metallurgical plant of 500 workers. There are many layoffs and union struggles are aplenty.

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<sup>1</sup> A priests movement born during the May 1968 events in France.

At that time a Sons worker-priests team begins in Belleville in which he will then be living. In 1984, BBT closes down and he becomes a union employee, secretary of the USTM<sup>2</sup>. He will be involved in many struggles with the steelworkers of the Paris region, aimed at avoiding that all the factories leave for the suburbs or elsewhere.

In 1993, he is elected secretary of UD-CGT<sup>3</sup> in an internal atmosphere that was somewhat difficult and tense. *“I think that I have done what I could in order that the tools of the Paris union members would remain alive and grow. I was not getting involved in a quiet thing, but it was a nice experience of human diversity with a common passion!”* He was successively responsible for communications, Peace and Disarmament activities and finally union training. He left the Provincial Unity when he retired in 2000.

Roland’s other great struggle was for peace. As early as 1966, during the Vietnam War, he gets involved in the Movement for Peace. Then concerns such as the Call for Peace, the development of peoples, the stopping of nuclear testing, the over armament race, are among his struggles. Since his retirement it was his main involvement. In the Movement for Peace he was responsible of the work team ‘Peace in the Middle East’. While on a trip in Colombia, Philippe Toulemonde who greeted him said that he had rarely seen such serious searching, such good listening to the workers and militants and with a will of transmitting correctly afterwards. Michel Martin, who is involved in Pax Christi, says that he admired Roland’s seriousness especially *“on the matter of Palestine/Israel (studies, information’s, campaigns, demonstrations...) I appreciated his political analysis of situations and his conviction that peace is a work of justice. He saw that the same values sought as fruits of peace (dialogue, frankness, trust) were also the means he used to reach that.”* René Lelièvre says: *“For him peace was not a feeling, but a concrete way of living, that we have to conquer.”*

His dedication to the cause of peace had made him, last February when he was already sick; go to Marseille for a two hour meeting about the Middle East with some thirty activists.

During a trip to Jerusalem with a delegation of the ‘Movement for Peace’, he met with Vincent Pagano a worker-priest from Marseille and with two other persons for a few moments at Jesus’ tomb. Seeing the quote from Mark’s Gospel written there: *“He is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. He is going before you in Galilee, there you will see him.”* In a murmur Roland had commented: *“He is with all those, Israelis and Palestinians that we have come to meet here and who fight for peace in justice.”*

It is in *“the regular meetings with Jesus Christ”* that his involvements were strongly rooted; *“I’m trying to live in connivance with him”* he would say. His involvements and his faith in God were tied together. He had said so to his union colleagues when he retired. He had an acute sense of the autonomy of the world and of our responsibility, given *“that the future of our society depends on us only, on us together, able of humanizing as well as destroying.”*

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<sup>2</sup> The steelworkers union.

<sup>3</sup> Provincial Unity of the General Confederation of Labor.

He suffered deeply from any attack to the dignity of persons and he saw in that *“the disfigured face of God in that of his sons for whose dignity He thirsts so much.”*

He had expressed his convictions with much profoundness in 2003 in Lisbon and it should be quoted entirely. *“Though he was in the form of God he did not regard equality with God something to be grasped... but he emptied himself”* (Ph 2,5-11) He said: *“ these words of the letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians were for me a very loud call to share concretely the working condition and its constraints. ‘To be with’, in the steps of Christ. To empty myself of what separated me from the workers in my life style, my status, my culture.”*

*“However it took me a good while to understand that the emptying to which Jesus was calling me was much deeper than the change from the ‘clerical status’... as far as getting rid daily of that ‘prefab’ me, that ‘owner’s me, about which Maurice Zundel writes to the point of giving up in order to let live in me the Source that the ‘ego’ constantly blocks with sand. A never ending struggle to let room for the experience of the tenderness of that God who is waiting for us in the encounter with the other, fraternity, the roads of liberation, but also deep within us, to his gratuity, his own initiative has always dazzled me, after my hours of withdrawal, of refusal.”*

He said that he was discovering in his colleagues of the union or the party a *“true spiritual life through the meaning that they give to their lives, as far out as it may be of anything religious.”* *“From some of them I would receive these lessons on life, on solidarity where they were risking tranquility, and loss of promotions. With the help of prayer, I received these lessons as signs that the Spirit works among the people. And for me new calls to draw from the Source of living waters, of greeting that living Gospel in the part of mankind were I was immersed, a call to me to persevere in the involvement of my life, to deepen it.”*

With us Sons of Charity Rolland was a brother full of kindness, friendly, faithful, a very good religious whose premature departure we bemoan.

He was coherent in his involvements as a religious and an activist, he could assert with much tenacity his convictions to defend the weak and any man. And he also knew how to listen, to question himself and always remained brotherly in any discussion.

He was well anchored in our Institute. He liked it. He shared in its life; he led the workshops of worker-priests and on politics. He had always maintained strong ties with the pastoral team at St-Jean-Baptiste parish, accepting some ministries such as chaplain of the Workers Catholic Action, He attended events of the parish community. Till the end he attended meetings, revisions of life and Team retreats. When our Institute left St-Jean-Baptiste parish in 2003, he accepted to leave that neighborhood and Paris where he had made so many friends. It was a hard move for him but he did it with the hope of living something coherent with Sons who had different ministries in the popular suburb of St-Ouen.

Recently illness caught him unawares. As the treatments were having their effects he got his activist spirit back and deplored strongly the growing privatization of health cares. On Easter Sunday he said that he thought he was going to die, but that he felt better. But his heart did not resist. He left us on the morning of May 4.

A few days ago, he was saying to René Lelièvre: *“I’m holding on thanks to two groups of persons: my so many pals and friends who take care of me, who worry about me (a sort of communion of the living) who have taught me what is important; and Jesus, his Father and the Spirit. I love that Trinity of persons, but above all it loves us and it is the very fidelity. We can always count on it in spite of our deceptions, our cowardice, and our lowliness of all kinds. We are never alone.”*

Regional Council of France

Translated by *Lorenzo Lortie fc*