

From *Zouaves Pontificaux* to the *Volontaires de l'Ouest*: Catholic Volunteers and the French Nation, 1860-1910*

By Martin Simpson

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Abstract: This article examines the French papal zouaves, volunteers who fought for the defence of the temporal sovereignty of the Pope in the decade 1860-1870, and their successors, the irregular Volunteers of the West. The latter was a volunteer force formed around the returning zouaves in the context of the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian war. It explores Catholic discourse on the zouaves and the *Volontaires* between 1860 and 1910, comparing the defenders of Rome with the defenders of France. The concern is to understand how service in the Franco-Prussian war impacted upon Catholic interpretations of the zouaves. In particular, their heroic if suicidal charge in the battle of Loigny under the banner of the Sacred Heart aligned them with this devotion, that flourished in 1870-71 and would culminate in the Sacré-Cœur de Montmartre. The *Volontaires* also offered political arguments about the relationship between patriotism and Catholic convictions, deployed in the context of debates about French regeneration. Yet in terms of ideas of expiation, national history and counter-revolution the discourse on the *Volontaires* reflected the original discourse on the zouaves developed in the decade 1860-70. Ultimately they stood for a vision of French history and French identity diametrically opposed to the legacy of 1789, a challenge to the Republic's official vision.

Keywords: Zouaves, Volontaires de l'Ouest, **Boulangism**, French-Catholic History, 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War, Battle of Loigny, Battle of Castelfidardo, **Banner of the Cult of the**

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Sacred Heart, Pope Pius IX, French Nationalism, French National Identity, Dolourist

Catholicism, Counter-Revolution

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I. Introduction

On 20 September 1870, after a token resistance and the brief bombardment of the Porta Pia, Italian troops finally invested the city of Rome, extinguishing the last remnants of papal temporal power. Pius IX became the “prisoner of the Vatican.” The papal zouaves, the volunteer force that had spent the decade 1860-70 defending the papal territories, were confronted with the ruin of their mission and became prisoners rather than martyrs for the papal cause. Five days earlier, colonel Augustin-Numa d’Albiousse, commander of three zouave companies at Civita Vecchia had pleaded in vain to be allowed to lead his men out in a fatal sortie.¹ The multi-national zouaves were divided up according to nationality and repatriated. Following a mass on deck of the French frigate *Orénoque*, the flag of the regiment was symbolically divided up amongst the 657-strong French contingent. This was not, however, the end of their endeavour: before they had even disembarked a zouave wrote to his parents, “I am happy in advance with the post assigned to me; and I hope with the help of God to be a true Christian and good Frenchman.”² Before the year was out Philibert Catherin, the zouave in question, numbered among the fallen of the Franco-Prussian war. The war, conducted under the auspices of the republican Government of National Defence after the precipitous fall of Napoleon III’s Second Empire, was to claim the energies and in many cases the lives of numerous returning zouaves. The narrative of zouave heroism, which began in September 1860 with the defeat of papal forces at Castelfidardo culminated in the defeat of French forces by the Prussians and Bavarians at Loigny in December 1870.

¹ C. Du Coëtlosquet SJ (trans. R. F. Clarke), *Theodore Wibaux, Pontifical Zouave and Jesuit* (London, 1887), 248.

² Philibert Catherin letter, 28 September 1870, in Laurent Bart-Loi, *Au Service du Pape et de la France. Catherin 1861-70* (Paris, [and Lille: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie.](#), 1901), 243.

The battle of Loigny, fought within the context of a northern offensive launched by the Army of the Loire to break through German lines and lift the siege of Paris, became an integral part of the zouave myth. Just as Castelfidardo had provided both martyrs and a potential saint, Joseph Guérin, Loigny provided new martyrs and another potential saint, the Catholic and monarchist general Gaston de Sonis, commander of the Seventeenth Corps. This great moment of expiatory sacrifice took place in the fading light of 2 December 1870. The Fifteenth and Sixteenth Corps of the Army of the Loire had engaged with Prussian and Bavarian forces north of Orléans, supported by the Seventeenth Corps. Initially the brunt of the fighting was borne by General Antoine Chanzy's Sixteenth Corps. As the day wore on the Germans recovered to retake the positions from which they had been driven back and by the afternoon the village of Loigny had been invested by Bavarian troops, though a remnant of the Thirty-Seventh Battalion held out in the cemetery. In a much-discussed action, Sonis decided to turn the tide of battle by retaking Loigny, though the dispersal of the Seventeenth Corps meant that he had relatively few troops at his disposal. Sonis later maintained that his intention was not to lead a charge of several hundred men, but by this example to galvanize the reluctant Fifty-First Regiment. He also expected to find his action seconded by the nearby Third Division.³

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In the event, however, the assault ~~comprised~~~~comprised~~ barely 800 men: the first battalion of the *Volontaires de l'Ouest*, the irregular *franc-tireur* battalions of Tours and Blidah and the mobile guard of the Côtes-du-Nord. The *Volontaires de l'Ouest* were identified with the zouaves; though technically a distinct irregular volunteer formation, they were led by Athanase de Charette, former lieutenant-colonel of the zouaves and former zouaves formed the nucleus of the force. Unsupported, Sonis proceeded in the spirit of sacrifice: "I did not want to dishonour myself by abandoning these three hundred zouaves who marched behind me... I felt strong in the sacrifice I was going to complete, in the assent of these courageous men... it

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³ For contemporary accounts with opposing views: Auguste Boucher, *Bataille de Loigny avec les combats de Villepion et Poupry* (Orléans, 1872); Amédée Delorme, *Journal d'un sous-officier, 1870* (Paris, 1891).

seemed good to me to die under the flag that sheltered them.”⁴ In the absence of support, the attack fizzled out and the handful of troops who reached Loigny were soon forced to retreat, the *Volontaires* taking their blood-stained banner of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with them. Of the 300 *Volontaires* who charged to the shouts of “Vive la France! Vive Pie IX!” 198 fell.⁵ Charette was injured and taken prisoner. Sonis was left on the battlefield with a shattered knee. He was sustained through the bitterly cold night by a vision of Notre-Dame de Lourdes, while the zouave de Ferron expired with his head on his shoulder.⁶ Catherin’s body was never found.

Two weeks later, Albiousse, commander in Charette’s absence, issued a short communiqué that set out the zouave reading of the battle:

The war which we undergo is a war of expiation and God had already chosen from amongst us the most noble and pure victims...

Let us retemper our courage in our religious convictions and place our hope in the divine Wisdom, whose secrets are impenetrable...

It was by an act of faith that France was born on the battlefield of Tolbiac; it is by an act of faith she will be saved ... with the help of God and for the patrie, let us remain here what we were at Rome, the worthy sons of the eldest daughter of the Church.⁷

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The action of Loigny was placed in a line with their service in Rome. The *Volontaires* were the expiatory victims whose sacrifice would redeem the sins of a fallen France. In his reference to the providential victory of Tolbiac, the inception of Christian France, Albiousse emphasized the

⁴ Sonis, cited in Bart-Loi, *Au service*, 277.

⁵ Figures from Charette report 10 January 1871, reproduced in Patrick Nouaille-Degorce, “Les Volontaires de l’Ouest: Histoire et souvenir de la guerre de 1870-71 à nos jours”, unpub. thesis, 2 vols. (Université de Nantes, 2005), vol. 2, 56-58. Saveur Jacquemont put the losses at 207 zouaves and 11 officers, 60 *franc-tireurs* and 150 mobile guards: *La Campagne des Zouaves Pontificaux en France sous les ordres du général baron de Charette, 1870-1871* (Paris, 1871), 111.

⁶ Mgr Baunard, (trans. Mary Herbert), *The Life of General Sonis* (London, 1891), 205.

⁷ Jacquemont, *La Campagne*, appendix, pp. 195-6.

Christian identity of France, “eldest daughter of the Church.” To be truly French was to cleave to France’s foreordained role as defender of the papacy.

This article examines the French zouaves, in the context of their engagement in papal territories and their subsequent involvement in the Franco-Prussian war. In engaging in the Franco-Prussian war the zouaves added another dimension to what was already a well-rooted and vigorous myth built around their specifically Catholic heroism. From the unequal and doomed engagement of Castelfidardo onward, the zouaves’ deeds had been reported to a receptive Catholic audience. Zouave exploits were recounted in diocesan *Semaines religieuses*, the Catholic press (especially Veuillot’s *L’Univers*), hagiographical biographies, martyrologies, memoirs and even romantic fiction.⁸ The zouaves of the Franco-Prussian war, reconstituted as the *Volontaires de l’Ouest*, offered fresh heroics for Catholics to admire.⁹ Loigny, celebrated as a glorious defeat that proved the martial virtue of Catholic soldiers slotted into the existing legend, confirming and amplifying pre-existing aspects of the discourse on the zouaves. It is this neglected Catholic discourse that lies at the heart of this article.¹⁰ It explores how the Franco-Prussian war impacted the ways in which the zouaves were understood — and chose to understand themselves. In examining the development and mutation of the zouave legend

⁸ e.g. J.-L. Allard, *Le Volontaire Joséph-Louis Guérin du corps des zouaves pontificaux franco-belges* (Nantes, 1860); Anatole de Ségur, *Les Martyrs de Castelfidardo* (Paris, 1861); Sophie de Ségur, *Après la pluie le beau temps* (Paris, 1871). Carol Harrison discusses the 1860-70 literature: “Zouave Stories: Gender, Catholic Spirituality and French Responses to the Roman Question,” *Journal of Modern History* 79 (2007): 274-305.

⁹ In addition to Loigny there was the engagement of Auvours, 11 January 1871. For an account Jacquemont, *La campagne*, 151-63. It was a limited victory — the first battalion of zouaves, again joined by the mobile guard of the Côtes-du-Nord, retook the plateau of Auvours, but the French lines were broken that evening, forcing a general retreat from Le Mans. Though celebrated it figured as a mere footnote to Loigny.

¹⁰ Recent scholarship does not address the myth in detail: Jean Guenel, *La dernière guerre du pape. Les zouaves pontificaux au secours du Saint-Siège, 1860-1870* (Rennes: [Bleud et Barra](#) Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1998); Harrison, “Zouave Stories”; Lucy Riall, “Martyr Cults in Nineteenth Century Italy,” *Journal of Modern History* 82 (2010): 225-87.

between 1860 and 1910 analysis focuses on three related themes: ideas of patriotism and the French nation; ideas of martyrdom and expiation; and ideas of counter-revolution.

Studying the zouaves/*Volontaires* sheds light on the elaboration of a Catholic vision of the French nation and the mid-century Catholic revival. Previous scholarship on the zouaves has failed to address the ways in which discourse on the French Zouaves emphasized their French identity and aligned them with the continuum of French national history. Although the language on the zouaves did not prefigure that of the nationalist new right of the 1890s, and I argue that the zouaves were in no sense nationalists, it is nonetheless undeniable that within the discourse a sense of French Catholic nationalism is observable.¹¹ In addition, the emotional dimension to the zouave narrative, the emphasis on physical pain and the sense of the miraculous (including the identification of potential saints) connect their myth to the new strains of devotion associated with the mid-century Catholic revival.¹² In light of the striking fascination with the suffering bodies of the zouave/*volontaire* martyrs, I also argue that the emphasis placed on female suffering and the suffering female body within a new “dolourist Catholicism” needs to be rethought.¹³

It is important to understand the wider political context within which this discourse unfolded. Many zouaves — and many of their champions — were legitimists, supporters of the

¹¹ On the complicated role of Catholicism within ideas of French national identity: Joseph F. Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2005).

¹² Amongst a vast literature Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 3rd edn. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (Harmondsworth, New York: Viking, 1999); Raymond Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). On the associated ‘feminization’ of Christianity: J.F. McMillan, “Religion and gender in modern France: some reflections,” in *Catholicism in Britain and France since 1789*, eds. N. Atkin and F. Tallett (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 55-66; Caroline Ford, *Divided Houses: Religion and Gender in Modern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

¹³ On this dolourist tradition and the centrality of female suffering: Harris, *Lourdes*; Richard D. E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Bourbon monarchy, ousted in the 1830 July Revolution. Yet the appeal of the zouaves was not restricted to one political constituency. There was a broader conservative — or arguably, counter-revolutionary — Catholic discourse that made no mention of Christian monarchy. Michel Denis argues that the “Roman question” saw a broad-based conservative Catholic politics opposed to Napoleon III’s Second Empire take shape in the 1860s.¹⁴ Following the collapse of the Second Empire in September 1870, legitimists looked to a restoration, believing that “le roi très chrétien” could redeem and re-Christianize France.¹⁵ The election of a monarchist-dominated National Assembly in the wake of France’s defeat raised hopes, but the supreme intransigence of the last of the French Bourbons, the comte de Chambord, frustrated all attempts. In 1875 the Third Republic, promoted as “the regime that divides Frenchmen least,” was finally established. By 1879 the Republic was led by committed republicans who proclaimed their loyalty to the traditions of 1789. Republican reforms in the 1880s, informed by a strong anti-clericalism, resulted in legislation designed to secularize the education system. Legitimists and Catholic conservatives who might have reconciled themselves to the conservative Moral Order regime of the 1870s were brought together by the republican offensive in a politics of “religious and social defence.” For many on both right and left there was a clear division predicated on religion: the two Frances.

While the Third Republic was destined to endure, it faced successive crises. In 1886-89 the novel political phenomenon of Boulangism, a campaign for constitutional revision headed by a general famed for his bellicose attitude toward Germany, challenged the legitimacy and patriotism of the Republic.¹⁶ In addition to corruption, the republicans were accused of

¹⁴ Michel Denis, *Les Royalistes de Mayenne et le monde moderne* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1977), 379–407.

¹⁵ On legitimism: Steven Kale, *Legitimism and the Reconstruction of French Society, 1852-1883* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

¹⁶ On Boulangism: William Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism and the Origins of the Radical Right in France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Philippe Levillain, *Boulangier, fossoyeur de la monarchie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982).

abandoning the provinces of Alsace-Lorraine (annexed by Germany in 1871) in their focus on imperial adventures in Indo-China. Although Boulangism collapsed in ignominious failures this unstable amalgam of radicals, conservatives, and royalists (who secretly bankrolled the general) is significant as the genesis of a new radical right-wing nationalism. This xenophobic and anti-Semitic nationalism became increasingly prominent, above all during the turn of the century Dreyfus Affair and found its most notable expression in Charles Maurras's neo-royalist *Action Française*. Maurras identified the Republic as "anti-France," controlled by Jews, Freemasons, Protestants and "half-breeds" (mêteques). These political struggles shaped and informed the discourse on the zouaves/*Volontaires* and fed an increasingly vocal sense of Catholic nationalism, though the established discourse which emphasized the centrality of France's Catholic identity proved an awkward fit with *Action Française* which sub-ordinated religion to nationalism.¹⁷

II. The Zouaves and the Volontaires de l'Ouest

The question of the Pope's temporal sovereignty, the great cause of the zouaves, came to the fore in 1859 due to a momentous shift in French foreign policy. As president of the Second Republic, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the future Napoleon III, had helped to restore the Pope to his throne in 1849. In 1859 he renounced such support. At Plombières in 1858, Napoleon III promised Camillo Cavour, Prime Minister of Piedmont, military assistance against the Habsburgs, in exchange for Nice and Savoy. Although Napoleon III was aware of the dangers of antagonizing French Catholic opinion he proved willing to countenance the dismemberment of the Papal States. While French troops garrisoned in Rome would ensure that the Pope retained the Eternal City and its immediate surroundings, it was envisaged that the Romagna

¹⁷ M. Sutton, *Nationalism Positivism and Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

and the Papal Legations would be absorbed into a kingdom of Upper Italy. The remainder of the Papal States were to form part of the kingdom of Central Italy together with Tuscany. It was proposed that the resulting four Italian states (the kingdoms of Upper Italy, Central Italy, Naples and the rump of the Papal States, ~~together formed the Patrimony of St Peter~~) should form a confederation, under the presidency of the Pope, in the hope that this would “console him for losing the best part of his States.”¹⁸

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Although the course of events escaped the control of Napoleon III, the drastic reduction of papal territories was envisaged from the outset. In 1859 La Guéronnière's *Le Pape et le Congrès*, known to be written at the direction of the emperor, made it clear that the pope should depend for his independence on a smaller state. Defence would be found in the army of an Italian confederation and income in grants from Catholic powers.¹⁹ These proposals were anathema to Pius IX, but his protests were swept aside under the pressure of events. The wholly unexpected success of Garibaldi's expedition altered the dynamic of affairs in the peninsula and, on 11 September 1860, four days after Garibaldi's triumphal entry into Naples, the Piedmontese invaded the Papal States. The papal volunteers who had been arriving over the course of the previous months finally tasted combat.

The decidedly unequal engagement of Castelfidardo pitted papal forces numbering barely 10,000, commanded by the French General Louis de La Moricière, a political opponent of Napoleon III who had found his Catholic faith in exile in Belgium, against as many as 60,000 Piedmontese troops. Though the Piedmontese victory resulted in their annexation of the bulk of papal territories, this did not mark the complete extinction of papal sovereignty. Cavour's gamble in invading the Papal States was in part predicated on the imperative need to prevent Garibaldi from marching on Rome. Thus while the kingdom of Central Italy did not

¹⁸ Cavour to King Victor Emanuel of Piedmont-Sardinia, 24 July 1858 in *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy*, ed. Derek Beales (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), 155-63.

¹⁹ Arthur de La Guéronnière, *Le Pape et le Congrès* (Paris, 1859).

become a reality, Rome and the small Patrimony of Saint Peter remained under papal control. French troops stationed in Rome guaranteed this state of affairs as Victor Emanuel could not risk a conflict with France. The Pope retained Rome until the French garrison withdrew in the context of the Franco-Prussian war.

Amongst those who fought at Castelfidardo was a 450-strong Franco-Belgian volunteer force. In 1861 the remnants of this force were reconstituted as part of an international volunteer force under the leadership of another former French officer, Louis-Aimé de Becdelièvre, who had led them at Castelfidardo. The name they formally took in 1861 was anticipated in 1860: the zouaves. The Franco-Belgians had borrowed a name and uniform from the elite force that La Moricière had commanded in Algeria. For the remainder of the decade the papal zouaves defended the truncated papal territories until the final fall of Rome.

Though significant, the zouaves were never a large force. Even at their zenith in the summer of 1870 they numbered 3,200 — though over the course of the decade 9,000 enlisted at one time or another. In terms of the French contingent it was a mere 3,300 men who upheld the honour of Catholic France. As we have seen, the French zouaves repatriated in September 1870 numbered well under 1,000. The key engagements associated with the zouaves — Castelfidardo, Mentana and Loigny — were fought by larger forces, of which the zouaves represented no more than a significant minority. At Mentana in 1867, they were in fact outnumbered by 2,000 regular French troops, hastily recalled in response to Garibaldi's incursion into papal territory. Also, service in the zouaves did not necessarily entail combat. After Castelfidardo zouave forces were not involved in any major engagements until Garibaldi's vain attempt to take Rome in 1867. The zouaves spent most of the decade in actions designed to bring order by tackling the problem of banditry.²⁰

²⁰ See e.g. François Le Chauff de Kerguenec, *Souvenirs des zouaves pontificaux 1861 et 1862* (Poitiers, 1890).

The return to France marked a new chapter in the zouave epic and transformed the nature of their engagement. They found themselves plunged into a hard-fought if ultimately inglorious war under the authority of the republican Government of National Defence. After a series of negotiations in October, it was agreed that the zouaves should form the nucleus of a new force, the *Volontaires de l'Ouest*, under the command of Athanase de Charette, their former lieutenant-colonel. Three battalions were swiftly recruited, with about 2,000 men under arms in the period November 1870–January 1871. All three saw action, but attention was above all drawn to the first, which distinguished itself at Loigny in December, and then, reconstituted with men drawn from the second battalion and reserves, at Auvours in January. The three battalions were reunited at Rennes on 27 January and incorporated into the 14,000-strong division of the Army of Brittany commanded by Charette, promoted to brigadier-general. The division had scarcely taken up position on the Mayenne line when the armistice was signed. The symbolic end to the *Volontaires* was marked on 28 July 1871 in the chapel of the Rennes seminary, where the regiment was consecrated to the Sacred Heart, thereby fulfilling the wishes of Henri de Verthamon, who had died holding the banner of the Sacred Heart at Loigny.²¹

Self-evidently, the *Volontaires* were not simply the zouaves under another name. Notwithstanding former zouaves who rejoined at Charette's appeal of October 1870, the original zouaves were no more than a significant minority in a force of about 2,700.²² The *Volontaires* might resemble the zouaves — from an over-representation of the west to a stress on Catholic fidelity to the point of requiring a *curé*'s statement — but they were not the zouaves writ large. They were a force led by zouaves — all 113 officers had served in Italy —

²¹ His ten year-old son read out this act of consecration at the 1873 pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial, attended by Charette, numerous zouaves and over 100 monarchist deputies of the National Assembly. *Paray-le-Monial. Le pèlerinage du Sacré-Cœur en 1873. Histoire et documents* (Moulins, 1873).

²² Recruitment to the *Volontaires* stretched from October 1870 to April 1871, despite the armistice of 28 January. During the initial negotiations 178 zouaves joined other army corps. In October the *Volontaires* numbered 350; by the armistice approximately 2700 had joined. Nouaille-Degorce, "Les volontaires," 1:48-102.

with a scattering of zouaves in the rank and file. They were, however, engaged in a very different combat. The *Volontaires* were one of a range of irregular volunteer forces and their history is part of the wider history of the war effort of Gambetta's Government of National Defence. The zouaves' service in Rome had been framed in terms of fulfilling France's historic mission as *la fille aînée de l'Église*;²³ the *Volontaires* served France directly. Castelfidardo and Mentana provided martyrs for the papal cause; Loigny provided martyrs for France. Nonetheless, there was a marked tendency to sharply differentiate the *Volontaires* from other elements of the French army. Unlike other soldiers, it was claimed, they carried the secret of regeneration and were untainted by defeat. They proved that true patriotism was rooted in Catholic values. They were on the one hand exemplars, on the other pure and expiatory victims whose willing sacrifice would redeem a fallen France.

Just as the zouaves were not latter-day vendéen or chouan counter-revolutionaries, the *Volontaires* were not zouaves, though undeniably some thought of themselves as such. For instance, Joseph Perraud wrote, "I will give with joy half my blood for France, but I want to save the rest for the Pope."²⁴ Patrick Nouaille-Degorce argues that the *Volontaires* must be understood as a separate phenomenon rather than assimilated to the zouave narrative.²⁵ The *Volontaires* were, however, very much assimilated to the zouave legend — in addition to being routinely referred to as zouaves. Those who celebrated their memory and exploits were reluctant to separate them from the zouaves, or to read them solely in terms of the wider French struggle against the German invaders. In particular, the commemorative ceremonies organized

²³ Martin Simpson, "Serving France in Rome: The *Zouaves Pontificaux* and the French Nation," *French History* 27 (2013): 69-90.

²⁴ Joseph Perraud, letter n.d., in Joseph Perraud, *Lettres de guerre d'un zouave pontifical, octobre-novembre 1870*, ed. Pascal Beyls (Montbonnot: P. Beyls, 2000), 24.

²⁵ Nouaille-Degorce also shows that recruitment patterns differed significantly. "Les volontaires," 1:52-102.

under the auspices of Charette insisted on continuity of the two forces.²⁶ The disbanding of the *Volontaires* came at the request of Charette, who declined the offer to serve in the French army when his condition that the *Volontaires* might continue as a separate force was not met.²⁷

Charette's logic sprang from his conception of the *Volontaires* as a continuation of the zouaves, a force that had to remain free to serve the pope if called upon. Integration into the French army would constitute a betrayal of their mission: "this uniform is the property of the whole Catholic world whose belief we represent; it is the livery of Rome, it is not ours to be disposed of at will and linked to the fortunes of an unstable government."²⁸

For Charette the *Volontaires* were not distinct from the zouaves: Loigny was located in the sequence of zouave heroism that began at Castelfidardo. The zouaves had never ceased to exist and the fall of Rome did not mark the end of their task. Theodore Wibaux wrote after entering the Jesuit novitiate, "I am convinced of the reality of the mission given to the zouaves; and I believe that the generous manner in which the regiment has been dedicated to the Sacred Heart is more than anything else a pledge that it will not cease to exist but is destined to bear a part in the regeneration of France."²⁹ At the 1885 *noces d'argent*, organized by Charette to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the regiment, and at the fiftieth anniversary celebrated in the Sacré-Cœur de Montmartre, it was emphasized that the regiment was still a reality.³⁰ The age of the zouaves was immaterial: Albiousse declared in 1885, "if, at the hour chosen by God, the vigour of our arms no longer answers to the ardour of our souls, well, my general, our sons

²⁶ See Athanase de Charette, *Noces d'argent du régiment des zouaves pontificaux, 1860-1885. Basse-Motte, 28 juillet 1885 – Anvers 30 août 1885* (Rennes, 1886)

²⁷ Letters in "Historique de la légion," in Nouaille-Dégorce, "Les Volontaires," II:98-109.

²⁸ Charette cited in Wibaux letter, 9 July 1871, in Coëtlosquet, *Wibaux*, 288-9.

²⁹ Letter, n.d. in [Coëtlosquet, Wibaux, *ibid.*, p. 328](#).

³⁰ Charette, *Noces*; Mgr de Cabrières, *Cinquantième anniversaire de la création du régiment des zouaves pontificaux* (Montpellier: [Manufacture de la Charité](#), 1910); *L'Avant-Garde*, 1 July 1910.

are behind us, ready to take the place of their fathers.”³¹ To analyze the zouave legend in full, account must be taken of the *Volontaires*. Conversely, the discourse on the *Volontaires* is only fully intelligible in light of the zouave legend.

III. The Zouaves: Catholics and Frenchmen

The discourse on the zouaves reveals how they were constructed as both Catholic and French exemplars. The zouaves offered lessons about the French nation and French identity well before they became embroiled in the Franco-Prussian war. *L'Univers* declared, “At Rome the regiment of zouaves... accomplished a French task in protecting and defending the independence and sovereignty of the Holy See. It is not for nothing that the statue of Charlemagne stands guard at the gates of Saint Peter at the Vatican.”³² The reference to Charlemagne points to the issue of national history. The zouaves were placed in a continuum of national history, read in terms of service of the Church, that legitimated and glorified their actions.³³

This discourse existed in a dynamic relationship with competing versions of the nation, both republican and Bonapartist. The example of the zouaves served to demonstrate the hollowness of Bonapartist claims to incarnate the glories of French national history.³⁴ Likewise, the republican version of France as the republican nation forged through the revolution and united around the values of 1789 was challenged by insisting on the national character of the

³¹ Albiouse cited in *Le Gaulois*, 29 July 1885, in Charette, *Noces*, 31.

³² Léon Aubineau, *L'Univers*, 23 July 1885, in Charette, *Noces*, ~~ibid.~~, 7.

³³ On reading the national past: Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1997). On Charlemagne: Robert Morrissey, “Charlemagne”, in *Lieux*, 3:4389-4426. On Catholicism and national identity, Byrnes, *Catholic and French*.

³⁴ On Napoleon III’s attempts to link the Second Empire to the monarchical past: Matthew Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Comment [AN10]: Couldn't find the publisher for Nora's collection in footnote 33.

Comment [MS11]: See below

zouaves.³⁵ The zouaves were one of the constituent parts of a vigorous Catholic discourse that countered the discourse and rituals of the Third Republic. It was, as Jean-Clément Martin has termed the Vendée, “contre-mémoire.”³⁶ Ruth Harris points out that the pilgrimage movement arose in the context of the construction of a republican symbolism. Lourdes offered an alternative Catholic set of rituals to challenge the secular cult of the Republic.³⁷ Similarly Brian Brennan has drawn attention to how pilgrimage to Rome offered the chance to experience “the historical fantasy of the ‘True France’ that was traditional, Catholic and royal.”³⁸ Much the same applies to the zouaves. They appealed to royalist traditionalists and ultramontane Catholic opponents of the Republic because they fitted into their vision of France: traditional, pious, largely rural, deferential, and monarchical.

Celebrating the zouaves served to advance a particular vision of France and French national history. The zouaves encapsulated a vision of a re-Christianized and regenerated France. The logic of the zouaves was undeniably a counter-revolutionary logic. They defined France in opposition to the heritage of 1789. The *Syllabus of Errors* of 1864, in which Pius IX effectively anathematized the developments of the nineteenth century, reinforced this counter-revolutionary perspective. Their project was couched in terms of the recovery of authentic French traditions, of the restoration of “true France.” Certainly, notwithstanding their concern for the contested terrain of the French nation and their readiness to challenge other versions, these counter-revolutionary upholders of “true France” were not nationalists. Catholics above and before anything, the zouaves shared in Pius IX’s rejection of the modern nation-state and

³⁵ On the construction of republican symbolism: Nora (ed.), *Lieux*, volume 1: *La République*; Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir: l’imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989).

³⁶ Jean-Clément Martin, “La Vendée, région-mémoire,” in *Lieux*, 1:519-35.

³⁷ Harris, *Lourdes*, 222.

³⁸ Brian Brennan, “Visiting ‘Peter in Chains’: French Pilgrimage to Rome, 1873-93,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51 (2000): 741-2.

its claims. By definition, in their fight for the temporal sovereignty of the Holy See the zouaves rejected many of the tenets of nineteenth-century nationalism.³⁹

The zouaves and the *Volontaires* were employed to advance a certain vision of France and later to contest the official republican alignment of France with the revolutionary tradition. It is, however, reductive to read this discourse solely in terms of political rhetoric. The primary audience of Catholics might choose to draw political lessons, but equally they were invited to reflect on lessons of the faith involving expiation, suffering, and abnegation. The zouaves and *Volontaires* need to be understood in terms of the mid-nineteenth century Catholic revival. There was a powerful emotional dimension to the zouave legend: they were not just martial heroes to be admired, but Catholics were encouraged to enter into an emotional relationship with them, sharing in both their pain and suffering and in the sacrifice and suffering of zouave mothers who mourned their sons.⁴⁰ As with Lourdes and the devotion to Pius IX the themes of pain, sainthood, expiation and the miraculous featured in the zouave narrative. It was in the context of the new character of Catholic devotions — including, particularly, the cult of the Sacred Heart — that the zouaves/*Volontaires* proved so potent.⁴¹

Yet the zouaves/*Volontaires* were not merely passive objects of the enthusiasms of counter-revolutionary Catholics. The zouaves played an active role in the construction of their own legend. Commemorative ceremonies — most notably the 1885 “silver wedding” celebrations — saw the legend powerfully restated. A newspaper, *L’Avant-Garde*, was

³⁹ On nationalism: David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Bertrand Joly, *Nationalistes et conservateurs en France, 1885-1902* (Paris: Indes savants, 2008). Riall argues that the papacy engaged in a culture war against Italian nationalists. The *zouaves* were the most dramatic expression. “Martyr Cults.”

⁴⁰ Harrison, “Zouave stories,” emphasizes the importance of zouave mothers in zouave narratives. Ségur dedicated *Les martyrs* to grieving mothers, “the true protectors, the hope and the salvation of France!”

⁴¹ Jonas, *France and the Cult*.

launched in 1892 to keep veterans' memories alive.⁴² Numerous memoirs helped to shape the images of the great set-pieces of zouave history — Castelfidardo, Mentana, and Loigny. Attention was drawn to zouave words, above all zouave correspondence, central to adulatory biographies, but also significant in works such as Ségur's *Les Martyrs de Castelfidardo*.⁴³ The language of expiatory sacrifice, fidelity to vendéen and Breton ancestry or identification with the crusades was not simply imposed on the zouaves by those who celebrated them.

IV. The French Nation

In September 1860 French Catholics' fascination with the zouaves began. The image of the French volunteers fallen at Castelfidardo resonated throughout Catholic France. Before the year was out further fuel was added with Allard's hagiographical biography of Joséph-Louis Guérin, the subject of a cult in his native Nantes. The following year brought memoirs — for instance Oscar de Poli's *Souvenir du bataillon des zouaves pontificaux – franco-belges* – and Anatole de Ségur's matryology. Soon there would even be works of romantic fiction — in 1862 there appeared in French translation Bresciani's *Le zouave pontifical*, which made extensive use of actual zouave letters.⁴⁴ These accounts followed in the wake of the first efforts to shape French Catholic understanding of the zouaves, sermons preached by Mgr Pie of Poitiers and Mgr Dupanloup of Orléans, two very different supporters of the papacy.⁴⁵

Comment [AN12]: Can't find the publisher of Jacques Gadille in footnote 45.

Comment [MS13]: See below

⁴² *L'Avant-Garde* reached out beyond France — its readership included Canadian veterans. Likewise the “noces d'argent” festivities organized by Charette were attended by representatives of the Canadian zouaves and additional celebrations were held in Antwerp for Dutch and Belgian zouaves. Charette, *Noces*; Diane Audy, *Les zouaves de Québec au XXe siècle* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2003), 57.

⁴³ For biographies reliant on letters e.g. Allard, *Le volontaire*; Coëtlosquet, *Wibaux*; Robert Oheix, *Joseph Rialan, sergent aux zouaves pontificaux* (Nantes, 1868).

⁴⁴ Harrison, “Zouave stories.”

⁴⁵ On the divided nature of French ultramontanism: Bruno Horaist, *La dévotion au pape et les catholiques français sous le pontificat de Pie IX* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1995). On Pie and Dupanloup: Jacques

The analyses of the intransigent “neo-ultramontane” Pie and the liberal Dupanloup were broadly congruent. Both employed the language of martyrdom and identified the zouaves as “new Maccabees.” Both saw parallels to the crusades, Pie referring to Rome as “another better Jerusalem, more precious, more necessary,” and both noted the recurrence of crusader names in the ranks of the zouaves.⁴⁶ By extension, both turned to reflections on the specifically French qualities displayed by the zouaves. Dupanloup argued that martial virtue was a French quality, demonstrated from the siege of Orléans to Sebastopol. So too was serving the cause of justice, so outrageously violated by the illegal aggression of Piedmont. The zouaves, he concluded, were martyrs of the Church, natural rights and French honour:

[They have attested to the honour of our nation: that France, in one part of its children, is forever the France of Charlemagne and Saint-Louis; that the land which once sent its most valiant knights to die for the tomb of Christ has not exhausted all this generous blood... that the heart of France, if one does not smother it, if it is left to beat at its natural rhythm, always beats for the Catholic church].⁴⁷

Comment [AN14]: Note to typesetter: Please use block quotation formatting.

Pie presented the zouaves as a lesson in French values to be addressed to the whole nation. He inveighed against the suggestion that French volunteers for the papacy should forfeit their citizenship for fighting for a foreign power: “Say that your king is called Pépin and your emperor Charlemagne; say that your banner is the oriflamme of Saint Denys [sic]; say that a French soldier, instead of losing his deeds of naturalisation, in fact wins them back in performing the tasks of the most-Christian France, in paying the debts of the eldest daughter of the Church.”⁴⁸

Gadille, *La pensée et l'action politique des évêques français au début de la troisième République, 1870-1883*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1967).

⁴⁶ Louis-Édouard Pie, *Éloge funèbre des volontaires catholiques*, 11 October 1860 (Paris, 1860), 11.

⁴⁷ Félix Dupanloup, *Oraison funèbre des volontaires catholiques de l'armée pontificale, morts pour la défense du Saint-Siège, le 2 octobre 1860* (Paris, 1860), 25.

⁴⁸ Pie, *Éloge*, 1860, 12.

From the outset, reflection on the zouaves was bound up with questions of national identity. If Napoleon III's restoration of Pius IX to the papal throne in 1849 placed him in a direct line with Clovis, Charles-Martel, Charlemagne, Saint-Louis, Joan of Arc, and Louis XIV, his Italian policy disrupted this relationship.⁴⁹ For ultramontanes the fact that the Patrimony of Saint Peter was preserved by the French garrison in Rome was wholly insufficient: Pie publicly denounced Napoleon III as Pilate.⁵⁰ [The locus of French identity shifted to those who stayed faithful, above all the zouaves, "the worthy sons of the eldest daughter of the Church."] Pie and Dupanloup argued that the zouaves stood in a line of national Catholic heroism inaugurated by Clovis and embodied in the great figures of Charlemagne, Saint Louis, and Joan.

In 1873 the first French pilgrims to Rome made a penitent address to Pius IX. They acknowledged that France's neglect of her mission had led to disaster for both nation and papacy, concluding: "The salvation of France is the triumph of the Church. The salvation of France is your deliverance."⁵¹ This was by no means an original line of argument.

Commemorating Loigny in 1871 Pie explained the *Volontaires*' logic: "Behind our human Fatherland there is the spiritual Fatherland, there is the Church, there is Rome."⁵² This insistent linkage of France to Rome points to what became an important element in the zouave legend, namely the concordance between 1860-70 and 1870-71. The zouaves upheld the cause of France in Rome and conversely, in fighting for France they did not cease to be the soldiers of the Pope. *L'Univers* asserted, "[the regiment] did not transform itself in taking up and raising its standard against our enemies... remaining what it was, it found itself to be French."⁵³

⁴⁹ Edmond Lafond made the former argument in *Rome, lettres d'un pèlerin*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1856), volume 2, p.v. After 1859 he identified France in La Moricière and Pimodan, successors to Saint Louis and de Guise. *Lorette et Castelfidardo, lettres d'un pèlerin*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1862).

⁵⁰ Jonas, *France and the Cult*, 265.

⁵¹ 15 August 1873 address, in Horaist, *La Dévotion*, 633.

⁵² Pie, *Éloge funèbre*, 1871, 143.

⁵³ Aubineau, *L'Univers*, 23 July 1885, in Charette, *Noces*, 6.

Comment [AN15]: Review. I think the sense of this sentence is "The locus of French identity shifted to those who stayed faithful, and the zouaves represented this above all."

Sentence needs minor editing to clarify how the "locus" clause connects to the "zouaves" clause.

Comment [MS16]: Meaning seems clear enough to me (and the colleague with whom I share an office) but I won't fight you – provided that you keep the quotation (e.g. 'the zouaves, "the worthy sons..." represented)

Nonetheless, the equivalence of the two combats was not necessarily self-evident. Though they preserved their own identity, the zouaves were ultimately under the authority of the republican Government of National Defence. It was unclear how victory under these circumstances might lead to either the salvation of the papacy or the associated re-Christianization of France. Theodore Wibaux found hardship in the campaign of 1870-71, but no spiritual reward. After Loigny he judged patriotism an “empty phrase” and struggled with the very idea of serving the Republic: “the thought of receiving a Prussian bullet under the auspices of the Republic is most repugnant to me, though I should have deemed it an honour to receive any number of wounds under the paternal eye of the Holy Father and for his sake.”⁵⁴

Henri Derély, a captain in the zouaves, attempted to resolve the tension between the *Volontaires*' heroism and the disagreeable principles of Gambetta's republican Government of National Defence, by disassociating one from the other. “Loigny,” he argued, “was not a victory for the army of ‘National Defence’ which did not call upon the God of [Saint] Clothilde to the rescue; but Loigny was victory of Christ as much as Tolbiac. That day, the Sacred Heart took over the soul of France.”⁵⁵ The dominant post-Loigny image of the *Volontaires* as soldiers of the Sacred Heart indicated that they had fought for France, but France understood in very different terms than those of the Third Republic. The banner of Loigny, venerated as a quasi-sacred relic, acted as shorthand for the uniqueness of the *Volontaires*' exploits. Loigny, despite its outcome, represented a victory of Christ; for former zouave Jean Delmas, “a miracle of patience, of confidence in God and of joy in sacrifice.”⁵⁶ Loigny was fitted into the narrative of French greatness. In 1889 abbé Vié considered comparisons with Bouvines, Patay, and

⁵⁴ Wibaux letter, 8 December 1870, in Coëtlosquet, *Wibaux*, 268.

⁵⁵ Henri Derély, *Le général de Sonis, les Volontaires de l'Ouest et le drapeau du Sacré-Cœur* (Paris, 1892), 52.

⁵⁶ Jean Delmas, *Les zouaves pontificaux en France* (Limoges, 1877), 34.

Valmy.⁵⁷ Challan de Belval, a doctor who tended to the wounded of Loigny, identified a great moment of national renewal: “Through Christ the Sicambre Clovis made France! Through Christ Joan of Arc resuscitated her! Through Christ and under the folds of your glorious standard covered in the blood of your heroes you have immortalised her.”⁵⁸

In the continuum of French national history, there was one figure above all others: Joan of Arc, credited with having resurrected France through her victories and through her supreme moment of triumph, her martyrdom at Rouen. The *zouaves/Volontaires* were conceptualized as Joan’s successors. Though in 1868 Mgr Louis Baunard, rector of the Catholic Faculty of Lille, had drawn a parallel between the actions of Joan, the redemptive heroine and the blood shed by *zouaves* in expiation at Mentana, Loigny became the great parallel.⁵⁹ Mgr Maurice d’Hulst, rector of the Free Catholic University in Paris, consecrating the rebuilt church of Loigny in 1893, argued that Loigny was greater than the neighbouring battlefields of Patay, Sargeau, or Meury, victories of Joan. True glory was found in defeat and martyrdom. The *zouaves* had displayed, “testimony, the heroic fidelity that is undaunted by any reverse, that is attached to a lost cause and saves it by believing in it. Joan vanquished, chained, maligned, condemned, burnt believed in France and her faith did not deceive her. Joan died and France owed her life to her.”⁶⁰

V. Expiation and Martyrdom

⁵⁷ Abbé Vie, *Éloge funèbre des soldats françaises morts à la bataille de Loigny, prononcé dans l’église de Loigny, le 2 décembre 1889* (Orléans, 1889).

⁵⁸ Cited in *L’Avant-Garde*, 1 July 1910.

⁵⁹ Louis Baunard, “Jeanne d’Arc et la délivrance d’Orléans,” 8 May 1868, in Baunard, *Saintes et Saints de Dieu: Choix de discours et panégyriques prononcés de 1868 à 1909* (Paris: J. de Gigord, 1914).

⁶⁰ Maurice le Sage d’Hauteroche d’Hulst, “Discours prononcé à la consécration de l’église de Loigny, le 18 septembre 1893”, in idem., *Nouveaux mélanges oratoires*, volume III (Paris: Poussielgue, 1900), 356.

The concept of expiation was at the heart of the zouave enterprise. France had proved an apostate nation. Napoleon III betrayed France's mission as *la fille aînée de l'Église*. Whether God's justified anger might be averted depended upon the innocent blood offered in expiation. Blood was the key to redemption and discourse on the zouaves was saturated with it. Enrolling in the zouaves was understood primarily in terms of expiatory sacrifice. The 'zouave saint,' Joséph-Louis Guérin, did not expect victory, but aligned himself with, "all the martyrs who offered themselves to the executioners."⁶¹ Louis Veuillot, encouraging the young Theodore Wibaux to enlist, was explicit: "we want to offer our blood in order to atone for the disgraceful defalcation of France."⁶² The idealized zouave accepted hardship, extreme physical suffering, and death joyfully.⁶³ Dying words that encapsulated these sentiments were eagerly transcribed.

In their martyrologies relating to Castelfidardo and Mentana respectively, Ségur and Huguet betrayed a fascination with what Huguet termed "[the zouaves'] blessed and triumphant ends, their smiling death throes."⁶⁴ Ségur captured the zouaves' fortitude and resignation, and also obliquely their innocence: "they lay on their bloody beds as if in the wedding bed of truth, singing canticles of eternal love."⁶⁵ On the young Mizaël le Mesre de Pas, wounded on the eve of Castelfidardo, Bresciani wrote: "Take your flight angelic soul: your blood will be the seed of martyrs! You were the first to water the soil with it, but others entered heaven before you, because God wished that the first [martyr's] crown should be more dazzling than the others and multiplied the florets for eternity in prolonging your suffering."⁶⁶ Guérin too was favoured with

Comment [AN17]: Review footnote 63. I'm not sure to which the *ibid.* refers because I don't think it's from the same letter cited in 62.

Comment [MS18]: Fair point. Changed for clarity.

Comment [AN19]: Confirm that this is part of the same paragraph. I removed a short block quote and made it an in-text quotation, and whether this was meant to be a new paragraph was unclear.

Comment [MS20]: Same paragraph

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⁶¹ Allard, *Le Volontaire*, 19.

⁶² Veuillot letter n.d. (November 1866) in Coëtlosquet, *Wibaux*, 28.

⁶³ The hardship of a soldier's life was stressed. Wibaux loathed sentry duty: *Coëtlosquet. Wibaux. ibid., pp. 59-60, 126-7, 152*. Huguet portrayed nobles accepting "the hard and degrading obligations of garrison life": *Les Victoires de Pie IX sur les garibaldiens en 1867 et les soldats du Pape devant l'histoire* (Paris, 1868), 164-66.

⁶⁴ Huguet, *Les Martyrs de la liberté de l'Église en 1867. Nerola, Monte-Libretti, Monte-Rotondo, Mentana* (Lyon, 1868), 9.

⁶⁵ Ségur, *Les Martyrs*, 47.

⁶⁶ Cited in Lafond, *Lorette et Castelfidardo*, 325.

a slow and painful death, “since doubtless the divine remunerator reserved a yet more glorious crown for him in heaven.”⁶⁷ Both proved suitably eloquent on the meaning of their agony. Le Mesre de Pas turned to Mary: “I offer you [my suffering] in union with those that tore your heart at the foot of the cross.”⁶⁸ Guérin thought of Christ: “My God, how I suffer, but let your will be done... how happy I am to offer my feeble sufferings to the good Jesus who suffered so much for me.”⁶⁹ Observers saw parallels to Christ’s Calvary and the Eucharistic sacrifice. Abbé Latreiche wrote of the injured of Castelfidardo, “they render to [Jesus Christ] blood for blood, and while at the priest’s voice the blood of the Lamb flows on the altar of sacrifice, their blood flows in a real and living union.”⁷⁰

The language of martyrdom employed by Ségur and Huguet did not disappear in the context of the Franco-Prussian war. For some there was a sense of deferred martyrdom. Henri de Verthamon, bearer of the banner of the Sacred Heart at Loigny, died five days later in considerable agony, reflecting, “[h]ow I regret not having died at Rome for religion, for the Holy Father... but one can only want what God wishes.”⁷¹ Yet there were also fresh martyrs to celebrate. Victor Charruau was described in terms to match any zouave: “God wished to make of him one of these pure and holy sacrifices who continue the passion of Jesus Christ and expiate the sins of the world.” His death had an explicitly redemptive quality, abbé Pergeline reporting that he had prayed to suffer longer to redeem the soul of a friend.⁷² This inescapable fascination with the suffering and the broken bodies of the zouaves/*volontaires* challenges the contention that dolourist Catholicism was obsessed with the Christian suffering of women.

⁶⁷ Ségur, *Les Martyrs*, 263.

⁶⁸ Jean Delmas, *La Neuvième Croisade*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1881), 86.

⁶⁹ Allard, *Le Volontaire*, 80.

⁷⁰ Latreiche, *Journal des événements de Castelfidardo*, cited in Charette, *Souvenir*, 9.

⁷¹ Marquis de Saint-Aulaire, *Henri de Verthamon, zouave pontifical, volontaire de l’Ouest, blessé mortellement au combat de Loigny, le 2 décembre 1870* (Perigueux, 1873), 118.

⁷² Abbé Pergeline, *Victor Charruau. Allocution prononcé le 27 mars 1872, adresse aux anciens élèves de l’Externat des Enfants Nantais* (Nantes, 1872), 14.

There was, however, one notable difference between the martyrs of Castelfidardo or Mentana and the martyrs of Loigny. The marked feature of those who fell at Castelfidardo and Mentana was their youth — the “gentle and delicate adolescent,” Georges d’Héliand was aged nineteen, Alfred de la Barre de Nanteuil and Alfège du Beaudiez only twenty, while the “very pure and very gentle,” Mizaël de Pas resembled a young girl, “so much was his appearance modest and virginal.”⁷³ Ségur’s martyrology developed a striking tension between the suffering endured and the zouaves’ young and delicate bodies. It was clear that the zouaves’ true strength lay in the fortitude with which they accepted pain and death. The language employed suggested the bodies of adolescents rather than grown men and had strongly feminizing aspects. This was heightened by the stress laid on zouave mothers. Both Ségur and Huguet devoted the closing chapters of their martyrologies to zouave mothers, depicted as exemplars in their willing acceptance of the pain of loss and in their understanding of the designs of God. D’Héliand’s mother, a widow confronted with the death of her only son declared, “I must thank God who made my George experience a happiness which I could never have given him if He had left him to me.”⁷⁴

There were young *volontaires* — Joseph Perraud and Fernand de Ferron died at Loigny aged nineteen — but the tenor of the descriptions of the martyrs of Loigny was very different, despite explicit parallels. The fallen of Loigny were no less heroic than the fallen of Castelfidardo and their status as martyrs was almost invariably commented upon. Both defeats were understood in terms of expiatory sacrifice and accounts reveal a continued fascination with physical pain, but the language of youth and innocence was not applied to Loigny. This can be explained in three ways. First, Castelfidardo represented the inception of a legend and the image of a legion of young Christian martyrs captured the imagination of Catholic enthusiasts. Loigny was the last act in the zouave epic, the culmination of their mission and, as

⁷³ Ségur, *Les Martyrs*, 73-74, 91.

⁷⁴ Ségur, *Les Martyrs*, 93; Mensor in *Le Gaulois*, 27 July 1885, in Charette, *Noces*, 157.

we have seen, in some cases the realization of a martyrdom they had hoped for in their service in Rome. By the time of Loigny, the zouaves were experienced and battle-hardened men, notwithstanding the presence of young *volontaires*. Second, emphasis was laid on the bearers of the flag of the Sacred Heart and the heroes Charette and Sonis, none of whom possessed the striking youth of many of the martyrs of Castelfidardo. Third, and most importantly, the context of their engagement was transformed. In their distinctive service in Rome the zouaves were unique; in their self-sacrificing devotion to the papacy they could be presented in feminizing terms without being effeminate.⁷⁵ In the very different context of the Franco-Prussian war, the zouaves/*volontaires* were to be distinguished in terms of their patriotic valour rooted in their Catholic faith. They were exemplary soldiers, not an innocent and chaste legion. Moreover, with fierce debate as to the reasons for the defeat, Catholics sought to rebut republican accusations that Catholic teachings produced weak, soft, and passive men.⁷⁶ The increasingly strident discourse of *revanchist* nationalism, enthusiastically embraced by the right, also impacted representations of the *volontaires*. Just as the language of the crusade could not be applied to the *Volontaires*, a new portrayal of Christian soldiers was produced after 1870-71.

VI. Loigny and the Sacred Heart

The unique position Loigny came to play in the zouave myth did not rest solely on the desperate heroism displayed in their charge. Significantly the *Volontaires* fell under the banner

⁷⁵ Harrison, "Zouave Stories," 297. Harrison [rights-rightly](#) argues that ideas of a feminized Church distinguished from a rational secular masculinity hinder understanding. For scholarship that challenges this dichotomy: Paul Seeley, "Ô Sainte Mère: Liberalism and the Socialization of Catholic Men in Nineteenth-Century France," *Journal of Modern History* 70.4 (1998): 862-891; Carol Harrison, *Romantic Catholics: France's Post-Revolutionary Generation in Search of a Modern Faith* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁷⁶ e.g. Henri de Cathelineau, *Le vrai patriotisme développé par l'enseignement religieux* (Lille, 1879).

of the Sacred Heart. Charette, who had received the flag embroidered by the Visitationist nuns of Paray-le-Monial in Tours, prevailed upon Sonis to display it in the field. Sonis, who had testified to Charette his conviction that the salvation of France hinged on re-Christianization, was entirely receptive to the idea. Comte Fernand de Bouillé, offered the honour of bearing the flag, demurred on the grounds that he had not served in Rome.⁷⁷ Instead Henri de Verthamon carried the flag into battle — Bouillé picked it up when he fell. In a lethal relay the flag passed from Verthamon to Fernand de Bouillé to his son Jacques to Cazenove de Pradines to Jules de Traversay to Le Parmentier. The chaplain Doussot finally brought it back from the battlefield.⁷⁸ Of the flag-bearers only Le Parmentier, Traversay, and Cazenove de Pradines survived, the latter taking pride in his status as disabled veteran of “Patay,” choosing to sit in the National Assembly in zouave uniform with his arm in a sling. The blood-stained banner became a relic, prominently displayed at commemorative ceremonies.

The myth of the charge under the banner of the Sacred Heart exerted a tremendous appeal over Catholic France and inspired Alexandre Legentil’s vow to build a chapel dedicated to the Sacred Heart. After Loigny the *zouaves/Volontaires* were recast as the soldiers of the Sacred Heart, indissolubly associated with this expiatory devotion that flourished spectacularly during *l’année terrible* (1870-71). Legentil’s vow ultimately resulted in the Sacré-Cœur basilica at Montmartre, explicitly conceived as an expiatory monument. Loigny, depicted in a mosaic inside the basilica, was the great expression of the cult.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ On the banner: *Bulletin de l’œuvre du vœu national au Sacré Cœur de Jésus*, in Charette, *Souvenir*, 93-6; Jacquemont, *La Campagne*; Bart-Loi, *Au service*.

⁷⁸ Accounts differ — only Verthamon and two de Bouillés appear in all versions e.g. Jacquemont, *La campagne*, 106-7; Bart-Loi, *Au service*, 280. Henri de Valori added sergeant-major Landeau to the list: *Charette, Troussures et les zouaves pontificaux* (Nîmes, 1871). Cazenove de Pradines later wrote that his inclusion was erroneous, though he was wounded defending the flag. Jacques de Bouillé may be a similar case: Nouaille-Degorce, “Les Volontaires,” 1:293-4.

⁷⁹ Jonas, *France and the Cult*.

The Sacred Heart was very much a penitential devotion in the wake of *l'année terrible*, obsessed with punishment and expiation. Notwithstanding protective and maternal qualities it was employed in conjunction with the image of an angry chastising patriarchal God.⁸⁰ Marguerite-Marie Alacoque's original visions had included ideas of divine anger.⁸¹ The Revolution was the first taste of this providential punishment; defeat and civil war the second. The zouaves enjoyed a privileged position within the cult, heroes who had rallied to the Sacred Heart, marking the path that others should follow. The annual services to commemorate Loigny offered the ideal opportunity to fix this image.

Just as with the dead of Castelfidardo, the divine reward of the expiatory victims of Loigny was not in doubt. In 1871 Pie was clear: "to have fallen under the folds of the banner of the Heart of Jesus is to acquire the privilege of the beloved disciple."⁸² Thirty-eight years later, van den Brule addressed a prayer to the fallen: "Soldiers of Christ, Martyrs of France, holy and bloodied sacrifices for the two greatest causes... you whose ashes were laid there, as if to be joined to the body of the August Victim and whose blood was spilt there as if to be mingled with his precious blood... we pray to you as we pray before the relics of saints."⁸³ Yet though the language of martyrdom was applied to the fallen *volontaires*, there was no work comparable to Ségur and Huguet's martyrologies. Biographies made the case for particular individuals — for instance Catherin, Verthamon and Charruau — and the frequent mentions of individual zouaves might stretch into page-long pen-portraits. However, there was one compelling martyr: General Gaston de Sonis. For abbé Vie he was the equal of Bayard and "since Saint Louis a soul at once so religious and so warlike has not been seen."⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Jonas, "Anxiety, Identity and the Displacement of Violence during the *Année Terrible*: The Sacred Heart and the Diocese of Nantes, 1870-1871," *French Historical Studies* 21 (1998): 55-75.

⁸¹ Jean Delmas, *Le pèlerinage de l'Anjou à Paray-le-Monial, 29-30 juin 1874* (Angers, 1874), 28.

⁸² Pie, *Éloge*, 1871, 144.

⁸³ Alfred van den Brule, 2 December 1909 address, cited in *L'Avant-Garde*, 15 January 1910.

⁸⁴ Vié, *Éloge*, 20.

This “archetype of the Christian hero,” emerged from Loigny, in the words of Mgr Freppel of Angers, who delivered his funeral oration, as “a glorious image of the mutilated Fatherland.”⁸⁵ Emphasis was placed on his vision of Notre-Dame de Lourdes; Charette later recounted that when he saw Sonis on the next day, “his handsome and noble face was radiant: he was still under the influence of the vision he had in the night, covered and buried in the snow as if in a shroud.”⁸⁶ There followed forty-five days of intense suffering in the presbytery of Loigny’s makeshift hospital. Theuré, *curé*, recounted admiringly that Sonis blessed God when his leg was amputated. Remarkably Sonis returned to serve in the French army; if scarcely able to walk, he could still ride. Mgr Freppel summed up his life after Loigny as “the seventeen-year struggle between a soul magnified by suffering and remains of a body become incapable of serving it... martyrdom renewed twenty times over.”⁸⁷ Mgr Baunard produced a hagiographical biography that closed with hopes for his future sainthood. In 1891 the Institut de Notre-Dame de Chartres made a pilgrimage to his tomb.⁸⁸

VII. The Counter-Revolution

Regenerating France was, for many, an explicitly counter-revolutionary project. The Revolution represented the rejection of God and negation of France’s national tradition. The whole zouave enterprise was frequently read in terms of counter-Revolutionary struggle. Following Mentana vicomte Sioc’Han de Kersabiec commented, “this time the Revolution,

⁸⁵ Freppel, *Éloge funèbre du général de Sonis* (Angers, 1887), 2. Pie almost certainly had Sonis in mind in 1871: “the patrie, sadly amputated herself, interests herself in the fate of these glorious mutilated men in whom she recognises the image of her own dismemberment.” *Éloge funèbre*, 1871, 144.

⁸⁶ Charette, 30 May 1892 speech, in *Collège de Juilly. Inauguration des bustes de Mgr de Mérode et du général de Sonis, anciens élèves* (Paris, 1892), 11.

⁸⁷ Freppel, cited in Derély, *Le général*, 56.

⁸⁸ Abbé Provost, *Loigny-la-Bataille, de 1870 à 1912* (Lille: [V. Ducoulombier](#), 1912), 445.

seriously attacked head-on had to fall back; it felt itself wounded and on the way to being vanquished.”⁸⁹ Catherin also read the Franco-Prussian war through the prism of the Revolution, but foresaw defeat; France was infected with the principles of 1789. Divine chastisement would bring about French regeneration: “Out of these sad events France will emerge completely purified of the harmful principles of the Revolution and will take up once more her old traditions as the eldest daughter of the Church.”⁹⁰

That the reasons for the fall of France lay in the fatal doctrines of the Revolution was a commonplace. Nicolas Vagner, the father of another zouave who disappeared at Loigny, wrote in May 1871, “Poor France! To what sad destiny has eighty years of irreligious teachings reduced you... the founder of the Church awaited a reform, a conversion of France; but our mad gangrenous patrie did not repent and God grew tired.”⁹¹ The zouave narrative was inscribed within the broader language of counter-revolution from the outset. La Moricière’s order of the day on taking command of the papal armies in April 1860 was unequivocal: the Revolution threatened European civilization as Islam had in previous centuries. 1870-1871 did not change this. The great addition to the zouave legend, the Sacred Heart proved perfectly in line with zouave thinking, stressing expiation and reading the Revolution and *l’année terrible* as divine chastisement. Moreover, the Sacred Heart was the literal symbol of the counter-revolution, worn by the Vendéen counter-revolutionaries of 1793-94. In 1870-71 therefore a counter-revolutionary force identified with a counter-revolutionary devotion in a mutually-reinforcing association.

⁸⁹ É. Sioc’Han de Kersabiec, *Les soldats du Pape. Journal de deux zouaves bretons* (Nantes, 1867), 2.

⁹⁰ Catherin letter, 9 August 1870, in [Bart-Loi, *Au Service*, 212-13](#) ~~É. Sioc’Han de Kersabiec, *Les soldats du Pape*, *ibid.*, pp. 212-13.~~

⁹¹ Nicolas Vagner, *Une visite au champ de bataille de Loigny, 22 avril 1871*, 4th ed. (Nancy, 1878), 8-9. Bart-Loi listed 131 zouaves wounded at Loigny, 66 killed and 21 disappeared — many bodies were never identified. Vagner was fortunate, finding his son Charles’s grave on information supplied by Le Gonidec de Traissan.

Jonas argues persuasively that the cult of the Sacred Heart was inextricably tied to the counter-revolutionary, not least because the leading participants had no interest in extracting it from this context. Legitimist deputies Édouard de Cazenove de Pradines and Gabriel de Belcastel enthusiastically sponsored the ‘National Vow’ movement to dedicate France to the Sacred Heart. The latter led the delegation of deputies on the 1873 Paray-le-Monial pilgrimage, while the former pressed for the National Assembly to attend the laying of the first stone of the basilica.⁹² Charette, invited to serve on the organizing committee of the “National Vow” basilica, liked to display the image of the Sacred Heart worn by his counter-revolutionary ancestor at his execution in Nantes.⁹³

For the most part zouave/*Volontaire* political thinking echoed that of their leader. Jacquemont wrote defensively, “If the greatest number of them were royalists, should that be held a crime? If they learnt from their King to love France before all else, to immolate themselves for her, did they not prove that [royalism] was a good school of patriotism?”⁹⁴ Guenel argues for a pervasive legitimism within the zouaves, a tendency to link ultramontane Catholicism to a belief in the monarchy as the instrument of redemption and re-Christianization.⁹⁵ The myth of vendéen counter-revolution also figured prominently. Allard, for instance, celebrated Guérin’s vendéen blood and read the zouaves through the prism of the “war of giants.”⁹⁶ Significantly many of those who championed the zouaves/*Volontaires* were legitimists, notably Pie, Freppel, and Cabrières. It was fitting that Charette laid the banner of

⁹² Jonas, *France and the Cult*, 224-243.

⁹³ Léon Aubineau, *L’Univers*, 23 July 1885, in Charette, *Noces*, 6-10.

⁹⁴ Jacquemont, *La Campagne*, 54.

⁹⁵ Guenel, *Dernière guerre*.

⁹⁶ Allard, *Le volontaire*. On this myth: Geoffrey Cubbitt, “Memory and fidelity in French Legitimism: Crétineau-Joly and the Vendée,” *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 21 (2000): 593-610. Nouaille-Degorce shows that though the *Volontaires* recruited heavily in the West, the fit with the heartlands of the Vendée/*chouannerie* is in fact a poor one: “Les volontaires,” 1:50-102

Loigny on his sovereign's defunct body, having attended the deathbed of the comte de Chambord.

VIII. Conclusion

Unity was elusive following *l'année terrible*. Though it has been suggested that there was a willed collective amnesia, the defeat was omnipresent in the early years of the Third Republic, a staple of political discourse. Competing projects for national regeneration rested on particular constructions of the collapse.⁹⁷ The commemoration of the *Volontaires* must be understood in this context. In the absence of any hegemonic interpretation of the defeat, it was hard for any particular memory to gain universal consent. Nonetheless, certain episodes were celebrated, particularly the resistance at Bazeilles, whose "maison de la dernière cartouche" was immortalized by Alphonse de Neuville.⁹⁸ At first sight, it might be thought that Loigny would exercise a similar appeal. A narrative of resilience, heroism, sacrifice and unity could be woven around the events. As with Bazeilles, there was heroic resistance, in the shape of the two battalions of the Thirty-Seventh Regiment in the cemetery. A disparate range of forces united, sacrificing themselves in a magnificent effort to afford them fraternal assistance. Albert de Mun argued that Loigny should feature in school primers, one of the "imperishable models of sacrifice offered to the patrie."⁹⁹

In 1893 Mgr d'Hulst drew a lesson of patriotic unity. Sonis and Charette symbolized "the alliance of the national flag and the white banner [of the Sacred Heart]." The rebuilt church, conceived as both expiatory chapel and ossuary, was "a Christian pantheon of martyrs,"

⁹⁷ Karine Varley, *Under the Shadow of Defeat. The War of 1870-1871 in French Memory* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 152-74. *L'Avant-Garde* played upon this legend, identifying the original "maison de la dernière cartouche" in the farmhouse of Crocette at Castelfidardo where twelve zouaves held out (15 September 1911).

⁹⁹ Cited in *L'Avant-Garde*, 1 July 1910.

demonstrating the indissoluble union of patriotism and faith, cemented in blood.¹⁰⁰ Already in 1884 abbé Beauchet had held out the hope that Loigny might become “a national pilgrimage.”¹⁰¹ Yet the theme of unity was drowned out by forceful arguments about Catholicism and patriotism. Vié, comparing the *Volontaires* to Joan at Tournelles and Patay, concluded rhetorically, “So who dared say that piety diminishes bravery and that a youth instructed by priests would be less valiant? Zouaves of Loigny, well you have avenged us.”¹⁰² The inclusive nature of the celebration of Loigny in terms of lessons of fraternal unity was undercut by the emphasis on the Catholic nature of patriotism. The anti-clerical offensive embodied in the *lois Ferry* of the 1880s, designed to render state education secular, sharpened the need to prove the virtues of Catholic principles. Arguments about regeneration gave way to arguments about Catholic education. D’Hulst’s reading of Loigny framed an argument for the rights of Catholic education, which was not divisive: “In the days of our disasters this fraternity was revealed. The zouaves of Loigny were not asked if they had the right to deploy the banner of the Sacred Heart. And they... did not ask of those who fought alongside them any other qualification than that of valour and devotion.”¹⁰³

While Loigny did become a site of pilgrimage — in 1901 a 350-strong pilgrimage was organized by the *Union provinciale de la jeunesse catholique de l’Orléannais* — it could not become a national site of memory.¹⁰⁴ In part, the sense of a Catholic site of memory, a counter to the secular Panthéon militated against this. In part, also, this was because the monarchist convictions of Charette and his fellow zouaves were imprinted on the site. The expiatory chapel contained a stained glass window of Saint Henri with the features of the comte de Chambord.

¹⁰⁰ Mgr d’Hulst, “Discours, 18 septembre 1893,” 358-60.

¹⁰¹ Abbé Beauchet, *Quatorzième anniversaire de la bataille de Loigny, 2 décembre 1884* (Nancy, 1884).

¹⁰² Vié, *Éloge*, 21.

¹⁰³ Mgr d’Hulst, “Discours prononcé à la distribution des prix à l’école Saint Etienne à Meaux, le 30 juillet 1891,” in d’Hulst, *Nouveau mélanges oratoires*, (Paris: Poussielgue, 1901), IV:89-90.

¹⁰⁴ Report préfet Loiret to ministre de l’intérieur et cultes, 4 July 1901, Archives Nationales (Paris) F¹⁹ 5562.

In part, though, this reflected the fact that the zouave/*volontaire* version of heroism and patriotism, was not only incompatible with but an implicit challenge to the civic ideals of the Republic. The whole language of expiation was inherently divisive, designed, as Jonas points out, to “identify and incriminate *others*.”¹⁰⁵ In using Loigny to advance arguments about Catholic patriots the *Volontaires*’ champions implicitly identified those responsible for the defeat. Henri de Cathelineau declared, “If in those days of trial, there had been more Christian soldiers, we would not have to weep over the fate of our brothers of Alsace and Lorraine.”¹⁰⁶

The zouaves/*volontaires* were Catholic heroes whose heroism was to be enjoyed and celebrated by enthusiasts for a rechristianized France, a vision that seemed within reach in the aftermath of *l’année terrible*. With the stabilization of the republican Republic in the 1880s, celebrating the zouaves was to assert the existence of another France and the essential falsity of the revolutionary principles central to the Republic. This logic chimed with the 1890s new right’s insistence that nationalism was in opposition to the Republic. The legend of the zouaves was a touchstone for the values that united anti-republican clerical conservatives, irrespective of their views on monarchy. Just as with the National Vow movement, commemorations of Loigny and the zouaves served to advance an alternative vision of France, French national history and French identity. Applauding the truly French nature of zouave/*volontaire* heroism was to operate within a distinctive Catholic definition of the national. The *Volontaires* reaffirmed the zouaves’ recognition of the value and necessity of expiatory bloodshed. They also demonstrate the strength of dolourist Catholicism, balanced by a confidence in divine intervention. Sonis’ words exemplify this tradition: “I love to be broken, consumed, destroyed by you... Let me be crucified, but crucified by you!”¹⁰⁷ Miracles stretching from the visions of

¹⁰⁵ Jonas, *France and the Cult*, 140-41.

¹⁰⁶ Cathelineau, *Vrai patriotisme*. Cathelineau wrote in the context of the threatened closure of schools run by non-authorized religious orders, especially Jesuits.

¹⁰⁷ Musée de Loigny-la-Bataille, Association des Amis de Sonis-Loigny website, accessed 15 November 2016.

Marguerite-Marie to the deliverance of Pontmain from the Prussian invaders were the counterpoint to this acceptance of pain.

The experience of 1870-71 provided new heroes to commemorate, new sites of memory to consecrate and a new confidence in engaging in debates over French identity. The *Volontaires* were never a national cult, but they possessed a resonance and political edge that the zouaves lacked. Clerical opponents of the Republic, whether overtly monarchist, or non-dynastic conservative proponents of “social and religious defence” or even those who, obedient to the policies of Leo XIII, officially rallied to the Republic in the 1890s, found a set of compelling arguments in the *Volontaires*. Yet the potential political uses of the *Volontaires* — as a counter to the dominant official republican discourse, as an argument for the value of Catholic education — did not necessarily outweigh the significance they held in religious and spiritual terms. Reflecting on the zouaves and the *Volontaires* was to reflect on the issues of sacrifice, suffering, and expiation. The faithful were invited not merely to celebrate heroism, but to enter into the pain of individuals, the physical pain that accompanied martyrs’ deaths and the pain of those who mourned the fallen. The zouaves and *Volontaires* taught the powerful lesson that suffering was never in vain.

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